



Review: Joseph Havel

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Joseph Havel
Talley Dunn Gallery, Dallas
January 14–February 25, 2012

When art places us squarely within the ambit of mystery, we'd be foolhardy to ask for more. Joseph Havel's exhibition, "Plus or Minus" at Talley Dunn Gallery, does precisely that. Like great literary works, Havel's art propels us into a realization that our lives — our phenomenological world — operate as an interlinear. We ferry about in a *mysterium* and this show reminds us that this lovely process is both gorgeous and marvelously enigmatic. Havel's wall of repetitive men's shirt labels, each bearing the word, "Nothing" adds up to a definite "something." It gives us nothing less than a vector into how our minds operate.

“Plus or Minus” ineluctably moves us to reflect upon the ways in which we interact with visual and written texts as well as the personal history we bring to bear upon them. Havel’s work is elegant and thoughtful. So is the artist. He’s well read and highly articulate. He readily admits to having been seduced by the language of poet John Berryman — and the dreamy play between artist and writer and artist and viewer becomes a massively joyous occasion of parsing classic epistemological questions with spanking-new enthusiasm.

The collection at Ms. Dunn’s ambitious space ranges from the aforementioned label installation to meticulously crafted bronze sculptures to minimalist oil and graphite on paper “articulations.” To call them paintings or drawings would be to short-change them. They come across as marvelous verbs ready to ignite when met with a gaze, a history, a stance or a simple emotion. Some are composed of quickly drawn rectangles that intimate the shape of postcards. They’re dashed missives with which we can interact in ways we find most comfortable. In the case of “Joseph Havel: Plus or Minus,” the idea of a “show” is freighted with multiple meanings. It’s put forth for our delectation but, in the words of Shakespeare’s “King Lear,” it also teaches us (shows us) “to see better.” And that’s impressive. This is a gallery that’s dependably intriguing and Havel delivers a kind of intelligent pyrotechnics not often found in North Texas. Havel and Dunn have provided a genuine gift to the city.

— *PATRICIA MORA*