

# Re-making castoffs

Artist Roy LaGrone uses a computer to re-shape found objects, what he calls an exploration of displacement.

BY DAN R. GODDARD  
EXPRESS-NEWS STAFF WRITER

Looking at Roy LaGrone's giant digital images of rough-worn yet futuristic artifacts can make you feel like a visitor from another planet.

For more than a year while he was living in San Antonio, LaGrone spent hours walking the city's streets, picking up odd bits of trash and debris. Then he used a computer to combine images of the found objects with his own photographs and personal symbols, adding layers of meaning to otherwise unremarkable discards.

"Beta Projections and Artifacts from Earth" is on view through Jan. 14 in the Project Space at the Blue Star Contemporary Art Center.

"I try to re-direct the discarded," LaGrone said. "These objects are charged with their own history, but I add things that are important to me, suggesting new narratives. I don't have a formula for doing it. I just add elements and modify them until I'm satisfied with the composition. These objects don't really exist anywhere except within these computer images."

"Ship Log #2515 (Ezekiel's Vision)" features a battered red plastic case framing a bug's eye-view photograph of a parking lot at night, with a small, floating cracked hand mirror that represents Ezekiel's vision of the burning wheel in the sky. "Talisman #1 (Will the Circle Be Unbroken)" centers on a round, yellow plastic thing resembling a candelabrum with a glowing sun at its center. Acorns, a thimble, a peach seed, dirt and other objects are jammed in the circular containers around the rim.

A native of Mississippi, LaGrone was teach-

ing computer art at the Savannah College of Art and Design before leaving the post, relocating to San Antonio in 2004. LaGrone said much of the computer manipulation of these images was done in Italy, where the artist now resides.

"Working together at the intersection of photography, sculpture and painting, these large-scale, computer generated transpositions are fetishes; which explore the idea of transforming socially discarded beings, places and objects into sacred projections," LaGrone wrote in his artist's statement. "I am culturally a southern African American male, yet my DNA is made up of several age-old, warring interests that descend from all corners of the earth."

LaGrone calls his work an exploration of displacement and 21st-century identity driven by his longing for a transformative model of diversity that "tran-

scends associative limitations" such as boundaries, boxes, borders and stereotypes. He's a fan of science fiction, especially African American authors Samuel Delany and Octavia Butler, and his work also contains references to blues, jazz and Southern folk culture.

Yet as South Carolina poet and culture critic Darryl Lorenzo Wellington discusses in his exhibit essay, LaGrone's work is not limited by the usual concerns of ethnic identity in black art – instead it's informed by a more universal sense of "global post-modernism."

"Beacon #2 (Havana Blues)" is a key piece featuring a bent, mangled metal container surrounding LaGrone's photograph of an inner city clothesline in a dilapidated courtyard, which he took on a trip to Cuba a couple of years ago. Across the lower lip of the image, he placed



'Beacon #2 (Havana Blues)', 2006  
30 by 32 inches; at Blue Star.

See NEXT PAGE

## Roy LaGrone's new show at Blue Star is called 'Beta Projections and Artifacts from Earth.'

CONTINUED FROM 3J

horizontal bars, adding a sense of confinement.

"It just made me think about the clothesline we used to have in our back yard while I was growing up," LaGrone said. "It's something universal that anyone can recognize, something very human and mundane that can have a lot of meaning."

His personal memories add poignancy to these images. "Ship's Log #5240 (Sharecropper Reflections)" refers to his rural roots, yet an image of a plowed field and country road are overlaid by images of the night sky, creating a dreamy, surrealistic collage that seems to yearn for the stars. "Transporter Terminal D" includes a photograph of his mother's beauty salon. LaGrone said the hair dryer helmets always looked like something out of science fiction.

But he can't keep his social consciousness down. The most chilling image features a doctor's operating table framed by a blood-splattered seashell; the title "Koochie Blues (Politics of the Womb)" refers to miscarriages and abortions. An eye-shaped piece of trash seems to be intently looking at a homeless

person's bed in "Beacon #3 (Lay Your Head on My Pillow)."

In addition to his prints, LaGrone is showing two remarkable videos. Set to the music of Boston Fielder's "Lawnmowers from Heaven," the 4-minute, 35-second "Initiation Module #1" combines images of the artist painting white lines in his studio with quick cuts of found objects, circles and clotheslines woven into a visual stream of consciousness. Motes of dust dancing in a sunbeam animate the abstractly whimsical "Smile Beacon #1".

LaGrone is at the forefront of artists using computer design not as a novelty, but as a new way of seeing, coming up with images that have never been seen or thought about before.

Roy LaGrone's "Beta Projections and Artifacts from Earth" runs through Jan. 14 at Blue Star Contemporary Art Center, 116 Blue Star, (210) 227-6960, [www.bluestarart.org](http://www.bluestarart.org).

[dgoddard@express-news.net](mailto:dgoddard@express-news.net)