

THINGS TO DO • Review

Drew Austin's installation at Leon Gallery uses mylar, glass and other glistening things to explore how light enriches our lives

“In-Dwelling” is a mirror-ball meditation on the natural world



Artist Drew Austin was inspired by dappled light when creating the works for "In-Dwelling." Amanda Tipton Photography, provided by Leon Gallery.



By **RAY MARK RINALDI** | media@rayrinaldi.com | The Denver Post
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Drew Austin's "In-Dwelling" is a tiny jewel box of an art show, full of things that glisten and glimmer, that twinkle like tinsel, that collect, refract and reflect light and splash it along the walls and floors of Leon Gallery.

In a sense, it is a lesson in the rays and waves of physics and how the interaction between light and various surfaces determines how we see the world. Each of the nearly 40 objects on display read like a mini-experiment in how shadows form and help our eyes to comprehend shape, texture and dimension.



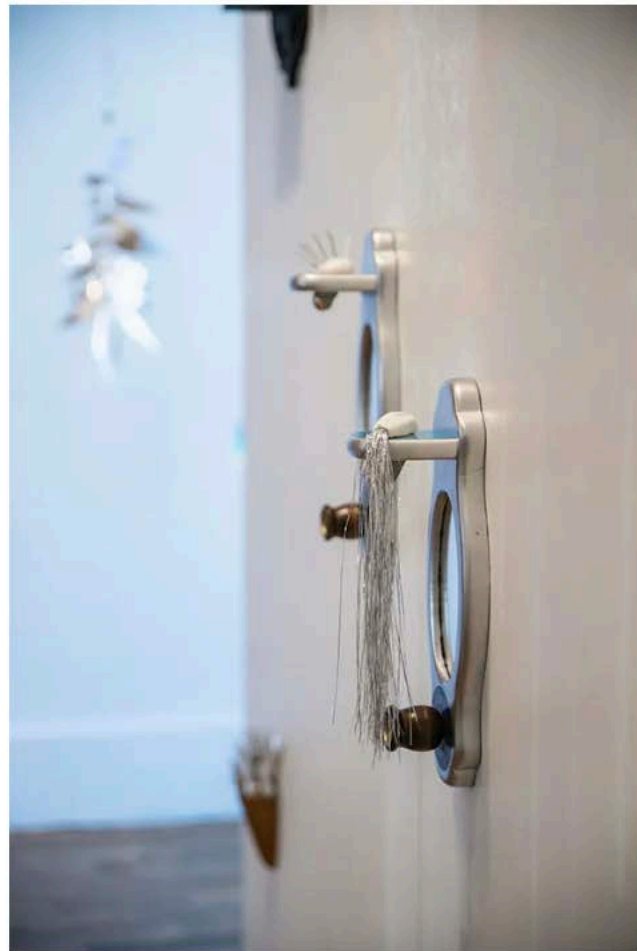
Clear and reflective surfaces capture light at Leon Gallery. Amanda Tipton Photography, provided by Leon Gallery

But that is a cold way to describe a show that is really a collection of intimate moments. The artist wants us to reflect on, and honor, the beauty and wonder of light as it filters through our lives, as it dapples through leaves and drops delicate, radiant beams along pathways, and how that can delight us — when we pay attention.

Austin keeps his tactics simple, *very* simple in fact, creating work out of inexpensive materials and objects recycled from secondhand stores that he mixes and matches to get the effects he wants. This show has a hand-made, thrift-shop feel, in contrast to the refined aura of objects one often encounters in a well-programmed art gallery.

Using that intuitive process, the artist makes pieces like “Multi-Level Home, with Guests” fashioned from an old decorative, living room mirror, some plastic grapes and a rock made of clay. Or “Heaven Ascending” which appears to be constructed from an old silver candy dish draped with mylar cut into the shape of tiny tree leaves. Sometimes it is hard to tell exactly what the source material is. Door knockers? Push pins? Make-up mirrors? There is some adventure in trying to deconstruct all of the elements while looking.

But it is not fancy, and it’s all right at home at Leon, which is a nonprofit with a very open mind about what it brings to the public. Leon does go high-end — I’ve seen shows there from top-tier, regional artists, like Diego Rodriguez-Warner and Laura Shill — but it also gives a break to up-and-comers, like Austin, a recent graduate from Rocky Mountain College of Art + Design who has been working overtime to earn a place in the Front Range art scene.



“In-Dwelling” fills the entire first floor at Leon Gallery. Amanda Tipton Photography. (Provided by Leon Gallery)

Leon's mission is a worthy one, and it is all in the name of bringing the community together around visual art and because the gallery allows experiments like "In-Dwelling," it puts Leon in a sweet spot in the city's art eco-system. (You can support it, by the way: Leon has its annual fundraiser, the Outliers Ball, on Oct. 21.)

It would be easy for this show to fall into the trendy "immersive art" category because entering the gallery can feel like dropping into a fantasy world of sorts. The pieces do connect and come together as a single, vibrant environment. Everywhere you look there is a 360-degree sparkle. I think it is possible to enjoy the show in that way, in the manner of popular art attractions, such as Meow Wolf.

Only this offering is smaller, just a single room in a 17th Avenue storefront, and less overwhelming. While the pieces do coordinate, they still feel like singular works of art. Part of that is because Austin works in many different media and the objects have personalities of their own.

There are the things that dance in the light: glass and metallic objects, in botanic shapes, like "Heaven is All Around Us," a piece that resembles the branches of trees and stretches across the ceiling like a mobile. There are three-dimensional, table-sized sculptures made of clear acrylic, upon which Austin has applied decals cut out of vinyl.

Notably, there is a series of framed prints — digital illustrations on paper — that capture in two or three tones of color snapshots of various flora. These renderings, free of politics and full of personal observation, are a highlight of the exhibit.

In his artist statement, Austin refers to the Japanese word *komorebi*, which refers to the sensation of light dappling through leaves and branches, noting how there is no equivalent term in the English language. He talks about wanting to recreate "the kinds of emotional content typically too nuanced for language" with the objects he concocts.

These small sensations dwell in his mind and in his installation at Leon, one quick instance after the next that is "waiting, welcoming, returning, honoring, repeating its cycles." That is how he came up with the title for his show.

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But in dwelling on the small, he has come up with something big. A mirror-ball meditation on the natural world, executed, ironically, with the most unnatural materials possible. This show invites us to reflect on our relationship with the sun and other sources of brilliance, and then to take that new awareness back to the outside world around us.

IF YOU GO

“In-Dwelling” continues through Nov. 4 at Leon Gallery, 1112 17th Ave. Free. Info: 303-832-1599 or leongallery.org.

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