Pop Rally; 36 Felt Pennants
About Things You Can Care About
By Raymond Biesinger
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Cold Mosaics

What do engagements, public transit, squirrels and Stephen Lewis all have in common? According to local artist and professional illustrator Raymond Biesinger, they’re just some of the things that inspire him and deserve some recognition.

About Things You Can Care About features artwork discarded from triangular felt pennants, described by the artist as being rooted in minimalism and construct. In fact, one of the pennants on display celebrates his favoured visual mode in text form, with the word “construct” spelled out, appropriately. Like many artists, the inspiration for the pennant project came from observing real life:

“It came out of one too many trips to antique fairs and shops that had pennants and badges promoting things that were already being celebrated on a massive scale, like Disneyland and professional sports teams,” Biesinger explains. “My intention is to focus on things that were more personal and important to me, things that I feel should be celebrated en masse but aren’t.”

“I didn’t have a rich background, so I was quick to learn to make do with what I had available,” Biesinger continues. “And in a complex world where we can do almost anything with digital technology in the fields of art or music, modern printing techniques, digital photography and all—especially in the West where our resources are nearly limitless—it’s often the most original or interesting thing to do is to accept limitations. That governs how I’ve lived, the bands I’ve been in and my approach to making images. Likewise, minimalism, efficiency, environmentalism—I see these things as being related.”

In Biesinger’s exhibit, the written word is sometimes used to replace an image that one might normally expect to see, as in the case of two pennants that feature the names in bold text of well-known Canadian writer and environmentalist David Suzuki and Canadian diplomat Stephen Lewis.

“I want to avoid pretentious like the plague,” Biesinger says. “I don’t think that the human face actually sells people all that much. I think faces just tell you how old someone is. I know that people always say that a portrait is a face. I feel that people have always understood what they represent as a face. I want to avoid that.”

Having done illustration work for a variety of major publications, such as the Globe and Mail and the New York Times, it wouldn’t be surprising for such an artist to seek out a larger urban centre for his exhibit, but Biesinger is happy to call Edmonton home.

“I’ve found that in magazine and newspaper work the common notion is that you have to move out to Toronto or Montreal or New York to get the big jobs. It isn’t really true,” Biesinger says. “More than half of my assignments come from the United States right now; less than are per cent from Alberta. And growing up and living here, I love the city and a lot of the spontaneity that comes with knowing the people that live here. You know, running into them along Whyte Avenue, seeing them for the first time in a few days or a decade. I feel a strong community here and I think that the world would be a bit better off if real communities were more prevalent.”