

# Local openings feature fine, creative specimens



A friend and I went to downtown Urbana on Saturday night to two art openings and serendipitously stumbled upon a third, upstairs at the Furniture Lounge, 126 Main St.

There, we, along with others, were impressed by the work of Michael Mapes, who lives in Champaign.

His exhibition, called "Specimens Collection," offers 20 or so pieces high on concept, technique, visual interest and appeal. They make me wonder if Mapes suffers from obsessive-compulsive disorder, but someone who knows him said no, he's a perfectionist.

He made the multimedia pieces,

or assemblages, over the past four years, using insect pins to stick into thin pinning foam on the backs of specimen and cigar boxes tiny photographs, some rectangular and some round, those cut out with a paper punch.

A lot of the little photographs are of the human eye, either open or closed. Or an ear. Or hair. I also spotted a miniature Eiffel Tower in a piece called "Robert, Paris."

Among other pinned-down objects are clear pill capsules, with their contents removed and replaced with what looks like paper, and bones, seeds, flower petals and coffee beans. Some are carefully displayed in small plastic bags.

From a distance, all the tiny pieces, a la the portraiture work of Chuck Close, form pictures. One depicts a

pair of pears, another a single pear. A lot of human faces appear, too. The effect is somewhat spooky, like fading memories, when you look at them from a distance.

One of the most amazing works is "Recollection." At first glance, this specimen box appears to hold, in neat rows, decaying insects, their wings partially or totally missing from the bodies and lying in small piles at the bottom of the box.

They're not bugs; instead Mapes fashioned this insect collection from flower petals, seeds, coffee beans (which resemble insect bodies) and other organic matter.

You can see photographs of works from "Specimens Collection" at [www.room62.com](http://www.room62.com), where there is a terse and piquant biography of Mapes, who was born in 1962 in Fort Knox, Ky.,

and in 1979, decided not to go to the Rhode Island School of Design.

"Specimens Collection" is Mapes' first show locally; it will remain on view through Nov. 1 at the Furniture Lounge gallery, an upstairs space that can be reached only by stairs. His first solo exhibit was in August at the David Erlanson Gallery at Richland College in Decatur.

Scott Schaub, co-owner of the Furniture Lounge, plans to have regular exhibits in the upstairs gallery, but so far hasn't finalized the next show.

Also in Urbana, at the Cinema Gallery, is an exhibition of art glass pieces, including a giant set of keys on a ring by John Miller, and at the Heartland Gallery, "Masque Appeal," featuring masks and other works by Gregory Slawko, a member of the theater staff at Northwestern Uni-

versity who has been a professional costume designer for more than 30 years. He has designed nearly 300 shows at 70 theaters in eight states. His most recent job was at the Drury Lane Theatre in Chicago, where he was the resident costume designer for eight years. He has designed for dance and movies, too.

The work, a bit theatrical, employs pheasant and rooster feathers, and favors gold, brown and other dark tones. Also at Kalarte Gallery inside Heartland, just in time for Halloween, is "A Masked Wall," featuring masks from Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, West Africa, India, Indonesia and the United States.

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