

Benjamin Kelley: Feb. 9 to March 30 at CONNERSMITH

By Kriston Capps • February 8, 2013



BENJAMIN KELLEY, "Universal Symbol of Achievement .001", 2010, human bone and resin, 2.75 x 2.5 x .25 inches

Appropriating the Chrysler symbol is a pretty dumb thing for a young artist to do. It inevitably invokes the work of Matthew Barney, whose 2003 epic *Cremaster 3* saw five 1967 Chrysler Crown Imperials engage in a balletic demolition derby in the lobby of the Chrysler Building. How are you supposed to beat that, kid?

Well, it looks like Benjamin Kelley is going to try. Kelley is new to Connersmith's *gogo emerging art projects—think of that as the gallery's farm league—and for his first show at the gallery, he appears to be touching on Chrysler (specifically, a 1971 Chrysler Newport) and other Barneyesque themes (including violence and masculinity). Kelley's works are sculptures, but they're what critics used to call "theatrical"—the pieces engage in a tug-of-war with the viewer.

Kelley has placed insignias on the wall but near the floor and put a prison shank under lights. Whereas Barney's over-the-top sculptures either played out over the course of a film or fell into orderly gallery arrangements, as if he couldn't care less whether a viewer was there, Kelley's previous, barely there sculptures took unexpected placements that always have the viewer in mind. He's gutsy to run headlong into a host of art-critical problems that household-name artists have already tackled. If he gets away with it, he'll be a new name in a D.C. sculpture scene that's been dragging for a few years.