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From abstract to architectural

By DOUGLAS BRITT
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Stuart Allen's four sculptures and nine photographic works at Finesilver Gallery look great together, but they're united by conceptual underpinnings as well as their considerable visual delights.

The San Antonio-based Allen, who grew up in Kansas, learned kite-making from his father as a child and later studied the craft in Japan. That lifelong enthusiasm is evident in the sculptures, three of which are kites and presumably function as such.

All are made primarily of sailcloth — reflecting the artist's interest in sailing — except *A Kite for Flying in Water* (2007), which consists mostly of aluminum punctured with holes to let water pass through. Thin strips of stainless steel provide the kite's support. As visual elements, they divide the space into eight triangles.

String goes taut when kites fly, but here — as in the piece's counterpart, *Kite for Flying in Air* (2007) — the strings dangle. Their drooping arcs add compositional interest without disrupting the simplicity.

These pieces don't have any sense of movement; I've seen installations of Ellsworth Kelly's colorful, shaped canvases that reminded me of flying kites much more. Instead, Allen de-emphasizes the kites' functionality by presenting them as almost abstract, wall-mounted sculptures.

More abstract still — and more airy — is *Seven* (2007), a beautiful sculpture consisting of seven elongated strips of sailcloth fastened to the wall with aluminum, stainless steel cables and turnbuckles.

There's a greater tension at work here; you can picture these pieces twisting in the wind and get heightened awareness of how sailcloth both catches light and lets some of it through.

The systematic approach evident in *Box Kite: 23,890 cu. inches / Approximate Volume of Air I Breathe in One Hour* (2007) also factors into Allen's nine pigment prints on rag paper on view.

Allen created four of the prints, dubbed "light maps," by screening camera lenses with sailcloth and shooting photographs of the sky at various intervals. Sunset —

One Photograph Every Two Minutes / 29° 27' 8" N ~ 98° 30' 4" W / 03-16-2007 records a beautiful array of shifting tonalities and colors lined up in vertical strips across a 22-by-36-inch print.

The title gives you the exact geographical coordinates of where Allen was when he shot the photos and the date he captured them.

In other prints, the image is a square composed of enlarged pixels taken from snapshots of the sky — as few as four in some prints, as many as 25 in one.

These sky samples range from midnight blues to off-whites to deep yellow-oranges.

ART ON DISPLAY

Stuart Allen

- When: 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays, through April 20

- Where: Finesilver Gallery, in association with FotoFest, 3913 Main; 713-524-3733

Jane South

- When: 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday

- Where: CTRL Gallery, 3907 Main; 713-523-2875