It's not too surprising that Pete Schulte talks a lot about music. He resists describing his recent works as paintings, drawings, or sculpture; more than anything, they are riffs. Visual riffs. Meditations on a theme. In fact, his current exhibition, in the Catich Gallery at St. Ambrose, is called *This Is Our Music*, and he refers to the exhibition as an "album" of songs.

The Catich is an intimate rectangle of space. A massive window faces the entrance to the gallery, and a floating wall of equal size stands before the window, at a distance of a couple of feet. Schulte riffed on the layers, adding several of his own. He sheathed the glass in blue cellophane, perforated by rectangular cutouts. Consequently, in daylight, the floating wall is backlit by a blue glow he describes as "church light." The rectangular openings in the cellophane are windows of natural light, miniature views if one traverses the narrow passage between window and wall. The plain white backside of the floating wall is illuminated with fuzzy distortions, and a powerful site-specific triptych titled *Blue* faces the entry.

Remember your favorite, greasy ballpoint? The one that got all over your hands? Schulte gorges on that arresting, metallic cobalt, itself a skin, or layer, over the subtle texturing of his panels. In the foreground is a floor piece, composed of midnight-blue crushed velvet and rock salt – yet another layer, like a prayer rug, a reflecting pool, or a shed skin. All these layers stand alone together; they're more movement than song.

Schulte talks at length about the cult of personality that took off with Abstract Expressionism and reached its apotheosis in Andy Warhol's obsession with celebrity. Like any thinking artist today, and Schulte is very much a thinking artist, he's grappling with the core ambiguity that is the legacy of art in the 20th Century. As a consequence, he's positioned himself outside the timeline, free to cherry-pick history. It should be noted here that Schulte happily appropriates the *idea* of flags and targets from the Godfather himself, Jasper Johns.

At first glance his works are oddly retro, as in Retro-Minimalist, because he exploits the visual language of Minimalism and the Post-Minimalist pattern painters. His patterns, however, explode, mutate, and deteriorate with repetition. He paints row upon row of loosely geometric emblems that masquerade as flawless draftsmanship, but he's not a machine, and – stay with me here – he's not a Minimalist, either. He's just appropriating, even subverting, the language. By sifting or dumping dry pigment on wet paint, he surrenders control; he risks an enormous amount of work. The effect? A subtle disturbance on his honed surfaces. He uses a fine drill bit to superb effect in *Black Flag* and *Sounds a Bit Like Goodbye*. The best passages originate with a slip of the bit.

Borrowing from Marshall McLuhan, who was all the rage in the late 1960s and early '70s, when Minimalism was in its prime, Schulte's works are cool, but his titles are hot. McLuhan wrote *The Medium Is the Message*, in which television, for example, is characterized as a "hot" medium because it *supplies* so much stimulation, thereby pacifying the viewer. He was ahead of the curve on that couch-potato thing. Art, on the other hand, is generally cool, because it *triggers* intellectual and emotional stimulation in the person who looks at it. Thus Schulte further corrupts the language of Minimalism by pairing cool, delicately embossed surfaces with emotionally

charged, and one assumes personal, titles, such as
Dark Day
,
Tears
, and
The Fall
, instead of something like
Blue Painting #6
, presenting us with a true 21st Century paradox.

** Borrowed from Bob Dylan.*

The Catich Gallery is located within the St. Ambrose University art department inside Galvin Fine Arts Center and is open to the public Tuesday through Saturday from 1 to 5 p.m. More info on Pete Schulte's works can be found at (http://www.schulteworks.com).