

# An Exceptional Vantage Point

## Remarks on Nestor's Kruger *Untitled "Room"* at the Contemporary Art Gallery in Vancouver

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Lamontagne donne sa représentation. *Souvenirs en coin* raconte une histoire fantastique d'où l'humour noir n'est pas absent. Alors que normalement un artiste a dans son œuvre le souci de la composition, Éric Lamontagne s'ingénie au contraire à y apporter des marques de décomposition. Les rideaux tachés de longues traînées verdâtres, comme celles que produiraient des moisissures, donnent au lieu une atmosphère sépulcrale. La housse blanche qui recouvre le fauteuil évoque celles qui protègent les sièges de la poussière dans une demeure inhabitée. La dentelle au crochet du napperon se défait. Dans le trophée de chasse, les bois du grand chevreuil tombent en lambeaux, tandis que la tête du plus petit commence à disparaître comme si elle était engloutie par la toile blanche. Le disque d'acrylique noir et rouge est si gondolé qu'il est peu vraisemblable qu'il puisse encore tourner. Un mouchoir de papier sur lequel pleure un œil sort de la boîte qui sanglote, renifle et se mouche, affligée sans doute par la mort de quelque artiste célèbre. Un grand tableau entouré d'un épais cadre doré représente un cimetière des Îles-

de-la-Madeleine. Herbe jaune d'or, mer bleue, phare blanc sont surmontés d'un ciel dans lequel flottent des nuages améthyste. Classique. Pourtant des rainures à la surface ne peuvent manquer d'attirer l'attention. Le titre renseigne le regardant : *Paysage-puzzle*. Le bidimensionnel recèle du tridimensionnel. Les marques indiquent l'emplacement de livres qui se révèlent être des tableaux lorsqu'ils sont retirés du grand tableau. Il est difficile d'imaginer mise en abyme plus réussie pour montrer que l'art est un casse-tête avec lequel il faut oser jouer. L'histoire de l'art perpétue le souvenir des peintres et des sculpteurs qui ne sont plus. Il ne faut donc pas s'étonner que certaines petites toiles représentent, dans une facture expressionniste, des défunts qui ont été tirés de leur tombe. Miracle de la vidéo, un fantôme apparaît dans les flammes du foyer et prononce d'inaudibles paroles. Il essaie probablement de raconter au visiteur l'histoire de l'art, une histoire fantastique qu'Éric Lamontagne poursuit à la fois avec sérieux et avec ironie. ←

←  
Éric LAMONTAGNE,  
*Sculpture tourne-*  
*disque*, 2004. Acrylique  
sur toile. 43 x 36 cm.  
Photo : Éric Lamontagne.

←  
Éric LAMONTAGNE,  
*Tableau-module*, 2001-  
2004. Transfert  
acrylique et huile sur  
toile. 94 x 73,5 x 20 cm.  
Photo : Éric Lamontagne.

Éric Lamontagne : *Souvenirs en coin*  
Galerie Sylviane Poirier, Montréal  
21 février – 20 mars 2004



## An Exceptional Vantage Point: Remarks on NESTOR KRUGER'S *UNTITLED "ROOM"* at the YAM LAU | Contemporary Art Gallery in Vancouver

### SPECULATIONS AND INVENTORY

How does a "painting," by taking its immediate space as subject matter, work to dislodge that very same space, the very environment in which it is situated, so that the space would appear to become misaligned, at which point it cannot be appropriated by itself? Would it not then entail that in such a space, every possible vantage point is rendered oblique, inadequate to the idea of the space proper? If the propriety of a space is the precondition that grants normalcy and stability of our actions, which include of course, looking at art, what then happens in a scenario such as this? Must the viewer be compelled to adjust his or her body, hoping to bring the space back to alignment with itself, so that the viewer could feel once more grounded in the space's identity, accommodated in the security of its matrix? And then move on, to look at art perhaps?

After all viewers did report feeling disorientated, even nauseous in Nestor's Kruger's *Untitled "Room."* The above are some of my speculations regarding this work, a kind of schema that the artist drew up for his exhibition at the CAG in Vancouver.

### BUT FIRST I MUST PROVIDE AN INVENTORY OF THIS COMPLEX SETUP.

1. A wall painting that mirrors the gallery space, projecting the space backwards into the virtual plane of the wall. Note that the position of the overhead fixtures and the curtains in the real space are carefully arranged to align with its painted reflection in the painting.
2. A piece of triangular reflective glass is placed against a corner opposite the wall painting. The glass, being an object in the room, is represented by its outline in the wall painting.
3. The word "room" is painted on

the sidewall of the actual space. The same word is depicted, as the mirrored counterpart of the "real" one, in the wall painting.

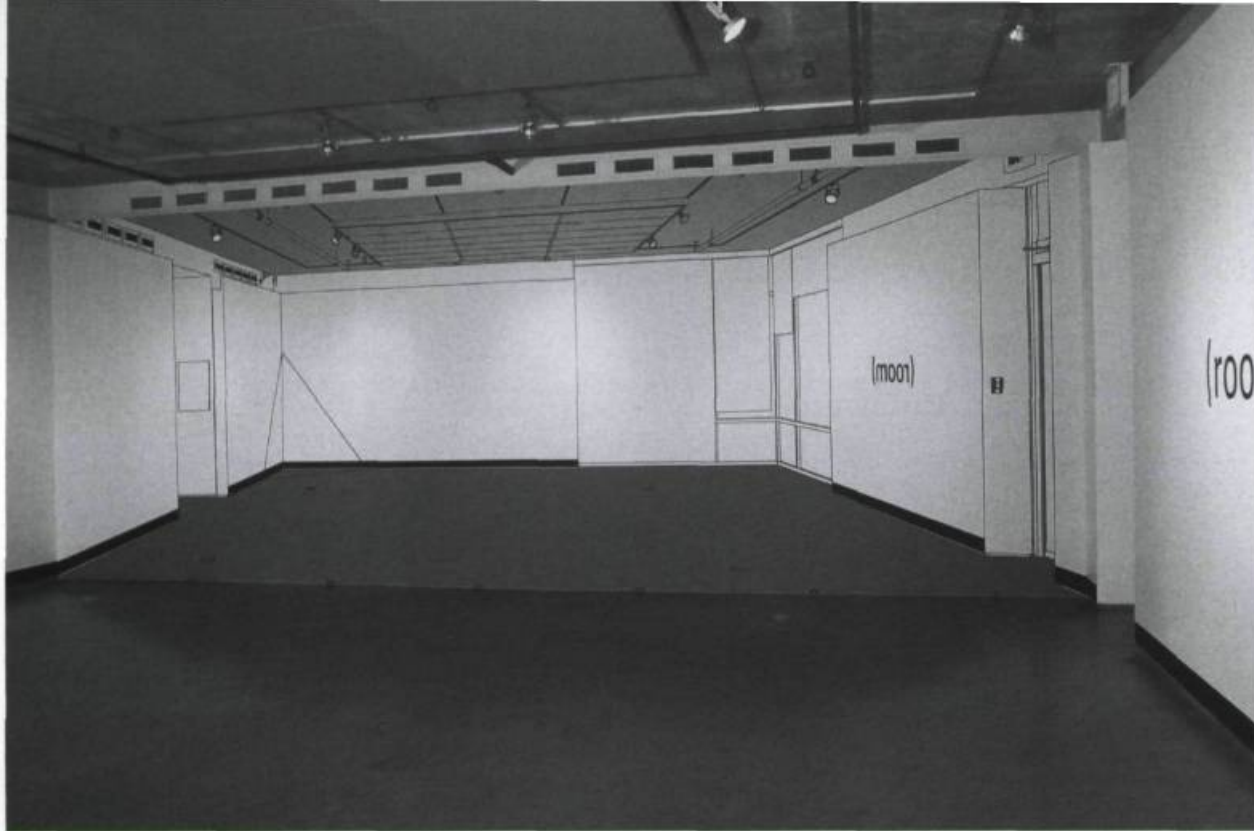
From the outset, I must make it clear that *Untitled "Room"* is not an exhibition of an ensemble of objects. Neither is the term installation appropriate to categorize the project. Instead, what took place was a kind of setup, a setting up of the exhibition space itself. All the components were arranged to facilitate a transaction, or complication rather, between the virtual and the real gallery space. But the misalignment, the sensation that the space cannot be recuperated as described by the viewers, unfolds, I think, from an inaccessible but definitive vantage point.

### THE BEGINNING AND GENERATION OF AN EXCEPTIONAL VANTAGE POINT

In addition to the physical components mentioned above is another

of a different kind: a virtual model of the CAG. Kruger had replicated the gallery through the use of 3D software. His procedure in generating the final painting was as follows: a virtual camera was placed at one end of the 3D model, at the wall that would eventually be painted in the real space. The view through the camera of the opposite end of the room was then rendered as a digital image. This image was finally executed as a painting directly on the wall at the CAG. The lens of the virtual camera was set at 50mm, which is commonly accepted as best simulating human vision, while its distance from the ground approximated Kruger's height. In other words, the viewpoint of the camera approximated what Kruger would have seen if he had been able to place himself at the same coordinates as the camera in the 3D model. The final painting was thus constituted from this particular vantage point.





Nestor KRUGER,  
*Untitled "Room"*, 2004.  
Photo courtesy of the  
Contemporary Art  
Gallery.

While the vantage point references Kruger's body, and certainly is not arbitrarily determined, it is nonetheless an idealized one. It is a mathematical proxy of the artist's lived body. For in the virtual model there is neither air nor friction. There is something final, omnipotent about this vantage point, for it does not compensate for the lived body's mobility, affection, duration and indeterminacy. In other words, the body's condition of being-in-the-world is not registered there. In this absolutized space, the term "otherness" has no meaning. Hence, I argue that while the extension of this exceptional vantage point constitutes the virtual space depicted in the eventual wall painting, it also invalidates all other potential vantage points. For no lived body can intimate, let alone identify with, such a radically different, abstract, and immobile kind of vision. In other words the space represented in the painting has "sense" only in the virtual world.

Might we not then ponder, that the transposition of the painting into real space amounts to an imposition of a dis-incarnated body (whose existence requires no oxygen!) implied by the exceptional vantage point adopted in the painting. And might not this disembodied, hence virtual body, since it is constitutive of the artwork, the focal object in the gallery, now be considered as the usurper of the entire space, claiming to be its origin? And might not such an imposition, insofar as it eradicates other dif-

ferential modalities, and invalidates the viewer's particular vantage point, thus render his or her position in space as subordinate, inadequate, and "oblique"?

#### AN OCCUPIED SPACE

From the outset, the viewer is initiated into the separation between the virtual and the real. He or she is "given" to locate himself between these two incommensurable realities. And yet the mirroring relation between the virtual and the real space, coupled with the aid of other physical components in the gallery, is set up to proffer the possibility that an alignment or recuperation between the spaces is at hand. Indeed the body willingly rises to the task of recuperation. For the propriety of space demands an undisturbed horizon, the kind of secured matrix required by the body to establish its orientation and to perform its usual function.

And yet, from the outset, the body is also denied the privilege to claim the space. It arrives already too late for this position, finding the space has already been taken up by another: a virtual body that can be situated but does not live, constituting the exceptional vantage point discussed above. From a conceptual point of view, as if merely proposed by *Untitled "Room,"* the question would be: if only one could assume the place of the dis-incarnated body, then could one "naturally" take possession of not only the exceptional vantage point, but the space itself?

#### A DISAPPOINTMENT OR AN OBLIQUE OPPORTUNITY

One may suggest that *Untitled "Room"* disappoints the viewer, that the work is disappointing. Approaching the work would seem akin to having one's desire and chance to obtain the best seat in a theatre performance, the seat that promises the most ideal, central, advantageous and commanding view, permanently thwarted. One always feels that one has arrived too late and must settle for cheap seats on the sides, never enjoying quite the same full experience as the view from Kruger's virtual vantage point. Disappointment is inevitable in such a scenario and could even be argued to be the content of *Untitled "Room"* — a setup that imposes the oblique as the viewer's only and lesser option.

But, then, thinking backwards, the viewer's oblique options, made palpable by Kruger's setup, are necessarily tenuous, mobile, complicated and open-ended. In other words, the oblique relation to the space is more life-like than the artificial, somewhat imperialistic vantage point pre-installed in the space. In fact, by artificially relegating the oblique to be secondary to the immobile and abstract vantage point, *Untitled "Room"* in fact obliges the viewer to recognize that the oblique is in fact the primary condition of his or her being.

The fact that the space is "disappointing" plays on the habitual inclination to privilege the conceptual over the experiential. The rea-

sons for this confusion are complex. But the simple fact that the painted space exists prior to the viewer's entrance into the gallery room reinforces it. The reverse is closer to reality: it is precisely the incomplete and the oblique that warrants freedom and authentic action, and the virtual vantage point reduces the infinite potential inherent in the world to a single, untenable point. Might not Kruger's intelligent set up reveal to us that our involvement with the world is always incomplete, finite, and hence rich and manifold?

#### THE COYOTE AND THE ROADRUNNER

I have been fascinated by a recurring episode in the well-known Warner Brothers Roadrunner cartoon. The Roadrunner, in order to escape from the pursuing Coyote, paints a tunnel onto the surface of a rock escarpment and escapes through it. The Coyote, in his attempt to follow his prey, abruptly runs into a painted surface. As a child, I was fascinated by the magical opening, or line of flight from one pictorial space to another. It seems novel dimensions and possibilities would always present themselves in life. As a painter, I came to regard the construction of new pictorial spaces as proposals to imagine other forms of life.

On the other hand, I have also always liked the Roadrunner less than the Coyote. The former is mechanical, sleek, almost too complete in its many superior traits, including the sole possession of passage between incommensurable spaces, making the inherent thickness and resistance in the world void, and consequently himself less believable. I have little empathy with him. But it is the Coyote's failure that makes him so much more animated, ingenious (remember all the devices he concocted to capture the bird?) in the ways he attempts to cope with the world, and hence more life-like. ←

Nestor Kruger, *Untitled "Room"*  
Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver  
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