

## Kevin Yates Susan Hobbs Gallery

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# Kevin Yates: Susan Hobbs Gallery

CORINNA GHAZNAVI

Kevin Yates makes really small sculptures. They are ordinary, even mundane things that are positioned around the gallery. They are tiny and they are simple and yet they block our view and remain obstinately closed to us. In a recent touring exhibition provocatively entitled *My Ex Girlfriend is a Slut*, one piece showed a series of miniature picnic tables with a single figure perched on one bench.

She wore a hoodie and had her back resolutely turned to the viewer. As the installation jutted up against the wall one couldn't circle the work and see her face. It was an ordinary setting that one could easily imagine in a real place, like a rest stop or a park just after the weather had turned and the picnic tables were being stacked. And yet, because a frontal view of the figure was denied to the viewer, there prevailed a persistent suggestion of mystery, of unease, of an untold story.

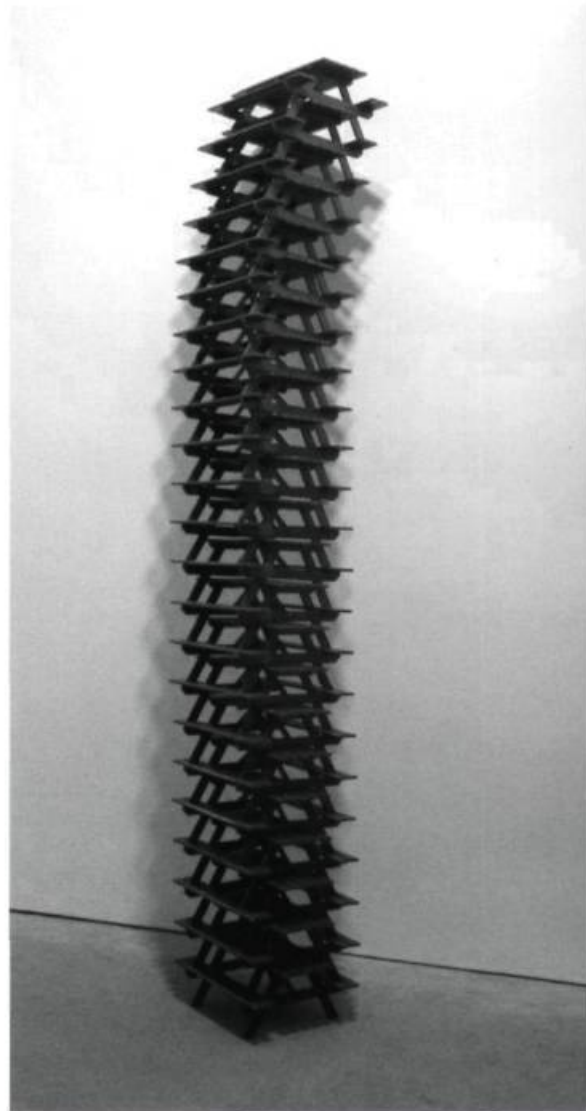
In the current exhibition at the Susan Hobbs Gallery, Yates does not exhibit figures at all, but rather small vignettes: a stack of picnic tables, a neon sign spelling *Sorry*,

a curtained motel room, and a series of garbage bags, all of them miniatures, all of them stubbornly silent and yet loaded with possibility. Scratched onto the picnic tables are words that Yates meticulously copied from found graffiti: words of love and words of hate. Text that is both personal and anonymous. The tables are stacked for the end of the season, put away until the next summer when new occupants may scratch onto their surface, perch, eat, or read there. Though the hate texts are fearsome they are also rendered silent without a context, made more complex by the fact that picnic tables can be associated with diverse cultural scenarios including family outings and trailer parks.

The garbage bags at the other end of the gallery are sealed, their contents unknown. Considering earlier work of Yates, like *Untitled (small dead woman)* that showed a small, eleven-inch woman laying sprawled face down on the floor, there is an eerie quality to this installation. Garbage can be anything, like the remains of a picnic, personal debris, or body parts. While this latter is unlikely, Yates's manner of working opens up the possibility that something scary is going on. Influenced by

Alfred Hitchcock and David Lynch, Yates points out that they never show everything — and that it is through suggestion rather than graphic depiction that fear is instilled in the viewer. Similarly, the curtained motel window suggests a private activity: the curtain seals off all view of the interior, which is backlit to suggest occupation. Motel rooms are notorious in B movies as anonymous sites of unseemly activities. A room so absolutely hidden from view but obviously inhabited stirs both the imagination and curiosity. One is tempted, as one traverses the gallery, to conjure up a narrative: a pile of sealed garbage bags, a three inch neon sign saying *sorry* — the American equivalent to 'no vacancy,' which struck Yates as both humorous and ironic when he noticed this custom in the United States — stacked picnic tables and a lit but curtained window. A sense of anonymity, secrecy and silence pervades the whole room. We are left with fragments of tiny narratives that serve to create unease merely through the fact that they close themselves off to interpretation.

An earlier piece is also included in the upstairs gallery: a weeping table that looks, again, quite ordinary from the top and sides. A persistent sound of running water makes the viewer crouch and view the table from below; there, one discovers the real sculpture — an intricate and beautifully carved underside from which water flows gently. This work then clearly demonstrates that what is crucial is often hidden or unseen. Here, the viewer can glimpse the mechanisms and be reassured that complexity exists beneath the seemingly simple surface. Far from reassuring, however, this only serves to strengthen our feeling that there is something more going on behind the window, in the supposedly fully occupied motel, with the suspiciously



bulging garbage bags and abandoned picnic tables. ←

Corinna Ghaznavi is an independent critic and freelance curator. In addition to writing a number of catalogue texts, she regularly contributes critical reviews and articles to national and international art publications. Upcoming curatorial projects include a touring exhibition entitled *18 Illuminations, The Wonderland, at the Tom Thomson Art Gallery in Owen Sound, before travelling to Austria, and Neutrinos They Are Very Small.*

Kevin Yates  
Susan Hobbs Gallery, Toronto  
January 6 — February 19, 2005

Susan HOBBS, *Picnic Tables*, 2004. Wood, paint. 219 x 34.5 x 27.5 cm. Each table measures 15 x 34.5 x 27.5 cm. Photo: Isaac Applebaum, Courtesy: Susan Hobbs Gallery.

← Susan HOBBS, *Garbage Bags*, 2004. Ed. 3. Bronze, cardboard. 12.5 x 34.5 x 35 cm. Photo: Isaac Applebaum, Courtesy: Susan Hobbs Gallery.

