

Don Maynard Looks Like Rain

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Don MAYNARD: *Looks Like Rain*

Gil McELROY

In his essay "Art and Objecthood" published over forty years ago, theorist and critic Michael Fried launched a blistering attack on Minimalism (or what he called "literalist art"), accusing it of the high crime of theatricality. "Literalist sensibility is theatrical," he wrote, "because, to begin with, it is concerned with the actual circumstances in which the beholder encounters literalist work."

Fried's may be an old battle, but his aesthetic positioning still has its uses. Under Fried's terms, the installational work of Kingston-based artist Don Maynard could very well lead to a verdict of guilty on all of his charges, but, hey, it's the heretics who've always pushed things forward against the railings of fundamentalists— aesthetic or otherwise.

Maynard mounted two separate, though thematically related, installations for the MacLaren Art Centre, each situated in its very own gallery space. Down on the gallery's lowest level, a narrow, windowless space— somewhat more akin to a large walk-

in closet than an exhibition venue— played host to *Falling to Pieces*. Here covering all the walls in these somewhat cramped quarters, Maynard had installed mirrors— seven hundred of them, in all— arranged as in salon-style hanging, from floor to ceiling. The mirrors varied in size, the largest no more than perhaps 50 centimetres in width. All were rectangles of various proportions, and none were cramped up against one another; Maynard made no attempt to entirely fill the space, and ample breathing room was given to all. Each mirror was mounted offset from the wall by a few centimetres on an individual backing, which did double duty in providing some visual angularity so that each mirror was uniquely tilted up or down, or to one side or the other. The space itself was deliberately unlit, the only illumination was courtesy of second-hand light spilling in the open doorway from the adjacent hallway.

The space was narrow enough that only a couple of visitors could comfortably walk around at any one time. And what one saw had everything to do with a phenomenological experience of space. The not-unrea-

sonable expectation was that we would see ourselves, but such vanity was denied, for one could never see one's reflection as a relative whole, only bits and pieces proffered in a highly discrete way— just small fragments of one's own body caught in the occasional mirror that was tilted just right in relation to your presence at a particular location in the room. And so as we moved through the space along the horizontal axis that we mundane, earthbound creatures spend our time in, our discrete, bodily reflections jumped about along the room's vertical axis, revealing a bit of leg one moment, maybe part of the head the next and then perhaps something of the torso after that. Our image was fractured and fragmented— "falling to pieces" indeed.

Upstairs, in one of the second-floor galleries, this one with both a window at one end and full gallery illumination, Maynard had installed *Looks Like Rain*. As with *Falling to Pieces*, this installation was comprised of only one material element: long, thin rods of Pyrex glass. And as with the mirrors, things here were measured in the hundreds— 900 of

the Pyrex rods, to be exact, all arranged so that they were leaning at varying angles against one of the long gallery walls. Tape on the gallery floor staked out the space of a long, narrow rectangle demarcating the extent of the footing for the rods, which were not situated so as to create a neat and soldierly line traversing the space, but rather more loosely organized, with footings both nearer and further from the wall. The only regularity here was in the near verticality of the rods, but each lazed against the backing wall set at a relatively individual angle, creating a wide footprint along the floor.

There was a point to all of this, for the varietal angles of the glass rods created varietal reflections from the overhead lighting; the glass *didn't reflect light back at exactly the same angle*, and the consequence was an illuminational myriad of bits of reflected light scattered randomly up and down the verticality of the work, coursing across its entire length.

One's movements in relation to *Looks Like Rain* were as phenomenologically important as they were with *Falling to Pieces*, for passing in front of the rods created the sensation of dancing bits of light running up and down the vertical plane of the piece that were in synchronous motion with your movement as you walked the horizontal extent of the piece.

Though Fried would have derided them, circumstances were everything, here. Employing a minimalist sculptural palette, Don Maynard set the stage for an experience of space that was entirely relativistic, exclusively dependent upon the circumstances surrounding our very presence. The only absolute, here, was his choice of working materials. The rest was entirely up to us. ←

Don Maynard: Looks Like Rain
MacLaren Art Centre, Barrie, Ontario
September 16 – November 2, 2008

Gil McELROY lives in Colborne, Ontario.

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Don MAYNARD, *Falling to Pieces*
(installation detail), 2008. 700 mirrors,
dimensions variable. Photo: Katie Sage.

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Don MAYNARD, *Looks Like Rain* (instal-
lation detail), 2008. Pyrex glass rods,
dimensions variable. Photo courtesy of
the MacLaren Art Centre.

