Espace Sculpture

Kevin Yates
Susan Hobbs Gallery

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Monuments déplacés
Displaced Monuments
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Citer ce compte rendu
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 an untold story.

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 obviously 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.

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

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