The Private World of Viktor Tinkl

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The Robert McLaughlin and Mississauga Galleries are to be congratulated for prizing some of Viktor Tinkl's art into the public forum. Since 1965, the Tinkl's schoolhouse-home has become integral to his artistic endeavours. After years of extensive exhibition activity, and a secure position in the Canadian art establishment, he has left the public gallery world to continue his life-project, creating a permanent venue for his own work and also that of his partner Judith's quilted art.

From a myriad of extraordinary creations, curators Linda Jansma and Rob Freeman decided to concentrate on two central works, The Meeting and Circle, finding thematic connections in them to many areas of the artist's vast and prolific oeuvre. Additionally, they have included some earlier pieces and had Tinkl execute two site-specific wall drawings in the Oshawa gallery space. Indeed the exhibition possesses the illusion of continued expansion as it progresses, mirroring its source at the artist's much-celebrated Sunderland home.

Circle from 2006 displays a biker bar aesthetic, with its ring of grimacing fox head skins that are both horrific and hilarious. The mouths are pried open with cans sliced and twisted to form bared teeth. Heads jut forward, mounted on up-ended rectangular Thompson water sealer cans, their obligatory skull and crossbones icon reading like T-shirt logos. Also evoked is granny's fur coat, in its day the height of fashion, with its little heads that came together at the collar, most certainly wreaking nightmarish havoc in small children everywhere. These characters menace each other effectively, without diminishing the underlying chuckle of the artist.

In The Meeting, two rows of figures are face to face, grinning maniacally with the aid of denture moulds attached to a variety of heads made from books, olive oil cans, wooden blocks, and so on. Each individual suggests lively interaction with its weird colleagues, possessing a multiplicity of detail that compounds upon the whole. Close examination reveals quotidian fragments such as old linoleum, calendar pages, photographs, cutlery, examples of the endless detritus of living. It is as if an entire junkyard was miraculously animated into a semblance of order.

Seasons shows most wonderfully the artist's celebration of his marriage to Judith. Made in 2001 for their 35th anniversary, four wheels exhibit photographs from their life together, four seasons depicted in natural imagery from their surroundings, and the seasons of life in evidence through suggestive images and objects portraying babies, fireworks, cakes and quilts. The Judith-component is surrounded by a collection of figures including the Pope, Death, various animals, and Viktor, who is sporting a spec-
photographies. Michael Cullen, Trent Viktor TINKL, 132.5x132.5 Circle (detail), cm diam. 2006.

of three wooden busts made from objects. Kbpfe of tive. He sees and employs the Tinkl's use of found objects is not exuberant and joyful life force. things are what he uses to express an exclamation of humanity, a celebratory. There is a comfort level in the world that Tinkl has created from similar materials. Origially planned as utilitarian buttressing and an aqueduct system, it evolved in fanciful extrapolation into gargoyles, familial characters, and all manner of creature. While some cement appears in a few of the smaller works on display in the gallery, most of it is built into his property and unable to be moved. In compensation, the exhibition catalog includes a photographed walkabout and artist interview. Beyond assemblage and Art Brut aside, aside and now I have a good bush cord of these fascinating configurations of wood. But do I still want to get involved in making something with them? Not particularly. Making things to exhibit them, there's no point to that so maybe they will just remain as potential things." The phrase "an excess of meaning" might as easily be attributed to the range and content in Tinkl's work as it is to that of Montreal artist David Altmejd.1 There is a speculative interstice—space for the imaginary that defies categorization and is imbued with raw, edgy energy. The affective combination of humour and the grotesque resonates against the messy and ambiguous nature of real life.

The exhibition title Making Things belies the fact that Tinkl's constructions go far beyond "thing-ness." They are vigorously animated and brimming with life forces. Both human, in their embodiment of the things that we throw away, they are also human in the sense of their representations. People in mythic proportion, they contain and evoke through material and subject, a vivid and heightened sensibility.


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NOTES
1. Wikipelia.