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Aller au sommaire du numéro

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NEW YORK

EDVARD MUNCH: THE MODERN LIFE OF THE SOUL
Museum of Modern Art
February 19th – May 8th

Nature looms large in Edvard Munch's cosmology of life. Angst-ridden and tinged with a real life tragic sense, the symbolist nerves of his paintbrush go beyond any simple expressionist tendencies in his art. And in no show has the symbolist edge to Munch's art ever been so exactly and clearly evident as in The Modern Life of the Soul. One sense the links to James Ensor, to Maurice Denis, even Jan Toorop. This is the first major show of Munch's work in New York in almost 30 years, this is a thematic exhibition that has great depth. Munch was a source for many, and his Scandinavian isolation, his marginal stance as a Norwegian in Paris, or Berlin, or in Norway, was very comparable to that of Canadian artists like Emily Carr. Munch played a painterly role in exposing the internal matrixes of society as they exist in the human psyche. It is these existential tendrils that continuously creep up on and engulf Munch's muse, who is largely unobtainable, or perplexing, or tempting, or engulfing, fatalistic. Basileit, Immendorf, Pencil, all the German Neo-Expressionists in fact, owe some psychic and painterly textual debt to Edvard Munch.

Women were a state of mind for Munch, and if they were a reality, usually trouble. He established new grounds for the social condition as a subject for art, just as Strindberg and Ibsen did with theatre and writing in general. The social was psychological a la Sigmund Freud. We sense that the men and women in his paintings are swept away by life. They have no distance and distance is all that saves them sometimes. They are controlled by fate, unseen forces, and happenstance. Munch's The Scream is still as potent an image of what modernization and technological change can do to the human psyche as any tract on social anomy by Max Weber, or Karl Marx. While the painting was stolen, and is still being sought after, this show includes two 1895 lithographs based on the image, one heightened with watercolour by Munch. The Scream defines a certain sense of madness and anomy that is so 20th century. The painting equally establishes a painterly paradigm whereby these sensations become legitimate terrain for future modernist painters to deal with as a subject. As the chief curator and organizer of this exhibition Kynaston McShine comments, "Edvard Munch is the modern poet and philosopher in painting. At the same time, he is passionately emotional, perhaps more so than any other modern artist. His exploration of human experience reflects an existential agitation. It is Munch's great triumph that in so many works, he is able to pictorialize an extraordinary range of intense human passion and in so doing delineate for the viewer the life of the modern soul." The state(s) of mind that engages us all is part of an ongoing force called progress. In Munch's Victorian Norway, and the City of Kristiania (Oslo) in particular, classes were contained, and religion played a role in containing people at all levels of society. The social conditions(s) for working people were not good, particularly the new urban working class, massacred in Munch famous paintings of workers on their way home. Unlike Kathe Kollwitz, Munch captured the social anomy, the unconscious fears and trepidations. We sense these in Angst (1894) or Evening on Karl Johan Street (1892). From summer nights under a moonlit sky to end of day workers returning home, all Munch's paintings speak of life. Life is a stage, and a stage in a cycle of life where people are constructed and conditioned by their social roles, and eventually overcome, to eventually deal with their own mortality.

Fate, fashion, and destiny are unforgiving, and equally testify to the human condition. What of the social order. Everyone has been constructed, and cannot move beyond the confines of their particular existence. The suffering is largely unexpressed, and accepted. Two paintings that speak of this best are: Self Portrait, Between Clock and Bed (1900-02) where we see the aging Munch maneuvering his way between clock and bed, facing his life. Other works likewise place each figure as if they were actors in a play, and they have no choice as to their place. Death in the Sick Room (1893) offers little hope. A sickly green colour and pallour invades the scene. It is like a Strindberg play, and relates to Ingmar Bergman's later films in the same way. The faces become structures, the clothes a form of entrapment, shrouds and make landscapes out of moss and straw. It is Munch's incredible sensitivity to the world and life in general that makes his art a true success. He expressed his life's experience with a simplicity and a sincerity, colouring it black and white, like Canada, Norway was plagued by the landscape idiom in painting. Like the Canadian painter Emily Carr, who painted landscapes, or figures within a landscape and caught the spiritual and psychic power of nature, Munch communicated a strong sentiment of links to nature. Nature became a backdrop for the human condition whether the theme was jealousy, melancholy, the stages of life, or the dance of life. And for Munch what was a spiritual burden came from his family's seafaring and religious background. He considered this legacy as being like "Two forces like priests and seafaring folk are no laughing matter!"

Born at Løten in Hedmark, Norway December 12, 1863 Munch encountered much sickness in the family, and death. When the family moved to Grunerløkka, a Kristiania suburb, after his mother died, his Aunt Karen taught Munch to draw, and cut to silhouettes out of paper and make landscapes out of moss and straw. It was Munch's incredible sensitivity to the world and life in general that makes his art a true success. He expressed his life's experience with a simplicity and a sincerity, colouring it all intensely. Even his Self Portraits which recur throughout this exhibition are endorsing for their penetrating gaze on the artist's life. We see an early realist portrait from 1886 where the artist has an intense gaze, a powerful lithograph Self Portrait (with Skeleton Arm) from 1896, Self Portrait with Cigarette (1895) which has
a depth and darkness as if the artist were standing on the edge of a nightmare, the unforgettable Self Portrait in Hell (1903) and of course Self Portrait Between Clock and Be (1940-42) ... A greater unity, simplicity, and more resolved vision accompanied many of the later works including the murals he made for the University of Oslo (not in this New York show). Many of the portraits are here, including ONE of Polish poet and writer Stanislaw Przybyszewski (1839-94), Julius Meier-Graefe (ca. 1895), Dagtry Juul Przybyszewlsa (1893), Professor Daniel Jacobson (1908) and even German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1906) in a seldom seen and very large charcoal, pastel and tempura on paper sketch.

Munch’s incredible facility with the woodcut medium, and his truly daring innovations with the medium are fascinating. Many capture not only the subject but the woodgrain material. The wood and the subject cross-over to become poignant, extremely modern expressions of emergent modernism. Munch innovated with jigsaw cut out sections in a single composition so that he could print in one go and entire woodcut. Each section of the jigsaw could be coloured and fit together before printing... Interestingly many of the lithographs, etchings and woodcuts in the present show which includes over 130 works covering the period 1880 to the year of his death, 1944, have been printed on by Munch. Some of the prints are experimental and single copies. Still others variations on a theme hand touched by Munch. An amazingly contemporary and seldom seen woodcut titled Aix in the Field (1913) carved shortly before Munch died, is a truly sincere evocation of youthful affection and love. Coloured brown the two figures are subtly carved in outline, as is the sky and shoreline silhouette. Otherwise, though, the wood grain engulfs the composition. For all the human drama, in art as in life, nature ultimately takes over. It is Munch’s incredible sensitivity to the world and the theatre of life that makes his art a true success. His life’s experience was expressed so effectively. For those who have the chance this show provides a rare opportunity to see a large selection of Munch’s art in North America.

John K. Grande

GOYA’S LAST WORKS
THE FRICK COLLECTION
1 East 70th St.
to May 14th
www.frick.org
Tel.: (212) 288-0700

Set in the magnificent ambience of the Frick Collection this seldom seen showing of Goya’s last works is both fascinating and provides viewers with the chance to see seldom seen carbon black and watercolour of ink on ivory miniatures by then 78 year old Francisco de Goya (1746-1828). Usually used for painting miniature portraits, the ivory flats were adapted by Goya for free style sketch-like works. Goya’s process involved blackening the ivory, to then drop water on their surface, and then reshape the smears into faces, torsos, figurative compositions. These bright illuminating sketches, often with a feeling of incompleteness are very lively and quite unique amid Goya’s oeuvre for the light projects from beneath the depiction. They reveal Goya’s acute eye for detail and capture the social event in a lively manner. These include a Revolving Nude, Monk and Old Woman, Two Children Looking at a Book, Maga and Cebstina and Man Looking for Fleas in his Shirt (all dated 1824-25). Also included in the show are the Bordeaux series of lithographs by Goya of the bullfight theme, done shortly after Aloys Senefelder invented Lithography between 1796 and 1799) to circulate his musical scores and texts of his plays. Though the Bordeaux lithographs works are more graphic than Goya’s paintings of the same theme. Executed in 1825, they communicate the immediacy of the event and the crowd through Goya’s superb draughtsmanship. The scenes of daily life, are incredible for the veracity of Goya’s penetrating social analysis, all done with a pencil on paper. A poor old man carries a woman seated in a box on his back in one such image, and we see both sets of eyes staring out at us – the poor man and the wealthy woman). Another has a beggar in Bordeaux (probably a disabled war veteran) wheeling around in a vehicle by hand, a precursor of the wheelchair. The image counter with an affirmative and hopeful resilience of the humanity at its best. And there is a roller skater out of balance his arms extended outwards and leg raised... always such sensitive lines, compositions, an eye for what matters, what we identify with. Another captures a man with a whip about to exact pain on his wife... And then there are the self portraits... These include Self-Portrait in Three-Cornered Hat (1780-92) where Goya looms large, a robust fashionable character with hat and shiny buttons and the later Self-Portrait after illness (1792-3) a fine grey wash of a more feeble man, who questions his situation and looks out at the viewer with dishevelled hair, and anxious face...

Goya’s Last Works captures the final four years artistic output of Goya’s life. This show and these works reveal that, despite an infirm condition and a self-imposed exile in Bordeaux, France, Francisco de Goya was still producing some very vital, intriguing art, and not for posterity. With an endless curiosity about life, he faced death through art. Another captures a man with a whip about to exact pain on his wife... And then there are the self portraits... These include Self-Portrait in Three-Cornered Hat (1780-92) where Goya looms large, a robust fashionable character with hat and shiny buttons and the later Self-Portrait after illness (1792-3) a fine grey wash of a more feeble man, who questions his situation and looks out at the viewer with dishevelled hair, and anxious face...

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Fredericton
ART IN DISPUTE
July 1st, 2005 - March 5, 2006
Beaverbrook Art Gallery
703 Queen St.
Tel.: (506) 458-2028
www.beaverbrookartgallery.org

Art in dispute is very likely the most important exhibition the Beaverbrook Art Gallery has ever mounted, though all the works in the show are from its own collection. There is the rub! The gallery is in dispute over these works with the Beaverbrook Foundation (United Kingdom) and the Beaverbrook Canadian Foundation. Numbering over two hundred, the works in this exhibition are the very heart of the gallery collection. To take these works away would be like a heart attack. If not fatal, it would be a very serious loss to the institution and its reputation as a major gallery. The issue is money, though the two foundations would argue that it is stewardship of the collection. The stakes are very high as the art whose ownership is being questioned is collectively worth many millions of dollars, and includes such renowned artists as Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510) and Lucian Freud.

It is necessary to go back to the history of the Beaverbrook Art Gallery to try to understand the nature of the dispute. The gallery was built and paid for by Lord Beaverbrook to exhibit his collection. When the gallery opened in 1959 it did just that and, indeed, it even housed an apartment for Lord Beaverbrook who took a very personal hand in the affairs of his gallery. Of course, over the course of next nearly fifty years, the role of the gallery has changed. It is now considered New Brunswick’s provincial art gallery and its collection is considerably larger and more diverse than at the beginning. The gallery mounts numerous exhibitions each year, being a showcase for regional, national and international art. The gallery still differs from other provincial art galleries in that it is for the most part privately funded.

Matters were not helped when at the beginning of the present dispute over ownership, the foundation
implied that Fredericton was not an important enough city to house some of the art works in question. Civic pride quickly lined up to back the gallery's bid to hold on to the works. The Telegraph Journal (owned by the powerful Irving family) is a sponsor of the exhibition and as publisher, James C. Irving stated; “This newspaper feels strongly about where these paintings belong. They must be the envy of art collectors around the world, but they are an asset of New Brunswickers.” In reality, if the 211 works in question were removed from the gallery and returned to the United Kingdom it would be very unlikely that they would find a new home in public collections unless the galleries were to find the funds to buy them. The most likely place they would end up would be on an auction floor. Their unity as a collection would be lost forever.

This collection does reflect the personal taste of Lord Beaverbrook which was very traditional. He did not like abstract or non-objective art. That not to say that he did not support modern artists. There are a large number of works by Graham Sutherland. Other modernists include Lucien Freud, Salvador Dalí, Jean Cocteau, Jacob Epstein, Paul Nash, Ben Nicholson and Henry Moore to name a few artists who were contemporaneous to Lord Beaverbrook and in his collection, but in the main the works are historical and British. Beaverbrook curator, Rachel Brodie Venart, choose to present Art in Dispute in Salon style showing all the works in one room with painting hung from floor to ceiling. This work very well given the traditional emphasis of many of the paintings in this exhibition. Lord Beaverbrook stated during his lifetime that he was in favour of all the works in the collection being shown in their entirety all the time. He would have been very happy with this exhibition, but less so with the reasons behind its presentation.

It’s hard to second guess the reasoning of the dead, but I have no doubt that Lord Beaverbrook meant Fredericton to be the home of his collection forever. He saw his heirs as custodians of this desire and did not expect his collection to fall into their hands to do with as they might please. But the devil is in the details and that’s why this matter is in the courts. Collections like this were always tied to a great many problems such as tax matters. Certainly things were different in 1959 than they are now. Lord Beaverbrook did have a hands on attitude about “his” gallery. Gifts of art to the Crown with their generous tax advantages did not exist then. At that time the gallery was a private gallery. Beaverbrook loved Canada and his home province. He wanted to leave something of quality to New Brunswick and his collection and a building to house it was that gift.

Art in dispute has been on display for nearly a year. It is the most popular exhibition that the gallery has ever mounted and as I said earlier its most important exhibition. I hope that it was not the last chance for Canadian viewers to see these works as a collection in the gallery that was build to house it. Now it is up to the courts and they could in their wisdom rule against the gallery. If that is the case Canada and New Brunswick will be a poorer place. It is good when a gallery in a small city like Fredericton can be home to a collection of important international and historic art. The Beaverbrook Art Gallery is fighting hard to hold on to its birth right. It is a fight in which all Canadians have a stake.

Virgil Hammock

MONTREAL

IL MODO ITALIANO:
ITALIAN DESIGN
AND AVANT-GARDE
IN THE 20th CENTURY

May 4 - August 27, 2006
Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

Il MODO ITALIANO is an ambitious and compelling overview of the currents of Italian art and design through the 20th century, segmented into aesthetic eras: Boundless Optimism, Violence and Speed, Monumentality and Rationalism, among others that, delineate distinct segments of time and their cultural production. Each era is accompanied by a lengthy wall didactic taking into account the political and economic cadron in which it brewed. Boundless Optimism starts the exhibition off with the Art Nouveau-influenced Stile Florido works that reflect the comparatively late accumulation of industrial wealth in Italy. Labor-intensive Symbolist paintings and intricately worked floral designs on furniture evidence the crushing lassitude of the previous century, but with a typical Italian willingness to push the matter, as if barring at the art-historical barista were enough to make him stop and take notice.

Pointing the way to the futurists, Carlo Bugatti’s pieces stand out as a conceptual assertion in the midst of a bourgeois aesthetic dialogue of tasteful affluence. It is an assertion, mind you, in exquisite materials – a writing table and chair (that was part of an entire “Small Room” during an early-century international design exposition in Torino) is covered completely in parchment, decorated by hand: the tattoo-like decoration lends an aged, Pearl-like effect to the swirling forms. Encountering Futurism in Violence and Speed is like a breath of fresh air after a lumbering, ponderous period of affluent dandyism. Confronting the viewer upon entering is Umberto Boccioni’s iconic Unique Forms of Continuity in Space (1913), a bronze figure running through 4-dimensional space, tufts of sloped wriggling meat tail the muscular movements of the runner, like wet stop-action photography. An abrupt break from the past, manifested aesthetically, socially and politically, is evidenced by a future visionary rigor and an exhilarating nascent fascism whose ideas had echoes throughout the rest of the 20th century. The exhibition is a rare chance to see perspective drawings from the architectural visionary Antonio Sant’Elia, whose fanciful but strangely prescient architectural imaginings from 1914 speak to a future of gigantism, intricate mass transport and mechanized living. Along with paintings, furniture and textiles from the proto-cubist Giacomo Balla, thrilling cityscapes from Carlo Carra and paintings from Giorgio de Chirico (four of which are thankfully included in this exhibition), this period of time in Italy sets the tone for subsequent aesthetic heroism and intrepid investigation: this was also a time of cool fascism, void of Tuscanio ankle-slapping federhosen and neo-classical monstruosities. It was Bauhaus that inspired the Casa del Fascio in Italy.

Renato Bertelli’s Head of Mussolini (1933) is a fast-crafted, machined-looking sculpture of a continuous profile, a black cartoon-like head of a dictator that seems to spin at the speed of a top. The density and blackness adds a gravity that speaks to the common face of dictators: a melange of the comical and menacing, like a Chaplin moustache on Hitler, funny uniforms with death-hats, the o’s fratboy smirk.

After war and reconstruction, a vibrant avant-garde tradition is evidenced by a dense collection of good work: the duchantopian Piero Manzoni with his Menda d’artista (Artist’s Shit) N° 68 (“freshly produced and thinned in May 1961”) rests among flashy Olivetti typewriters, plastic TVs and a pint-sized Fiat Nuova 500 from 1957. A couple of Lucio Fontana’s Spatial Concept...
Art Brut, or outsider art as it is often called, is not vastly popular or appreciated, as it was in the days of Dubuffet, although even then its appearance was fraught with controversy. Referring to art produced by children, loners and those with mental problems, it has a unique feel, at once gay and poignent. It can take many forms, from colourful doodles to complicated compositions, from abstract shapes to realistic depictions. But always, it is permeated with a childlike simplicity and abandon. All this is true of the work of Martial Lebras, a self-taught artist and patient at the centre for therapeutic arts, which houses the Les Impatients gallery. A regular participant in the art workshops offered by the centre, he has produced an impressive body of work, involving the series illustrating the life of Moses, now being shown. The project, begun in 1958, has taken the Britizly-born Lebras close to four years to complete, and resulted in some 60 works on paper, 30 of which are now on display.

Inspired as much by the Bible as by Cecil De Mille's 1956 film The Ten Commandments, these colourful illustrations will bring a smile to any viewer. Imbued both with humour and piety, they begin with a delicate crayon drawing of the child Moses being floated down the Nile in a basket, as the Pharaoh's family batthes nearby. As the tale progresses, so does Lebras' self-assurance, visible in the choice of gouache as medium, its fluidity adapted to his irreverent style, and the strong colours that mark the works. A deeply religious man, whose family adopted the Book of Mormon as their beacon, he approaches his drawings with touching dedication, and equally moving attention to the historical sequence of events. This exhibition has all the pre-requisite images; the plagues that fell on the Egyptians, sent by an angry God, the conversation with God on Mt. Sinai and the appearance of the stone tables with the commandments. There is Moses descending the mountain, his white beard luminous against the dark night sky, while a carnival takes place below him, and Moses waving a joyful good-bye before ascending to heavens. This Moses is no muscular Charlton Heston, but a simplified figure in a long robe, marked by a flowing white beard and wild grey hair. We keep looking for him in all the images, though he appears in only a few. One scene depicts him hurling the city (one of the plagues), that covers rectangular structures and grinning sphinxes in white dots. In another, Miriam shows off her most beautiful dress to her husband. Moses is not there at the death of the pharaoh, a dark, ominous drawing with black and white skulls that decorate the roof of the catafalque, and where Anubis, the jackal-headed funerary deity of ancient Egypt sits sentinel over the body of Ramses. This complicated scene has a range of symbols yet does not lose the main character of the deceased pharaoh in all the visual complexity. Lebras exhibits a sense of abandon and artistic license in the scene depicting Moses leading the Jews out of Egypt. This drawing is teeming with people led by Moses holding a staff, a tiny figure barely visible in the bottom of the composition. Some are in chariots, others on camel, but most are on foot, and all are foundling o. The sketched, near cinematic perspective adds a sense of great urgency. Most moving, is the lonely image of Moses traversing the desert, a bent, crooked figure seen from the back, his arms limp by his side, a searing orange sun glowing enormous above him, the yellow desert dotted with cacti stretching endlessly ahead. This is a mighty tragic drawing, painful and dramatic despite its simplified, even simplistic, execution. And therein lies the magic of Art Brut!

Dorota Kossinska

ZAO WOU-KI: PRINTS FROM 1956 TO 1994 & INTERNATIONAL PRINTS

Galerie Simon Blais
May 3rd–June 3rd
5420 boul. Saint-Laurent
Tel.: (514) 849-1165
www.galerie-simonblais.com

Since 1970, Galerie Simon Blais has strived to promote the art of the print and in this current exhibition, the efforts to support it are well displayed. A selection of past masters including Guido Molinari, Sam Polet, Pierre Soulages, Yves Guillaume, Jean McEwen, are presented as well as a new selection of artists of a more recent era, such as Ludmila Amatia and Marc Seguin.
MAY DAY MONTREAL TO MAY DAY LONDON, ENGLAND

Montreal artists and members of the public celebrated May Day from the Ste-Hélène with a spectacular display of Tibetan prayer flags. The many colored flags were unfurled in a gesture of solidarity with artists around the world, and to celebrate the opening of the international London Biennale. Artists in cities around the world simultaneously celebrated the May 1st event. Noted among the Montreal crowd were Nancy Petry and Joyce Rykman, artists who have participated in the London Biennale since 2000. Filmmaker Co Hoedeman was likewise present recording a video of the event for production in the near future. Eros arrows, though invisible to the human eye, could be remote sensed as they passed onwards over the Jacques Cartier bridge, down the St. Lawrence River to the Atlantic Ocean where its merging with yet more waters. Directed towards Picadilly Circus where the famed Eros statue/fountain still stands, the invisible Eros arrows presumably made it back to London, the point of origin of the event. Originally proposed by David Medalla in 1998 and now totaling over 300 artists, the Biennale organisation is not restricted to London, and plays an active part in international events such as Gwangju Biennale earlier this year.

All of this will culminate in a hoisting of the flags on London Bridge August 31, 2006 - the official night of the closing of The 2006 London Biennale. Al Kafa Gallery in London will exhibit the Flaggling Down May Day project, flags made by artists exhibited along side their proposals, images and documents of photographs on bridges on May 1 2006 around the world in all cities and locations.

John K. Grande
TORONTO

JOHN MARRIOTT: EASY TO ASSEMBLE
May 10 – September 15
Toronto Sculpture Garden
115 King St. East
www.torontosculpturegarden.com

Familiar, personal and private, this suburban backyard trinket available at any Home Hardware or Reno Depot, now looks displaced in downtown Toronto at the Sculpture Garden.

John Marriott has stated he admires the works of Vito Accocci and Dennis Oppenheim, but this place is urban grassy and green, not conquered by the wrecker's ball, or developer's dream, and as such it allows such an infusion of space, and the adhesion of a temporary and eternal thought object like Marriott's Easy to Assemble is a graphic alliteration on how form usually follows function.

The artist as non-agnostic pragmatist betrays the illusion, giving it all a surrealist twist. As Marriott states: "... This sculpture nods in solidarity to those who have struggled to follow the confusing instructions and diagrams that accompany build-it-yourself pre-fabricated sheds. This envisioning of assemblage harkens to chance, daring us to imagine that this sculpture might be the result of someone who misread the shed's assembly instructions—chose to ignore them and create the unexpected from something seemingly pre-determined."

As a 3-D exercise that looks put together as if from a kit, it has a directional or rational menu of potential directions it could go as assemblage, but Marriott has defied it all by building upwards with motifs that while maquette-like and miniaturized as compared with the scale of downtown Toronto nevertheless display a graphic sense. This personalization of de-construction has its own common person's structural syntax that is... revealed, to then be re-veiled again. Its structure is familiar, but has been turned upwards, for just a brief series of moments in time. It suggests structural flux, expansion, the uncontrolability of all this instant architecture, and development, as if forces external to our own being were designing our reason. We read Easy to Assemble one way, only to discover it literally exists in another form, not as a container, or object/structure that could hold garden implements, but instead as a form whose geometries move outwards into space. The suggestion is of a vacuum, of an emptiness, an absence of context, and as a synthetic visual and three dimensional world where the borders between objects, visual sensations and concepts are largely and endlessly in a state of flux, undefined, manipulated, imperceptibly affecting our unconscious and the way it associates form and function, or the manifest purpose of structure(s). In a word, Marriott's sculptural art suggests form no longer follows function, just as our "global" economy has outscaled its own resources, expanding beyond rational or economic scale(s).

John K. Grande

JEANIE RIDDLE: EVERYTHING PAINTED WHITE WITH COLOR
YYZ
May 5 - June 17
401 Richmond St
www.yyzartistsoutlet.org

Jeanie Riddle's sculpture/assemblage is presented at YYZ as a single entity, albeit one that plays on and with popular notions of design, advertising, and the commensurate commercialization of the art object/image. The work exists as a comment, (an instinctive comment) on the way formal compositional gestures can have a relation to performance actions, while establishing a dialogue with the viewer vis-à-vis their own perception and contemplation of material, its value, its component and ideational capacities.

The faux wood finish (MatTac appliqué), the illusionary way Riddle assembles her object/representation, which is in effect a demonstration, whereby what looks
like a wall of wood is actually a surface covering or optical barrier, even the quiet gathering of pedestal boxes as if in a Tony Cragg piece uses the various found or bought objects and recontextualized elements to present an art piece that is largely about the definition of meaning, of integral purpose and function. All the object elements are actors themselves in the assemblage and become a part of the art. There are the curious Dollar Store multiples a minimalist-like row of Whiffle balls stuffed with synthetic grass, very cube-like and spiky bright coloured rubber objects that have no visible function other than as objects of curiosity. All these items and objects, brought together as they are, suggest that we live in a culture where value exists as an abstract entity, that value, even aesthetic value is denaturalized and strangely foreign as are elements of culture to this cultural set up or assemblage scenario. Yet these elements are pseudo-formal, serially installed with a correctness that kindles memories of the Minimalist era that speak of the illusionary character of perception.

Riddle’s YYZ installation has a more edgy and less embroidered feel to it than her recent Optica Gallery show in Montreal did. Solidity becomes pliable, lines of green masking tape on the floor of the reserve side of Riddle’s wall act as a separator between what we see and what we cannot see, and both sides are illusory, in that they defy categorization, quantification, make us question what category we might slot this whole assemblage into. The wall acts as a buffer or firewall to our unconscious. There are paint colour samples, like the ones from your local Home Hardware or Reno Depot. The paint chip samples are gathered en masse, are no longer samples but objects with no perceivable function, and though these are colour samples they are painted samples. They are white, seen on the reverse side. This, and other elements provide a clue to the very matter-like material quality of Riddle’s experiential musing as does the reversed contact paper segment that lines innocuously on the floor at YYZ. There is even a solidified spilt of paint wrapped in MatTac, an afterthought, post-conceptual, a concept piece (or fragment thereof) seeking its own disposability by way of packaging and the allusions to packaging, even advertising are there, but this whole work is ironically made of recycled, reused, redefined materials. All this brought together to defy the site, to defy the architecture that is or was the modernist, and even the postModern context or non-space.

Riddle seeks to negate the very purpose, even the readability of object categories, and succeeds to a degree. The synthetic, arranged, salon-like atmosphere that these Pop colours, signify a realignment, even a resteralizing of potential meanings or readings of these objects, which are no longer functioning as objects. As she states, “It is in the process of assembling, and of making, that I arrive at a formal composition. I am always interested in the way everything comes together through the formal compositional gesture. I am now doing this with objects instead of painting.” Surreal, denaturalized, but comfortably so, the show bequeaths its title Everything Painted White with Color.

John K. Grande

REGINA

DOMINIQUE BLAIN: POETIC MEETS POLITICAL

April 1 - July 9
MacKenzie Art Gallery
T. C. Douglas Building
3475 Albert Street
Tel: (306) 584-4250
www.mackenzieartgallery.ca

Dominique Blain is a conceptual artist who struggles with the consequences of our increasing global consciousness: How should we, the relatively privileged, live knowing that great suffering exists beyond our comfortable homes; misery caused in part by our historical relationships, and by our present consumer choices? Blain condenses complex themes—such as the oppression of women, the legacy of war, colonialism, white privilege, and the mad creativity of landmine design—into aesthetic objects that at once call up and critique these issues.

Japan Apologized is a deep green and white changot—the traditional Korean clothing of the female nobility—suspended from the ceiling. The arms are splashed and the gown is spread open to reveal a white interior with the phrase “Japan Apologizes” patterned over the creamy fabric. The changot stands in for the euphemistically named “comfort women.” Koreans who were enslaved and subjected to serial rape by Japanese soldiers during World War II. The very late and heartfelt apology is registered here as a repetitive and indelible mark, a pattern that echoes rather than replaces previous abuses.

The suffering of these women is impossible to capture and convey. Instead, Blain creates an object that absorbs and reflects meanings by suggesting rather than illustrating, By evoking rather than explaining, this work is more available for a complex range of meanings and feelings than histories are. Conceptual sculpture has a special evocative magic. Unlike paintings and photographs that exist in fictional space, sculptures—especially those made from found objects—seem more real. And when real things imbued with conceptual meaning they can generate a haptic affect that is different, more visceral, than that produced by images and words alone.

However, when conceptual artists work with emotional content their intellectual strategies can appear remote, calculated, and clever when an intimate, expressive, and emotional response seems more suitable. I was often uneasy with this exhibition. The cool and precise beauty of these elegantly crafted and virtruous objects, these frozen thoughts, often seemed at odds with their heated content. Some works, such as the baby shoes with soles imprinted with facts about landmines, seem naively manipulative. Other works stuck me as truly brilliant inventions only later to leave a bad taste in my mind.

Rug is a handmade textile by the Jackciss Cooperative of Dera Ghazi Khan, Pakistan. Like much of Blain’s work, initial appearances are deceiving. The rug’s abstract patterns turn out to represent small landmines—treacherously designed to attract children. It is shocking and informative piece. But I can’t help but wish that members of the Jackciss Cooperative had conceived the rug. I am concerned about the work’s secondary message. The executive labour was done in Canada, but the manufacture was farmed out to cheap labour in Pakistan. The artist/contractor never met the artisans. The product was then shipped back for circulation and eventual sale in richer nations. The narrative feels too close to the global capitalist narratives Blain critiques in many of her other works (especially Duty Free).

Perhaps I am suffering under an archaic phenomenology that perceives “authentic” expressions coming first from the people who directly experience an event. The expressions of a landmine victim feel more powerful to me than expression of other people on the same subject. Similarly, I feel that an expressive object made by the same people who had the concept is more resonant than if the conceiver subcontracts the labour to others. In our age of dead authors these sorts of things are not supposed to matter. And when the display system is merely semiotic, that is probably so. But when magic and affect are involved, I think it does matter, it does affect the affect.

This said, I have returned to this impressive exhibition many times. I am grateful that these things exist, that Blain has so effectively stirred my conscience. These works are impossible devices than inhabit their anxiety, and infect all who come close.

David Garneau

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Land and art as a property for higher thoughts, conceptions... We are able to explore the details in these paintings, stone by stone, wave by wave, detail by detail. There is a near ritualistic repetitive methodology to Tanabe's painting. They could be caricatures of what a landscape should potentially represent and hence largely conservative and corporate, but equally they could be reflections of the land we identify with.

Tanabe has undoubtedly made a lot of bread, are the more ingenuous experiments with abstraction and fluid painterly effect. These abstractions are, to my mind, much neglected as a genre in Canadian West coast painting, a phenomenon largely overlooked by collectors and historians alike who will go for conceptual art, or sculpture, or realism, or Native and ignore all else.

As Tanabe's first teacher, Joe Plaskett has stated, "He knows his strength, and in each phase of his work he discovers a way to get closer to what he knows he can do. His character is at once straightforward and yet complex. So his art shows mastery, and behind it is mystery." — John K. Grande

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VIE DES ARTS N° 203 87