

**IN THE CORNER,  
BEHIND THE WALL**

SEAN ALWARD

Saturday, June 26th // Opening Reception // 7pm - 11pm  
June 26th to July 10th 2010

Sean Alward's work develops from an examination of hidden spaces within his home, formerly a communal residence in the 1960's, and a sealed hidden room in his studio building. He has composed mixed media works that reconfigure space and explore the role of paint and light in accessing history through vision.

Sean Alward completed his BFA at NSCAD and MFA at UBC. His working method is pseudo-archaeological and is concerned with the representation of space, time, and history in images. He has exhibited in Canada and internationally. He lives in Vancouver.



*A Hole In the Studio Wall Revealing a Room Not Seen Since 1938 (Light Source),  
Inkjet on paper, watercolour on linen, gouache on mattboard*



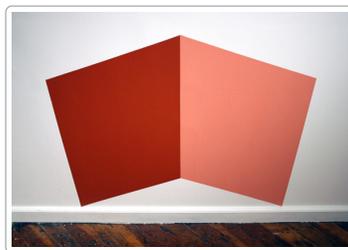
*A Hole In the Studio Wall Revealing a Room Not Seen Since 1938  
(Key), Inkjet and acrylic on paper with plexiglass*



Left: *Communal House, Behind the Fridge #3* (Vancouver, circa 1969), Acrylic & inkjet on paper  
Right: *Communal House, Behind the Fridge #4* (Vancouver, circa 1969), Acrylic & inkjet on paper



Left: *Communal House, Behind the Fridge #1* (Vancouver, circa 1969), Acrylic & inkjet on paper  
Right: *Communal House, Behind the Fridge #2* (Vancouver, circa 1969), Acrylic & inkjet on paper



*Communal House, Behind the Fridge*  
/ installation (Vancouver, circa 1969),  
Latex on gallery wall



*A Hole In the Studio Wall Revealing a Room Not Seen Since 1938 (Reflection)*, Inkjet and mylar on paper



Left: *Behind the Microwave (Vancouver, circa 1969)*, Inkjet on paper and acrylic on canvas



Right: *Beside the Brooms (Vancouver, circa 1969)*, Inkjet on paper and acrylic on canvas

Sean Alward's new work involves an archeological-like gaze into domestic spaces. Through excavation and analysis he provides the viewer portholes into forgotten spaces.

**304 Days:** Your work seems to function like a time machine delivering the viewer glimpses into sites that have not been viewed for decades. Does your work function like historical narrative and what is its relationship to the field of archeology?

**SA:** I'm not sure if my work functions as historical narrative or not, that depends on the viewer. I do think it is experiential though. In terms of narrative there is obviously a pretty explicit indication of past time in my work. However, it is the process of interpretation and experience in present time that interests me - history now. There is a back-story to all of the pieces, the most essential components of which I include in the titles so people have a sense of context and can project themselves into the alternate viewing positions suggested in the images. Narrative can be understood in many ways, but in imagining how other people see or have seen the world, maybe that automatically involves narrative of some sort.

Generally though I think of my work as having some relation to History Painting, but without explicit narrative. I'm more focused on the process of perception.

In terms of archeology, there is definitely a relationship, but my version is unscientific and amateur - though not inaccurate.

**304 Days:** Gilbert and George said in a recent interview that they are interested in how "The picture stays the same, but the world changes around it" when considering an artworks relationship to time. Is this idea relevant to the sites imaged in your work?

**SA:** In a way, yes. These sites were sealed off from the attention of the world and were basically left physically untouched for a very long time. Looking at them again, they become re-activated and altered by attention. They are altered because we are interpreting and they become part of a perceptual loop. They become part of a process that is constantly changing: observing visual details, making associations and ascribing meaning. In that sense then, yes, the site, or picture is the same and the world changes.

However, these sites are really fragments of the original larger 'picture.' Both their physical surroundings in terms of their buildings' subsequent alterations and social context have changed a lot. So the picture is not entirely the same. Archeologists also typically deal in fragments, which leaves room for a lot of creative misunderstanding.

**304 Days:** Lastly, you mentioned that there is a back-story to each piece in the exhibition and that seems like an important ground for each work to develop from. Could you discuss this process regarding your site-specific wall painting and the book piece?

**SA:** The book or magazine piece, *A Hole In the Studio Wall Revealing a Room Not Seen Since 1938 (Key)*, comes from an image taken inside the 'secret' room that was sealed behind my studio wall. After a recent fire in the building, workers knocked a hole in my studio wall to gain access to this space. Inside was the top five feet of a very large room that had been subdivided into smaller apartments below, with lower false ceilings. This large room had actually been the viewing room for one of Vancouver's earliest crematoriums. Inside I found a magazine left by the tradesmen who'd sealed the room up. It dated from 1938. My version is a kind of reconstruction of the magazine. However, I extrapolated from my photographic image of the magazine and not the actual artifact. All images are basically fragments, and my reconstructed object is based on an image.

The site-specific wall painting, *Communal House, Behind the Fridge / installation (Vancouver, circa 1969)*, is a partial colour match of the corner space behind the fridge in my house, which had been a communal "hippy house" in the 1960's. I went searching for any original evidence from that era and found this section of wall that had not been repainted the white colour covering the rest of my house interior. Half of my wall piece is a match of this old paint and the other half is a lighter tint of that same colour, as if it had faded with time or was currently in the glare of a bright light. After the show ends it will get painted over with white like the rest of the gallery, which is the same white as in my house.

## EXCAVATING EXPERIENCE

Paul de Guzman

What seems unmistakably missing is inherently completed by the viewer. Sean Alward's exhibition, *In the Corner, Behind the Wall*, at 304Days seems to play with this aspect of an incomplete narrative. Although the narrative may be fixed in Alward's mind through his personal encounter of a particular event, the artist nonetheless wants the experience of the viewer to be completed by the viewer, perhaps involving a certain democracy of experience.

Alward's work primarily deals with painting. But with this exhibition, I was interested in seeing his investigation into an archeological context and how that experience has informed and influenced his recent work. Although Alward's intent in revealing dormant histories was accidental, the opportunity was significant in exposing a photographic and architecturally rich exploration into an already intensive and dedicated painting practice. Painting, photography and architecture each have their own particular histories, but for each of these related but apparently disparate disciplines, the viewer's experience is paramount. Viewer conceptions and expectations through the creation and continuation of existing and new narratives inform the exhibition.

Upon entering the gallery, I was initially struck by the abstract quality of the framed works hanging on the wall. But upon closer inspection, central throughout the works are abstract photographs of interior architecture, documents of an accidental structural excavation in the artist's studio. These photographs show a vibrant, historical even psychedelic sensibility. The photographs taken during that time showed an abstracted quality that is painterly. The artist then decided to extend the painterly projections beyond the confines of the photograph to further explore each composition's reductionist and abstract potential. Perhaps accidental that these dormant histories were revealed. Contemporary artists of late tend to direct a lot of energy and effort into forcibly revealing dormant artistic histories and little known historical facts. Sometimes they work but most often the results work toward a blinding boredom. To the artist's credit, Alward was reacting to a serendipitous moment; an historical opportunity to muse primarily on intuition rather than conceptual or academic construct. That's not to say that Alward lacks these latter qualities. On the contrary, his explorations reveal a richness and dedication to an almost fanatical investiga-

tion into new experiences. Alward takes this experience to move and expand into other artistic and conceptual territories and creates work that melds successfully into a new visual and experiential context.

The experience of a work, whether in painting, photography or architecture, is fundamental. The recognition of any experience is an ideal best enjoyed in abundance, but we rarely ever do so. The experience of art, architecture, life or anything worth the trouble tends to get short-changed due to self-imposed conditions on time or our sense of priority. We tend to limit our experiences of things to the point of the anecdotal, and simply try to get to the point and move on, satisfied with our brief encounter. I suppose with all the technological advances in recent years, we've become a society of impatient spectators satisfied with short, quotidian experiences. This is similar in fact with watching movie trailers rather than the entire movie. With Alward's exhibition, I would suggest employing some form of control over our dismissal of experience. The best experience one can have with the work is through the creation of a personal narrative, one that will linger and perhaps last longer than the quotidian.

Paul de Guzman is an artist with opinions. He lives and works in Vancouver.