

# 304 days

AIDS-3D  
JEN AITKEN  
SEAN ALWARD  
RYAN AMADORE  
ANDREAS BREUNIG  
MATTHEW BROWN  
MILANO CHOW  
ANDREW DADSON  
MAX FRINTROP  
ADAM GANDY  
JEREMY GREEN  
COLLEEN HESLIN  
KEVIN HUBBARD  
BEHRANG KARIMI  
JEFF LADOUCEUR  
DAVID OSTROWSKI  
NATHALEE PAOLINELLI  
MICHAIL PIRGELIS  
LES RAMSAY  
JASMINE REIMER  
MARINA ROY  
NICOLAS SASSOON  
LUKAS SCHMENGER  
AUREL SCHMIDT  
JANA SCHROEDER  
PHILIP SEIBEL  
LUCAS SOI  
CHRIS SUCCO  
JONATHAN SYME  
SVEN WEIGEL

Posted: May 15, 2010

304 Days is an artist-run project space in Vancouver, Canada. It is a temporary space that will host exhibitions for three hundred and four days.

304 Days is interested in exhibiting professional artists from Canada and abroad with a focus on enabling solo exhibitions. Group exhibitions will also be considered.

304 Days gives artists a space to exhibit their work with no strings. 304 Days exhibits work that is experimental, engaging and is in dialogue with issues in contemporary art.

No CARFAC fees are paid to the artists, and no fees or commissions will be taken from the artist or work sold.



304 Days  
436 Columbia Street  
Vancouver, Canada

2010-2011

All exhibition images and video walkthroughs are online:  
[www.304days.com](http://www.304days.com)

A PROJECT BY: SEAN MATTHEW WEISGERBER

# 304 days

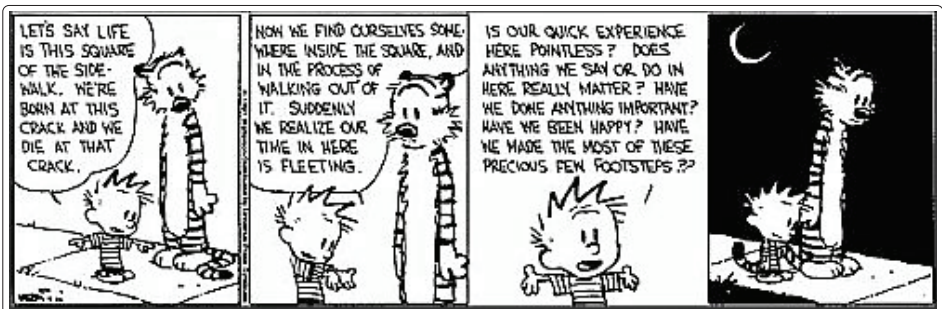
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# THE PROJECT SPACE AND DISCOURSE OF 304 DAYS

Mitch Speed

304 Days was an independently run gallery and project space, which existed at 436 Columbia Street in Vancouver, from May 2010 until April 2011. In addition to describing the length of the projects operation, the moniker '304 Days' also alluded to one of it's most prescient attributes; limitation. Limitation, in this instance, has not so much behaved as a "restrictive weakness" or a "lack of capacity" as it has bound a set of activities within a pre-ordained time period. The surplus energy that has been generated within the 304 Days project, and which has in turn spilled into the larger artistic community, owes its existence to the confluence of a limited temporal period with an effective strategy for managing it.

Relative to established, permanent exhibition spaces – whether commercial, artist-run, or institutional – the aforementioned time period seems scarcely long enough to gain proper momentum, but relative to the sporadic and sudden world of "pop-up" stores, and exhibitions – to which the project is related – the period seems immeasurably long. 304 Days thus found itself situated in a proverbial no-human's land – which came to be populated by many humans – between extreme temporality, and carefully charted out longevity.



Calvin and Hobbes

The other day, during a break at work, I re-discovered the above cartoon, which illustrates, with a lovely combination of sardonic wit and sincere whimsy, a problem that has both fascinated and troubled human beings since time immemorial. The rate at which tasks are carried out within a given period of time results in a relative compression, or decompression, of mental and physical energy. Depending on context, and



depending on whom has set the temporal standards within which the given activity takes place, this compression results in a conglomerations of energy – always idiosyncratic to the human being in which they occur – made up of anxiety, excitement, and boredom.

How can we understand the particular way in which human energy has been expended within the 304 Days project – by the projects facilitator, Sean Weisgerber, by the artists involved, and by visitors to the space? By coordinating the distance within his self-imposed sidewalk cracks in a particular way, Sean has connected the goings on between those cracks, with the goings on in a larger material world which, flowing around and sometimes through this art world, presents daily challenges inextricably bound up with the expenditure of valuable human energy.

Specifically, Sean has upped the ante in terms of exhibition turnover – one, sometimes two per month, give or take – whereas galleries and museums typically operate on anywhere from a six week to six month rotation. The speed at which exhibitions have been planned, assembled, carried off and de-installed, and the pace at which that process has been repeated thirteen times over, has had multiple consequences. These consequences can be identified and interpreted in relation to the space's functions, as contemporary art gallery and locus of social activity.

In cahoots with the demands of work, families, and educational careers, the compressed time frame of each exhibition has, in some cases, limited contact between art and its viewing public. To my mind, this fact – made known to me through conversations with would be visitors – should not be denied when it comes to honest considerations of the space's functioning, but grouped into those considerations as part of an effort to achieve a complex picture of the equally complex interfaces between art production and art reception, by way of the spaces where art is shown.

We would be remiss to consider the aforementioned consequence without also considering the other effects of the strategy that precipitated it. The exhibition's at 304 Days have been brief, and because of their brevity, have taken the form of dense flourishes of creative activity, which have generated an energy uncommon in the worlds of typical galleries or pop-up ventures. The circuit through which this energy has traveled has taken the form of a website, interviews, openings, conversations, and new and exciting relationships between people. The tightness of that circuit – short time spans – has been absolutely necessary in gener-

ating the energy that flows through it in the first place. While the same tightness that has generated the energy to feed the circuit, has, in amplifying the difficulty of public participation, also short circuited it.

When we exercise our prerogative to engineer our own perspectives, optimistic impressions begin to form in the potentially problematic surface of this scenario. The embodiment of this complicated situation by 304 Days suggests the possibility of casting the project as a conceptual model in which a triangulation between time, economic circumstances and creativity has produced a type of energy particular to the conditions of a specific period in time.

By way of discourse – in all its forms – this energy will carry forward into future worlds, forming a loose network of recollections that will in turn invoke the cultural conditions that gave form to the recollected moment. This is not unlike the way in which the empty spaces that surround the fleeting and imperfect markings of a charcoal rubbing invoke the entire history of an object. A view of this project as a model in which human excitement/creativity and harsh circumstances co-mingle, disregards the pessimism of proclamations of victim hood in favour of a productive, and poetic, engagement with circumstance that can be typically artistic, entrepreneurial, or even institutional.

Mitch Speed is an artist and writer. He lives and works in Vancouver.

# NO SEX NO LIFE

AIDS-3D  
MILANO CHOW  
COLLEEN HESLIN  
JEFF LADOUCEUR  
MARINA ROY  
NICOLAS SASSOON  
AUREL SCHMIDT  
LUCAS SOI

Saturday, May 29th 2010 // 1pm - 11pm // Opening Reception 7pm - 11pm  
Sunday, May 30th 2010 // 1pm - 5pm

AIDS-3D were featured in *The Generational: Younger Than Jesus* at the New Museum (NYC)

Milano Chow runs the independent publishing house: Medium Rare (NYC)

Colleen Heslin's solo exhibition *I See Water* is on now at LES Gallery (Vancouver)

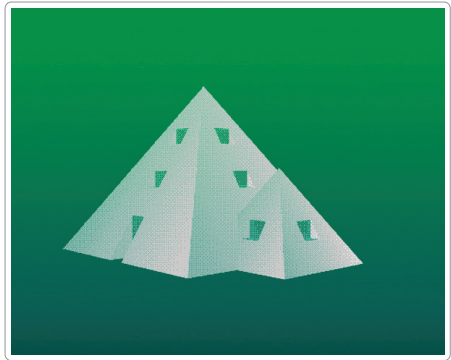
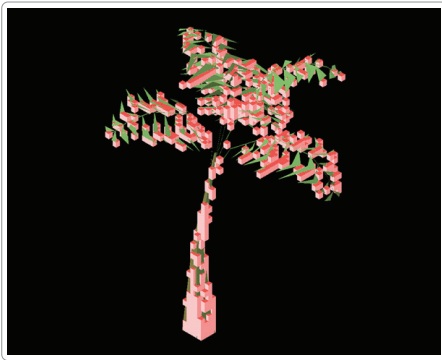
Jeff Ladouceur's most recent solo exhibition was at Richard Heller Gallery (Los Angeles)

Marina Roy is the recipient of the Jack and Doris Shadbolt Foundation's VIVA Award (Vancouver)

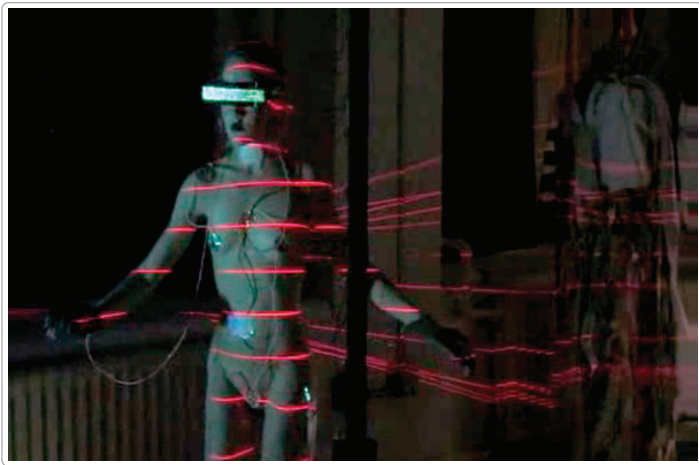
Nicolas Sassoon's most recent solo exhibition *Home Studies* was at Woo Gallery (Vancouver)

Aurel Schmidt is currently featured in the *2010 Whitney Biennial* (NYC)

Lucas Soi's two-person exhibition opens in October at The Shooting Gallery (San Francisco)



Left: Nicolas Sassoon, *Where is the Money Tree?*, Animation (Still)  
 Right: Nicolas Sassoon, *Pyramides*, Animation (Still)



AIDS-3D, *Network Of Love*, Video of performance (Video Still)



Colleen Heslin, *Morningtime*, Oil on canvas



Jeff Ladouceur, *Untitled*, Pen and ink on paper



Aurel Schmidt, *Burnout*, Burns and pencil on paper





Left: Milano Chow, *Untitled (Girl On Couch)*, Pencil on paper  
 Right: Lucas Soi, *Christmas Eve 1990*, Pen and ink on paper



Marina Roy, *Untitled (Mattress)*, Burns on paper





Installation Shot



Installation Shot

## WHAT A DIFFERENCE A YEAR MAKES

Lucas Soi

In the summer of 2010, I heard from my friend Adam Dodd that his old studio mate, Sean Weisgerber, was opening an exhibition space. I had been working on a show for my gallery in Mexico and wanted to exhibit it in Vancouver. The show was pretty provocative; a biography of Traci Lords—the adult film star. After seeing the space, I emailed Sean some pieces I had been working on and never heard back. I wasn't surprised the subject matter was difficult, not to mention illegal; Lords was sixteen years old during the filming of her movies.

A few weeks later, I learned of Canadian Art magazine's annual gallery hop. Sean's space, named 304 Days after the length of his rental agreement, was right across the street from Shudder Gallery, an official stop on the hop. I wrote Sean again, this time pitching him a group exhibition that would open on the same day as the tour. I was intent on taking advantage of the timing; it was a high profile event that was sure to bring traffic to the space.

Sean responded and told me that his original intention for 304 Days was to showcase solo exhibitions. But, what better way to debut a space than to include a group of artists? We met and I showed him some pieces from my private collection. We only had two weeks and I thought I had the beginnings of a great show.

As a painter, he immediately responded to the works on paper and canvas. With drawings by high-profile Canadian artists living in New York, Aurel Schmidt and Jeff Ladouceur, a burn drawing by local established artist Marina Roy of a naked woman parting her legs on a bed, to emerging painter Colleen Heslin's portrait of a nude girl pissing onto palm fronds. The work was challenging.

We both wanted to do something that worked both visually and conceptually. The drawings and paintings in the main exhibition space would be bookended by two video pieces: two flat-screen TVs in the large front window faced out onto the street and played looped computer animations of a pyramid and a palm tree by the French artist Nicolas Sassoon, and a projection of a performance in Berlin by the American duo AIDS-3D ran in the back.

The fearlessness and commitment to quality work that operated on its own merits, without accompanying text or commentary, was a bold move that set the stage for the gallery's future programming. A year later, 304 Days is officially included in Canadian Art magazine's gallery hop. What a difference a year makes.

# 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*

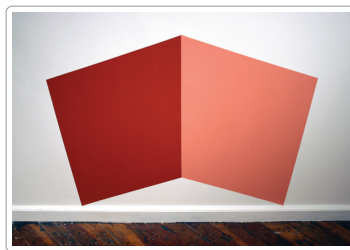




Left: *Communal House, Behind the Fridge #3* (Vancouver, circa 1969), Acrylic & inkjet on paper  
 Right: *Communal House, Behind the Fridge #4* (Vancouver, circa 1969), Acrylic & inkjet on paper



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.

# FAMOUS LAST WORDS

An Exhibition in Two Parts

Act One:

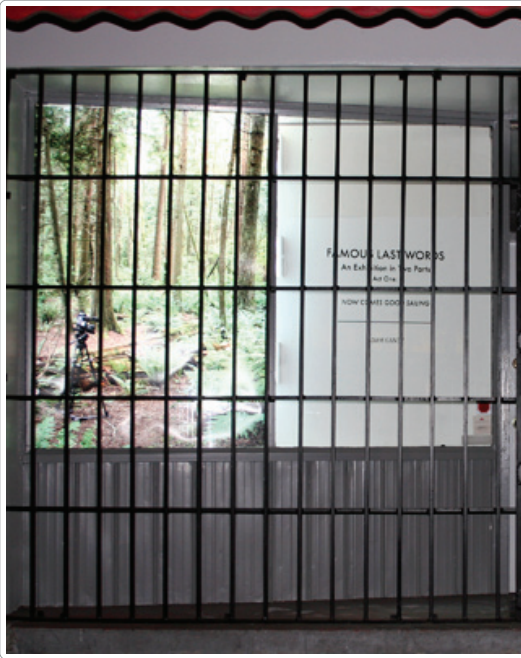
*NOW COMES GOOD SAILING*

ADAM GANDY

Saturday, July 24th // Opening Reception // 7pm - 11pm  
July 24th to August 14th 2010

Adam Gandy exhibits two new videos, drawing, sculpture and photography that develop from an exploration of the Homeric idea of Nostos, or homecoming. Gandy's work examines the cult of the masculine ideal reflected through film, philosophy and history exploring the notion of resourcefulness as heroism and man's gaze into nature.

Adam Gandy is an artist and writer living in Vancouver. He received a BFA from ECUAD in 2006 and is currently on hiatus from pursuing a BA in Sociology and Philosophy at UBC.



Left: *Untitled (Behind the Scenes)*, Inkjet on styrene  
 Right: *Berk's Excalibur*, Knife, log and cloche +  
 + *Everyman's Multitool*, Lighter, bottle opener, log, stick and plinth



Installation Shot





Installation Shot



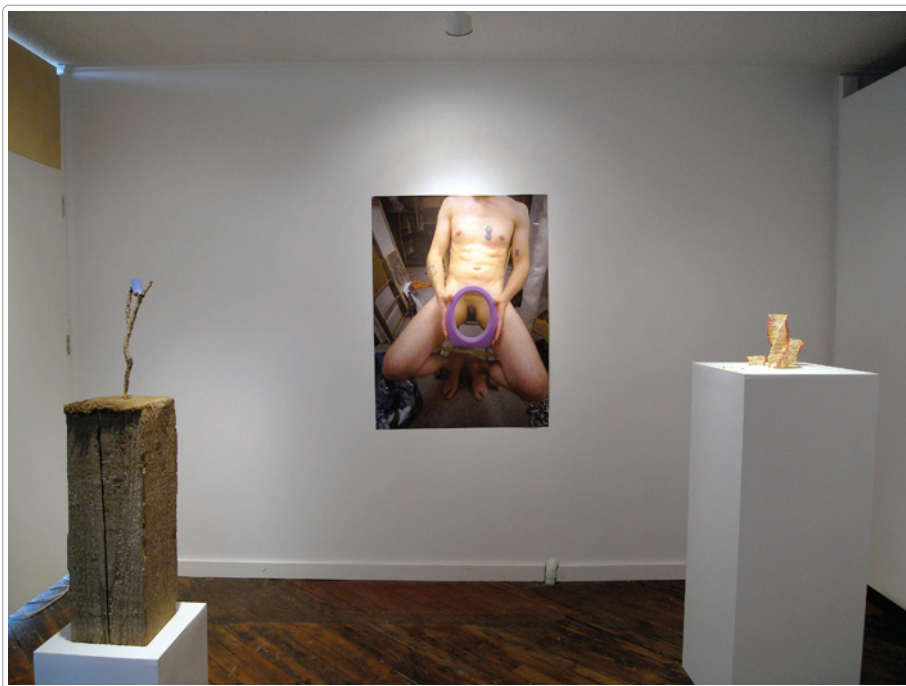
*In Consideration of the Tendency for Civilisations to Destroy Themselves, Matchsticks*



*Liberty Tool Kit, Inkjet on paper*



*One Man's Opinion, Inkjet on paper*



Installation Shot



Left: *The Fragile Economy of the Gifts of our Fathers*, Cape on stick on log with thread  
+ *Rambo Research Photography*, Various landscape, photographs and lightjet  
+ *Demonstrations of the Futility of my Labours*, Sharpened sticks  
Right: *Ecstasy of St. Francis (after Zurbaran)*, Ballpoint pen on plywood with light



304 Days speaks with Adam Gandy about the first act of his two-part exhibition during a brief few breaks from installing the works.

**304 Days:** If we can talk briefly about a specific piece of your choice, or I can suggest one, from this show?

**AG:** Yeah sure.

**304 Days:** Perhaps the dagger piece, *Berk's Excalibur*?

**AG:** Ok sure, yeah. I guess so, that is the piece that brought you into this thing.

**304 Days:** Maybe that piece and the *Rambo* piece?

**AG:** Yeah, it relates to *Rambo* in a strange way. Weirdly enough a lot of my notions of what I am going to make actually come out of my dreams. And, I think there is a very 1950s aesthetic to what I do.

My Dad was British and was a biker, but not really a tough guy but he had a best friend named James that he called Ted. And we grew up calling him Ted. Uncle Ted. Even though that isn't his name. And the reason why is that he was kind of a violent guy when he was younger and my dad thought he acted like a Teddy Boy. And, they raced trials and they both rode Triumphs along with another one of my 'uncles' who I'm named after. So, in some way these and the stick-sharpening piece have a little quiet homage to my dad somehow where I am wearing his motorcycle jacket in the stick-sharpening piece. But, you know the story *The Sword in the Stone* was not part of the official King Arthur myth. It was something that was written later about Merlin. And, they made the Disney movie of *The Sword in the Stone*. And when you go to Disneyland, which I did when I was younger, they have *The Sword in the Stone* and everyday at some time in the square people line up and they do a big type of pageant where this guy dressed up as Merlin and others are dressed like characters in the movie in this cartoonish version of Medieval garb and volunteers from the audience try to pull the sword out of the stone. And, they get a couple of grown men up there, and there are always celebrities at Disneyland, like football players and whatnot because it is in Anaheim. And, they get these big guys to try and lift it out and of course they can't and then a little boy or girl will come up and they will extract the sword magically and they get to become the king or

queen for the day. And, I always liked the idea of retrieving the sacred object.

I also pull from the Elton John song, *Saturday Night is Alright for Fighting*, that is about a sort of Lad culture and the violence with the Ted's, the Edwardian kids. And there is a line, where he talks about the sounds I really like. I like the sound of a switchblade on a motorbike. And in a roundabout way, I went and got a switchblade from Italy. I ordered a switchblade and had been waiting for something to do with it and then I retrieved this log. The owner didn't want it anymore, so I took it and decided to polish it up to make it look like one of those tables that is made out of a log and then I stuck the switchblade in it and put a cloche over it in order to elevate it to a sacred object. I think it is funny in a lot of ways, and it is obviously a goofy piece, but it's like in case of emergency break the glass, but in this case it is an emergency generator. If you broke that glass now everybody is fucked because now you have a big knife.

[Laughter]

I like the idea of the potential for violence or the preparedness for action that accompanied the act of being sort of lower class Liverpudlian in the 50s, and the rise in teenager culture and the violence inherent in that and the movies of Nicolas Ray and I think all theses are all kind of a little bit contained in that work where you know James Dean gets involved in a switchblade fight and they poke each other in *Rebel Without a Cause*. And the way people act out in order to be who they are and I don't know if it is all contained in the work, but for me it was there. Sort of like my machinations as I was ruminating about what to do with the switchblade and I was thinking of all of those things and how I could encapsulate it, but still have it be not just about being a violent dude having a switchblade or being cartoonishly about biker culture, but something else entirely.

# NEVER BEFORE EVER AGAIN

NATHALEE PAOLINELLI

Saturday, September 18th // Closing Reception // 7pm - 11pm  
August 27th to September 18th 2010

Nathalee Paolinelli exhibits new paintings, sculptures and an installation in the front window. Paolinelli's works address formal systems within abstraction interpreting and reconfiguring them through a whimsical mode of discovery. These diverse pieces employ a palette of saturated hues that result in a dynamic arrangement of shapes and forms for the viewer to engage.

Nathalee Paolinelli. Born in Prince Rupert BC. Living and teaching in Vancouver BC. Graduated from Emily Carr (BFA) in 2004.



*35 Dots - Composition One in Twenty,*  
Acrylic paint and gouache on wood



Left: *Composition Ten,* Gouache on Arches paper  
Right: *Lallygag,* Acrylic and plaster on wood



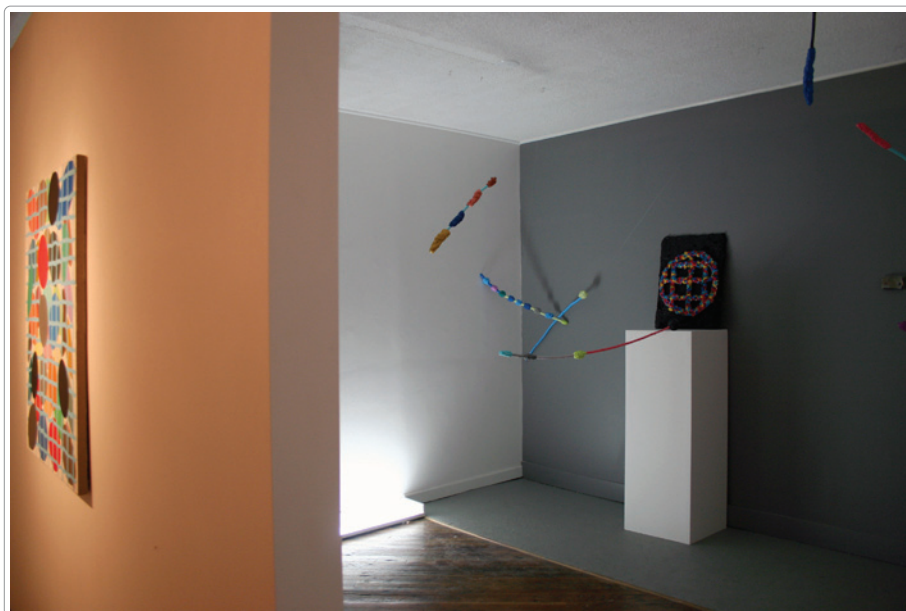




Left: *All About Ever*, Gouache on linen  
 Right: *Ruin*, Gouache on linen



*Too the Good*, Gouache on linen



Installation Shot



*Youth*, Acrylic paint and plaster on wood



*Youth*, Acrylic paint and plaster on wood +  
On Plinth: *Porthole*, Acrylic paint and plaster on wood

304 Days speaks with Nathalee Paolinelli about her exhibition via a few questions posed through email.

**304 Days:** Your works suggest a playful approach to abstraction whereby you make paintings and sculptures in an intuitive mode and then experiment with configuration and display post-fabrication. How does this process inform your practice?

**NP:** I'm only working this way with the oval piece, *Composition One in Twenty*, displayed in the front window. This process of recomposing a piece is playful but more than that it helps me establish a composition, I figure its much faster than making a painted study and slower than using the computer.

**304 Days:** The 'sticks' and the thick paintings in the back room of the exhibition have a heavy application of paint and the works in the front room and the window are flat. How did these different factures of paint arise?

**NP:** I'm working on several different works at once, that way I never have the feeling of "here we go again" I have different ways of working some loose and fast and others more drawn out and meticulous.

**304 Days:** All of the works in this exhibition have a similar palette of mostly saturated hues. How did you come to this palette selection?

**NP:** I don't choose a palette before I start it comes as I go. I'm using colours I like. I don't buy colours I don't like.



# MORNING LIGHT IS THE BEST LIGHT

LES RAMSAY

Thursday, September 23rd // Opening Reception // 7pm - 11pm  
September 23rd to October 9th 2010

Captivated by still life, Les Ramsay seeks an intimacy with form while romancing notions and techniques of abstract painting. His work is invested in the exploration of tropes found in modern, cubist, and abstract art examining the contrasts between the artists' intellect and their whim. He exhibits several new paintings and sculptures that investigate circumstances where subject and composition exist in limbo.

Les Ramsay has received his BFA in visual arts in 2007 from the Emily Carr University, and also studied at the Bellas Artes, Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, Spain. His work has been exhibited in Canada, Spain, and the United States.





*Rug Table Vase, Oil on canvas*



Left: *Still Loaf, Oil on canvas*  
 Right: *Untitled (Flying Carpet), Oil on canvas*





Left: *Untitled*, Oil on canvas



Right: *Untitled*, Oil on canvas

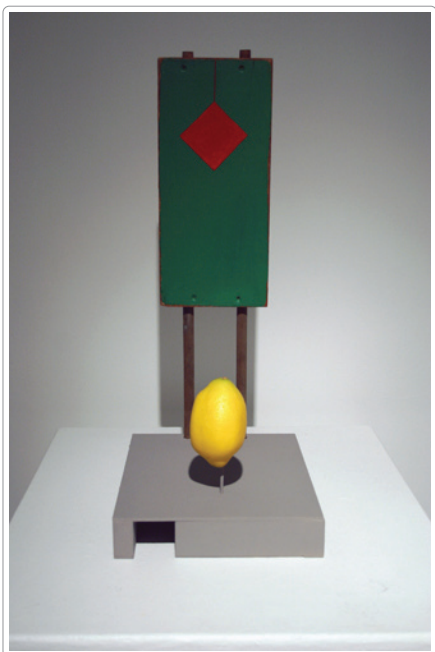
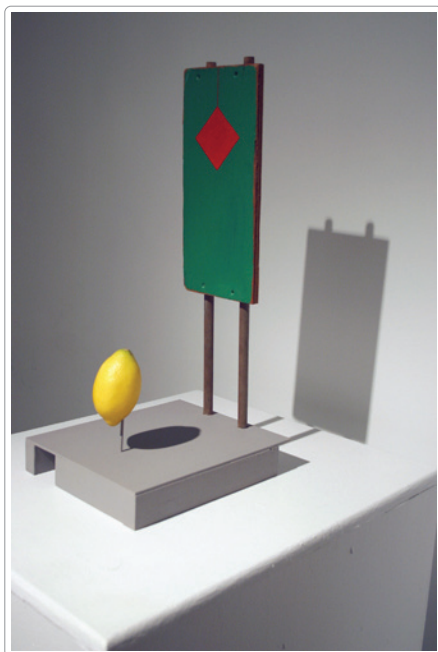


*Untitled (Red Checkers)*, Oil on linen



*Night Time*, Wood, metal, paper mache and enamel





*Zinger, Wood, enamel and fake lemon*

304 Days speaks with Les Ramsay about his exhibition on the morning of his opening outside of the Woodward's building.

**304 Days:** What is it about the morning light that you are interested in? Do you work early in the morning or outside of the studio often?

**LR:** I got the idea for the title when I was trying to consider something that had to do with all of my work. And, that was actually the time of day I was going to the studio, which was the morning. The title could be considered poetic. I like things that are open ended.

**304 Days:** Your work seems to explore many genres: still life, portraiture and abstraction, often in a single composition. How do you decide on your content and what to make?

**LR:** It does have to do with what is lying around in my studio. And, I choose what is in my studio. There are a lot of objects and things that I relate to and have brought into the studio or I have kept all of my life. So, those things are there.

As far as mixing different elements of painting in one... Something that I struggle with, but at the same point use to my advantage to finish a piece would be for example wanting to paint a landscape in my head, but then stretching the canvas as a portrait. And those are things that I find myself afflicted with and then just go with it. I like throwing myself a speed bump. That constant decision making throughout the making of a piece, whether it is myself limiting the materials around me or forcing myself to do something I don't really feel that I would do normally.

**304 Days:** There are many reoccurring objects in your work (vases, breads, fabrics and patterns). What is your interest in these subjects?

**LR:** I could say again, objects that I find in my studio, but to go back further these are all things I was interested in before making this work. I guess it is my fascination with still life and the history of it. I was really fond of the still life genre when I was taking art history in school and the way that it evolved. And, how they made pretty grand statements for being such mundane situations. I really like how they can be super loaded with a punch, but at the same time they can be subtle.

I really enjoy Cubism and how they took the still life and really distorted and flattened the still-life objects. I find myself referencing that kind of work. The objects end up standing in for, or personify, the figure.

As far as pattern, since I was young I was into pattern and found Op art from rock albums interesting. I got into stenciling and had some jobs silk-screening. And, I also wanted to throw some Canadiana in there in terms of the patterns referencing quilts. I have seen some quilts over the past few years at museums and at peoples homes and really felt this amazing camaraderie of Canadians that dedicated themselves to their art and craft and they are dazzling pieces and they are all so full of great pattern.

**304 Days:** The paintings appear to have a relationship to the sculptures in their form and content. Do you work on both simultaneously or do they develop more out of one medium?

**LR:** It is kind of a loop. Initially, I was pretty set on being a devoted painter, but always dabbled in print and actually not much sculpture until I went to school and had the facilities, space and access to new materials. The objects that have been coming into my paintings have been brought into the studio by me and the way I have been arranging those objects whether it's just setting them up around the studio, getting some inspiration or sketching from them. That's when I realized that I enjoy organizing and arranging things due to their shapes and what they look like. And, I started getting really into that and started taking photos. I started making assemblages that had these objects in them, casting from them and on them. And, I have tried to directly paint from a still life that I set up, but once I try to paint from something that is right there. I have two modes of working when I am setting up to make a painting and I end up doing a drawing with paint when there's something there in front of me. And, it is good to get a sketch out of what's there sometimes, but then I really have to either turn the painting around or move that set-up away and remember it in my head for what I saw that I liked of it and paint what I saw that I liked of it because I can't make what's there and that's not the way I want to paint.

## YOU WERE SAYING?

Lee Henderson

Small questions insinuate themselves into the delicate, smart, beautiful paintings and sculptures by Vancouver artist Les Ramsay. Small but still quite paradoxical questions. For one thing the paintings seem to think for themselves. How is that? Viewers walk in on a conversation already in play. You catch up. Pondering their own surfaces' patterns and elliptical imagery, Ramsay's paintings joke and tease each other from across the wall, competitive like siblings in the same classroom. They engage in a kind of covert dialogue in advance of the viewer. Some of his paintings are still-lives that look like abstracts. Some of his paintings are abstracts that look like still-lives. Some of his still-lives revisit the Cubist experiments of dimensionality and POV, but the grid approach is quickly dissembled. Some of his more labour-intensive abstractions are based on quilts. Is that an abstraction or an Amish quilt? Is that a still-life of a suffragette quilt hanging on a wall? Is that drunk-walk patterned painting of another quilt or a kaleidoscopic image of a sailboat or pure non-denominational abstraction? It's beautiful. So is the abstract / still-life of a checkerboard tablecloth hiding the shadow-form of an empty vase. Is that a Wittgensteinian bird-bunny or a subconscious colour-shape made to signify nothing? Could it be both? Maybe: yes and no. Many of Ramsay's abstracts do take their cue from classic folk-patterns and domestic still-life objects and then quickly start to modify them in the painterly way. Ramsay is engaged in the painter's traditional signifiers -- the empty vase on a table, the bowl of fruit, the uncorked bottle of wine and longstem glasses. He shows new ways to know these things -- he sees around the objects, into them, and how to unfold their topos. Then his people -- his portraits appear out of nowhere. By a palette and form-combo with no straight relationship to skin and bone, he paints men and women. The paint insinuates the face, the neck, the persona -- without losing its canvas flatness. The paint is talking about a man, but does not represent him. The surface mask is explicitly painterly and flat, so that the soul of Ramsay's portraits remains somewhere beyond this non-illusion in oil. Paintings like our atmosphere where we see the stars on a flatscreen that makes eons worth of cosmic puddles into a single cartographic panorama. Ramsay's expressionist portraits made with improvisations of colour, texture, palimpsest and tradition, do the work to dramatize identity in a deadpan way. They explore point-of-view, provide other dimensions of seeing. Les Ramsay's paintings polyverse the universe.



Lee Henderson is an author and writer. He lives in Vancouver.

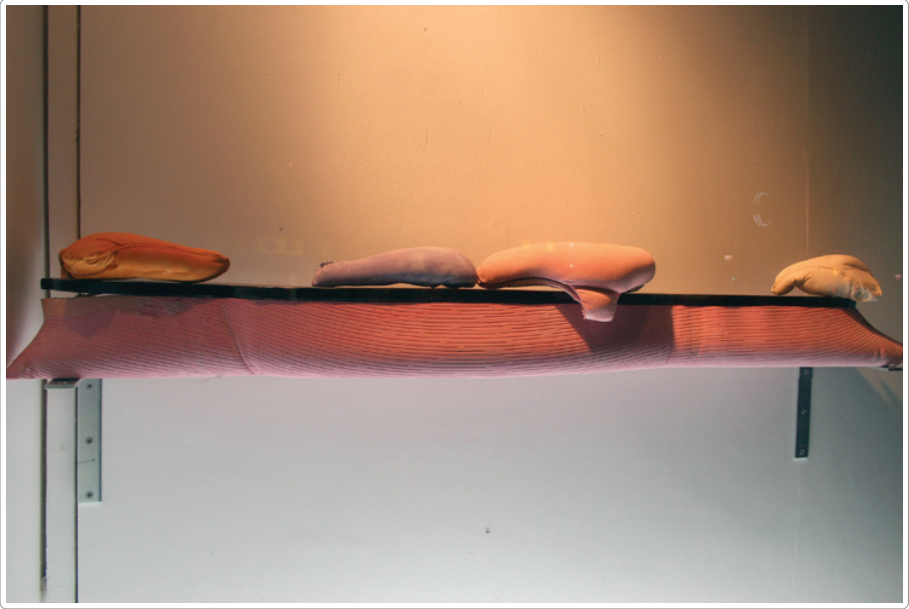
# SLUMP

JASMINE REIMER

Saturday, October 16th // Opening Reception // 7pm - 11pm  
October 16th to November 6th 2010

Jasmine Reimer exhibits an installation of new sculpture that examines the relationship between the public and private sectors of life. Her work explores contrasts between form and function while investigating notions of obsessive excess in both physical and intellectual patterns and the devices we employ to make life easier.

Jasmine Reimer. BFA - Emily Carr University 2009, Fine Arts Diploma - Langara College 2007, Theatre Arts Diploma - Grant MacEwan College 2001. Living and working in Vancouver BC Strong aversion to bureaucracy and administration. Penchant for all things edible.



*Slump*, Hydrostone, dye and plywood (Shelf)  
 + *Lump*, Plaster and dye  
 + *Wilt*, Plaster, dye and resin  
 + *Swell*, Plaster, dye and resin  
 + *Sag*, Plaster and dye



Left: *Bundle*, Plaster, dye and resin  
 Right: Installation Shot



*Pile*, Plaster, dye and resin





Left: Installation Shot  
Right: Installation Shot



Left: *Bulge*, Hydrostone and dye  
Right: *Partition (detail)*, Hydrostone, dye, plywood and acrylic



*Partition*, Hydrostone, dye, plywood and acrylic



*Division*, Hydrostone, dye, castor and plywood





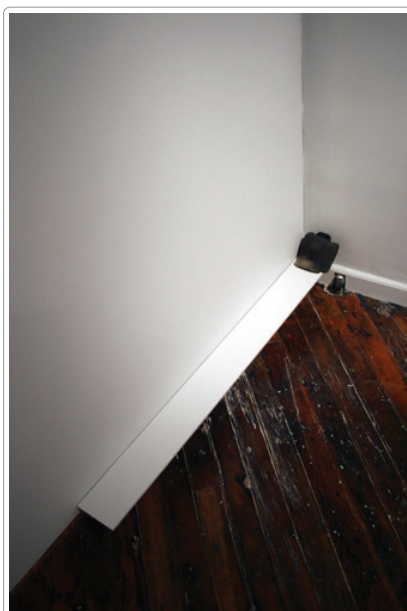
*Seize*, Plaster, acrylic and wood



*Hoard*, Plaster, dye and wood



*Easy 5*, Plaster, fabric and castor



Left: *Easy 2*, Hydrostone, dye, castor, leather and wood  
 Right: *Easy 1*, Hydrostone, dye and castor

304 Days speaks with Jasmine Reimer about her exhibition in the gallery post-installation.

**304 Days:** The sculptures are all made with plaster and hydrostone, yet they take on the formal qualities of fabric or fur. What is your interest in these materials and how does this process of 'material translation' inform your work?

**JR:** Fabric has always interested me because it's right next to the skin and because it has a sort of bodily shape, but not exactly a bodily shape. So, I always looked at fabric, clothing in specific, and how our bodies are supposed to fill up that shape. Even if it's kind of vice versa. I was always interested in that and what are bodies are supposed to do according to these man-made sacks, tubes and containers basically. So, then I got interested in not using pre-made clothing, but making my own sacks and it just became that I was making bodily shapes the way I wanted them to be, letting them become whatever they became as I filled them with plaster. Instead of a very conformist and controlled environment it was sort of a free thing.

**304 Days:** You've made the division of the gallery prominent and modified the space to create two distinct areas, yet they are connected through the shelf that goes through the dividing wall. How do you view the relationship between these two sectors and the works that inhabit them?

**JR:** Well as far as the way I set up the exhibit, the dividing wall is the division, but it's not a successful one because that shelf that goes through connects it, plus there is a giant hallway that goes all the way around, which is exactly the way our private and public lives are usually. We all try to keep some things private, but there are certain people that we tell lots of things to. There are people we act a certain way in front of, but we sometimes slip. And, we act a little bit more and then a little bit more and all of a sudden we have no private left and that person becomes our closest friend. So, in this case the public life I am referring to specifically is a working environment and sometimes you end up in a working environment where you can really be your self and you don't have much of a division. And, sometimes in your working environment you are completely alienated and you end up dark and gloomy and depressed or whatever, or maybe some people like it, that sort of bi-life.

I have been so divided between my private and my public life and not wanting to give up so much of my private in my public. I feel they don't deserve it. It's a comforting thing. The privacy.

**304 Days:** Many of the works appear as if they are carrying weight in the sense that they are burdened with a load that renders them overwhelmed and often useless. What is it about excessiveness that interests you and how does this inform the content and form of your work?

**JR:** Because I wonder why we, myself included, have the urge to do things beyond what we can normally handle. Everyone's line of capability is different. But, I wonder why most people want to, but if they don't want to they have control in excess, so it's interesting how something is always excessive to somebody. It's a self-medication and the only way to cope with things. Sometimes it is a cop out, for lack of better words, you know they use it as an excuse. The most fascinating thing about it is that simultaneously it supports a person while it is also breaking them down. And, that's why you get stuck in excess, because you can't survive without it. So, what do you do? There's not a specific avenue of excess that I'm most interested in. You know I wouldn't be able to bluntly say its drugs, alcohol or food. Because I am interested in the body it comes out as food related, I guess you could say, because my bodily forms are large and what makes bodies large? Too much food. It's the burden that I am interested in.

**304 Days:** Several of the sculptures are mounted on devices that were designed to make life easier, i.e. castors to move things more efficiently and shelves that help us arrange and store the objects that we have. What is it about these devices that intrigues you?

**JR:** I was rolling around in a two-inch space. So, I thought I feel lazy, but I can't stand up, and so I thought this is ridiculous! Right? Sometimes castors are just stupid and useless, just like the job I'm doing is stupid and useless. It's just a little indication of a bigger problem. That's how I see it.

## TRUE ART LIES

Lesley Anderson

In the Frontage of 304 days, a cool, florescent light flickered from below, lighting a long horizontal shelf in the window. It served as support for four subjects arranged in an asymmetrical fashion along the length of it. These four soft-bodied objects sagged and rested on the shelf, resembling slugs in a garden. The creature in the middle dangled an appendage over the edge, while the one on the far right teetered there threatening to fall, yet remained perfectly balanced. Their colours were soft pastels: pink, rose, mauve, cream, clashing somewhat with the dramatic lighting and the slug-like shapes. The shelf, on which these forms rested, on closer inspection, was a piece in its own right. Light bounced off a polished black surface that snaked along the wall and a plush looking pink underbelly hung below this rigid surface. The word '*Slump*', written in sans-serif capitals, greeted the visitor from the window. Beneath the title, the name 'Jasmine Reimer' read between the ominous bars that guarded the entrance.

On entering the space, I encountered a wash of white walls and bright track lights. My eye came to rest first on an eye-level sculpture across the room that was jutting from a dividing wall. But before I could give this piece my full attention my eyes were pulled upward by a flash of colour to meet an object hanging above the door to the left. A very long shelf reached across the room from wall to wall crossing overtop of the viewer. The piece was perched there and one sensed the weight of it by the way the supporting shelf bowed beneath it. The piece, *Pile*, is a 'dog pile' of beanbag forms, in the same Easter-like palette as the work seen from outside. On the bottom of the heap is a fleshy pink form, with ribbons of bright pink swirling across its ribbed texture like ice cream. The imprint of a seam or elastic mark is visible; a crease that follows the bulge and curve of the work. As I stepped left to see more, I noticed how the piece folded itself over its display, not just resting on it, but also curling under and hooking onto the shelf. A yellow form flopped over the pink one with many creases pinching where it folded, then a purple form, then green, then more purple. A flash of blue nestled between the pinks and yellows. The effect of their colour was cheerful. The shapes appeared soft, yielding and pliable.

I returned to the piece that I had temporarily put on hold, *Bundle*, jutting from the wall. Three forms appeared to have collapsed in exhaustion.



The first is flesh tone, draping off the edge and gathering in puckers on the top. The second is light yellow, butted up against the pink from behind with a knot reaching from one side. The third form is light green, flopping somewhat seductively over the other. They look like pillows, but not quite. They look like organs, but not really. They look anthropomorphic, but lifeless.

Reimer's work is self-described as relating to the body. In the interview for the show with 304 days, the artist talks of interest in fabric in that it lies next to the skin, man-made sacks that imitate the body. Her inspiration drawn from how ones flesh fills containers. *Slump* embodied all these discomforts of the body in clothing: tight elastics, bulges that threaten to burst and rolling masses that spill over.

What may be startling to the viewer is how the soft, drooping, sagging sculptures created are in fact not soft or pliable at all. They are solid, cast from hydrostone and plaster. Once the material hardens in the mold, the form is fixed. Reimer sews her own shaped sacks, filling them with plaster and, in her words, "letting them become whatever they become"<sup>1</sup>. Once the material has hardened, the mold must be removed. In a violent kind of birth the mold is torn away, sometimes leaving soft cotton fibers clinging to the finished work. The marvel of this process is the amount of detail that is retained in the finished piece, the crisscross of fabric threads, ribbing, seams, elastics, creases, that gather, bulge and bunch.

Back at the exhibition, in the right corner of the room was a piece titled *Partition*. It was composed of a plank of wood, painted white, standing vertically with its edge tucked into the corner. The effect divided the corner in half. At the bottom of this divider, scrunched down to the floor, was a sack-like form, bunched at the edges of the plank, hugging the bottom of it like a sock. A pinching in the middle divided the sock piece into a bulbous lower half, and a smaller upper. Beneath a thin coat of creamy yellow the piece was blue. The thinness of the topcoat allowed the blue to show through in areas, the effect becoming that of a sickly greenish hue.

I turned to move toward the second half of the exhibition, but not before confronting a heap on the floor that leaned against the wall: *Seize*. Two arms reached upward, pinned to a narrow strip of wood, installed diagonally on the wall very close to the floor. The work appeared as though it were trapped in shackles and pinned to the wall. The fallow lump of

folds drew thoughts of uncooked chicken to mind, visions of translucent and pimpled skin. To the left, just beyond the dividing wall, lay a somewhat matching counterpart. This piece, *Hoard*, sat on the floor like the previous work, *Seize*, with a cherry stained piece of wood lying parallel to the wall. Two fatigued blue arms draped over this piece of wood with the rest of its blue shape sinking behind; sandwiched between the wall and the wood. Perched atop the blue, was a green organ-like shape sitting upright. It reached up against the wall squishing the blue form beneath its weight.

Past the partition wall on wheels, in the second half of the exhibition, I could see that the eye-level shelf, supporting the piece *Bundle*, continued beyond the wall and into space on the other side. Dangling from this other side was *Bulge*, pink and floppy. Two arm like projections flopped over the sides hugging a corner between them, reaching under and hanging on. Again we have ribbing, seams and gatherings on the top of the work.

To the right and towards the floor was a strange sight. Just off the floor and running along the wall to the corner was another long white shelf and huddled there in the bottom left corner was a dark little creature, *Easy 1*. Looking fuzzy, it wrapped itself around something black and shiny and in its clutches: a caster wheel. It seemed to have its back to the viewer as it sulked there and appeared unwilling to turn around.

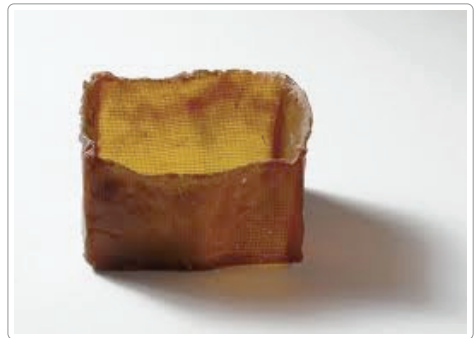
On the back wall at chest height a short bare wood shelf sat in space. Sitting atop this shelf and leaning back against the wall rested a blue, fuzzy-looking ball: *Easy 2*. An upward fold in its shape from beneath gave the piece the look of a tooth, or two stubby legs. The 'blue tooth' wore a grey-blue hat that was rumpled. An unexpected feature in the display was the circular hole drilled through the shelf directly below the tooth. A stark shadow was cast below the shelf by the bright track lights above, and in this shadow is a crescent shaped peek of light, shining from between the legs of the tooth and the hole of the shelf.

Returning to the floor, my eyes examined the work in the lower right hand corner of the room: *Division*. A piece of wood painted white, roughly 2 by 3 feet, sat squarely in the corner. Starting from the floor, moving up from the bottom edge crept a fluid shape. On the floor, it flowed like pink clay and there were two black wheels on the bottom that were enveloped in the fleshy drape. As the clay inched upward its form began



to change and break apart, from a distance it began to look vaguely like fire. The colour, however, was nothing like fire, closer to the colour of salmon or fiberglass insulation. Just to the right of this at roughly chest height hung: *Easy 5*. I saw another shiny black caster wheel protruding from the wall. A leathery looking green sack rested across it, its weight falling off to either side of the wheel and resting underneath. The seams of the sack created two diagonal lines leading up to the dark eye of the wheel. Along the seams, the leather gathered and puckered.

In Reimer's work, the sagging sacks that droop under the tug of gravity rely on trial and error and artistic intuition to be realized. The process and exploration of materials becomes so significant to the results. This type of process calls to mind the work of Eva Hesse, who utilized unconventional, malleable materials such as latex and rubber to create her sculptures. In comparing Reimer to Hesse, many parallels can be drawn formally and thematically. Hesse used memory, sexuality, self-awareness and humour as inspiration for her work; allowing forms to emerge from the interaction of the processes inherent in her materials, as well as natural forces of gravity. Reimer's work employs these things to great affect in her own work. Many of her bodily forms slouch somewhat comically, oozing with sexuality and ruminations on the body. Hesse's creations sag and nod toward the floor, the pendulous shapes provoking associations with gestation, growth and sex. Her emotionally loaded themes were ones that minimalists set-aside during a period of dominant reductivism<sup>ii</sup>. Like Hesse, Reimer's work is a refusal to shy away from loaded themes.



Left: Eva Hesse, *Aught*  
Right: Eva Hesse, *Untitled*

Eva Hesse is not the only relation that comes to mind when considering Reimer's work and I would like to draw the link to another sculptor that

used the power of gravity to create sagging forms in space. The work of Claes Oldenburg is reflected in Reimer's approach. In his soft sculpture works such as *Floor Cake* or *Soft Toilet*, his flaccid and pathetic looking forms have all the vulnerability of human flesh. Oldenburg's work followed a self-proclaimed doctrine that art should literally be made out of the ordinary world. "Its space should be our space, its time our time, its objects our ordinary objects, the reality of art will replace reality" <sup>iii</sup>. The use of an everyday object, the caster wheel, is a repeated element in Reimer's work. This tiny object brings to mind a place of work, such as an office and the reality of the daily grind. It's incorporated into the work surrounded in folds, creating visions of flesh engulfing them entirely. The work exudes anxieties about the degradation of the body in the office environment. Oldenburg described his practice as "the detached examination of human beings through form". Reimer's practice could be described as an examination of human beings through form, as well as the form of human beings.



Left: Claes Oldenburg, *Floor Cake*  
Right: Claes Oldenburg, *Soft Toilet*

In every sculpture the viewer's eyes move along the sags and curves of Reimer's creations knowing that they are rock hard and impenetrable. It is in these contrasts that we find the charge of the work: Soft/Hard, Comedic/Tragic, Attraction/Repulsion, Public/Private. What is perceived as soft, saggy and plush is in reality rigid and unyielding. These colourful pieces that sometimes read as playful and toy-like, can equally be perceived as grotesque. There is humour in the way they flop and stack on top of one another, silliness intertwined with the pathetic and cuddly with disgusting. These qualities create an attraction/repulsion conflict within the viewer.

The most fascinating binary of Reimer's work is the private/public. In the interview for *Slump*, Reimer spoke about the divide between her private and public self, revealing a very personal theme in the show: that the private is a sacred thing to her, not to be shared easily or with just anyone - it must be hard won. In the layout of the *Slump* there was a dividing wall that severed the exhibition space into two halves. The partition served as a symbol for a division of the private and public sectors of Reimer's life. One recalls that the pieces *Bundle* and *Bulge* existed on a plane that intersected the two rooms. This signals the partitions defeat, that the division of the self is an unsuccessful attempt and that no such segregation of self can be complete without cross contamination.

In speaking about this kind of 'bi-life' <sup>iv</sup>, Jasmine touches on guarding the private and the hazards of secrecy. It can lead to a gloomy daily prison and a tenuous environment that is impossible to maintain. The title of the show, *Slump*, is a perfect title, loaded with implications. Linked to the body and weight, the word 'slump' can also be used to describe a period of deterioration or decline: personal or professional. Her work proclaims that the bi-life leads to alienation and ultimately collapses.

Reimer's sculptures are strangely sad and sweet, charming in their vulnerability, as are the themes for the show. But considering her comments on concealing her true self from the public, I was left with a lingering skepticism on whether or not her work could be genuine. I believe now that Reimer's work is as honest as it can be. Artistically, Reimer is dealing with the difficult task of defining her own boundaries and I could argue that we all struggle with this burden. Personal limits are unknowable until we step too far and must come back again. I feel that the work is brave, brimming with the tension of navigating the self. As a result, the work flips the viewer back and forth between its extremes. On the one hand, her work is very sexy, yet on the other it is self-conscious and anxious. Simultaneously it can be funny and sad. In this way it is exciting and exhausting as the viewer; being emotionally lead down so many paths at once. However, Reimer does not shy away from these loaded subjects, but instead embraces them while revealing her own subjectivities. Ultimately, this show is performative and it is in this act of self-exhibition that the true art lies.

\*Notes on page 176.

+ & –

# ADDITION AND SUBTRACTION

ANDREAS BREUNIG  
BEHRANG KARIMI  
DAVID OSTROWSKI  
MAX FRINTROP  
CHRIS SUCCO

LUKAS SCHMENDER  
JANA SCHROEDER  
MICHAEL PIRGELIS  
PHILIP SEIBEL  
SVEN WEIGEL

Saturday, November 13th // Opening Reception // 7pm - 11pm  
November 13th to November 27th 2010

Andreas Breunig's most recent solo exhibition, *Brainfreezer*, was at Galerie Warhus Rittershaus in Köln. (Lives and works in Düsseldorf)

Max Frintrop recently exhibited in a group show, *K22*, at Tanzschuleprojects in Munich. (Lives and works in Düsseldorf)

Behrang Karimi was recently included in a group exhibition, *Self-Consciousness*, curated by Hilton Als and Peter Doig at Veneklasen Werner in Berlin. (Lives and works in Cologne and Düsseldorf)

David Ostrowski's recent two-person show, *1981*, was at Parkhaus in Düsseldorf. (Lives and works in Cologne)

Michail Pirgelis is represented by Sprüth Magers and recently exhibited in a group exhibition, *Der Westen Leuchtet*, at the Kunstmuseum Bonn. (Lives and works in Cologne)

Lukas Schmenger received the 2010 Eberhard-Dietzsch Art Prize and was included in *Happy House oder kleine Reparatur der Welt* at the Kunst Im Tunnel in Düsseldorf. (Lives and works in Düsseldorf)

Jana Schroeder recently founded an artist-run gallery, Gesellschaft für streitorientierte Kulturforschung (GSK), in Düsseldorf. (Lives and works in Düsseldorf)

Philip Seibel's most recent exhibition, *Pulsholz*, was in the Schmela Haus Düsseldorf, as a part of the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen. (Lives and works in Düsseldorf)

Chris Succo is represented by Duve Berlin and recently had a solo exhibition, *PANORAMA*, at the Kunstverein Schichtwechsel in Liechtenstein. (Lives and works in London and Düsseldorf)

Sven Weigel's most recent exhibition, *The Mirror Pool*, was at Circus in Berlin and he recently exhibited in a solo exhibition, *Modell für einen Wegstein*, at Marion Scharmann in Cologne. (Lives and works in Berlin)

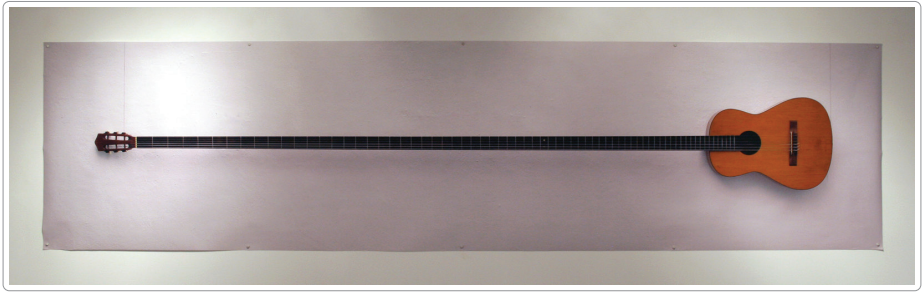




David Ostrowski, *H*, Print



David Ostrowski, *F (-)*, Oil and wood on canvas



Philip Seibel, Photo of 'Souvenir', Print

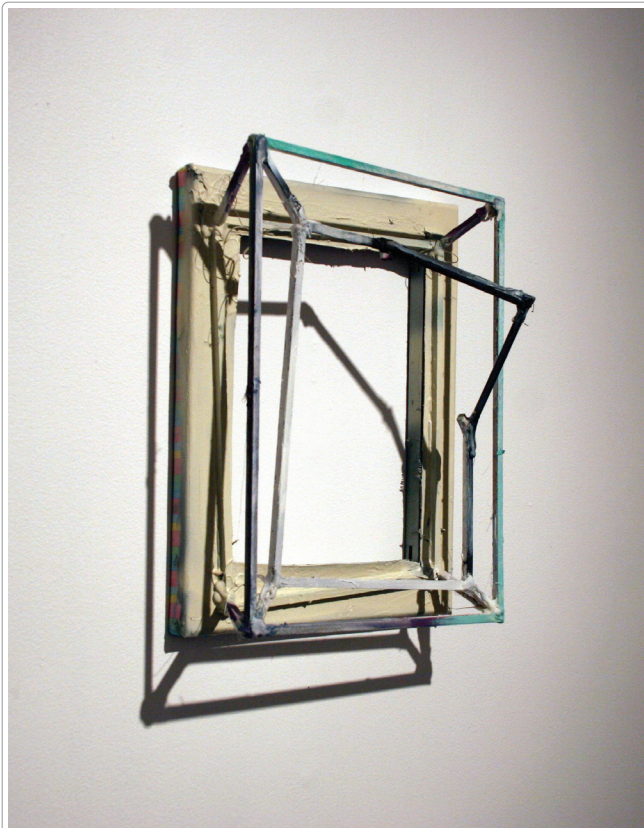


Michail Pírgelis, *Aerotopie*, Photo





Left: Lukas Schmenger, *Study (Head)*, Oil on paper  
 Right: Andreas Breunig, *Untitled*, Collage and coloured plexiglass



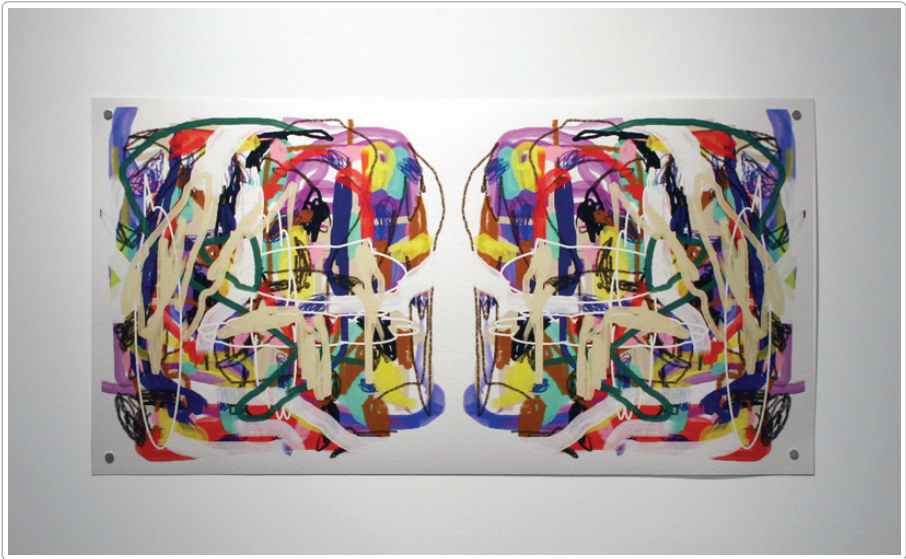
Max Frintrop, *Untitled*, Mixed media on canvas



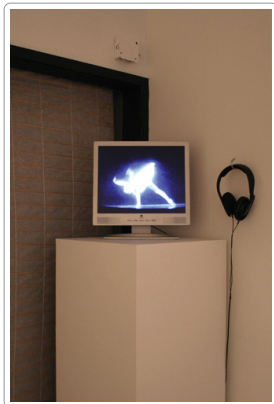
Chris Succo, *Untitled*, Photos



Behrang Karimi, *Untitled*, Pastel on paper



Jana Schroeder, *Universal Vibrations*, Digital Print



Left: Sven Weigel, *The Dancer*, DV transferred to DVD, Music: Peter Tschaikowsky, 7 Minutes  
Right: Sven Weigel, *The Dancer* (still)



304 Days asked the ten artists in *Addition and Subtraction* via email to respond to one of three questions. Below are five out of ten of the artist's responses.

**0.** 304 Days strives to exhibit local artists and artists from abroad. The ten artists in this exhibition are based in Germany. What are your thoughts about contemporary art produced in Germany, or abroad, and how important do you think location is to the production of art today?

**1.** Can you describe and discuss the process behind the making of your work?

**2.** Write a couple of sentences about whatever you want?

**Andreas Breunig (1):** The challenge is to reduce all pictorial effort to the essence. Neglect artistic mastery. Achieve a maximum of aggression. Produce beautiful paintings.

Obtain rules. Lose control. React. Flatten. Control. Repeat all.

**Lukas Schmenger (1):** Normally, I have a concrete idea for a motif, which is placed in the middle of the painting almost without a narrative context, just figure and ground. Although, I know (roughly) what to paint when I start I don't know how to paint it. I have to develop forms, colours, surface, atmosphere, expression and so on while working.

Most of my portraits are self-portraits I painted with the help of two mirrors. At the moment, I like to paint on wood or metal with a very smooth surface and thin layers of oil color, which gives me the possibility to remove brushstrokes totally like you can do in computer paint programs.

**Behrang Karimi (1):** My work is divided into process painting and intuitive works, which have subjects that came out of experiments in painting, which is connected to my background, my past and my inner.

I don't work in series. I mostly work with figures in rooms or landscapes and sometimes they become "good" or significant enough to stay on the canvas if they are connected and clear to my view.

**Jana Schroeder (1):** In 2010, my paintings are symmetric. Symmetry is the arrangement of the dumb.

**Max Frintrop (0):** Art always happens in a social context. Language is the basis to think, but feelings are universal. That's all you need and ideas are out in the world.

## ADDITION AND SUBTRACTION: CONDITIONED ANTAGONISM AND THE NEUTRAL

Jasmine Reimer

In the mid-20th century, two major European thinkers, Claude Levi Strauss and Roland Barthes, observed that our understanding of certain words is not merely born from their established meaning, but by our understanding of the difference between the word and its 'binary opposite'. Strauss and Barthes concluded that words simply act as symbols for society's ideas and that the meaning of words is a relationship rather than a fixed thing: a relationship between two opposing ideas. <sup>i</sup>

Addition and subtraction as binary opposites, intrinsically tied to the principles of semiotics, present an antagonistic and yet inseparable relation. "In lexical semantics, opposites are words that lie in an inherently incompatible binary relationship as in the opposite pairs male/female, long/short, up/down..." <sup>ii</sup> 'Inherently incompatible' should be emphasized not for its truth but for its inconsistency. Our pedestrian usage and definition of the word opposite or opposition includes an automatic pairing in that two opposing terms are conceived of as naturally conflicting but continually united. I.e. 'they sat opposite the table' or 'the couple lived all their lives in houses opposite each other.' Reinforced by the term binary, meaning two, it is important to note the diversity of the word duality. Dual means composed of two like or complementary parts as in 'dual controls for pilot and copilot.' <sup>iii</sup> In addition, duality describes having two characters or a duplicitous nature permitting one to concurrently undertake two opposing tactics with equal motivation.

This kind of contradiction within the structure of binary opposites led Strauss and Barthes to conclude that the existence of an absolute dichotomy is a myth. Roland Barthes' definition of *le neutre* (the neutral) and what I refer to as 'the grey area' thus implicating possibly the very oldest opposite (black and white), deconstructs the binary opposite as a method of total reliability and knowledge.

The neutral escapes or undoes paradigmatic binary oppositions that structure and produce meaning in Western thought and discourse... lexically, the 'Neuter' refers to neither masculine nor feminine... neither active or passive, or action without regime... Botany: neuter flowers, flowers that sexual organs constantly abort... Physics: neutral bodies, which don't have any electrical charge, conductors that aren't the seat of any charge... <sup>iv</sup>

Addition and subtraction as both fundamentally learned skills and binary opposites are included in the production of meaning often progressing into a pervasive value system, or ideology, based upon antagonism. Binary opposites transcend semiotics and are found in all aspects of existence from sexuality to politics to philosophy and are used to aid in the comprehension of personal development and experience.

Within this exhibition German artists selected through an analogous approach by curator Sean Weisgerber, employ additive and subtractive methods of art production, connecting directly with a system of opposites, in order to construct expansive forms of meaning. The diversity of the work presented, through both content and form, is a palpable demonstration of the insidious nature of addition and subtraction in both mathematical and allegorical contexts.

The title terms 'Addition and Subtraction' become equivalent to the simplistic dogma of good vs. bad, a concept that is incessantly applied to one's life. As one side of a binary pair is always seen by a particular society or culture as more valued over the other, addition as first understood implies positivity as a term that is naturally inclusive, expansive and productive. Comparatively subtraction is first perceived as threatening; its innate ability to create loss, invalidity and insecurity precedes its capacity to cleanse and simplify.

As Behrang Karimi stated within the exhibition interview conducted by Weisgerber, "...sometimes they become 'good' or significant enough to stay on the canvas if they are connected and clear to my view." What is valued, what is discarded, what remains and what is lost becomes a theoretical battle for the artist's approval and thus permanence within the artwork. Ironically, neither what is removed nor what remains is superior. Most of the work in this exhibition speaks equally to both positive and negative action, each referentially implicating the other through its presence...or lack thereof, creating an unaligned meaning thus more attuned to Barthes' concept of the neutral.

The introductory work displayed in the gallery window created by David Ostrowski, addresses the content of the exhibition within but also the politics of its surrounding environment. Hung on the wall behind the security bars, a photograph depicting a crown of high-gloss hair contrasts an abstract background and stark white space beneath. Through the elimination of the face, the definitive feature of a portrait photo, Os-



trowski immediately establishes a hierarchy between the remaining details and those removed. The copper bangs central to the image, give no evidence of its sex, expression or focus; details that usually indicate the significance and tone of a portrait. Perhaps its title, the solitary capital 'H' is indicative of its position if using an alphabetical scale and 'H' refers to the order within a school roll call. It could be: the background of the photograph is regrettably suggestive of the laser-beam drop-down so indicative of elementary school picture day.

Regardless, this work unconsciously addresses the fragmentation and dislocation of its surroundings. Vancouver's Downtown Eastside residents remain highly visible yet somehow unseen and consequently, anonymous. They hinder on the periphery of both life and death and as a consequence, societal inclusion. Straddling the divergence between representation and abstraction and evading any association to beingness, Ostrowski's deficient photo somehow acts as an accurate and complete representation of the street that it faces.

Contrarily, in Phillip Siebel's substantial image addition becomes excessively gendered. Siebel's color photograph of a guitar with an extended neck is the largest work within the exhibition claiming the entire North Wall of the gallery as its territory. The multitude of extra frets and elongated strings, spanning a length that must reach six feet or more, recalls to mind advertising featuring products promised to enlarge the male... virility and thus unites us with obvious big vs. small, masculine vs. feminine, adequate vs. inadequate and consequently superior vs. inferior.

Without the title, *Souvenir*, the extended neck of this instrument could speak to issues of community or playful topics including dream machines and bizarre inventions but because the ties that keep it suspended in the air (on its invisible pedestal) are noticeably visible, it is clear that this object of desire is exactly that. The guitar, art historically identified with the female body, becomes equivalent to hanging a buck's head on the wall demonstrating male potency and clout. But, the guitar of course has not been captured... or has it? The title indicates that it is a 'Souvenir', which leads the viewer to believe that a journey has taken place in order to obtain this memento. It can be assumed that its role is as an addition to a collection of keepsakes, trophies and awards establishing the guitar as yet another victory. Referentially implicating the inferior version of this endowed instrument, the regular guitar, leaves one feeling strangely deficient.

Michail Pirgelis' photograph titled *Aerotopie* depicts a quintessential beach scene with palm trees blowing in the breeze and rectangular void cutout where water meets sand. The emptiness predictably once filled with content that reinforced the vacation/pleasure/leisure motif was extracted skillfully leaving the surrounding tree trunks in place. What is desired remains visible, even emphasized by the deliberate elimination of an unspoken misfit. It seems like a post-modern cliché to remove a section of an image exposing the bare wall directly behind however, Pirgelis may have been attempting to address a not-so distant yet recognizable fear common in fantasies of success such as owning your own island. (Or having an art career.) The wall is a blank spot, an unfulfilled moment in an otherwise complete dream. It becomes a nascent or 'grey' area because it negates the fulfillment of the potential of the surrounding fantasy leaving room for the unknown. The void is neither good nor bad just indefinite like Ostrowski's missing face, successfully evading binary descriptions regardless of its method of creation.

Opposites, used within comparison as a source of understanding, are instigated by a desire to eliminate the unknown and/or neutral. Ambiguity is a disconcerting state for both individual and object as the indefinite creates immeasurable room for interpretation, transformation and isolation. Evident in Chris Succo's untitled images is an avoidance of identification. Under the premise of 'Addition and Subtraction', Succo's photos remain within the binary system through the ostensible subtraction of light but more significantly they mediate the mysterious.

Succo's photographs are similar to a series of drawings using adept chiaroscuro techniques to distort figures, objects and background creating an outstanding propensity for gloom. From a distance three of the six photos appear almost completely black. The images range in content from barely visible hands appearing in combination with what could be a head, a man's arm holding a gun (given the tension in the forearm) and the clearest yet ironically most confusing image, of a large man standing in front of a vehicle? grasping a massive unknown object. Like an incoherent memory of a bad dream, the photographs give no indication of chronological or conceptual order.

Contrarily, it is the obscurity that acts as a guide to meaning. Unavoidable is the association with death; diminishing, black, morbid imagery of a potentially violent, quasi-narrative negates any additive sensation of life. By studying these photographs one could equate each image to

Barthes' assertion, "To mourn is to be alive."<sup>v</sup> Addressing the idea that we find comfort in the death of what (who) has come before us and therefore are able to fully commit to the events of present time, Succo's images force an introverted retrospection of all that is (was) life. His images could have been titled: consume, procreate, die and their opposites; purge, kill, live.

The only three-dimensional piece in the exhibition uniquely draws upon the *le neutre* through the implication of the artist and not solely through its form or content. Max Frintrop displays careful use of a variety of materials including masking tape, delicately welded metal bar, paint, and wire to install two obtruding DIY frames on the back of 8 ½"x 11" stretcher bars. His mixed media piece recalls the term bricolage and consequently, bricoleur apparent in his accumulation of materials and amateur aesthetic. "Borrowed from the French word bricolage, from the verb bricoleur, the core meaning in French being, 'fiddle, tinker' and by extension, to make creative and resourceful use of whatever materials are at hand...A person who engages in bricolage is a bricoleur."<sup>vi</sup>

In his work 'The Savage Mind', Straus presents the archetypal roles of The Bricoleur and The Engineer as oppositional but demonstrates that through the sharing of self-inflicted limitations are quite united in their differences.

The Bricoleur is adept at many tasks and at putting preexisting things together in new ways, adapting his project to a finite stock of materials and tools. The Engineer deals with projects in their entirety, conceiving and procuring all the necessary materials and tools to suit his project. The Bricoleur approximates "the savage mind" and the Engineer approximates "the scientific mind"...the universe of the Bricoleur is closed, and he often is forced to make do with whatever is at hand, whereas the universe of the Engineer is open in that he is able to create new tools and materials. But both live within a restrictive reality, and so the Engineer is forced to consider the preexisting set of theoretical and practical knowledge of technical means, in a similar way to the Bricoleur.<sup>vii</sup>

Frintrop's small structure is both a feat of minor engineering and successful bricolage in that the artist has manipulated materials, utilized found objects and deployed the scientific through the use of machinery. Frintrop as an artist becomes a mediator of the 'savage mind' and the scientific mind and thus embodies the neutral. Although the work presents both additive and subtractive techniques (the extra frames house an empty square) it is the artist's handy work that is the focus of the

piece and thus his role as creator (bricoleur) becomes more significant than the manifestation of his labor.

For Barthes, the attempt to deconstruct or escape from binaries has great ethical, philosophical, and linguistic implications. The Neutral, according to Barthes is not a grey area, in accordance with impartiality, but an area that requires great action. "My definition of the word neutral remains structural...the Neutral doesn't refer to 'impressions' of grayness, of neutrality, of indifference. The Neutral- my neutral- can refer to intense, strong, unprecedented states. 'To outplay the paradigm' is an ardent, burning activity." <sup>viii</sup> The neutral then, is analogous to anarchy, as it has no intrinsic regulations or applications other than remaining outside of the definite. It actively defies the identified, is born from the unknown and therefore creates the new (something that did not exist in the world previously) causing rupture, re-order and a consequent disorder of the established.

Locating ones work and even oneself within the territory of the unknown indicates not only courage but also autonomy. By committing to neither polarity, choosing neither side or displaying personal imprecision, the indefinite becomes a state of ever-expansive revolution, progress and betterment and thus great responsibility, akin to the role of the artist. Barthes states, "A reflection on the Neutral, for me: a manner- a free manner- to be looking for my own style of being present to the struggles of my time." <sup>ix</sup> I understand the neutral as constantly in flux; a mutable state that does not set out for or against a finite oppositional structure but awaits each shifting moment to dictate its course of action. The artist as neutral, for example, must persistently remain outside and/or critical of systemic structures in order to sustain a contemporary analytic practice.

I envision the current 'style of being' as free of divergent and rigid language since the complexities of existing conflicts and thus communication have vastly outgrown its simplistic approach. Adapting and implementing subtle relationships with words will ultimately forge innovative understandings of language and consequent values. The artwork presented within the exhibition *Addition and Subtraction* is ironically, born from the restriction of disciplined contemporary art practices. Being in the 'style' of their time, these artists exemplify creative yet subtle maneuvers around fixed structures resulting in complex, expansive and diverse forms of visual language. Surveying

the show in its entirety, it is immediately apparent that no one artist is susceptible to a singular approach, each piece accommodating an ever-changing and thus indefinable moment in contemporary culture.

\*Notes on page 176.

Jasmine Reimer is an artist. She lives and works in Vancouver.



# HOT SPRINGS

NICOLAS SASSOON

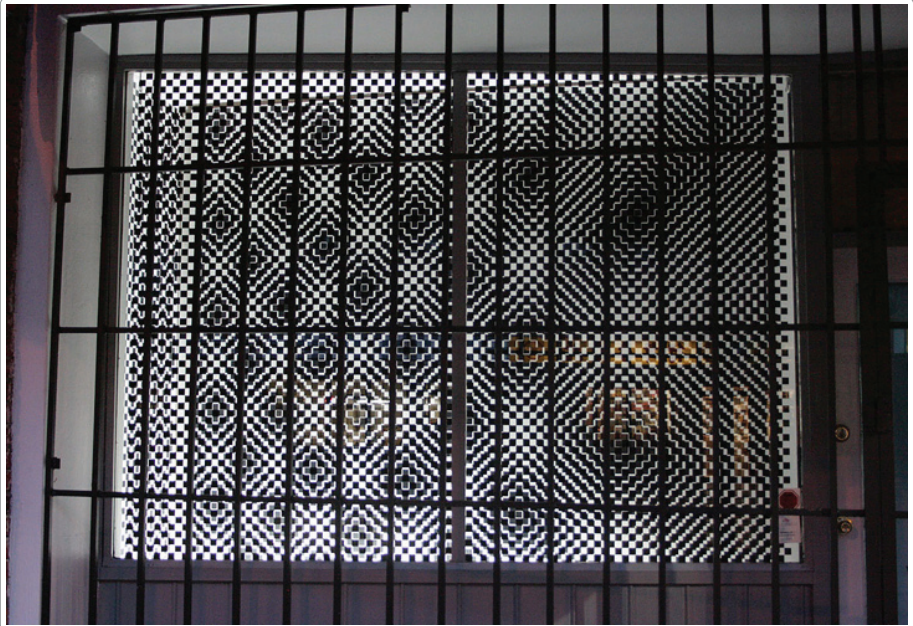
Saturday, December 11th // Opening Reception // 7pm - 11pm  
December 11th to December 18th 2010

Nicolas Sassoon exhibits an installation of sculpture, print and animation. His practice examines the relations between architecture, landscape, and the origins of computer technology.

Nicolas Sassoon received his MFA from EESI. Lives and works in Vancouver and Biarritz, France.



*Matter, Vinyl Installation*

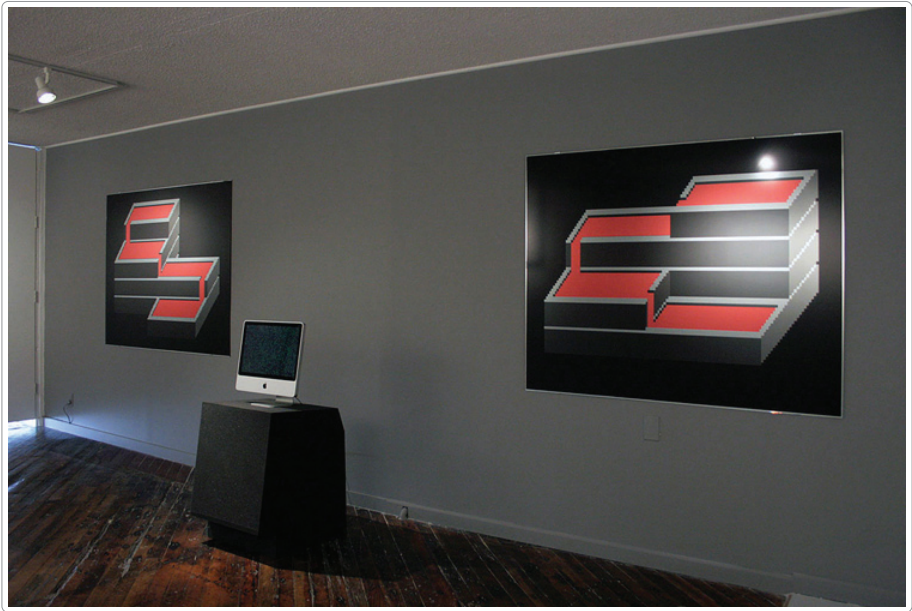


*Matter, Vinyl Installation*



Installation Shot with: *Hot Springs - 1*, Vinyl on mirror

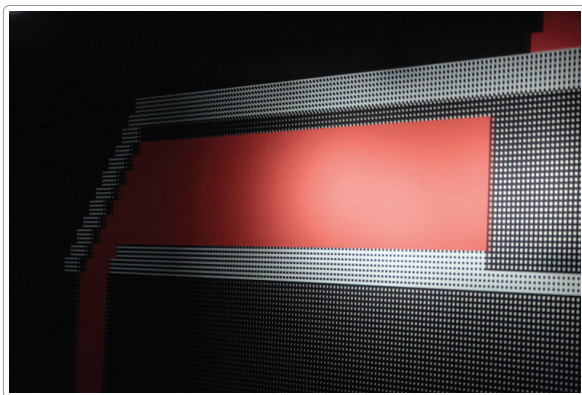




Installation Shot



*Memorial Study - 1, Charcoal foam  
+ Flames, Animated GIF*



*Hot Springs - 2 (detail), Vinyl on mirror*



*Memorial Study - 1, Charcoal foam*



304 Days speaks with Nicolas Sassoon about his exhibition on the morning of his opening.

**304 Days:** The work in this exhibition all stems from your interests in computer technology and its effects on modern living. How does this affect your work in terms of materials and processes?

**NS:** I think the first thing is that it is the technology from my generation. Computer technology is something I've been exposed to fairly early, so it is always something that has been a part of my daily life and is something that I have completely integrated. Digital images exist in the same way as painting and drawing for me. I am naturally drawn to them.

After art school, I started thinking about how this technology affects my daily life and surroundings. And, how it affects different types of production, like architecture and urbanism. I am excited to experiment with digital technology and computer programs and see how people use it, and create things with it. I am excited to see how professional tools are used to create elements of daily life and how this can eventually be used to shape aesthetics.

Something about computer technology that really excites me is the immateriality. When I work on animated GIFs or 3D models of architecture I am interested in the ethereality of these objects and when I work with materials I am excited to find if there is a way to translate this immateriality or virtuality into materiality.

**304 Days:** You seem to make use of moiré a lot in your works. What is it about this optical device that intrigues you?

**NS:** I was interested in optical art when I first started working on computer drawings. I was also excited to use moiré in my computer drawings because it is to me something very specific to the physicality of the computer screen.

I've always wanted to do a lot with objects, landscapes and architecture. I was always excited to see how I could create an experience that keeps a type of physicality to it. When I think about it, I aim to create a landscape animation where basically you are supposed to scroll up and down or left and right to explore the landscape. You are going to explore the landscape through a computer screen and I want to bring a physical

feel to this experience.

**304 Days:** The installation and content of your work also suggests your interest in design and architecture. How do these fields impact your process?

**NS:** I think they impact my process because design and architecture are two fields that are making use of computer technology. When I talk about computer technology I am talking mostly about computer programs for creative uses. And, I think my interest in these programs with time have been drawn to examine how these tools are used in society and in industry. I naturally went towards design and architecture because 3D programs are used for rendering and designing objects. I am really interested and excited to see how the aesthetic and the mechanism of computer technology can influence architecture and design. I think there are some ideas that are implicitly present in how computer programs work and how we project the image of an object on the computer screen and I feel that there is the potential in this that really excites me and also brings up a lot of fantasies and desires.

**304 Days:** There seems to be a fantastical element visible in your pieces. How do you decide on the content and form of your work?

**NS:** When I talk about computer programs I speak of them as vectors to fantasies. And I totally include myself in this phenomenon. Hot Springs is a good example of that, it was one of the first drawings I did for my blog and it was one of my computer drawings that was supposed to represent an object that was going to be built as a sculptural object. With time I realized there was a quality within the computer drawing that is something that I would not be necessarily able to achieve with the physical object and that's something that really interested me. I realized there is a partial fantasy within these drawings in the specific display of how you represent an object with computer technology and how you are going to represent it in 3D, with textures. It is something that also happens with painting and drawing, but computer drawing is a different step in this field.

I am really excited about how these computer aesthetics and graphics have an influence in industry and how they are becoming available to everyone for many different applications.

# MAKE ME A MOUNTAIN THAT I MIGHT CLIMB IT AND CAST MY GAZE OVER THE VALLEY BELOW

Adam Gandy

We begin our journey inside a compartment of a commuter train. We see a man sitting near the window wearing a business suit and reading a newspaper. His gaze is suddenly drawn from his paper to the window and we see at the same time as he does an enormous face looming over the whole tableau laughing maniacally. The face belongs to Gomez Addams, patriarch of the Addams Family playing with his model train set.

Now we are looking down over a lush, green forest in the opening shot from *Beetlejuice*. The camera moves high over the treetops revealing a small town nestled in a valley. We are taken into the town, gliding over rooftops and along the main road as it leads out of the town and rises up a hill to come to rest looking upon a large, Victorian mansion. Suddenly an enormous spider crests the roof. A hand reaches down and removes the pest, revealing the town as a model.

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The model functions as a magic mirror for us to project our fantasies into. I will chart three common variants: the Architectural model, The Hobbyist model and the Film model.

The Architectural or Geographic model serves a similar function to a chart or graph to translate certain empirical facts that would otherwise remain a bit too abstract. They are tools used to pass along specific information about the objects or areas they represent; not entirely a fiction as they point to a reality that has yet to come but is promised. The Architectural model becomes an artifact once the building it represents is completed, and if the model comes to live within that same building, it becomes more akin to the Hobby model. We now view the model as a map and relate our own spatial existence within it.

The Hobby model reveals itself as a model, which is to say that it does not deny that it is a fiction. This model is usually a recreation of something that already exists independent of it. The act of building the Hobby model is concerned with empirical facts similar to the Architectural model but once the construction is complete this model is ripe for fantasy and related activity. The Hobby model is not just the train set but also

the video game; it is a site where the participants' projection is for play.

The Film model is distinct from the previous two in that it is not meant to represent a thing but substitute it, to be the thing itself, constructed in miniature but shot to appear life size. It is not a necessity for this model to deceive us per se, but where we are not deceived by its fidelity to reality, we agree to the rules of fiction and pretend it is the thing it stands in place of. Scale models are a staple of filmmaking; at times entire miniature cities have been constructed to stand in for places actual or fantastical ones that could never be constructed at actual size. More recently, many films have turned to models created or composited entirely in a computer.

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Nicolas Sassoon makes models. He of course does much more than this, but a sampling of his practice reveals that he deals in models that have some relationship to all three types mentioned above. Natural and man-made objects make frequent appearances in his computer made works. These recognizable forms lend to us the illusion of scale, but it is a relative rather than a fixed or empirical scale. Given that we understand roughly the bigness of trees and mountains, of doorways, windows and staircases, we can extrapolate a sense of the scale of things in his images through their relationship to each other. There are differences, too, between Nicolas' models and the others mentioned. Firstly, we don't play in them as in a hobby model, they exist less for interaction and more for observation. Secondly, where an architectural model is site-specific promise to build an object of measurable size and scale, Nicolas' work has no such obligation; his computer sketches and models, as works, are only bound by the media that represents them. Scale for Nicolas has fluidity, it can move from the smallest of screens to the largest of projections, while still retaining the same sense of relative scale. Thirdly, they do not seek to deceive us or have us participate in an illusion of being the thing they are not. We know that Sassoon's mountains are not mountains, but virtual mountains. Mountains that could be as large as actual mountains for all we know, but probably aren't.

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What am I trying to say about models, participants and projection? The model is the setting for a fiction to take place, its existence sets up the

physical parameters within which we can project our fantasies and ourselves. The participant is more than just a viewer; the participant is active and engaged in a fiction portrayed or is generating his or her own fiction. And as for projection, it is the act of participating in fiction, play, make-believe; projection is sending a part of one's own self into an illusion. While a film is projected onto a screen, we also project a portion of ourselves into the film. We participate in the fiction presented.

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Plato and the Allegory of the Cave: Imagine people tethered to a bench facing a wall in a cave. Their heads and bodies are fixed so they cannot look away from a wall on which a puppet show is projected. They have been there all their lives so to them this projection is reality. If one of them were to be set free and leave the cave, he or she would be confronted with the reality behind the fantasy. Plato believes that representation is illusion and illusion is a lie. Illusion cannot be a place where people participate, but can only be used as a mode to illuminate reality. For Plato, only the Architectural or Geographic model is allowable in his Republic as it only ever serves to illuminate reality, it is not for fantasy play or deceit.

*Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back.* Luke Skywalker travels to the Dagobah system to learn from the Jedi master Yoda, who presents him with a cave he must enter. "What's in there?" "Only what you take with you". The cave of course is less like a model and more of a set, a life-size model. The cave is the primeval source; a part of a distant evolutionary memory and to return to it is to face, not the unknown, but the forgotten. No one projects an illusion for Luke to see, Luke projects himself onto the tableau provided. Plato's cave is the cinema and Yoda's is the set of the film, his participant is both actor and director.

The Matrix, from the film of the same name, is a model participants project themselves into, but the participation has become literal enough that not all of the participants are aware of their own participation. When viewed from the outside, the model can be seen in total as columns of cascading green source code, but from within the model its borders are un-established. The Matrix is in some sense the ultimate model, an experience machine in which the inhabitants occupy an enormous city and its outlying mountains; a model realized as a Moebius strip that loops and changes so that the boundaries are unknowable to

those inside. This is the model beyond all scale: the model blown up to the proportions of reality.

What is special about the Matrix? Just like in Plato's cave, participants begin their lives inside the model, but if one of them proves to be the sort of person who senses something is amiss, who glimpses that there is something behind the curtain, they may qualify to be extracted into reality; a reality that is poorer and significantly more shabby than the world offered by the model.

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The model is traditionally a place where we adopt God's viewpoint, we oversee our creation, we understand our world and our location within it and we project our fantasies into it. But the model can send us down disturbing thought paths: if we can create models of reality to project ourselves into and we can project ourselves into other people's models, it is possible we are projecting ourselves into a model built by a stranger. Or that we are the projections and we have no existence as a point of fact; our being created in God's image means that he is projecting himself into a model he made and we are figments of his imagination.

So what can we make of the man in Gomez Addams' model train? When he glimpses the enormous laughing face, he sees the Creator looming over his creation. The curtain has indeed been pulled back and what the man finds is that he is in fact a projection conjured by a mad God. What existence can he be said to have after glimpsing God at the controls? It doesn't matter in this case as it is revealed that the man in the train's God has his own God. Gomez turns his eyes upwards and cries out, "Spirits above me, give me a sign! Should I be joyous, or shall I be damned?" before sending the train and the man inside crashing into another train in a fiery explosion so huge it shakes the Addams' house to its foundations.



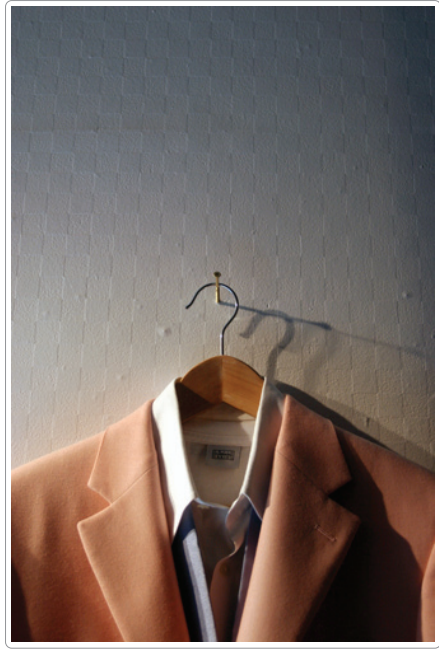
# IN CONVERSATION

KEVIN HUBBARD

Saturday, January 8th // Opening Reception // 7pm - 11pm  
January 8th to January 22nd 2011

Kevin Hubbard exhibits an installation of painting and sculpture. His work investigates the purpose, personas, and places of artistic production and how they are transmuted through time.

Kevin Hubbard, often described as a benevolent antagonist, is an interdisciplinary artist and recent graduate of Emily Carr University and the Cooper Union.



*Untitled, Cashmere blazer, dress shirt, tie, self-labeled t-shirt, hanger and gilded screw*

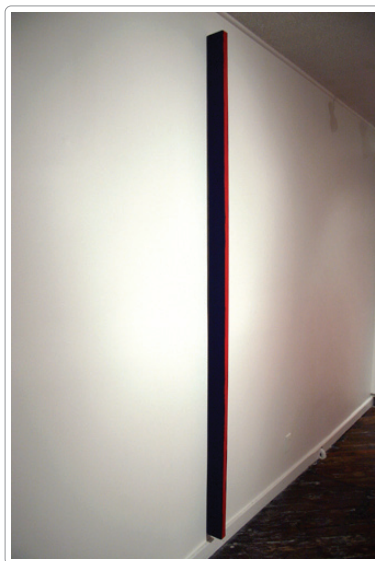


*Man, Heroic, and Sublime (after Barnett Newman), Acrylic on 35 logo stenciled 2X4's*



*Atypical Ends (in two parts), Acrylic on 2X4 and mirrored stainless steel*





Left: *The Water Carrier*, Acrylic on canvas  
 Right: *The Wild (after Barnett Newman)*, Acrylic on logo stenciled 2X4



*In His Own Image (after Barnett Newman)*, Chair, uniform, cigarettes, ashtray, beer cans, cup, paint brush, acrylic. Barnett Newman catalogue raisonné and wood



Installation Shot



Installation Shot



304 Days speaks with Kevin Hubbard about his exhibition post-installation.

**304 Days:** Many of the works in this exhibition make specific reference to Barnett Newman. What is your interest in Newman and his works and why are you making adaptations of his oeuvres?

**KH:** Newman's interesting because his works hark back to a time when people were actually trying to create grand change through their work. Their work was meant to do something or create different subjectivity, the artists were trying to create their own world, attempting to change who they were or escape from their own time. What's interesting with Newman is his notion of transcendence and his attempt to escape his own subjectivity, although he knew it was completely futile.

I too am trying to create my own worldview although I know it's impossible to escape the world I was born into. Exactly like we were talking about design earlier, shiny and pretty things appeal to me - and who am I to pretend that I am not attracted to them? Although I'm educated and have been instilled with an analytical way of seeing, that doesn't make me above my innate or inculcated desires.

Barnett Newman was one of the first artists when I was a kid that I fell in love with and I didn't know why. For me, it was always unexplainable and uncanny that I came from a family with no artistic background, but I was just drawn to his work. And then I remember the first time I went to New York and saw *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*. There it was: Newman's signature on the front. It drove me crazy because it was supposed to be like a Rothko. You were supposed to be lost in it but there's his signature on the front and it kills it. It empties it out, it becomes about Newman and not a collective experience. So for me, taking *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*, using the 2X4's, cutting it down to half its size, and bringing in my own subjectivity with the Hubbard stenciled 2x4's is bringing that story forward and emptying it out again. But it doesn't negate Newman's original attempts. It opens it up to new viewers. Also, it's positioning myself in it, so that my own viewpoint and subjectivity can't be denied. It becomes obvious.

**304Days:** The pink suit with white shirt and blue tie and the branded 2X4 appear to be iconography that you have developed as a part of a fabricated persona. What is it about the persona of the artist that intrigues

you and how does this relate to Newman?

**KH:** The 2X4's, suit, persona, branding, and the Hubbard logo are all about taking this Kevin Hubbard, me, the body or the corporeal Kevin Hubbard, and taking it as far as it can go and emptying it out of meaning in the same way Calvin Klein is no longer Calvin Klein, he is a pair of underwear. That fascinates me because I wonder if you can empty out an identity so far that you can go beyond it. Essentially, if I can become nothing don't I have the power to become anything?

In the same way that Barnett Newman was striving for universal truths I'm trying to find any 'truths'. I think people take issue with the persona, or the 2X4's and the branding because it comes off like brash self-promotion, and for me it's trying to go past that and empty it out, it's the exact opposite of self-promotion. Ironically though, I can say it's not about self-promotion and still benefit from what I say it isn't. That's the pathetic tragedy I like, similarly to Newman's attempts.

I like the idea of a person being able to create their own worldview. I think that is a pretty incredible thing and I think our worldview is malleable. We have the ability to see the world through the eyes we want – but of course, I'm only able to have that belief because of my own place of privilege.

**304Days:** The set-like installation, *In His Own Image*, which you have constructed, refers to the persona of the artist and their studio specifically relating to the stereotype of the abstract expressionists. What intrigues you about this stereotype and why are you interested in the 'mythology' surrounding the location of an artist's production?

**KH:** It's mythologizing the place of artistic production, the studio, and the artist without directly depicting one. The abstract expressionists were mythologized as proletariats working independently from cultural or social influence, which is of course absurd. But it's interesting to take note that we haven't only mythologized them in hindsight, they were being mythologized in their own time, for political, commercial, and other reasons. As a way to remember that nothing has changed, I included the blue worker's uniform, the proletariat garb, which is also my father's old printing press uniform, to locate my own subjectivity and the lineage that has created that subjectivity. Also, it's a way to reference those we heroicize, sometimes falsely, from the past. What's interesting to me,

when *In His Own Image* is in 304 days we're faced with the historical mythology, the reality of a working studio, a living space and a gallery, but in the present moment. In this instance, we're mythologizing the place of artistic production, and in turn the artist, in the present moment. In general, we're used to mythologizing the past, but to be aware of it in the present moment is interesting. I think we become more aware of how we're constructing our worldviews in the here and now. And going back to the idea of persona, we become aware that we are all mythologizing ourselves in the present moment. We're creating the stories we want to inhabit as we write them. This is where *The Water Carrier* factors in, it's another constructed attempt to mythologize my own subjectivity. It's an effort to be aware of everything that has contributed to my worldview in order to release myself from those bounds. It's an impossible transcendental feat, but worth a try. Oh, by the way, Newman never considered himself an abstract expressionist.

**304Days:** *The Water Carrier* painting, shown in this context, suggests that perhaps as a contemporary artist you are burdened with the chore of carrying the baggage of your predecessors. Are you optimistic about this position or do you feel weighted making work in an era rife with art-historical antecedents?

**KH:** No, for me it's an absolute joy. For me this work isn't about a burden. I find history liberating. When I make work, it's an essay. I start with questions, I do research, I interrogate what I'm thinking, and then it produces the work. There's always a conclusion, although it may be a personal one that a viewer reads very differently. I'm always trying to communicate something. I think it's a cop-out to say the viewer is going to make the meaning of the work regardless of artistic intent. I don't want to just make something and put it out there and say that all interpretation is valid.

When you consider the artist as burdened with the chore of carrying the baggage of their predecessors, what is interesting to me is that sentiment never really came up when making it. To me, it was the artist as bringer of knowledge to the people, even though he's partially a charlatan. One bucket full, one empty, read it how you will – that's the contradiction that I intended.

## ON TRANSCENDENCE AND BRANDING: KEVIN HUBBARD AND BARNETT NEWMAN

Anne Cottingham

People spend a lot of money in search of a better, wiser self. Sometimes it involves ancient traditions like yoga and meditation – methods that have withstood time for their positive benefits to the mind and body. Other times it involves LSD or other psychedelic drugs, in search of a mind-numbing experience or revelation akin to ascending the heavens. By any method, is this search really worth it? Can a person really become enlightened before they are dead? Kevin Hubbard (b. 1978) is fascinated by this idea of transcendence, both personally and artistically.

For his solo show at 304 Days, *In Conversation*, the artist makes reference in three of his works to the painter Barnett Newman (1905-1970). Newman's sparse paintings reduced pictorial language to the most basic elements in an attempt to remove all narrative and figuration – any distraction to reach the “pure idea.”<sup>i</sup> The viewer, Newman felt, had to experience being a part of the picture in order to find this state of being.<sup>ii</sup> As he wrote in *Tiger's Eye* magazine in December 1948,

Instead of making cathedrals out of Christ, man, or “life,” we are making [them] out of ourselves, out of our own feelings. The image we produce is the self-evident one of revelation, real and concrete, that can be understood by anyone who will look at it without the nostalgic glasses of history.<sup>iii</sup>

Hubbard has been interested in Newman's paintings since he was a child. In discussion with 304 Days curator/manager Sean Weisgerber he laments the first time he actually saw *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*, one of Newman's most well-known works, finding the submersive experience he thought he was supposed to have ruined by Newman's big signature on the bottom.

For Hubbard, this was eye-opening. *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* became more about Newman for him than it did about the sublime. This both drove him crazy, and sparked an idea to subtly alter the conversation. “So much of my work is about transcendence and trying to rid myself of things,” he relates, “and encouraging other people to become better or the best they can be.”<sup>iv</sup> Hubbard thus broke down Newman's seminal work to a more approachable material: the 2x4, foundation and frame for many a building project. The 2x4s of *Man, Heroic, and Sublime (After Barnett*

Newman) are painted to match Newman's original painting, and they lean against the wall, taking them out of the vaunted white gallery and down to the worker, the everyman, who needs their sublime-inducing powers more than anyone. In place of Newman's signature is the logo of Kevin Hubbard, the brand.

Why replace the thing that drove you most crazy with effectively the same thing? He is aiming to

Push Hubbard the name and identity past being this Kevin Hubbard into something... that is trying to empty all that out. To do away with self-doubt, self-hate, all of those things that come with identifying with an identity, to try and get in contact with something real.<sup>v</sup>

In a way he is taking Newman into a contemporary context. Newman and his peers were rough guys who stood the picket lines and suffered like so many other Americans in the 1930s.<sup>vi</sup> A middle-class kid born in 1978 Canada, like Hubbard, would have little context to understand what kind of sublime Newman was searching for, and so he reinterprets it. With the internet daily confirming that there are millions of more interesting people in the world than 'you', many settle for trying to understand that self better, a task no smaller than the memories of hardship Newman was using painting to overcome, but certainly different.

Let's return to the idea of Kevin Hubbard as a brand. This brand is more than just the logo used on the 2x4s. His prints and paintings take on an easily recognizable style, the result of a rigorous work method that erases the hand out of each image as much as possible. Take for example *The Water Carrier*. He would have begun with a photograph, in this case a posed one of himself wearing *Untitled*, a pink blazer, white dress shirt, and baby blue tie that hung in the window of 304 Days during the exhibition. The selected photograph is then manipulated in Photoshop. All of the important lines are traced, and then that line drawing is transferred into Illustrator. The lines are turned into vectors, manipulated more and then the drawing is printed. If it is for a painting, the lines are cut in vinyl and transferred to a canvas.<sup>vii</sup> In the same way that a brand can get re-created over and over again without ever changing or revealing the person behind it, so too can Hubbard disappear in the creation and identical re-creation of his paintings.

Other than self-branding, another brand pops up frequently in Hubbard's art – Pabst Blue Ribbon. No, this is not a hipster joke, although

that shift in meaning is certainly of interest to him. PBR was originally a low-class, workers beer before it was adopted by ‘alienated’ youth all over North America. Hubbard used PBR in a sculptural work at 304 Days, entitled *In His Own Image (After Barnett Newman)*. Visitors questioned its use during the run of the exhibition, exclaiming, “What is that hipster beer doing here?” Rather than interpreting it from both past and present reference points, they were using present signs only, despite even a title that not only referenced Newman, but also quoted a line from the Bible. <sup>viii</sup>

It would be difficult to discuss this work without also discussing this Biblical reference. It is a portion of the line “God created man in his own image,” from the book of Genesis, which describes the creation of Earth and humans by God. Using the terminology of one of the oldest Judeo-Christian texts creates a powerful sense of mythology and reverence in the sculpture. Newman and his peers were living myths in their time, believed to have been working independently of all influence, absorbed only in their studio activities. As Hubbard notes, this is “absurd,” <sup>ix</sup> as most myths are. Yet the heroic, romantic notion of the painter in his studio, dressed in the worker’s garb and swilling the worker’s beer remains.

It is uncertain if Hubbard is any closer to reaching transcendence than before he started, but he certainly feels closer. He is “trying to create the world [he] wants to inhabit by creating [his] own worldview.” <sup>x</sup> In a society full of so many conflicting ideas and ideologies competing for attention, that’s an epic and admirable task. If, to his chagrin, there ever is a ‘mythology of Kevin Hubbard’, I’m sure his journey will be considered heroic too.

\*Notes on pages 176-177.



# FAMOUS LAST WORDS

An Exhibition in Two Parts

Act Two:

*TOO LATE FOR FRUIT, TOO SOON FOR FLOWERS*

ADAM GANDY

Saturday, February 5th // Opening Reception // 7pm - 11pm  
February 5th to February 19th 2011

Adam Gandy exhibits new video, sculpture and photography that stems from an exploration of our lived world. Gandy's work examines the cult of the masculine ideal reflected through film, philosophy and history exploring the notion of resourcefulness as heroism and an interest in the moment before climax.

Adam Gandy is an artist and writer living in Vancouver. He received a BFA from ECUAD in 2006 and is currently on hiatus from pursuing a BA in Sociology and Philosophy at UBC.



*Cover Art Proposal for Every Album That Ever Mattered, Plaster, paint, knife and rose*



*Still Life with Cheese and Compound Light Source, Inkjet on paper*



*Vitruvius' Arrow (still), Video*



*Absolute Beginners (detail), Wood, knife, rope, books and brick*



*Installation Shot with: Absolute Beginners, Wood, knife, rope, books and brick*





*Retire The Pantheon, Capes and wood*

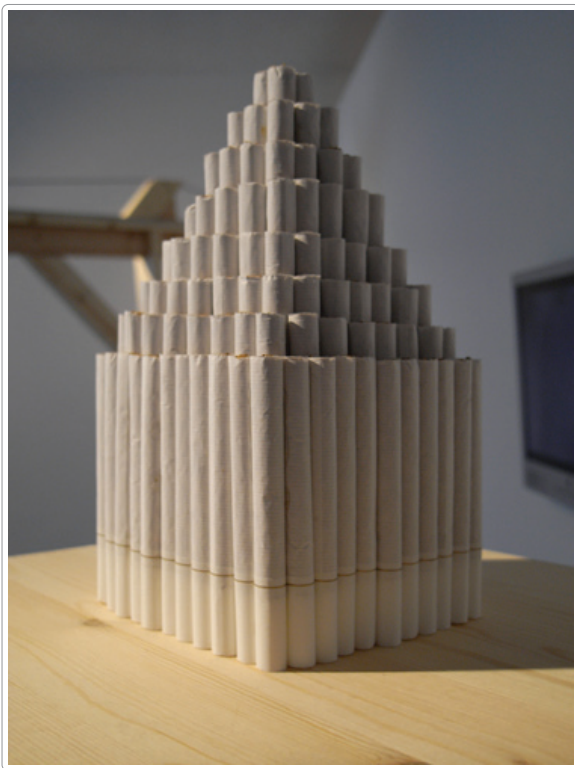




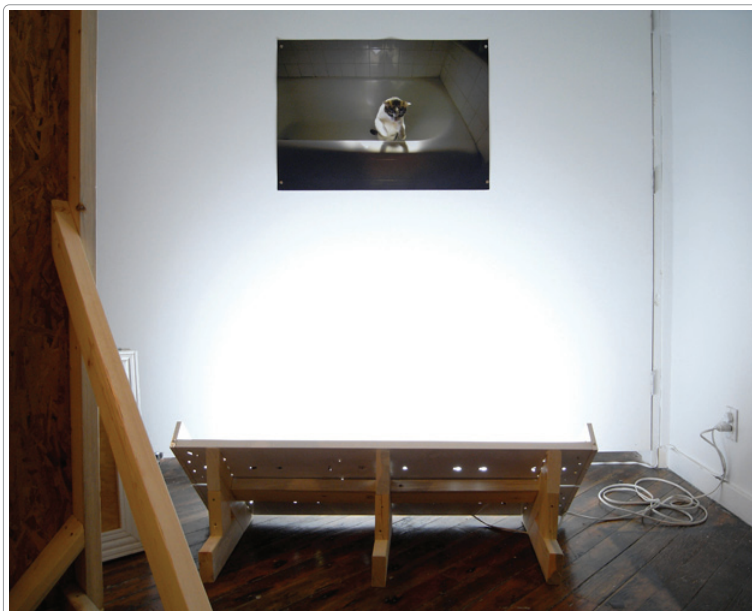
Installation Shot



Left: *Monument to the Revolution*, Whittled wood + *Still Life Works 2008-2009*, Lightjet prints  
 Right: *Proposal for a Monument to Immortality (Cigarette Ziggurat)*, Cigarettes and wood



*Proposal for a Monument to Immortality (Cigarette Ziggurat),  
Cigarettes and wood*



*Still Life with Cat (illuminated), Inkjet on paper and flourescent lights*

## BUT I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING! ... I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING! AN INTERVAL BETWEEN TWO ACTS

Mitch Speed

I am not intimately familiar with the subjects of this essay — the artist Adam Gandy and his recent and forthcoming exhibitions at the artist run gallery, 304 Days, collectively titled *Famous Last Words: An Exhibition in Two Parts*. This nod towards the possibility of my own failure might appear as an overly self-conscious manoeuvre, but bravery, when manifested at a whim, often takes the form of a borrowed costume. And like a costume, bravery has the nasty habit of slipping off at the most inopportune times, if the space between it and its wearer does not amount to a perfect fit. I get the impression that Adam Gandy might agree. The little that I do know about his work tells me so.

Eleven digital images, describing Gandy's first installation at 304 Days, are available on the gallery's website. From the limited perspective offered by these photographs, the exhibition unfolds before me as an image of images, or a distant, heretofore unknown situation. This is the way most of us encounter art and its history, and it is a perspective that affords us the freedom to engage in creative readings — and mis-readings – albeit at the expense of intimate encounters. To my mind, this piece of writing, itself a provisional attempt to describe the machinations of an unfamiliar body of work, makes good company with Gandy's own process. While the work itself seems structured around the relationship between introspection, and a "lived world", this relationship is communicated through a lexicon of images and objects borrowed from popular cultures and histories that I imagine appearing to the artist as flickering inconclusive artefacts on a distant, retrospective horizon.

At the moment, I am dwelling on a photograph that features a cropped view of the corner of a room. This image is organized into four planes, two white walls, a ceiling, and a hardwood floor that is worn and battered and stained and beautiful. The photograph has been captured at such an angle that the floor's fir planks correspond to the image's bottom edge. Three plinths of different sizes sit on the time worn floor. Two stand vertically, while one sits on its side. On one of the vertical plinths, a squared block of wood, taller than it is wide, supports a stick standing on end. At some point in its life, this branch divided itself into three smaller offshoots, which have since been broken to more or less

uniform lengths. A slender blue object appears to span the distance between these smaller branches. In my haste, I read it as the elastic band of a slingshot. Closer inspection reveals it to be a blue Bic lighter. To the bottom left of the photograph, on the horizontal plinth, many wooden sticks of various diameters, larger than kindling but not yet logs, have been piled in the form of a prism. One end of each stick has been whittled into a violent point. Set deeply in a foliage covered pit, or suspended above a forest floor by a rope, these things would seem perfectly suited to bring down a small beast. On the furthest and tallest plinth, three small, rising helix forms, constructed with a framework of matchsticks, glow in the yellow beam of a spotlight.

Several photographs also populate this image. Nine of them, which have been clustered together, depict a forest situation, but the larger image through which I am looking is too small, and the smaller cluster of images too dark, to properly make out their contents. So I will keep them in mind in the hopes of returning to them later. I've also noticed a red flag hanging from the top of a long, slightly bowed branch, accompanied by a spool of red thread. The flag and stick configuration seems to bundle nationalist fervour with an ad-hoc, renegade spirit and brings to mind *The Lord of the Flies*, or *The War* — a lesser-known 1994 movie starring Elijah Wood and Kevin Costner, in which a Vietnam veteran is confronted with the militant play fighting of his son.

For the moment, the content of a larger image to the left has stolen my attention. Here we see a naked man whose head has been severed by the picture's top edge. He holds an ovoid mirror over his penis. This mirror, ringed in a purple plastic frame, reflects the image of a woman's vagina and two thoughts enter my head with such simultaneity that I lose track of which arrived first. A lingering memory of Gustave Courbet's, *The Origin of the World*, 1866 and the question, "is this a photograph of the artist himself?" It isn't until later that I ask myself who the vagina belongs to. In hindsight, it seems like a strange thing not to consider. But the oversight has had a fortuitous consequence. It has pointed towards an important subject within the work, which in turn hints towards the way that it functions structurally.

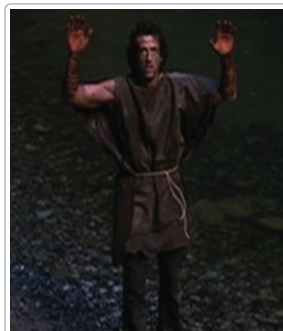
My delayed reaction to the photograph, introduces the works involvement with – and elaboration on – the male perspective within an ongoing feminist struggle. There are historical precedents for such an arrangement, in which a conflicted subject makes use of a poetics of re-

enactment in order to reconcile itself with a harmed 'Other'. We'll get to that in a moment. In the meantime, let's take a step backward and see if we can get at the root of the matter at hand.

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Estimates approximate a 400 year delay between the events described in Homer's *Odyssey*, and the author's recording of them in 800 BC. It took another 2,388 years before a name was given to the unshakeable melancholic condition that propelled Homer's battle weary Odysseus to spend ten years struggling to return to his wife, Penelope. In 1688, a Swiss scientist by the name of Johannes Hofer was inspired by the... "Swiss mercenaries who in the plains and lowlands of France...[and]... Italy were pining for their native mountain landscapes", to understand the phenomenon that we now know as nostalgia — an elaboration of the Greek "nostos", for homeward journey — and to give it that name.<sup>i, ii</sup>

Two hundred and ninety four years later, in 1982, movie audiences encountered the chiselled and scarred, jeweled countenance of John Rambo; an archetypal anti-hero animated by the ghost of Odysseus — in one of the action genre's seminal films, *First Blood*. Within ten minutes of the film's opening credits, John Rambo returns worn and weary from a tour in Vietnam, only to be abducted at the side of the road by two police officers who lay on him the charge of vagrancy. Stallone wastes little time in absconding, and thus begins a two-hour sequence of unceasing action wherein he leads his former captors on a violence-saturated tour of destruction through the wilds of Washington State. The anti-hero figure, embodying equal parts childlike innocence, confusion and victim-hood, delivers a crescendo of finely calibrated savagery that is both institutionally endorsed and not.



Left: *Odysseus*  
Right: *Rambo (still)*



Act 1 of Gandy's two-part exhibition also featured a composite of scenes from *First Blood*, in which the beleaguered super warrior careened, with the calmest urgency, through the same Washington forest. In his re-edit of the original scene, Gandy removed all indications of a predator, so that our anti-hero seemed propelled along a rough and tumble path of dense forests and dizzying drops, by nothing more than the threat of an unseen spectre. In another video, John Rambo faced an elevated camera and screamed, in loop... "But I didn't do anything!... I didn't do anything!... But I didn't do anything!"... I didn't do anything!..." The framing of this shot implied that we were the pursuers. In any case, we can't be sure whether to believe him or not. Our knowledge of the character's personal history as a de facto embodied weapon has the effect of undercutting our sympathy for him. The viewer is left to connect the dots between this situation – where empathy and anger collide – and the cohabitation of an ambiguous network of masculine mythology, by equal parts romantic nostalgia, and systemic, and violent chauvinism.

If not performance in the strict sense of the word, Gandy's work is most certainly performative. While the artist is not literally present within the work, his visage appears as a refracted image emanating from so many props and accessories. By way of a small wall of bricks interspersed with paperback books, the world of a mythical tradesman – the mason – is collapsed with that of the western intellect – recorder and orator of so much worldly knowledge. As these associations topple forward like domino blocks, I am lead to wonder how such a practise might elucidate the nature of our own movements through space and time, as bodies and performed selves. On this matter, I defer to the thoughts of another artist who shares with Gandy a geographical context — Vancouver — as well as a hybrid sculptural-performative strategy.

In an article titled *Alive*, Judy Radul has suggested that we live in a moment wherein the present is understood to be alive, and each passing moment dead.<sup>iii</sup> A dead space is a place haunted by ghosts. It is a place that we do our best to escape, where unfinished business lingers and festers and forever accumulates emotional and spiritual weight — unless exorcism intervenes. So we might think of our own forward marches through time as steadfast, determined evasions of dead moments, or the constant evasion of spectres of our own making. Intervening in this process is our old friend Dr. Hofer, and his "nostalgia syndrome", which allows us to return — emotionally if not physically — to a better past that in all likelihood never existed in the first place. In such a way, we



are permitted to distance ourselves from the realities of now, and then, alike. We are compelled by the perceived deadness of inactivity to move forward and escape the past, while our need to re-discover that past is soothed by the idealistic reconstructions of nostalgia.

It might be that Adam Gandy is a modern day time traveller attempting to dislodge both himself and his subject from their respective realities. This time traveller illustrates his findings in a language of objects and images. A three-dimensional log book, maybe? While the artist moves backward in time in order to uncover a constellation of objects and moments that signify a particular archetype, his quarry moves forward in time in order to emerge from the fog of memory. Like so many bodies moving towards each other in a dense wood, some communications are made, while others miss each other by mere inches, only to lose sight of one another forever.

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In the oeuvre of Joseph Beuys, ghosts travelled in a vessel called metaphor. Beuys, the quintessential practitioner of performative sculpture, deployed poetic metaphors in an effort to “come to terms with his country’s—and his own—historical experience, so as not to repeat it...”<sup>iv</sup> In Gandy’s case, metaphor is replaced by a poetics of objects and images that does not infuse materials with the weight of history, so much as as re-create and arrange historicized objects – lighter, flag, butterfly knife... into poetic constellations that suggest an earnest — even loving — interest in his own personal history, while nodding towards the utter ubiquity of the experiences which have coloured it.

Works of art communicate through manifold conduits and interfaces. If the shared identification described above allows the work to travel through the force of empathy, the artist’s idiosyncratic processes of selection, arrangement and construction re-focus the work around a particular subject position, and give it a spirit. When I think of Beuys’ canonical performance *I Like America and America Likes Me* (1974) I think that the coyote — trapped, confused and noble — operated as a cypher for a mythic America. And while the coyote’s signifying potential was paramount, the catalyst for its meaning to emerge was the presence of Beuys himself — hat on head, cane in hand, swaddled in felt. The ghosts of history that the artist made manifest through those materials accompanied him to American space and behaved as dual mirror/mediums,

in which the spectres that populate American history flickered through the fog of cultural memory.



Joseph Beuys, *I Like America and America Likes Me*, 1974

If I have permitted myself to believe that newspapers, felt, and the living, breathing body of a coyote have conversed with profound historical situations, my having mistaken a stick and a Bic lighter for a slingshot is not exactly insignificant. To my mind, this mis-apprehension signals the artist's skill in collapsing multiple potentialities within a single object. And although the readerly possibilities are multiple, they are not at all chaotic or random. The lighter and twig construction springs forth from the same world as the slingshot, a world populated by ripped knees, mischief and small doses of mayhem. So in an economy of signs, the actual things, and the other thing that their abstract form suggests, exemplify a tense slippage between mystery and comprehensibility. Miss-apprehensions can be just that and only that. But they can also point towards glitches in our own interpretive systems. Glitches caused by a residue of meaning that accumulates on and around the artist's project like a magic dust, or soot on the window of a burning building, likewise obscuring our vision of the activities unfolding inside, while elucidating the larger situation with arresting clarity.

\*Notes on page 177.

Mitch Speed is an artist and writer. He lives and works in Vancouver.

# ORBICULUS

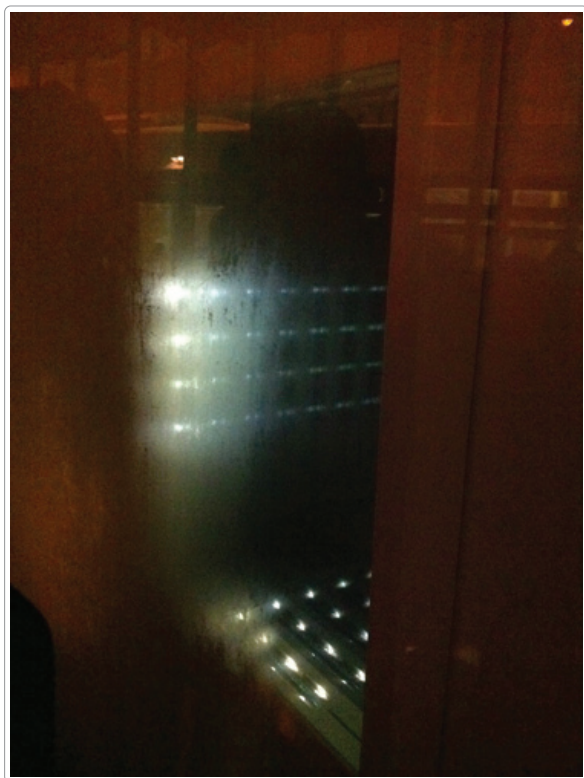
ANDREW DADSON  
JONATHAN SYME

Saturday, February 26th // Opening Reception // 7pm - 11pm  
February 26th to March 19th 2011

Andrew Dadson and Jonathan Syme exhibit new works that explore the materiality of paint through distinct methods of layering. Syme uses linear elements of saturated colour to draw the eye into his optically rich fields of algorithmic-like abstraction. In contrast, Dadson's work is mute and calm by nature with subtle evidence of the layers of colour and texture that make up the final effaced surface; both allowing the viewer to enter the void and explore the liminal space between.

Andrew Dadson lives and works in Vancouver. He is represented by Galleria Franco Neoro, Torino and has exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Art I Basel (Switzerland), the Vancouver Art Gallery, the Seattle Art Museum, the Power Plant Gallery, and Museion Bolzano (Italy). He received a BFA from ECUAD in 2003.

Jonathan Syme lives and works in Vancouver. He has shown recently at CSA space, in an exhibition curated by Adam Harrison, Jeffrey Boone Gallery, Hotel Gallery, and the White House Gallery. He received a BFA from ACAD in 2003.



Jonathan Syme, *Untitled (Void)*, Mixed media (Photo: Wil Aballe)



Installation Shot (Photo: Scott Massey)



Andrew Dadson, *Leaner*, Oil, acrylic and ink on canvas and linen (Photo: Scott Massey)



Installation Shot (Photo: Wil Aballe)





Andrew Dadson, *Leaner*, Oil, acrylic and ink on canvas and linen (Photo: Scott Massey)



Jonathan Syme, *Untitled*, Acrylic on canvas (Photo: Scott Massey)

304 Days spoke with Andrew Dadson and Jonathan Syme before the opening of their exhibition.

**304 Days:** Your works from the past few years—the lean paintings, the re-stretched paintings and the outdoor paintings—involve the use of either black or white as a major element of final art object. Why do these symbolically loaded colours keep reoccurring in your work?

**AD:** Originally they started coming up because it's almost like getting buffed. After applying all this paint then people were using more paint to get rid of something. So, that's how they originally started. And, I kind of like that it also looks like nothing has happened. It's a starting point. Often, freshly white is a starting point for a canvas, but for me it ends up being an ending point. And, all the colours underneath whether they're just a few colours or a lot end up being what is sort of helping make the painting skew off the wall—like in the lean paintings. They hold the painting off the wall and are like these building blocks or what would be the ground or the primer.

I don't necessarily see them as completely loaded because I am using them in a way to try and cover up something, but its not really possible, so you always get little bits of colour poking through. In the outdoor paintings, I painted over grass and things and you get the little bits of flower or garbage poking through. So, when I am doing all this work to try and paint over the grass and I take a photo and you can see that it didn't cover up everything.

For me it ends up being a way to cover up something and I don't know if they particularly have to be white or black, but they always end up being that way. I guess because I like to go back to the blank canvas. And the black just seems like the most obvious way to cover up things outside, but it doesn't always work. So, I have that kind of battle.

**304 Days:** Your paintings involve a repetitive process of mark making using numerous layers of thick paint that in the end are effaced by white or combined to create a black monochromatic surface with ghosts of the mark making below and overflow on the edges. What is your interest in layering, repetition and erasure?

**AD:** The layering part of the process is not really my first concern. It's the idea of erasure in the same kind of way in which you can pave a field,

but if you left it things would start popping up and it would just kind of crumble. So, you could try to block it with pavement, but eventually it wouldn't be that way anymore and you would have grass growing through—like in the paintings when the paint starts to seep through. So, the paintings for me are the same idea and by layering the colours and building something up because you have this canvas sitting in your studio and it's sort of propped up against the wall and the paint starts to cement it at whatever angle it is at or position. Eventually, the paint cements it in its final place acting like a building block of the painting and, they all interact with one another with how some dry and some don't, and some fall on the ground and some stick to the wall, and some make it and some don't, and in the end you get the painting. So, I like the process of the lean paintings because they take many months to make often. This is the same with the outdoor painting when I am painting something it doesn't really just happen, the photo happens really fast. But, you're out there painting all day trying to cover something up and the wind is blowing things like garbage back on to it and I guess it is a bit performative in the way. It's time-based and I have to keep at it and trying, but in the end maybe that is not possible. But, it adds to it in a way.

**304 Days:** I am curious about the layers below the final surface. Are they completed pictures that you keep layering over top of one another? Could you discuss what is happening below the surface of these paintings?

**AD:** Sometimes I really like them, but in a way you can't hold on to them too much because I have sort of set these parameters to keep doing it and to build up the void or the gap in the top of the painting, however it is leaning against the wall and in a way I am trying to fill that with paint, so I can't just go with the picture on the front, even if I really like it, but you get points where they're really nice and would like to leave it, but I don't. So, I keep adding to them and working on them. But, I like to work on them over a long period of time where the paint can dry properly and you can spend more time with them. These ones are messier than some of the other ones I have made, so you can maybe see what the layers are. But, some of the ones in the past you can barely see, but I have been playing with different ways. In these ones, when I am making them I'm just not bending over as far, and the paint is drying faster and becoming chunkier at the bottom, so I kind of put the paint on, and if I don't get to it that day then it is just sort of stuck there. You get a sense of what they might be like, but they are really just a lot of different colours of paint.



With the first ones, I had to get all the paint to the top, but with these ones I can barely reach to the top, so it's a bit different and you get the scope of my physical ability to get the paint to different places. I noticed that happening once the canvasses started getting bigger, so I started playing with this idea a bit more. I can't scrape the really large canvasses because I would have to stop and either use a ladder or make a machine. So, you get a feel for my own performative action. And, I often title my works using relevant art references. In the case of the plank paintings, I am making a reference to Charles Ray's performance where he uses a 2 X 6 board attached to his stomach and where he is performing with this object, so when they're propped against the wall that is sort of me performing with it.

**304 Days:** The way that you exhibit your work indicates a certain level of consideration to the architecture of the space in which the work is shown. How do you make these decisions and at what point in your process do they occur?

**AD:** The Franco Noero gallery in Torino was the first time that I exhibited a lean painting. I knew that I was having a show there and the building itself is a triangle and it had this sense of all these angles and I wanted to make something in a way that would fit with the space. So, it just all happened at the right time where I was making these lean paintings and I made them so that the same angle was sort of like the angle of the building, and so when you walked into the gallery you have the painting and the skew of the wall that make all these different kinds of triangles, and basically mimicking the building. But, it is not specifically like that. It ends up being more like the paintings in my studio and how they start. I just know that I want to make a painting and I buy some canvas and it just goes in the corner and that's where it's sitting—propped up. So, often now I try to prop them up in a way where it's just haphazard and just try to let the paint make them. When you start painting, you hang your painting on the wall and it's done, but most painters start off with it leaning on something and I have the idea that that's where the painting starts and it ends up staying that way. But, they definitely can play with the space a bit more as soon as they are sitting on the ground they kind of demand their own space and they are more sculptural. But, I more think of them as haphazard canvasses in my studio. I used to try and put weights on them, but I found I really didn't need to do that, because eventually they will just be stuck where they want.

My old studio was really small. So, to work on many canvasses at one time they had to touch and be askew and you want to work with what you have I guess. But, now that I have a bigger studio it is interesting to start to play with these bigger canvasses and with how high I can reach and not reach and so things have changed a bit.

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**304 Days:** Your work has a strong visual presence using high contrast linear elements alongside a fairly saturated palette. What is it about this vocabulary of formal devices that intrigues you and how are these forms generated?

**JS:** The bright and high contrast colours are agitative colours. I don't want them to be comfortable design things, so those agitative colours and the contrast and dynamics that exist there are purposed based and they keep your eye enticed and busy and they're pushing. They're prickly colours, and the highly chromatic colours produce the most retinal agitating effects. I have done a whole series of black, white and grey paintings to relieve the stress of always choosing the next colour and how to pair this with that and what's the right colour choice. So, to escape that I did a whole series that had to do with space and form and that became the focus. So after that series of painting, I was able to reexamine colour and then use that in conjunction with what I had learned about form and space and also a sort of indication of environment. I say environment, but really I mean just a reference to a plane in space rather than a structure or a landscape. So, then colour gets introduced as a further signal or agitation.

The forms are going to be one of two things, they're either going to be derived from a representational object or thing or they'll be somewhat symbolic in their inception. Once, I get a really good grasp on a form or symbol then I can obfuscate it and soften the edges and do what I need to do to remove the symbolic from the symbol. Essentially that's it, you learn to eliminate all of this power of the symbol or referential object and then just turn it into a form and that's essentially where the forms come from. They would never get as complex as describing an actual location or as complex as describing a specific object, but what they do describe is either a line of sight or even a psychological, not location, but arc or the trajectory of something.



**304 Days:** The large painting allows your eye to be drawn into the three distinct layers of the work: the linear elements on the surface, the high contrast stripes and the striped upward pointing arrow form. This creates an illusory field where your attention shifts between layers creating a rhythmic movement between forms. How do you find this illusory approach affects the work?

**JS:** The sharp surface stripes or forms are referencing all of the colours that happened before and presenting something that is physical and is right on top. It is unbroken. It's almost a sculptural element on top of this painting and those are all referencing or informed by everything that's occurred previously. So, they're like a final interpretation of my own of the painting and breaking it down into a really simple vocabulary of colour. There is a direction and a placement of everything that happened on the surface. And, to have it crisscross over itself and form a new structure while that's communicating with everything that's happened behind and so it moves in and out. It pushes and pulls against everything else behind it. And, essentially those lines on the surface act as an eloquent summation of the underlying structure in the painting.

So, in terms of that spiking form that is sort of in the middle layer, or wherever you position it—they are all side by side until you get to the surface. It is a gesture. It doesn't reference in the same kind of the way that some of other paintings have a specific symbol or a plane in space. It is more of a gesture and should be viewed as an action. Now, that ultimately is left up to the viewer and their subjectivities. But, it does hint at some clues of what I think that motion is and what that gesture entails and is confined in the overall structure. So, it is never a completely loose thing and it also has its own sort of pattern of formula to create that as well. That form is really about composition and formal elements.

Those lines on the surface and everything that has come before create a play between the depths of the painting and that immediate punch in the face kind of the colour on the surface, so that it is moving not necessarily in and out, but on and off. Things are turning on and off and there is a special quality to the way those things work. They are there, but then they're not there and they exist, but there is never a real moment of clarity where you say this is how this painting looks. It just keeps moving.

**304 Days:** Your work suggests that you have an affinity with geometry and optics, but I get the feeling that there is more to these images than the formal qualities of the works. What motivates you to create these pictures?

**JS:** Geometry comes into these in a certain way, but it is all imperfect, nothing is made using a protractor or anything like that, but even the mathematics are fairly rule of thumb mathematics or eyeballed. As far as optics, I think of it as a spiritual thing. I think there is a wonder to looking at things and wondering how was it made. This traces back to the pursuit of spirituality through psychedelic effects. Whether that responds to psychedelic or psychotropic drugs isn't really here or there, because this type of visual work is evident among many cultures that ascribe to spirituality in that way. You can definitely attach patternistic pursuits to all natures of religions and cultures. I associate it more strongly with a freewheeling, not necessarily hippie, but definitely explorative of that psychological state of mind and that's the type of image I like.

But, that whole idea of creating the unknown visually and what that speaks to psychologically and how you absorb that and thinking about how it is all human made is baffling and that's not to say that I have achieved that, but I achieved a certain level where these images are fun to look at and I am pretty generous with the eye candy. But, these images are essentially studies searching for clues for something that is going to become bigger. The idea is to paint a state of confusion and keep working and looking.

**304 Days:** You work mostly with paint, but you are exhibiting/working in other media now as well. Can you talk about the relations between the paintings and the mirror/light works?

**JS:** The mirror pieces are for me this boggling thing—to look at them and at infinite. It just uses constructs that already work. And, my role in this is to set up these elements to get you excited and to get me excited. In the case of the mirrors, you put two mirrors together and you can look into them, but you can only look into it so much before you see your own reflection. You want to know where that goes eventually. It is just going to continuously reflect, but the psychological thing is that this is somewhere and this goes somewhere. And the paintings do that too. There is a tangible space that you are dealing with and you are standing

in front of. And, you actually believe that there is a plastic space, while you are looking at least. So, while you are looking into it and you are engaged there is depth there. There are certain parts of that painting that are further away from you than other parts. And, I'm not sure that that wonderment ever goes away from the human mind. So, continuing to find these things that trick you into believing something is real that isn't. And, especially when it's an abstract thing and when it doesn't have a reference to the real world and yet you are convinced by it. And, you say ok that's real and that's what I think the pursuit is across the board. I think the new or different material just comes out of the idea of continuous exploration, which is an important for me when it comes to art.

Before I came here I was talking to someone about Terence McKenna and we talked about the psychedelics and that whole thing. And, we were talking about the idea that you're not taking a drug, you are communicating with an element and you are not in control—you are negotiating. And, I thought that is the greatest way that I have heard about taking drugs, looking at art or listening to music, you are absorbing it and putting back towards it, but it's all a negotiation and it's going to pull you and push you in ways that you didn't expect.



**WESTERN EYES:**  
THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY;  
*or Fetish?*

JEN AITKEN  
RYAN AMADORE  
JEREMY GREEN

Saturday, April 2nd // Opening Reception // 7pm - 11pm  
April 2nd to April 16th 2011

Jen Aitken, Ryan Amadore and Jeremy Green's new works consider the relations between natural and synthetic materials offering a sincere and obsessive exploration of these resources. All of these sculptural works function as pleasurable objects and loaded symbols with varied aesthetic, material and conceptual concerns; yet sharing a desire for both visceral experience and cerebral expansion.

Jen Aitken lives and works in Toronto. She has recently shown at the Trench Gallery and attended a residency at the Banff Center with Geoffrey Farmer: *Theater of Erosion or I Hate Work that is Not a Play*. She received a BFA from ECUAD in 2010.

Ryan Amadore lives and works in Vancouver. He has recently attended a residency at the Banff Center with Silke Otto-Knapp: *Figure in a Mountain Landscape*. He received a BFA from ECUAD in 2009.

Jeremy Green lives and works in Vancouver. He has recently shown at Clark & Faria and the Queen Elizabeth Theatre, and attended a residency at the Banff Center with Silke Otto-Knapp: *Figure in a Mountain Landscape*. He received a BFA from ECUAD in 2009.





Installation Shot



Installation Shot



Ryan Amadore, *Trees Singing Saw*, Cedar driftwood logs with bark, polyurethane glue, doweling, staples, screws, MDF, speakers, speaker wire, stereo track (with saw songs), wood stool, musical saw and bow (Photo: Scott Massey)



Jeremy Green, *Behemoth*, Acrylic paint, glass plinth and flashlight with battery  
(Photo: Scott Massey)



Jen Aitken, *ottoman*, Fabric, rocks and thread  
(Photo: Scott Massey)



304 Days spoke with Jeremy Green, Jen Aitken and Ryan Amadore before the opening of their exhibition.

**304 Days:** In your recent body of work, you make thin membranes of acrylic paint that you then peel like fruit roll-ups to create layered forms of compressed paint. What is it about this process that excites you and how do you decide on these sculptural forms?

**Jeremy Green:** The ‘fruit roll-up’ process was developed out of a necessity to use paint in a different way that was new and exciting to me. I tried using acrylic and pouring it into cups; using a form based method. But, I found that no matter what, it always had to be really thin for it to work properly. A membrane would solidify on top and then it would be juicy and still wet underneath. So, I kind of developed this process, the fruit rollup process, basically out of an urge to use paint in a more monstrous fashion. When I was in Banff, I was painting monsters, just for fun, because I like monsters and things from pop culture. Movies. Drama. But, they were uninteresting, or at least that was the critique I got when I got back from Banff. I looked at a studio-mate’s painting and realized the method in which she had been painting was quite monstrous. It exhibited these characteristics that I wanted the viewer to feel and so instead of subjectively rendering the monster. I decided to use paint in a way that was monstrous, so that it would exhibit those properties.

Basically, what I realized is that your aesthetic and your own take is what holds you back and so I was urged to try new methods or processes. I tried to destroy everything that I made where my aesthetic would say: “Oh, this looks really good right now, I should probably hold back.” But, I decided to push further and in pushing further I would make mistakes and discoveries that I never would’ve made because I would’ve been too confined by my aesthetic. The form kind of came about initially from wanting to create a universal form, an oval form, like a spherical form. And, I really wanted it to relate to an organ or something of that nature without being so descriptive as it would’ve been so literal and loaded and everybody would’ve got it. I wanted to keep it open ended and I figured the more basic and common the shape, the more it can read as multiple things.

**304 Days:** In *Behemoth*, you have created a plinth of glass to exhibit your paint sculpture that is lit from below by a flashlight. Why have you decided to exhibit the paint sculpture using this method of display?

**JG:** Originally, I had come up with an idea to display the work in the center of a destroyed room. I wanted to create a false wall that looked like it was part of the gallery and then have a hole that looked like it had been eaten through, or something of that nature; where it looked like vermin had burrowed through—this strange and uncomfortable feeling—but, because it had already been covered in another fashion by another artist in this space we decided to do something else. The important part about this display is: How the work interacts with the space? How does it activate the space? And, how does it convey or express what I'm interested in?

I'm interested in mythology and ritual and all that kind of old world stuff. In cinema, film, comics, graphic novels, the sense of drama, conveying a narrative or telling a story. The way I look at my work now—if I can make an analogy—it's as though I am making this recipe and I add this component, but I want these components to signify their own meaning and when they come together. They still have their own meaning, but come together with the other components and make a stronger read. Or, take the work into a direction, that maybe I didn't foresee or that I did foresee. It's open to interpretation.

With the glass plinth, I wanted to convey or exalt the work like an idol, so I was creating something like an altar with idols or things of worship from mythology and all of the different religions of the world. They're usually put in the center of the room, so that they're the most important things that you'll notice in the space. I worked with the curator, Sean, and we both decided it would be best to be in the center of the room because that's part of the work and it's suppose to read like it's very important. The glass is an interesting material because it's sleek, it looks expensive, it looks important and basically it adds another layer to the piece. With the flashlight, I wanted to highlight the piece, but do something different. And, given the kind of ugly or grotesque nature of the paint sculpture on top. I thought lighting it from below would be dramatic and that it would cast a shadow on the ceiling. And, it would just add another layer of storytelling that would allow the viewer to experience the work and let their mind wander in their own imagination.

**304 Days:** You have titled the work *Behemoth* after the mythological beast and it is a term that is also associated with an enormous powerful entity. What is it about this particular reference that interests you and how is this reflected in this work?



**JG:** That's an easy answer because I like mythology and I like monsters. Even though the paint exhibits some monstrous qualities, I felt that I needed an extra kick in that direction. I named it *Behemoth* because: A) its mythological and religious references, and B) it's the name of a beast with insurmountable power. But really, it represents what this new process has done for my practice. It's basically blowing my mind. It's a new 'fruit roll-up' way of making sculptural pieces out of paint. It's opened so many doors in my mind of where this kind of work can go and what can be accomplished. I have more ideas and want to make more of these sculptures and am interested in the many ways to display them. And, to consider what other kinds of themes I want to load them with?

**304 Days:** And, maybe there's something about the Behemoth, this powerful entity sitting on top of the plinth of glass, and that it's almost blocking the light in some ways as though it's a bit of a burden to the light below. Is there something about that you can talk about?

**JG:** Yeah. There's an eclipse of the light and at the same time it is highlighting it from below and giving it this eerie kind of lighting. And, I think the paint says a lot about what regard I hold for paint. You can make a sculpture out of anything. It's pretty ridiculous thinking about making one with paint because it's so bloody expensive. It's interesting that you mentioned that. That read. When you said: "Yeah, this paint sculpture is blocking out the light." That's creating another element to the read of the work. It's activating a celestial body maybe? When we think of an eclipse we think of the sun and the moon and it makes us think of constellations and it makes us think of those gods from the old world, so I think it fits in nicely.

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**304 Days:** Your piece is using the soft and smooth qualities of fabric in contrast with the unyielding and rough qualities of rock. What is it about this collision of materials that excites you and how do you view their relations?

**Jen Aitken:** I started by using more natural or fashion-like fabrics, and now I've moved into more synthetic ones, I think this one's called 'leatherette.' I've used it in this weird realm, so it's much more removed from fashion for me now. And then pairing it with the rocks seems totally ridiculous, but it's just the classic juxtaposition of hard and soft,

or natural and designed. There is something about those two rocks and that synthetic fabric that just works for me. On one level it's just about being ridiculous, taking something so natural and basic and designing something around it using these costume-y, outlandish materials. But it's not over-the-top, it's just enough so that it works. It's believable. I guess that's the thing. There never is a glorious master plan. I work very intuitively. Not that I am simply messing around, putting things together without thinking, but you could say I've educated my intuition. I'm learning to recognize that certain feeling I get, that I know now from experience means something's working. Now I can just trust it and go with it. So I can't say that anything I say now, in the interview, was in my head while I was making this thing. But when it's done and I feel like it works, then I can start to really think about it. And that doesn't mean that I'm just making things up after the fact to defend the work, but just that this kind of intellectual reading is separate from the making. It's in a different part of the brain—or, it's in the brain, not the body.

With the rocks and the fabric, there's an element of time: a primal one for the rocks and then a degrading or temporary one for the fabric. It's cheap. I have no idea how long it'll last. Making a totally ridiculous cradle around these natural rocks works, I think, because they were already there, and they're from a different method of being. It wouldn't have worked to make the cradle for a designed object, like if there were bowling balls in there, because they're from the same language.

**304 Days:** Your upholstered object encases fairly heavy stones in soft flesh tone recesses of fabric adding a certain amount of tension and weight on the work. How do these recesses and the idea of moving inward work within your sculpture?

**JA:** It's definitely a reference to the body, which is a huge part of all of my work. It's merging that very geometrical form of the half cylinder with these sort of orifices. And with the recesses, I know it's kind of a simple concern, but I'm interested in the base, and what supports what. I really liked the idea of making a base that wasn't flat on the bottom and then to have these things sink into it rather than sit on top. And then it became this sort of rocking cradle. It's sort of halfway in between design and something else. And I really like when things fit together. It's so physically satisfying to put those rocks in there. That might be it for me I think. A lot of it is just about pleasure. Touching and seeing how things are. It's hard for me to imagine the viewer, what it's like to look at the

work without ever having touched it. But I think even just looking at it, you can imagine putting the rocks in and them sinking down.

I find when I'm showing my work to people who aren't in art dialogues, they get really uncomfortable, and they're not sure how to react. But then their responses can be so honest and perfect, and I feel like I've done my job. One girl said to me once: "your work makes me feel like a pervert."

**304 Days:** (Laughs.) Well, you're touching on these pretty suggestive forms to start with; at least in your previous works. And, we're somewhat seduced by the texture of fabrics in general because it has to do with the body and clings to the body and is designed around the body, so there is something already there. When you use these protrusion or recesses there's very much a visceral experience, for sure.

**JA:** So why am I not the pervert? That's interesting. I think maybe it's because you're never sure if I'm trying to be serious or funny. But it's always both.

**304 Days:** I think you're too sincere to be a pervert. You're really involved in what you do, you know what you are doing, so it's hard to believe that it's all just a perverted kind of thing, which is why I really like this work, for example, because it has this quality to it, but it's not hitting you over the head with it. It functions in a more subtle way, but it lures you in and seduces you and once you're there you're thinking: "this is totally perverted, but I love it."

**JA:** Yeah, I think you have to work through those "hitting you over the head" impulses. You've got to get dildos out of your system. I think I've made enough of them now. I'm over it. (Laughs). Shock is still interesting to me though. I try to think of ways I can shock myself, of what I can do so that after I've made something I think "ew, whoa!" And I keep on going, and I have to think, maybe I am a pervert or something. And it goes into a real psychological territory with the compulsive making of these things.

**304 Days:** *ottoman* is a sculpture that makes reference through its title to the piece of furniture that one rests their feet on, implying with it a certain air of luxury and leisure. What is your interest in this device?

**JA:** I think it's more about the service of that object. The focus is not on the person who gets to put their feet up, but it's on the burden of the ottoman having to hold up the person's feet. It's this sort of glorifying of the subordinate—this kind of submissive subject. And, doing it all up in this ridiculous shiny fabric, and having your focus drawn to the sculpture that's low and under. And then even the rocks are under that, and there's this sort of play between who's the lowest? Who's there to serve who? The title *ottoman* is just another reference to the domestic world, or the feminine world. It's a parallel to a kind of general subordinate role. You know, like furniture in comparison to art.

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**304Days:** Your work repurposes old trees that have: drifted to shore, been collected, sawed into firewood lengths, hollowed out, had speakers inserted into them and reconfigured to be used as a tool for your performance/installation. How did this process play out and what is your interest in nature and these resources?

**Ryan Amadore:** I guess it all started when I was at the Banff center. There were piles of logs all over the Banff National Park that you could see all along the pathway and they'd been cut down for interfering with the path and left there to naturally decompose. At least that's what I was told. I kept on walking past these two logs while going to town and I was really attracted to them. I was doing these sound painting contraptions at the time, using sound to create patterns in paint and to me the message was about nature or the natural energy that is around us all the time and that maybe it's shaping the physical in some sort of way, but I didn't like that once I made a painting using that process. The piece became a detached separate thing. It became decorative, like a painting. People seemed to be more interested in the process and the contraption I was using to make them. So, I thought about making some sort of contraption that would be visual and was a symbol relating to that idea of nature, which has a kind of rawness to it. At the time I was also reading a lot of books on Art Povera because I had been referred to Giuseppe Penone and I was inspired by that a bit. I read about how he was interested in natural energy and that's why I think a lot of these Art Povera artists used neon, dirt, actual horses and whatnot. I really like the simplicity of it, so it was a kind of reduction for me. I wanted to find something and alter it slightly to make it into an art piece. I wanted to incorporate the sound too.

While I was in Banff I had a few people, one of them being Kitty Scott, telling me that once an art piece starts to have too much of a function, which these speakers had because I was playing *There is a Light that Never Goes Out* by The Smiths. And, playing tracks like that through it during our open studio visits. I think just the fact that I was playing just anything out of it like any sort of speaker system, with a left and a right, people were offering to buy them right there and then saying: "This would look great in my living room." I liked the attention that it got. And, it was mind blowing in a sense to try this new thing. But, I wanted to amp it up in some way that it could become more than a functional faux-nature design object. With these trees, I thought about going big. It was cool to do that with this piece. It was specifically for 304. Before I even started it that was the idea—to measure it for this ceiling. I also wanted to see how sound would travel through it once it got bigger and I liked the challenge of hollowing it out. At first, I was trying to figure out ways of doing it without having to cut it into blocks like maybe there was a way to magically hollow it out without doing that, but that was just a compromise that I had to do to go through with it. In the end it actually turned out to improve the piece in a big way because it gives it this Frankenstein quality; the glue is visible in some parts where it's broken apart and it slants, but it's kind of resurrected.

**304Days:** I find the sounds, created by the musical saw, that are being played through the trees to be both hypnotic and calming and they recall sounds of alarms, whales or what we would associate with the sounds of ghosts. How do you see the relationship between the sound and the log sculpture?

**RA:** It's interesting. That hypnotic and calming quality—a lot of my art pieces even through out art school were always incorporating sound somehow. I was doing a lot of animations that were based on time-lapse loops and I would always have some sort of sound element to it. But, it was important not to make it too musical in a sense. I didn't want to play just some three-chord progression or some sort of scale or anything. Actually, I did a couple where there was: E, A, D, G, B, E. Or, going through A to G as a whole scale because at the time it was more of a formal way of exploring sound as an art medium. With this, maybe I was a little too literal using the saw in the way that you can tell the trees have visibly been cut and there's a play visually. It's another symbol sort of, just like the trees, but also it's a coincidence in the sense that I had been learning to play the saw over the last year and a half. I like that there is an emo-

tive quality to the sound and there's something kind of sad sounding to it, but it's also kind of comical. I like that it plays on the whole lumber-jack/Canadiana thing a little bit too. For the whale sound, it's funny, I was thinking of this driftwood floating in the ocean and how those are probably the things that it would be hearing and I was wondering what it would be hearing? I like that the saw, in the bending and wobbling of it, and how it expresses some sort of idea on balance, which is interesting too.

**304 Days:** Can you talk a little bit about the ghostly qualities of it? I said, "what we hear is what we associate with the sounds of ghosts" and that kind of comes from pop-culture. So, when you're talking about the work as having a bit of a comical element; I think a bit about Scooby-Doo and the sounds that have been made up to sound like ghosts. But, we all understand those sounds.

**RA:** Totally. I think part of the logs floating in the ocean, this driftwood, comes from when I imagine myself in that position. I think what it would be like to be that piece of driftwood floating in the ocean—I know it sounds cheesy (laughs). But, thinking of the fact that you're surrounded by these two abysses: you have the open sky, stars or universe, and then you have this open ocean underneath you. There's something scary about that. Scary. But, also enlightening maybe. Not that I was consciously thinking about these things when I was making this work, but in retrospect, a lot of these things are interesting with regards to the saw, the sound and its relationship to the logs. When I made the first two logs in Banff, I had the hardest time figuring out what sort of sound to play out of them. But, I knew it needed to be a very specific sound to make it into a sound sculpture or an art piece in itself. I feel that in a lot of ways there are a lot of chance elements that came into play with this whole thing, but it kind of fell together.

**304Days:** *Trees Singing Saw* slips between several modes of visual and auditory experience. It starts as a performative work where you, the artist, play the saw, to an installation where the viewer experiences the work as an art object and finally to an interactive work where the viewer becomes participant in playing the saw alongside the musical trees. What excites you about these different experiences or modalities of the work?

**RA:** I like that because it's a stereo track running through the speakers.



And, that the left and right are playing different sounds; a part of the experiment with this piece was to see whether there would be some sort of physical relationship to that sound. A person will physically experience it because of its size—I don't know anybody larger than these trees (laughs). But, I was hoping that maybe the sound coming out of the each speaker would be different and would create some sort of perceptual tweaking or a push and pull, so that it's more based on the sound than what they're actually looking at. I find there's a performative quality in a lot of the work I've been doing. Basically, every single thing that I've been doing over the last few years has had a performative element to it, but I've been avoiding performing and trying to figure out ways around it, so the art piece can maybe speak for itself without having me assist it in its presentation. I think I've kind of gotten over that with this piece and I realize that I'm taking a risk in putting myself outside of my comfort zone to play in front of a crowd of people. I think because I made the sound tracks for the speakers and logs, there will be a relationship to the sounds that are coming out of it and I'm hoping that will create a magical moment. That maybe time will kind of stop while it's happening. Even the way it's lit, I feel like it's going to be a bit of a séance or something with these trees, or a moment for everyone to be quiet and listen. Maybe I'll be overpowering some of the things people are thinking or saying and force them to look.

The other thing I'm not comfortable with is coming off as though I'm narcissistic or egotistical or that I'm begging for this attention. But, without me performing on the opening night there would be something missing. When I'm not here to perform, I hope people will want to pick it up and play. I think that's cool because they're kind of activating it. It's also a challenge to play the saw. It's even more of a challenge to try and play the saw by ear and match the sounds that you're hearing or playing along with it in some way that even if it's not with it, or against it, it's still interesting and the circumstances around the tree continue to change.

Maybe the message in the end, not that there's a finite message, but hopefully it would stay generally the same and it becomes experiential, which is the one thing that ties it all in together. It's interesting looking at the piece and the stool, the saw and bow and how they're all set up in place. Those are things that came together last minute. I made that stool overnight without really having the time to sit with it and find out what my intentions were with it. So, that idea of having this object that be-

comes an invitation in some way for people to come over and sit down and play the saw with the trees is exciting and it was unintentional. But now that I think of it, I like that a lot because I feel there's a kind of constant reminder that parallels some of the concepts behind my ideas of nature. Not that I am for or against, but socially there's this green revolution about saving the world and I don't want to be '*Ferngully*' about it, but there's a temptation in some sense that we all have towards these issues and that fits nicely with the temptation to play, and having the courage to play in front of other people. I don't mean to sound preachy or anything, but it's kind of interesting how those things play out. Maybe it's an allusion of some sort too because the trees are all torn apart and then put back together and even the way the bark has been re-applied; there's something artificial about it. It's natural, but there's something not quite right about it. It's obscured. It's abstract I guess.

One thing about its modalities, there's an element of performance and theatre and all that stuff that we all take part in within the art world. Even being a person at an opening, in some sense, you're playing out the role of the artist or entourage or whoever you are. Curator. Critic. To me it's a playful way of messing around with that a little bit by putting not just myself on the spot, but putting other people on the spot, so they're the performer taking part in the performance or theatre and being even more aware of the fact that you're performing.

## WESTERN EYES: THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY; OR FETISH?

Sean Matthew Weisgerber

One morning last year in June, I was woken up by my alarm clock to an interview on CBC radio between the host of *Q*, Jian Ghomeshi, and New York Magazine art critic Jerry Saltz. They were talking about the 'reality' TV show *Work of Art: The Next Great Artist* and Saltz's experience as a judge. When Saltz was asked what it takes to be a great contemporary artist, he mentioned two things that still resonate for me: obsession and delusion.<sup>i</sup> Great artists that I admire possess these two qualities. They must be consumed with their thoughts, questions, concerns, research or another aspect of their art process and must be able to maintain a certain belief that their efforts are important enough to be realized; often resulting in the creation of an art-object forged by this determination. This compulsion to explore our own ideals, fantasies or fetishes seems instinctual as an artist and without shame. Driven by our own impetus for self-realization when making art there is often a euphoric sense of accomplishment not unlike sexual gratification via an object or experience produced by artistic fervour and a keen desire to succeed in realizing one's own goals and ambitions. This said art making is not completely self-indulgent of course. And, there is an element of the process, the exhibition, which functions as a stage for unveiling and sharing objects and ideas. In this exhibition, the works by Jen Aitken, Ryan Amadore and Jeremy Green function as pleasurable objects and loaded symbols with varied aesthetic, material and conceptual concerns; yet sharing a compulsion for both visceral experience and cerebral expansion.

Jeremy Green's sculpture *Behemoth* is composed of three elements: the paint sculpture, the glass plinth with light and the projection, or eclipse, on the ceiling. The paint sculpture is a biomorphic form that is approximately the size of a human heart or brain. Green creates this object through a process of layering and wrapping; whereby he lays out membranes of acrylic paint and gels on wax paper allowing them to dry and subsequently peels them like fruit roll-ups. He compresses these membranes of paint by compacting them in his hands like an anxious person using a stress ball to alleviate tension. After dozens of overlapping layers, a sculpture of paint is generated that resembles a stress ball pressed

so hard that it cannot return to its original state; perhaps because it has been impregnated with the maker's thoughts, anxieties and decisions, which become visible in the final form of the piece. Green uses a variety of hues to construct the piece evidenced by a few subtle splatters of paint and cracks on the surface that allow us to see into the first few layers of the piece. The paint sculpture can be viewed as having two distinct constituents: the large mass of a dark charcoal grey-violet and its protective shell of transparent gel. The transparent epidermis-like layer is slightly yellowed and suggests that some of the artist's skin flakes, oils and sweat have been transferred onto and into the paint membrane; highlighting the presence of the artist's hand and the labour to seal the layers below the surface. The final form and texture of the paint sculpture also reminds me of a nugget of gold and within the context of western Canada, the gold rush; a journey into the unknown in search of riches through resources. And, one of the most powerful symbols of this obsessive and somewhat deluded quest in the West is the gold nugget—Gold in its most raw form. It is this resource that still emblemizes currency. In this case though Green is not in search of gold per se, but perhaps for another kind of idol in the form of a paint sculpture that is being monumentalized by its exalted display.



Left: An image of the 'Alaska Centennial Nugget'. The largest nugget found there.  
Right: A still from *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

The paint sculpture is displayed on a plinth that is made of clear, frosted and mirrored glass. It is placed on a mirrored piece of two-way glass that reflects the sculpture and its surroundings—including the viewer. Inside the lower part of the column of glass is a light source that travels up the reflective interior of the column to illuminate the paint sculpture from below and the glass plinth from within. This light emerges from a flashlight and summons thoughts of telling ghost stories around a campfire using a device that we use to illuminate our pathway through dark-

ness. As the light makes contact with the paint sculpture it projects a shadow in the center of the light imaging a two-dimensional translation of this relationship between light and dark, or transparent and opaque, while creating an eclipse-like projection on the ceiling of the gallery. This method of display more closely resembles that of commodity display explored by artists like Jeff Koons in the eighties. In this series of works he examines how objects like vacuums are displayed in stores in relation to how art objects and artifacts are exhibited, and as a result fetishized, using museological display conventions. His sculpture, *New Hoover Convertible*, is composed of a plexi-glass vitrine, lights and an object: a Hoover vacuum. Green's *Behemoth* shares this method of display, yet he substitutes a vacuum for a mass of paint, which may serve as a monument to the medium of paint while showing it in a manner that celebrates it in its raw form, as a building block and resource for art making; suggesting the mediums expansive and layered histories.



Jeff Koons, *New Hoover Convertible*, 1980

This celebration and preservation of resources exists as a parallel to Jen Aitken's sculpture, *ottoman*. This work is made of two elements: the two rocks and the fabric upholstered structure that envelops them. The rocks are shale, a type of sedimentary rock that is formed from eroded particles of larger rocks, and were collected while Aitken was on a residency at the Banff Center. This experience in Banff's amazing mountain-scape impacted her process and generated new forms where the artist was prompted to fuse natural and manufactured, or raw and processed, materials to create a sculpture that emphasizes the relations between them. The structure created to hold and presumably protect these rocks is mostly covered with a layer of soft leatherette fabric that is silver metallic and has a fairly reflective sheen. Another layer of beige sueded jersey fabric is used to create the customized containers that house the rocks. This carriage that encapsulates the raw materials acts like a con-

tainer to protect these fetishized stones and examine their relation with these eroticized synthetic fabrics.



Left: Ron Gorchov, *Chevalie D'Eon*, 2008  
Right: Christo and Jean Claude, *Surrounded Islands*, 1980-83

The sculpture's title, *ottoman*, refers to the piece of furniture that one rests their feet on while sitting in a chair. This device that serves to alleviate the stresses of a hard day implies with it a certain air of luxury and leisure. Aitken's *ottoman* is able to rock back and forth with aid from the audience and as it does it makes a subtle sound like someone rocking in a chair. This potential for movement creates tension in the work and when it is still and not activated there is a desire created—at least for myself—to touch the work and set it into motion suggesting the potential for a relationship between object and viewer, as well as a relationship to the body. The tactility of the work and its sensuous surfaces remind me of American artist Ron Gorchov's paintings. Aitken's work is of course not made of any paint; however in its form and structure it shares many links to abstract painting and specifically to Gorchov's recent painting, *Chevalie D'Eon*, from 2008. This painting reflects a similar compositional structure and palette even utilizing a support that is comparable to that of Aitken's *ottoman*, yet Aitken delivers a sculptural device that sits below us, on the ground, as a subordinate and it is not hung on the wall like Gorchov's work. This allows the work to have a tension as it rocks between functional design object and an art object, and it is this quality that allows the viewer to relate to and consider this device. This work also generates links to the collaborative artists, Christo and Jean Claude. In the early eighties, they realized a large-scale public installation work, *Surrounded Islands*, in which they wrapped several islands in Miami with large pink fabric shrouds. This specific work resonates with Aitken's in a few ways. On a formal level these two works have compelling overlaps in composition and material concerns.

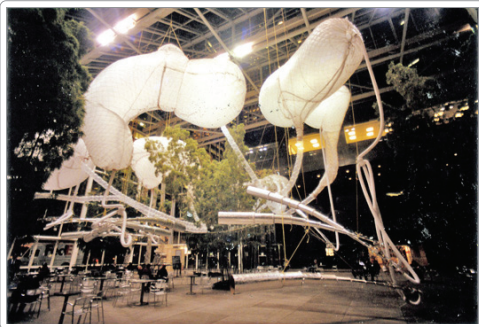


Further, Aitken employs similar strategies to highlight the relations between humans and our resources: both natural and manufactured. Aitken examines these issues through her own subjectivities enabling her to create a sculpture that reduces and refines these ideas into a potent visual form that conveys a fetishistic interest in materials and a sincere desire to examine their potential to communicate through their tactility and ability to arouse our senses.

Ryan Amadore's work, *Trees Singing Saw*, is constructed of three components: the two hollowed trees, the speaker's inserted at the bottom of the trees and the stool with the bow and musical saw. The two trees are pieces of driftwood that have traveled in the sea for an unknown distance before washing up onto Jericho beach. As they dock at Jericho, the grounds workers pull them off the beach and store them in piles for them to decompose naturally. Amadore rescued these fallen trees cutting them into manageable lengths similar to that of firewood, however he does not intend to burn them for warmth, but repurposes them to become sculptural forms with a distinct function. He hollows each log out and then restacks them to return the logs close to their original form, although now they appear slightly synthetic exhibiting signs of their Frankenstein-like reconstruction. The logs now serve a different purpose as Amadore transplants speakers at the bottom of each tree and uses these now organ pipe-like forms to project sound through. This is reminiscent of Tim Hawkinson's *Uberorgan*, a piece that he made for the MASSmoca in 2000. Hawkinson used manufactured plastic ducts and pipes staged in an organic tree-like form to play a musical score that he created specifically for his elaborate organ-like instrument. This work uses all manufactured and synthetic resources to project its sounds, however Amadore uses natural materials to create a similar effect with a much different experience. In Amadore's previous works he has created contraptions that project sound through speakers and capture these vibrations to create paintings. In *Trees Singing Saw*, Amadore creates a more organic ad hoc-like work associated with a Canadiana aesthetic and more aptly linked with the iconography of the *Log Driver's Waltz*—a short NFB film from 1979. This is in contrast to Hawkinson's high-tech and sophisticated gadgetry. However, it is Amadore and Hawkinson's processes that are interesting; both artists follow their ideas and allow their works to manifest through a dedicated investigation of processes and materials.

During the opening of the exhibition, Amadore plays prerecorded mu-

sical saw sounds made in a recording studio through the repurposed trees and plays alongside the trees almost as if to serenade or converse with them. This performative element of the work not only highlights our relationship with trees and nature, but also emphasizes the artist's fetish with the natural world, specifically embodied in these emblematic symbols of nature and especially potent within our geographic context: in the wild western Canadian landscape. Further, by using the saw, a tool generally associated with the destruction and cultivation of this resource, Amadore uses these generated sounds to create a enchanted and eerie aura around them and effectively sound like lamentations for their past abuse; like a brother asking for forgiveness from his sister. And, in this way Amadore's work and his performative gesture infers undertones of our guilty conscious for the abuse we, and our ancestors, have imposed on our natural world with regards to our greed for, and over-extraction, of natural and manufactured resources without casting blame to any one person or group in particular; instead unearthing our own inextricable guilt by way of inviting the viewer to engage with and be a part of the performance.



Left: Tim Hawkinson, *Uberorgan*, at the IBM Building Atrium (New York), 2000  
Right: NFB film, *Log Driver's Waltz* (still), 1979

The exhibition's title, *Western Eyes: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly; or Fetish?*, is admittedly verbose and maybe even a bit absurd and comical, yet it is sincere—a quality shared by all of the works by Aitken, Amadore and Green. It makes references to a number of cultural resources simultaneously; however its intention is to both consider and complicate the works in the exhibition while allowing for a fruitful multi-directional journey through the exhibition. Similar to the 'create your own adventure' novels popular in the 80's and 90's this exhibition appropriates this strategy asking the viewer to create their own pathway through the work and to choose a framework, or title, to consider their relations. This exhibition highlights and examines our eccentric fantasies and fe-

tishes and how they are translated into the material world—at least by artists—through art making. As artists, our experience with the natural and lived world as well as our use of resources, both natural and synthetic, can give us insights into our subjectivities and worldview. As the viewer, I expect to believe in the artist's obsessions; whether or not I care about them or believe in them. For me this obsession and delusion make the work valid, sincere and potentially contagious.

\*Notes on page 177.

## Notes\*

*Western Eyes* is a song released in 1997 by the trip-hop musical group Portishead. Its lyrics speak to the trope of the western gaze and ultimately of the west's greed and fetish for wealth at all costs through reckless means; exploiting whatever it can to get its own ends.

*The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* is a film from 1966 by Italian director Sergio Leone and is arguably the most famous spaghetti western of all time. This film tells the story of three men who all aspire to claim a treasure of confederate gold that is poetically buried in the grave of a deceased soldier. This story again suggests the Western obsession for fortune and its deluded quest for 'freedom' through wealth.

A fetish can be viewed as either, an inanimate object valued for its alleged magical powers, or as an obsessive form of desire in which a particular object, or quality, is regarded with a form of gratification; sexual or otherwise.

**A GLIMPSE OF SMOKE  
COMPELS MY EYE TO BLOSSOM**

**MATTHEW BROWN**

Saturday, April 30th // Opening Reception // 7pm - 11pm  
April 30th to May 14th 2011

Matthew Brown exhibits several new paintings that hang somewhere between figuration, still life and abstraction. His works are derived from drawings altered by computer software and transmuted into ambiguous and unsettling paintings that oscillate between the real and the artificial.

Matthew Brown lives and works in Vancouver. He is currently exhibiting at the Vancouver Art Gallery in *Unreal*, and has exhibited at the MOCCA (Toronto), the Marlborough Gallery (New York) and Galerie Simon Blais (Montreal) in an exhibition curated by Robert Enright. Matthew is represented by Clint Roenisch Gallery in Toronto.





*Untitled*, Oil and acrylic on canvas



*Untitled*, Oil and acrylic on canvas



Left: *Untitled*, Oil and acrylic on canvas  
 Right: *Untitled*, Oil and acrylic on canvas



*Untitled*, Oil and acrylic on canvas

304 Days had a conversation with Matthew Brown in his studio a couple weeks before his exhibition.

**304 Days:** When I look at your paintings, my mind is constantly at play trying to decode their origins as they flicker between figuration, still life and abstraction. How do you decide on the content of your pictures?

**Matthew Brown:** I guess for a series, I'll try to stick to an idea and keep it from jumping all over the place. There will be one-off paintings sometimes; when I'm in the mood to do something with the computer drawings I've been making or from doodles. Usually something that I've made by chance and I like how it looks. That's partly what dictates what I do and in the end it's all stuff that I'm producing, so somehow there's an aesthetic that I'm interested in and it comes out inadvertently.

How do I decide on different series? I don't know... I just get interested and try and decide. Sometimes I get excited about something and I just do it and other times I look for ideas. For example with the flowers, I was at a loss for a while. I had a bit of painter's block and I was inspired by other artists at shows that I had seen, so I decided to do something similar; the same kind of objects. I was taking ideas that I picked up when seeing their shows.

**304 Days:** So it's more of an intuitive thing? You choose what you're keen on and gravitate towards that?

**MB:** Yes.

**304 Days:** You have been working on a body of paintings derived mostly from flowers for the past couple of years and these recent works still have a 'ghost' of those pieces, but are from a new body of work. What is it about flowers and campfires that excites you and what direction is this new work taking?

**MB:** The style has changed. I've had a couple interruptions in my studio over the last two years, so how they begin and now how they've sort of ended has changed the style over the last two years. But, I still consider them all as one series. There does seem to be a part one and part two. In the first part, the paintings are more like the colour scheme of the work I was doing before: bolder colours, more vibrant and more contrast. The second half seems to be more subdued or soft.

I think it's probably come to the end of the series. I've made about twenty and I'm still working on a few, but I'm planning on moving in another direction and want to make some larger paintings.

The content will change because it'll be a larger painting. With the size I'm working with right now, everything seems to be a centered object or a still life. It's as though I'm depicting one object, but once I start working on a larger format, I'm going to have to start adding in other elements, so they're going to be much more complex narrative-like scenes. I guess I could just enlarge a single thing, but it's not really what I had in mind.

**304 Days:** Your work has a certain kind of awkwardness to it and this tension is what makes the paintings interesting. Can you talk a bit about the process you use to realize these paintings?

**MB:** Why are they awkward paintings?

**304 Days:** I think a lot of people think of 'awkward' in a derogatory sense, but the most interesting works for me always have a tension to them and that awkwardness; the thing that makes you want to look more and feel curious about the images. That's something your paintings always have. Maybe it's a skull or maybe it's this or that. There's something that throws you off. They're not pretty images, they're not ugly images. When I look at them, I feel there is an off-putting feeling to it as though they're not comfortable to look at. You're trying to constantly figure them out. Compositionally you use different strategies every time. You're always pushing yourself to try different things and in the end, there's always a tension that makes me want to look more. I think that's a good thing.

**MB:** Everybody has their own process, so I'm not sure if my process has anything to do with why they're like that. Anybody could be using the same process and make something that is the opposite of what you just said; that they're pretty or banal or commercial. Maybe it's the mentality, but I don't know that it's the process. The process probably makes it easier to come up with something that looks more unique. I think those are assets of my process. I'm not using forms or samples of things that just anybody can use: It's very unique.

**304 Days:** I think that's true. Maybe awkward is not the best word,

but it kept on popping into my brain and maybe that's what I mean, that they're difficult to take in. Awkward to me means they're strange. When I look at the images that you make, an image for example that I always ask you about is the skull painting. It's a very strange image. When I look at it I recognize the skull, I see things happening. There's a flatness happening, but at the same time there is depth and I can see the inside, the back and the front of the skull, so it creates a very strange viewing experience where you're always trying to unravel it and figure out what's going on there and why you made those decisions. That creates a tension and a curiosity for me and I'm trying to figure out why you do it that way. "What's going on? I've never seen a skull rendered that way." I'm curious and that makes me think about your process.

**MB:** For the flowers, I thought about creating them using the same process I was using for previous work. I thought: "What would happen if I made a flower using the same process I used before?" Before I was playing with the idea of things referencing things. Like when I made the masks, I looked at different styles of masks and for this I did the same thing. I made something that looked like a plant or a flower, but I wasn't trying to anthropomorphize it or have it refer to anything else. Sort of just being a picture of a flower. A painting of a still life: of a flower. I thought I would just create flowers in my process and it would still just be its own thing.

**304 Days:** I've noticed that in most of your paintings you start with hardedge shapes that you then fill in with a mix of blended strokes and washes. You consider the edges where the shapes meet and often leave remnants of saturated colour along the edges/outlines. How do you make these decisions?

**MB:** It's part of the process and I'm always trying to make something believable. I'll have an idea of what I'm trying to make or I won't, but I'm still trying to get to state where in the end it's still believable. Before I start the painting, I do a lot of thinking and planning with drawings by projecting them and erasing my projections and re-organizing it, changing the scale and all that kind of stuff. I don't make any color decisions until I actually start painting so then everything kind of changes because you're not in the planning stage and the drawing has to commit to the painting. When you start painting, you start to change the space and all that kind of stuff. Dimensionality. A lot of times they're accidents that I



use as assets that are helping the work, but sometimes you have to erase them because they're not helping it.

**304 Days:** In your bank of knowledge, I know you have a diction of images, like the flowers, and you're thinking about those colours to a certain point, but at the same time the awkwardness that I was talking about before comes through and you're using these really obscure colours to represent something we're kind of familiar with, but you're using a really strange colour palette to do it. I'm thinking that it probably comes pretty intuitively; you make marks and then you see what's happening. One thing I've always found intriguing about your work is that it always has these really saturated edges and you paint up to the edge, considering the edge and how it's working with the picture. Maybe that's just my read of it, but I always think there's a sensibility to your paint handling and that you're aware when making the work that you're making, and these sort of washy, really saturated colours happen; but then you leave some of it and some of it you desaturate with other blends and work into the image. So, I guess in a long-winded way: I'm asking about that. I'm interested in knowing why you leave that edge because that's one of my favorite parts about your work and it's always there.

**MB:** I think that's probably just my style. I think it helps render the picture to my style and the end game is just to make it believable. There's no real reason why I'm doing that except that it is my style of painting right now, and maybe it'll change, but it's kind of been like that for a while and keeping those things or making it the way it is, is just because I want them to be believable and I guess that's helping achieve that. I wouldn't be doing it if it wasn't doing that. I'm doing it to make the picture believable. There's not another reason, I guess. They're nice colours, but they wouldn't be there if they weren't doing something to help the picture. As to the question of it being awkward, I think it's a good thing if you ask me, but I don't think I'd be happy if... well I kind of know people have a hard time getting them and I think that's a good thing.

**304 Days:** I think that's the part that helps them be more believable at the end of the day. I think that's the part that makes the most sense to me and it creates interest and curiosity and it makes me think: "there's something going on here, but I can't quite figure it out."



## MATTHEW BROWN: READDRESSING PAINTING, NEW LIGHT

Wil Aballe

Much has been said about Vancouver-based artist Matthew Brown's approach to painting. His shorthand drawings, piped through a self-made software algorithm, transmute them into digital sketches. It is a reduced view of his greater output that places his canvases squarely in the present, but does not adequately explore the intention behind his work. His work is not derived from happenstance.

In his paintings, the loose union of objective forms resulting from his software algorithm, projected onto the canvas, produce a handful of abstract planes. With sparing use of paint, magically, suggestions of objects are produced with unusual vividness and clarity. This is even stronger in his newer works, in which Brown concretely connects his paintings with the representational only by referring to the series as "flowers", and then diffusely. The flowers are nothing more than a set of abstractions, and therefore leave all the more to the imagination.

Nevertheless, these floral subjects break through again and again. His compositions, for all the painterly freedom they evoke, embody balance and harmony. To establish order from a knotty pile of amorphous shapes is to see an intentional purpose of unifying on behalf of the artist, a concern with the whole, and a deliberate act of aesthetic creation. The logic seems to rest in the realm of Brown's pure mind with an abundance of impulses, like a game of free association.

Upon close inspection of his painting style, compelling abstract moments occur. A form in one canvas repeats as an element in another, establishing common leitmotifs in his work. Yet his approach to applying brush to canvas does not concede with prescribed modes. In conversations of his work with his peers, Brown is admired for his ability to manipulate styles. His choice of colour is complex and suffused by a glow emanating from within, alluding to mysticism and the spiritual. They contain resonant emotional values - washed primaries, shimmering greens, oxidized ochres and muddy browns - and there is a spartan quality in his ability to apply flat paint on canvas to render a sense of depth and space without use of perspective devices. Foreground figures tend to float simply against an expansive background plane.

There is sophistication in Brown's style beyond immediate perception. Relying on the elemental, cohesion is achieved through the transformation of forms, which is not an end unto itself, but a means to manifest his concepts of beauty onto a physical and tangible medium.

Wil Aballe does programming for the CASV and is an art collector.  
He lives in Vancouver.

**304  
days**



## SEAN WEISGERBER OF 304 DAYS

Anne Cottingham

Like every other emerging artist in Vancouver, Sean Weisgerber has noticed and lamented the lack of spaces for artists to show and build experience here. Unlike other emerging artists, he has been successful, if temporarily, in trying to do something about it. Weisgerber is the brains (and brawn) behind 304 Days on 436 Columbia St, an artist-run gallery space in Chinatown open for only 304 days.

Not only is it a gallery space, but 304 Days is also Weisgerber's home. That was always his vision in the years he was looking for an appropriate venue. He began looking before he even graduated from Emily Carr in 2009, but it was difficult to find a commercial space that he could also live in, or that someone would guarantee would be okay for the duration of the lease. As he puts it, "it's sketchy when you're applying for a lease that's three years long and they could at any moment say you're not allowed to live there anymore!" Eventually he gave up and focused on other things, moving to Calgary for a while and working long hours in commercial property.

Until one day he got a call from Mysa Kaczkowski, the Director of Shudder Gallery at 433 Columbia. The space across the street from Shudder had come up for lease. She knew he had been interested in a gallery space similar to her own, and she knew the previous tenants of 436 (across the street) had been living there while operating a shop. So Weisgerber called the owners of 436 right away, put up some of the cash he had saved in Calgary as a deposit, and came back to Vancouver to begin renovations.

Luckily, his work in commercial property in Calgary really came in handy in the transformation of the space. He took out some unnecessary plumbing and made electrical upgrades. Like any renovation, there were unanticipated bits of work resulting from aesthetic upgrades – taking out a cupboard revealed a hole in the floor, necessitating the replacement of some of the planks in the floor. He has also had to make some sacrifices while living in the space, like showering in a utility sink; he chuckles when I bring that up: "Everyday when I go in there I just laugh for a little bit because it is hilarious." In reality, showering in a utility sink was a cheaper alternative to adding a raised shower to accommodate major plumbing that he couldn't change, according to his lease.

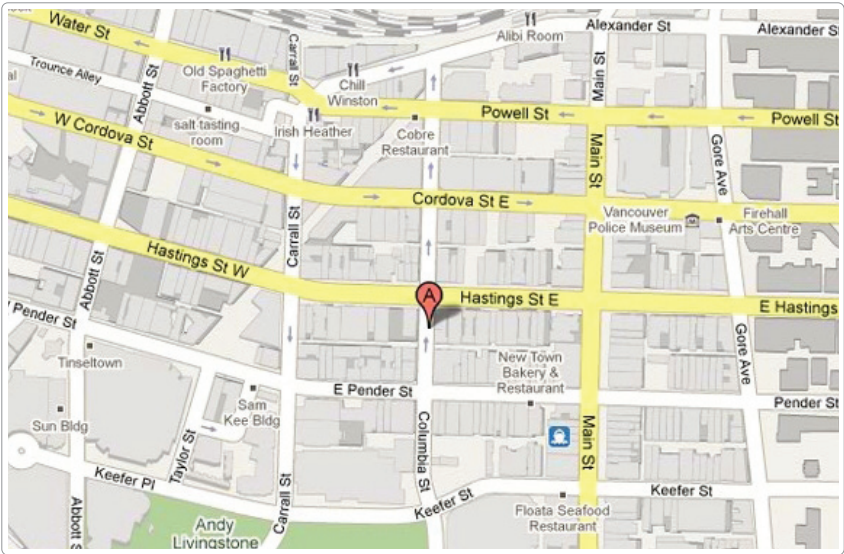
So that's how 304 Days came together physically. In terms of what would be shown, how to choose? Weisgerber initiated a submission process. He wanted the focus to be on solo shows as much as possible, with interspersed group shows. Any artist would have to be an honest person; deeply conceptual or not, their work couldn't feel contrived. In the end, "there's no real formula, it's more or less a gut feeling, whether I trust that that person is going to come through." He is quick to note that he doesn't purport to be a curator, having too much respect for the kind of study and work most curators do before they legitimately become one themselves.

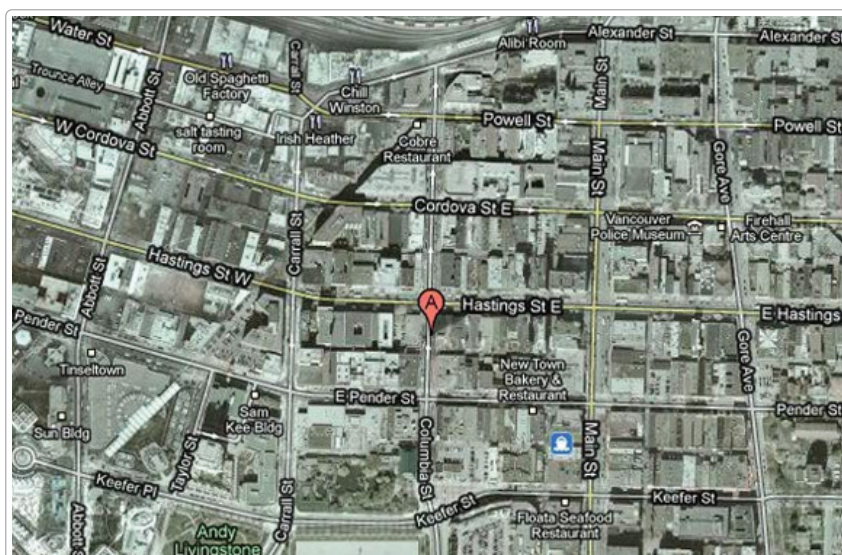
So I suppose you could say that Weisgerber is an artist facilitating other artists. The guy really doesn't sleep much, spending four days-a-week crating at Denbigh Fine Art Services, putting approximately 40 hours a week into 304 Days, and still managing to make his own art, somewhere in there. Part of the space also includes a studio for his multi-disciplinary production, from painting to collage to light boxes. At first he wasn't sure that 304 Days was a part of that practice, but now he really feels it is. He feels that art can be a narcissistic thing, and the gallery provides him a bit of balance and a way to give back.

Like anything, there are great advantages and disadvantages to the entire endeavor. He certainly hasn't created as much of his own work as he would like in the last year. The model he chose was expensive also; he could have gotten grants but that method seemed to be failing everyone around town, so what was the point? The advantages seem to far outweigh those comparatively trivial things though – he has found great satisfaction in giving others a place to have their first solo show or their tenth solo show; basically, a place to share their hard work and passion with the city they live in. He loves having created a place where people can see and talk about art, and also interviewing the exhibiting artists and listening to what they have to say. As he puts it, "an intimate grounds for art-making and art-looking."

So would Weisgerber do it again? He has been asked to collaborate on similar spaces, but feels that too many directors and leaders would dilute the possibilities of any given space. If anything, he'd like to be involved in any way he can for someone doing a similar space – donating any extra money he has at the end of each month, labour, anything, "All I care about is art," and he would happily give any way he could.







## Notes:

### TRUE ART LIES

Lesley Anderson

- i. Reimer, Jasmine. Personal interview. 14 Oct. 2010.
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