



## KELLY MARK TORONTO

Since 1997, Kelly Mark has been diligently punching in and out of her studio, recording her time spent making art. The Toronto artist plans to continue until 2032, when she turns 65 and can retire. No matter that her production operates outside the blue-collar realm or that she receives no hourly wage. Besides, what would determine her income? Yet, her display of timecards in steel racks as sculpture begs the question: what defines an artist at the turn of the twenty-first century? Especially in a fickle and competitive art world in which access to collectors and public funding is crucial to an artist's livelihood. Conflating a big brother mechanism of proletarian control with art making, Mark contemplates what is accomplished in the space of the studio, or more recently, the-world-as-studio, where artists are charged with manufacturing creativity.

For her part, Mark embraces a conceptual eclecticism to further her wide-ranging and constantly shifting preoccupations. In the process, she generates subtle shifts in our awareness. *Kelly Mark: Stupid Heaven* delivers several unpretentious "ah ha" moments. Curated by Barbara Fischer, the survey presents a cross-section of drawings, sculpture, photography, performances, and video installations that, primarily made within the last ten years, provides a glimpse into the inner sanctum of Mark's private thoughts [University of Toronto's Justina M. Barnicke Gallery and Blackwood Gallery; September 14–October 28, 2007].

*Everything is Interesting*, 2003, characterizes a central tension in Mark's outlook on life—a tension between a sincere fascination with the world and absurdist skepticism. Produced as a button and postcard, it is displayed in a vitrine alongside other multiples and ephemera from past performances. These include a goofy black-and-white spotted cat costume copied from a stout feline heard meowing on a monitor across the room. In that piece, *Sniff*, 1999, an anonymous hand

work approaches such branding of another with the mark of recrimination and shame. Instead, when Tarry sheds an ecstatic tear and McCallum wipes it away with his thumb, it's just two silly people lost in a dream, giving each other bad haircuts.

Only Mark Newport brings to his work the imagination, sincerity, and sense of correlation that marks deep fantasy and its potential for transformation. His knitted superhero suits *Sweaterman 3*, 2005, and *Every-Any-No-Man*, 2005, are combinations of footed sleepers, union suits, and balaclavas. Sometimes comically elongated and always brightly silly and comforting, they stretch deep into childhood's dreams, drift into comic-book sci-fi fantasies, and fold back into a competent maternal fuzziness. The video *Heroic Efforts*, 2007, is a hilarious mixture of giddy desperation and aplomb. A hooded male figure wearing the brown cableknit *Sweaterman 3* suit rocks in a wooden chair, knitting a red skein for all he's worth, while the *William Tell Overture* tumbles in the background. It's a charmingly ridiculous yet consoling heroic effort.

Sure, there are Trekkies and Fan Boys, goth teenagers cruising the mall, kids playing dress-up, and plenty of pretentious grown-ups with wonky ego integration. And almost everyone's interior life has moments of simple, Walter Mitty fantasy. Transformation stems from a stranger, more complex process, though, one that was only partially present in this exhibition. Still, a semantic transformation did occur in its title. It should have been called *Pretender*.

—Dinah Ryan

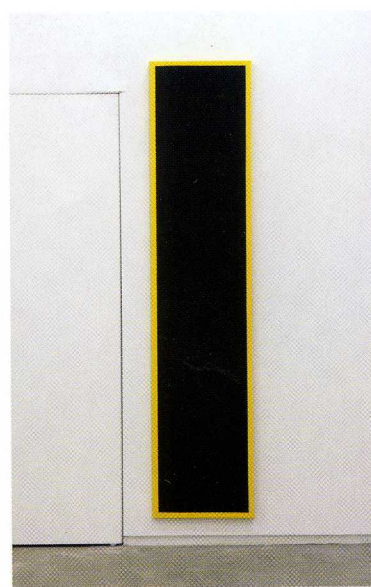
in hot pink and orange. It was all recognizable, which is both the point and the problem. Simultaneously reenacting and critiquing a stereotype, the work flirts a little too comfortably with *National Geographic*'s style of exoticizing voyeurism. FEAST plays out and plays with cultural stereotyping. It's hard to have it both ways, and here, they miss the target. What's more, this sort of critique is already well established. In their 1993 book *Reading National Geographic*, for example, Catherine A. Lutz and Jane L. Collins took *National Geographic* to task for skewing the perception of cultures through a lens that reinforces white, middle-class values in the United States. If FEAST's cultural critique is tired, their fantastical role-play yields little more than an unnerving burlesque.

Annie Schap's two videos are jejune trifles. In one, a wetly pink cut in the artist's thumb opens and closes to *All Out of Love*, recalling familiar tricks with talking fingers, knees, and upside-down faces. After the singing penis-and-scrotum puppet in the counterculture classic *The Groove Tube*, 1974, however, there isn't much left to do with lip-synching body parts. In *Me Time*, 2006, Schap plays both roles in a scene from the movie *Parenthood*, 1989. Her point may be that identity has been utterly worn out through imitation and parody. If this is indeed the case, the work needs to hopscotch a few steps beyond facile commentary.

*Cut*, 2006, is an intimate performance for the camera in which husband and wife collaborators Bradley McCallum and Jacqueline Tarry are locked in a slow, stroking give-and-take of cutting one another's hair with a straight razor. Potentially quirky or profound, these images are solemnly serious, with an airless, self-referential quality of porn that makes them seem mildly obscene. Exhibition curator Amy Moorefield's essay states that *Cut* was influenced by the "post World War II public shearing of Nazi collaborators." Nothing in the

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Mark Newport, *Sweaterman 3*, 2005, hand-knit acrylic and buttons, 80 x 23 x 6 inches (courtesy of the artist); Kelly Mark, *REM*, 2007, DVD, 2:16 hours (installation view at Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, Hart House, University of Toronto; courtesy of the artist and Wynick/Tuck, Toronto)





## IAN WALLACE VANCOUVER

presents an assortment of objects for the cat to investigate. A bible, shoe, twenty-dollar bill, light bulb, and so on, are held up in succession. When the cat is presented with a plant, however, bored curiosity becomes rapacious. Everything may be interesting, but we all have our predilections.

Mark's objects tend to take on a life of their own, as if they were capable of emotions and empathy. *Hold that Thought*, 2006, a white neon sign, is programmed with all-too-human failure units. Its letters blink intermittently, exhibiting a pathos that mirrors the inherent futility of trying to obey its straightforward request. Like the impossibility of stepping into the proverbial river twice, thought, always changing, can never be still. The sign seems to insinuate a Zen-like appreciation for flux. *Object carried for one year*, 1997, an engraved aluminum bar, humbly asks for a leap of faith in the veracity of its written claim. It is silent, however, about the experiences of that year or even about the identity of its carrier(s). An ultimate expression of the enlivened object, *The Kiss*, 2007, consists of two abutting television monitors, further simplifying Constantin Brancusi's blocky bodies, which, in turn, were a reduction of Auguste Rodin's romantic embrace. Yet, Mark dispenses with figuration altogether. Hers is not a sentimental representation of human sexuality, but an erotically-charged, technological coupling. Their convex surfaces flirtatiously touch, responding to each other in real time by emitting a pulsating glow that suffuses the room.

While Mark's work may appear diffused, from swirling Letraset drawings to photographs of impaled Styrofoam cups and other thoughtfully placed litter, certain themes continually resurface: repetitious tasks, everyday moments that often go unnoticed, and accumulation. *Hiccup #2*, 2003, is a five-channel DVD installation of a performance executed over thirty days. On each monitor, the artist is seen sitting in the same location on public steps between a tourist sign and a trashcan, wearing the same outfit, and executing the same

motions like rubbing her face and then taking a sip of coffee. Her actions are fixed while the flow of people and pigeons is unpredictable. It doesn't lessen the impact of this uncanny time warp to realize that, for this sleight of hand, the artist is following an audio script of the choreographed movements delivered on headphones.

Mark mines the physical, mental, and ultimately, spiritual effects latent in understated gestures such as rubbing two painted steel files together until their edges are smooth, drawing script-like lines until her Castell 9000 4B graphite pencil is spent, or recording herself staring into a video camera for thirty-three minutes. Presented on a monitor, *33 Minute Stare*, 1996, is unnerving. Mark's unflinching stare seems bored or accusatory. Or maybe she is just meditating. While we may view these activities as idle, a waste of time that slows down worker productivity, she convincingly demonstrates an enlightened mindfulness and intense focus that are infectious. Through otherwise ordinary devices, Mark aims to subversively tweak perception, inviting us not only to give ourselves freely to mundane existence and ideas simply conveyed, but to take the time necessary for them to work their magic.

—Sandra Q. Firmin

Rarely does a small solo exhibition unfold the inner developmental logic of the artist's career. Even more rarely does it also display the concerns of a group of artists, and, indeed, the presenting gallery. Yet, this is precisely what Ian Wallace's exhibition manages to do [Catriona Jeffries Gallery; October 18–November 17, 2007]. Wallace—an artist uniquely capable of reflecting on the trajectory of his own practice—has been influential since the early 1960s as an artist, teacher, mentor, colleague, and friend of other well-known Vancouver artists such as Stan Douglas, Rodney Graham, Roy Arden, Ken Lum, and Jeff Wall. So much so that, in many ways, the interests and trajectories of the so-called "Vancouver School," which is best known for its "photo-conceptualism"—a term by no means uncontroversial—are reflected here in the open space of the gallery.

Wallace's exhibition turns on a singular fulcrum: the moment when conceptualism is both cancelled and preserved within the pictorial medium of photography. Responding to certain readings of his monochromes of the late 1960s, readings which looked beyond the objects themselves to discover figurative, often mystical meanings, Wallace embarked on a self-conscious probing of the other side of painting, that is, the painting as an object comprised of both base and superstructure. Here in the exhibition, the material relationship between surface and support is most dramatically conveyed by two installations—*Untitled (Plank Piece)*, 1969/2007, which consists of five pieces of wood (the support) draped with translucent vinyl (the surface), and *Untitled*, 1968/2007, a photographic triptych of a somewhat similar wood and vinyl arrangement. One of the exhibition's most recent works—actually entitled *Support/Surface I, II*, 2007—is a photolaminate diptych on canvas that seemingly depicts a work in progress in the artist's studio. As such, it reflects back on the earliest work, establishing an uncanny repetition with a difference.

From his monochromes and the subsequent installations, Wallace then moved into photography, crucially

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Ian Wallace, installation view, Catriona Jeffries Gallery, 2007; Ian Wallace, *Untitled (Black Monochrome with Yellow)*, 1967/2007, acrylic on canvas, 90 x 20 inches (images courtesy of the artist and Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver; photo: Scott Massey)