

Bryne McLaughlin's Top 3: Projective Imaginations

VARIOUS LOCATIONS JAN TO DEC 2010

by BRYNE MCLAUGHLIN



Installation detail of "Traffic: Conceptual Art in Canada 1965–1980" at the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, November 2010

3. [Traffic: Conceptual Art in Canada 1965–1980](#) at the University of Toronto galleries

The fact that we know so little about our own history is a much-lamented fact among artists, curators, critics and other art professionals, as is the truism that there are so few opportunities to fill in the gaps. This omnibus exhibition of works from Canada's conceptual-art heyday, which drew on the expertise of a cabal of curators from across the country, went a long way to correcting that historical debt. Arranged as a series of regionally focused exhibitions at the University of Toronto's four gallery spaces this fall, it was an unprecedented chance to see key works that you may have only read about in the past—or not even have been aware of at all. For me, this notion of missed histories really hit home in the [Justina M. Barnicke Gallery's](#) presentation of vintage conceptualism from Montreal. Organized by [Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery](#) director Michèle Thériault and independent curator [Vincent Bonin](#), the tight selection of Quebec conceptualism was an eye-opener. Thériault and Bonin have spent a lot of time thinking about archives and art through their recent Montreal exhibition series "[Documentary Protocols](#)," and that showed in their deep awareness of issues at stake and of related practices developing in Montreal at the time. Unlike artists in other parts of the country, who were often mulling over the influences of conceptual practices from south of the border, Montreal artists had the omnipresent impact of the October Crisis and the fantastic hype of Expo 67 to respond to, not to mention the linguistic divide that gave their practices a crucial distance from the lingua franca of the conceptual canon. This was a site of real, charged social and political histories that made many of the concerns raised in other "Traffic" exhibitions seem, well, academic.

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