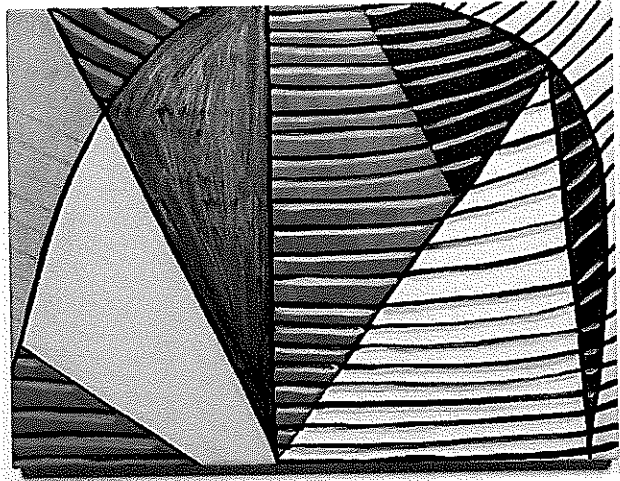


TERENCE DICK in Toronto 05/08/12

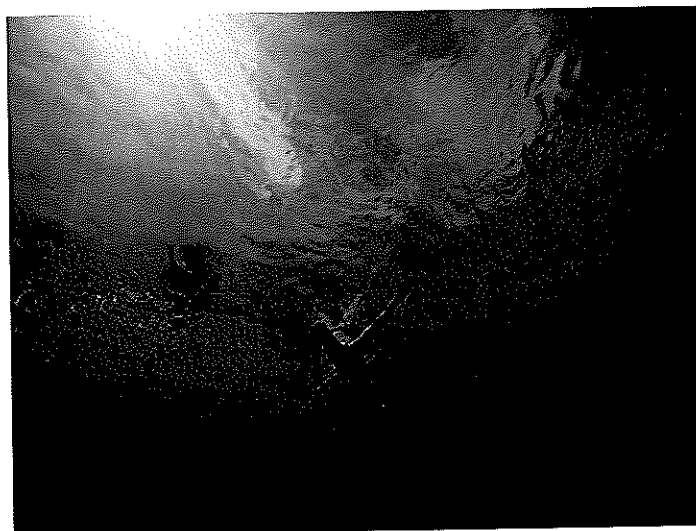
Elizabeth McIntosh at Diaz Contemporary | 2012 Contact Photography Festival | Patrick Cummins at Urbanspace Gallery | PUBLIC & Street View at MOCCA

posted by Terence Dick - May 8th, 2012.



Elizabeth McIntosh, *Beginner's Luck*, 2011, oil on canvas

If painting lies on a spectrum that runs from abstraction to representation, Elizabeth McIntosh, who had previously hung right by the former, moves with her most recent work a smidgen closer to the latter. The ex-Torontonian painter headed out west about a half a decade ago to teach at Emily Carr. The move was well timed and she has since established herself amongst the pigment-slingers who've claimed some turf from the ruling photoconceptualists in such state-of-the-union exhibitions as the Vancouver Art Gallery's *PAINT*. (If only Toronto could get its act together and make a bold statement or two for the artists of the 416!) Her current exhibition at Diaz Contemporary continues with her now familiar big bold colours and assorted shapes, but surprises with the appearance of what could only be described as objects on some of the canvases. There is a definite still-life thing going on here, though it's always in service of painterly notions like balance, contrast, etc. and so on. However, since she lives in the 21st Century, McIntosh can't help but be self-conscious of her own practice and thus imbues her work with a similar level of awareness. Nothing is – or can be – simply what it is, and so each field of colour has an unexpected depth that is achieved through layering often radically different colours. The paintings end up not simply working along the picture plane, but head into the past of the studio and manage the tricky task of revealing something of their own creation.

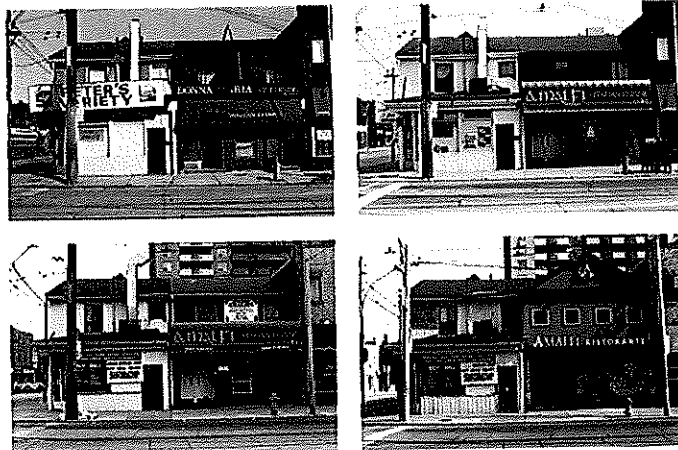


Jill Greenberg, *Untitled (Glass Ceiling #2 - 428)*, 2010, archival pigment print

May is the month for photography in Toronto and all the information you need can be found in the Contact Photography Festival catalogue and/or website. The invasion of mechanically reproduced images is so pervasive you can't swing a tripod without hitting a gallery, museum, shop, restaurant, or subway platform that isn't participating in the whole shebang. Random art encounters are one of my favourite things in the world,

so the public project part of Contact is always a delight. My first sighting occurred as the family drove over the hump of the Dundas West bridge and headed across Lansdowne in search of pho. War correspondent Tim Hetherington's photos of sleeping American soldiers stationed in Afghanistan could be mistaken for a Calvin Klein billboard ad campaign were it not for the army greens and worn mattresses. There's an old story about a novice artist trying to draw a sleeping pig; each picture he completes is mistaken for a dead pig. That Hetherington himself was killed in the fighting in Libya last year only adds to this elegy.

Amongst the many other Contact exhibitions, Jill Greenberg's series of headless, high-heeled women floating in glittering expanses of water at O'Brien Contemporary makes for a challenging complement to the unconscious men. She is explicitly trying to provoke a response, but I can't help thinking her strategy risks reinforcing the attitudes they mean to critique. A perusal of her past work reveals that that's always been her game and it leaves one (or, at least, me) with no easy aesthetic response, so I guess it works. A wholly different play on politics, both sexual and global, can be found in Sanaz Mazinani's photo-based fractal-pattern wall-works at Stephen Bulger Gallery. They intrigue and please the eye with their slowly-revealed detail, but don't do much more conceptually than similarly sampled work for the good old days of the agitprop eighties.



Patrick Cummings, 227-229 Church Street (January 1986, August 1987, May 1997, October 2002), 1986-2002

A different sort of Contact exhibition can be found deep in the heart of 401 Richmond in the open area known as Urbanspace Gallery. Local photographer and employee of the Toronto Archives Patrick Cummins takes a page from Bernd and Hilla Becher (the German couple who made a career out of photographing the same type of building numerous times and displaying them in grids), but adds a temporal dimension to the proceedings by capturing certain locations at different points over the past two and a bit decades. The show works on the level of art because it does the same thing the Bechers did: play identity and difference against each other through repetition. A disinterested observer could easily appreciate the amazing range within set limits dictated by the architecture of the city. However, for a Torontonians, the exhibition has the added value of providing a street-level chronology of some fairly familiar streets, evoking not a few memories of neighbourhood fixtures now lost to the past. Anyone who lives in a city understands how it forms one's identity. Cummins' dedication to documenting the history of Toronto's residents through their buildings should be celebrated.



Michael Wolf, *Tokyo Compression #37*, 2009

The cornerstone of Contact is always a curated exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art. This year the show is entitled *PUBLIC* and is split between the Queen Street gallery and the University of Toronto Art Centre. I'll have to catch the latter before it closes at the end of June, but the former provides a good introduction to the reigning concept with its selection of images depicting the entity otherwise known as the general public. (A complimentary show of classic street photos taken by the likes of Weegee and Henri Cartier-Bresson drawn from the collection of the National Gallery is also on display.) I could do without Jon Rafman's images from Google Street View (hasn't this been done before?) and found Philippe Chancel's pics of North Korean mass rallies almost banal in their weirdness. However, Baudouin Mouanda's work provides some fascinating documentation of the Congolese dandy subculture know as the *sapeurs* as well as haunting images of people reading in the street after night fall because the only available light is provided by streetlamps. The real star of the show, though, is Michael Wolf's framing of faces caught in the windows of Tokyo subway doors during rush hour. The range of expression on these cramped commuters – from resignation to acceptance – is nothing short of Biblical.



Terence Dick is a freelance writer living in Toronto. His art criticism has appeared in *Canadian Art*, *BorderCrossings*, *Prefix Photo*, *Camera Austria*, *Fuse*, *Mix*, *C Magazine*, *Azure*, and *The Globe and Mail*. He is the editor of *Akimblog*.

Diaz Contemporary: <http://www.diazcontemporary.ca/>

Elizabeth McIntosh: *Pink Nude* continues until May 26.

2012 Contact Photography Festival: <http://scotiabankcontactphoto.com/>

Urbanspace Gallery: <http://www.urbanspacegallery.ca/>

Patrick Cummins: *Full Frontal T.O.* continues until May 31.

MOCCA: <http://www.mocca.ca/>

PUBLIC: Collective Identity / Occupied Space continues until June 3

Street View continues until June 3.

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