

art



National flags appear to be on fire in Will Kwan's *Flame Test*.

INSTALLATION

Burning issues

Will Kwan probes recession fallout **By DAVID JAGER**

WILL KWAN at Justina M. Barnicke Gallery (7 Hart House Circle), to December 20. 416-978-8387. Rating: **NNN**

WILL KWAN'S STUDIEDLY NEUTRAL displays of objects are like thin layers of ice through which the palpable tension of global financial meltdown can be felt. Mapping the fallout of the

present recession through the use of ordinary objects, the neat displays in the show *Multi-Lateral* point to the shadow economies and hidden costs concealed beneath the high-gloss lustre of late capitalism.

In *Clocks That Do Not Tell Time*, a grid of clocks is arrayed in customary airport or hotel-lobby formation. Name tags of the usual 15 global cen-

tres – London, New York, Hong Kong – are replaced by the likes of Sonapur, a slum housing over 150,000 mostly illegal workers building Dubai's towers; Wilmington, a U.S. corporate tax haven; and Delft, the Ikea headquarters where the clocks were designed. Each tag marks a hot spot for double-dealing, technological innovation or worker exploitation that rarely makes headlines.

Only in some cases is he blatantly political. *X-Ray Yankee Zulu* spells out Weapons Of Mass Destruction in the NATO phonetic alphabet, a scathing reference to the geopolitics of the Gulf War (and a nod to Bruce Nauman). *Displacement* (With Chinese Characteristics) is a picture of a Shanghai development site where Kwan built the Bank of China logo out of rubble.

Most controversial is *Flame Test*, a row of national flags silkscreened so they seem to be in the process of being burnt in protest. Ostensibly a commentary on the violence in Denmark following the publication of the Muhammad cartoons, its ultimate statement is up for grabs.

Kwan displays a polished visual sensibility and a deeply reasoned critical and conceptual process. However, some of the work feels too theoretically removed, and his intense study of depersonalization leaves you feeling simply alienated. ©

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