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TERENCE DICK in Toronto 03/27/12

Blue Republic at Katzman Kamen Gallery | Antonio Caballero, Graciela Iturbide & Enrique Metinides at Nicholas Metivier Gallery | Kerry Tribe & Dissenting Histories at The Power Plant | Melanie Gilligan at the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery

posted by Terence Dick - March 27th, 2012.

Blue Republic are a local art duo who had been on my long-range radar for a while but up until recently had never been experienced in the flesh (as it were). Based on the descriptions I'd read, their ambitious, ambiguous, heterogeneous, elliptical assemblages were something that might be just up my alley. My hesitation in searching them out was grounded in a worry that, despite all those good vibes, the final product would end up not more but less than the sum of its parts. When your medium is a sprawl of found objects, those parts can spread endlessly in an easily amusing way; the tricky part is to generate some sense of a higher (for lack of a better term) reward.



Blue Republic, 12:02, 2012

Also known as **Anna Passakas** and **Radoslaw Kudlinski**, BR's current gathering of stuff runs the length of **Katzman Kamen Gallery's** one wall and proceeds both vertically and horizontally into the space. Despite its obvious organization the arrangement seems on first glance to be random in the range of materials and its lack of recognizable form. However, patterns and echoes emerge once one begins to peruse the floor. Objects are identified and then recontextualized as representing something more than what they are. The result could be a model for a building or a map of the city or a plan for some complex project. The pleasure is in teasing out the puzzle, searching for clues, and learning the language of the artists. Their discipline in limiting the materials and balancing order with nonsense is well honed. The final product is admittedly far more polite than, say, a Jason Rhoades installation, but feels meaningful in its own reserved way.



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Antonio Caballero, *Lucia Guilmain y Carlos Riquelme*, fotonovela "Generacion Jet" para la revista "Novelas de Amor", 1970, vintage silver print

Unfortunately it just closed, but given the kind of photography presented, I think you'd get the point of **Nicholas Metivier Gallery's** exhibition of three Mexican photographers even if you scanned through the archived images on the gallery website (apoplectic letters from artists and curators can be sent to me at akimblog@akimbo.ca). **Antonio Caballero** contributes stills from his fotonovelas (photo-based graphic novels), and the dramatic tension captured in these familiar scenes reveals as much about the construction of identity and the language of cinema as any of Cindy Sherman's early *Untitled Film Stills*. **Enrique Metinides** falls on the side of photojournalism and his pictures of car accidents, while striking, are a bit too raw to be judged as art. Where Caballero is all artifice, Metinides is all brutal truth and it feels wrong to aestheticize the tragedy in the images he's taken. **Graciela Iturbide**, however, is all aesthetics, both in the formal quality of her photographs and the uncertainty about what is staged and what is simply captured by an observant lens. One quickly moves from mere identification to consider meanings: what to make of a woman grimacing with a knife between her teeth as she butchers an unidentified off-screen corpse or a weathered old man staring up into a cloud of starlings who swarm like bats? The truth is there to behold.



Kerry Tribe, *H.M.*, 2009

Last week I did what I never do and went to an opening. The event was multipli-significant because it was the public debut of **The Power Plant's** new director **Gaetane Verna** (read my interview with her [here](#)) and the first exhibition of its 25th anniversary celebrations. It was also the first exhibition season out from under the sway of former director Gregory Burke and the first big statement in exhibition form made by relatively recent chief curator **Melanie O'Brian**. Given the turmoil that inevitably surrounds such a turnover in key positions over such a short time and taking into account the time it takes to get back up to speed, I have not so much words of criticism as some words of advice. Those words are: go big. The current exhibition consists of three video/film installations by American artist **Kerry Tribe** on the ground floor. Her looping, double-projector

essay on amnesiac *H.M.* leads the pack with its clever combination of form in presentation with filmic content, but the triumvirate feels a bit light. Upstairs there is a venue for an ongoing intervention into the gallery's archives in celebration of its quarter century of existence. I've never been shy about expressing my antipathy to art-about-art in the past, but this is my first opportunity to state my feelings on exhibitions about exhibitions: they don't thrill me. Having spent eight years working behind the scenes at the PP, I have a bit of nostalgia for the place, but I also have certain expectations of its potential. Looking at the exhibited timeline of past exhibitions, I can't help but compare the current show to such blockbusters as Douglas Gordon, Tim Hawkinson, or the Mike Kelly/Paul McCarthy combo. The current admin should look to these and aim high as they plan for years twenty-six through thirty and on.



Melanie Gilligan, *Popular Unrest*, 2010

The first question that needs to be asked about **Melanie Gilligan's** work at the **Justina M. Barnicke Gallery** is what distinguishes it from web-based episodic television. I haven't yet figured that one out. [Crisis in the Credit System](#) and [Popular Unrest](#) are both available for online viewing and, other than the clever way the latter is set up with wireless headphones, seem more suited to the internet than the white cube. Once you get past that, they make an engaging doublefeature on assorted malaises of postmodernity. *Crisis* is the earlier one and its clever critique of financial institutions and their unique form of self-consumption reads like a Don DeLillo script presented by an improv troupe. The puns and allusions are pretty basic and the target is clear, so the fun is of the wink-wink, nudge-nudge variety. Gilligan ups her games significantly with *Popular Unrest's* JG Ballardian myth of the near future with a far better sense of directing, acting, and shooting and a much more intriguing tale of unexplained social behaviour and globalized surveillance. It stands up there with any "real" film and leads one to wonder when BBC or HBO will exploit her talent to its fullest.



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*.

Katzman Kamen Gallery: <http://www.katzmankamengallery.com/home.php>

Blue Republic: 12:02 continues until April 7.

Nicholas Metivier Gallery: <http://metiviergallery.com/>

See website for current exhibitions.

The Power Plant: <http://www.thepowerplant.org/>

Kerry Tribe: Speak, Memory continues June 3.

Dissenting Histories: 25 Years of The Power Plant continues until September 3.

Justina M. Barnicke Gallery: <http://www.jmbgallery.ca/>

Melanie Gilligan continues until April 8.

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