

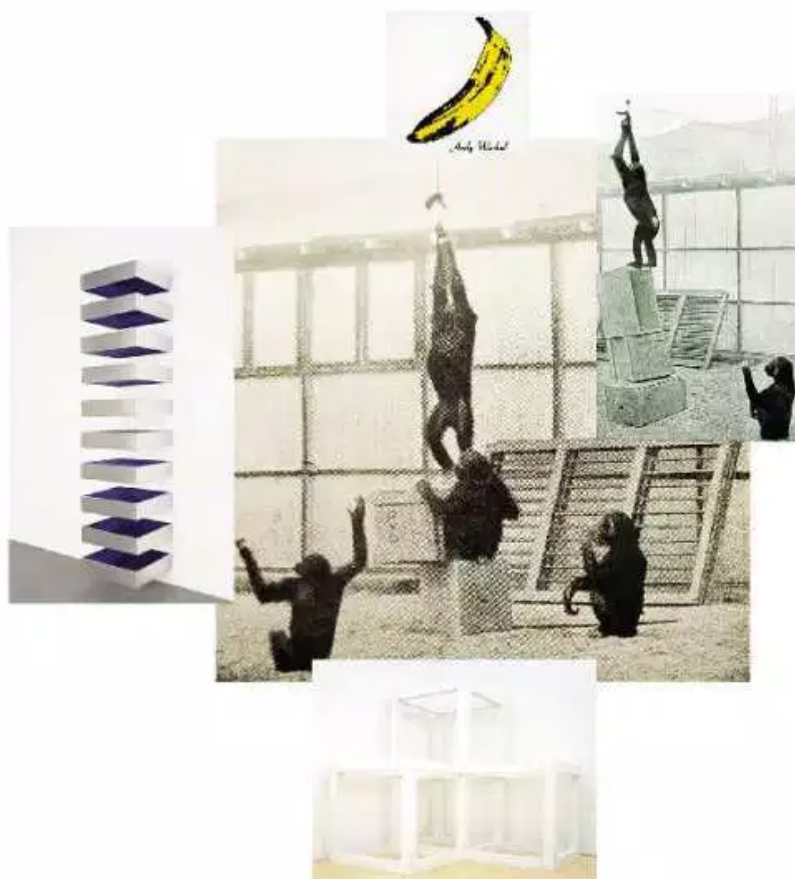
New Contemporary Calgary exhibition takes humorous look at minimalism



STEPHEN HUNT, CALGARY HERALD

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John Marriott. Hidden in Plain Sight. Part of Why Can't Minimal exhibition at Contemporary Calgary. Digital collage on paper 8.5 x 11. *CALGARY HERALD*

The story of how curator John G. Hampton came up with the title of *Why Can't Minimal*, the new exhibition at Contemporary Calgary, may not exactly make sense, but it also tells you everything you need to know about the sensibility of the exhibition.

The exhibit — which is both minimalist in practice at the same time it's a somewhat humorous, twisted commentary on it — got its name when Hampton, a Boston born, Regina-raised, University of Toronto graduate student, was looking for a project to curate for his graduate thesis.

The problem was that age-old intellectual dilemma summed up by the old Starkist tuna ad: do you want to be a tuna that tastes good or a tuna with good taste?

Or at least that's the newspaperman translation of art curatorese.

"I was getting fed up," Hampton says, "with trying to do an exhibition that encompassed all of my thinking about what curatorial practise was, and decided to do something that was more enjoyable, or captured the spirit of what I appreciated about art (instead)."

In search of inspiration, he began flipping through the pages of his notebook, where he had a habit of jotting down ideas and titles and things.

"I found one page," he says, "where it was all nonsense written.

It (was filled with sentences like) like *How Become Minimalism*," he says. "All these questions that were statements that didn't quite make sense — And then I read *Why Can't Minimal*, and there was something about it that immediately made sense to me — even while being complete nonsense.

"That's the same spirit I think the works (in this show) have," he says. "They have that absurd, nonsensical elements in them, but there's something that makes sense — or at least (that) I appreciate

(aesthetically).”



Contemporary Calgary's new exhibition is *Why Not Minimal?*, a humorous look at minimalism curated by John Hampton. It includes *Big Blue* (Jennifer Marman and Daniel Borins), a painted MDF speaker (far left), that plays *In the Mood* when you press a button on its side. *TONI HAFKENSCHIED TONI@THPHOTOS. / CALGARY HERALD*

The show that emerged from Hampton's notebook looks minimalist on the surface, but upon closer examination, possesses a sly sense of humour about itself.

Jon Sasaki's *A Minimalist Cube Shipped With Minimal Effort and Expense* is a work of art that looks like a Fed Ex parcel someone forgot to open — with its shipping receipt part of the piece.

There's *Big Blue*, a pale blue, off-kilter, vaguely futuristic piece by Jennifer Marman and Daniel Borins that's almost the only piece in the show with any colour to it. It also has a button that when you push it, it plays *In the Mood*.

"I like to think of this as like something from *2001: A Space Odyssey*," says Hampton, "if Buster Keaton had made it."

There's Dear Agnes, a single sheet of paper, drawn on pencil by Saskatoon artist Tammi Campbell, that consists of nothing but geometric squares — a nod to abstract expressionist — and Saskatchewan-born — Agnes Martin.

There's John Boyle-Singlefield's Untitled (Coke Zero), a Plexiglas cube that stays true to its minimalist antecedents — except for the fact it contains soda pop.

There's audio (by Louise Lawler), and video too, that sound and look like conceptual art straight out of some 1980s art show, but each one contains a kind of visual or audio non-sequitur that allows a little humanity to leak through the concept, Hampton says.

That's what Why Can't Minimal is aiming for, anyways, he says.

"Although I'm a big fan of conceptual, serious, cognitively laborious practices in ways of looking at work," Hampton says, "this is really working to dismantle that need in art.

"I don't think it's a necessary part of enjoying or even of appreciating contemporary art — going through (a lot of) cognitive labour," he says.

The problem, Hampton says, doesn't lie with conceptual artists, but rather with the perceptions of it that conceptualism created — which is another way of saying they sucked all the fun and sensuality and playfulness out of experiencing art in the first place.

He hopes Why Can't Minimal restores a little bit.

"I don't think the fault's with minimalism," Hampton says. "The fault is with the way people frame it — the way people talk about it very seriously and these very convoluted concepts — and so I thought that Minimalism is the most intimidating and serious (of all artistic) practice, so that's maybe a good start for undermining the seriousness (with which we treat conceptual art).

"It (the show) sets you up in these expectations for very serious and dense work," he says, "and then it just presents you with something

absurd — or just pretty.”

Why Can't Minimal at Contemporary Calgary through October 18.

Artists Jennifer Marman and Daniel Borins will present an artists talk September 18 at the University of Calgary.

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