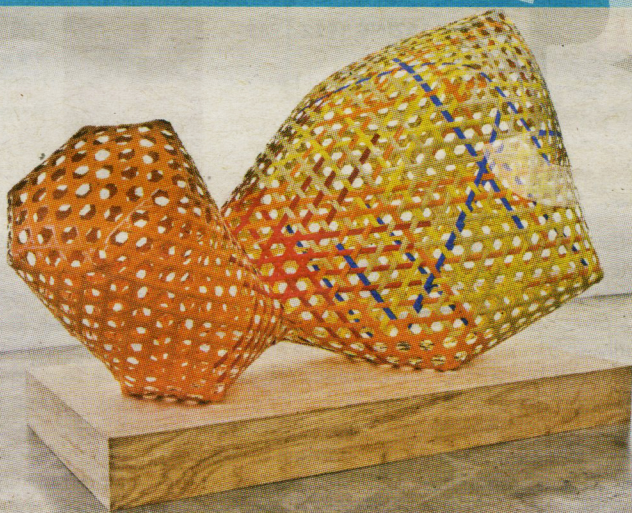


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BY DAVID BALZER

**James Carl “do you know what” and “jalousie” ★★★**

James Carl has two shows in Toronto right now, and both offer much to fascinate and frustrate. Your first stop should be “do you know what” at Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, for it is a retrospective that begins in the '90s and gives a decent indication of the evolution of this mercurial, oblique artist's career. One instantly notes Carl's conflation of creation with fabrication: he likes to make to-scale replicas of commercial objects. This is not his exclusive domain — many artists are interested in recasting the ready-made as a crafted, mimetic yet still-useless thing — but he has managed to do it fairly intriguingly. There is a lusciousness to his electronic equipment (Discmans, microphones, etc.) made of jade and a mild hilarity to his power tools made of Coroplast. Most impressive is a roomful of elastics made of Fimo. The point is annoyingly if purely theoretical: seeing these projects as critiques of capitalism or comments on post-industrialism doesn't quite work, for they seem intent on an inward-turning muteness and an essayistic kind of formalism. They seem to want you to appraise their own dissembling.

More or less the same can be said of a completely different-looking new series, “jalousie,” on display at Diaz Contemporary. Granted, the work is more instantly spectacular — the title is the French word for venetian blinds, and Carl has taken individual slats of these and woven them together into large, blobby shapes. The raw intention is clear. The works have been produced with a technique similar to that of basket weaving, and have repurposed an arguably hideous-looking (even anti-aesthetic) contemporary object (i.e., the venetian blinds) into something playing on both avant-garde and domestic decorative traditions. But what of it? One can't help but admire Carl for his skill and braininess and then regret that he has used them to achieve such a cold, remote effect.

JAMES CARL'S “DO YOU KNOW WHAT” RUNS TO JAN 25. MON-WED 11AM-5PM; THU-FRI 11AM-7PM; SAT-SUN 1PM-5PM. JUSTINA M. BARNICKE GALLERY, 7 HART HOUSE. 416-978-8398. WWW.JMBGALLERY.CA. “JALOUSIE” RUNS TO JAN 17. TUE-SAT 11AM-6PM. DIAZ CONTEMPORARY, 100 NIAGARA. 416-361-2972. WWW.DIAZCONTEMPORARY.CA.