

A shop of horrors and a poignant rebuttal

Milroy, Sarah

[ProQuest document link](#)

FULL TEXT

Video exhibitions at The Power Plant highlight two sides of the social realm

The other day, I was describing to my grown-up kids the world before voice mail. In a way, this seemed almost more antediluvian to them than my descriptions of the arrival of television or home computers. No messaging was positively primeval. You would call someone on the phone, I explained, and if they were not there ... you missed them.

Today, of course, evenings are spent in perpetual trading-up, with bids and counter-bids for social connection vying for attention in cyberspace. The social realm as we knew it now seems almost unimaginable. With infinite connections and cognitive channel-flipping now technologically possible, though, is old-fashioned human connection still in the cards? From my semi-fossilized vantage point (age 52), I'm worried.

Two exhibitions on view at The Power Plant in Toronto bring us to contemplate this altered reality. Emerging Philadelphia-based artist Ryan Trecartin is showing a suite of videos that seem to both embrace and parody (in a feverish, apocalyptic, ADD-addled way) the Facebook and MySpace world. Sharon Lockhart - a 46-year-old Californian almost 17 years his senior - is showing a collection of slow and steady videos of children playing in the streets in Lodz, Poland. Titled *Poland*, it offers a sense of stillness that seems almost antique. These exhibitions are polar opposites, and they make great company.

Trecartin is showing two bodies of work: his just-completed four-part series and his 2009 video triptych *Poland*. (His titles mimic the fragmented and compressed lexicon of e-chatter.) Ranging in length from 10 to 52 minutes, these videos are exhibited in viewing suites designed by the artist, each one mimicking various types of communal space: One looks like a meeting room, another is a bank of airline seats, another a set of metal stadium benches. On the screens, Trecartin's ghastly crew of BlackBerry-toting actors and wannabes prance before the camera, their faces smeared with fluorescent war paint and their teeth blackened - feral cyber-urchins in a digital Arcadia. In *Poland*, a squadron of girl and boy careerist Koreas (the rhyme is intentional) in blond wigs jabber aboard a commuter flight from hell. (Perpetual motion is part of the deal.) In *Poland*, we descend into a watery netherworld (it looks like a harshly lit indoor motel pool) inhabited by bratty female contortionists who splay their perfect bodies before the camera. Trecartin enhances the sense of perpetual puerility by speeding up their voices to helium squeaks; we can barely make out the narcissistic, often spiteful drivel that spews out of their mouths. At first, one can't help but be enthralled - the artist's mastery of jump-cut editing, digital effects, script writing and art direction are all superbly evocative (this is a trashy, synthetic world of interiors, congested with consumer products and overlaid with slogans and design motifs lifted from screen space), and he has a stinging comic touch, but extended viewing brings on a kind of sorrow. These frenetic, ambitious hyper-sexualized cyborgs run through their paces like rabid hamsters. Fun, fun and more fun are the objectives, and the quicker the better.

Watching these tapes brought me to some conclusions. While Trecartin borrows heavily from his artistic precursors - among them his Los Angeles elder Paul McCarthy and Andy Warhol of the Factory years - he has taken the tradition (self-consciously crafted vacuity performed with a touch of depravity) somewhere new. I think I feel about Trecartin the way lovers of Mark Rothko and Willem de Kooning felt about Warhol: This kid has an undeniably distinctive vision, and I suspect he is a good artist, but his work gives me the creeps.

If Trecartin's world is like reality on very bad cocaine, Lockhart's six-part suite is just the opposite. Born in

Massachusetts but living in Los Angeles, she rose to prominence a few years ago with her work , one of the standout pieces in the 2008 Carnegie International in Pittsburgh. Having suffered from career burnout a few years earlier, Lockhart had moved to a small community in the Sierra Nevada mountains of California. After a while, she began making very slow and deliberate video portraits of some of the children in the community, whom she recorded in long takes with a fixed camera. Through her lens, we saw a girl sit reading in a field, utterly absorbed, the wind blowing the grass while she slowly turned the pages. (Remember reading books?) A boy practised his flute beside a stream in the woods. The tapes had about them the feeling of careful observation, like nature films about human beings, and the mind dilated to receive her epiphanies.

In , Lockhart brings this gaze to the back streets of Lodz, where she observes random children at play. In a courtyard, two boys hang out together, one with his plastic trucks, the other with a bicycle that he drives again and again through a puddle, leaving a tracery of wet marks on the pavement. In another, a boy and girl make mud pies in a side street, completely absorbed in this most element and primordial of child's play. A third shows us a group of children playing ball in a courtyard, observed by a lone tree climber, who maintains a careful, watchful distance. In each case, we watch their human relationships unfold in real time, unharried by distraction. The artist's mastery of composition and lustrous picture quality add to the air of enchantment.

This is not the work that was. Where the earlier series felt revelatory, like a discovery-in-process, Lockhart seems here to have settled into a signature style. But she still offers a poignant rebuttal to Trecartin's shop of horrors next door. All of us now live in the space between these two. Viewing them together you have to ask: Which way will I go?

Any Ever and Podworka continue at The Power Plant until May 24. For more information, visit www.thepowerplant.org.

Special to The Globe and Mail

DETAILS

Subject:	Cameras; Power plants
Location:	Los Angeles California
Publication title:	The Globe and Mail (Online); Toronto
Publication year:	2010
Publication date:	Apr 6, 2010
Publisher:	The Globe and Mail
Place of publication:	Toronto
Country of publication:	Canada, Toronto
Publication subject:	General Interest Periodicals--Canada
Source type:	Blog, Podcast, or Website
Language of publication:	English
Document type:	News

ProQuest document ID: 2385867240

Document URL: <https://www.proquest.com/blogs-podcasts-websites/shop-horrors-poignant-rebuttal/docview/2385867240/se-2?accountid=14026>

Copyright: Copyright The Globe and Mail Apr 6, 2010

Last updated: 2020-04-04

Database: Global Newsstream

LINKS

[Check SFX for Availability](#)

Database copyright © 2023 ProQuest LLC. All rights reserved.

[Terms and Conditions](#) [Contact ProQuest](#)