

The body artistic

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ABSTRACT

At first glance, his array of lo-fi sculptural materials -lawn chairs, plush toys, papier mache, styrofoam, packing tape, mannequins, etc. -overwhelms.

FULL TEXT

Following months of renovations, the Power Plant relaunched this Thursday with three new exhibitions. Are they as fresh as the gallery's new drywall? Find out now.

1. Thomas Hirschhorn at the Power Plant

231 Queens Quay W., to May 29

Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn's installation is both painful and powerful. At first glance, his array of lo-fi sculptural materials -lawn chairs, plush toys, papier mache, styrofoam, packing tape, mannequins, etc. -overwhelms. But it's the small photographs Hirschhorn affixes to these sculptures that stand out. They document instances of man's inhumanity to man: people beating each other with sticks; grotesquely severed limbs and heads; and the bodies of innumerable babies, mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers lying dead and violated. Above it all, a massive eye -which provides the installation's title, *Das Auge* (The Eye) -watches, with dozens of smaller ocular models scattered throughout. Two questions rise to the surface: What's the good of being able to see if we block out everything that's disturbing? Do we choose to look rather than participate because of spectatorship's seeming safety? Granted, Hirschhorn throws much into the mix that complicates these questions and his perspective on them. His treatment of the seal hunt and fur trade makes it unclear whether he's trying to critique these industries or the people who protest them. It's also uncertain whether Hirschhorn's in situ righteousness is matched by any non-art actions on his part. Ultimately, however, I felt grateful to the artist for making me aware of some of many atrocities I shut out daily. Though this exhibition is ostensibly about the opening of the eye, it is also, quite palpably, about the opening of the heart as well.

2. Inigo Manglano Ovalle

To May 29

Inigo Manglano Ovalle's offerings are also chilling, but in a different way -they're as minimal in their means as Hirschhorn's are maximal. The first work viewers encounter is a video documenting piles of broken glass being swept. Its soundtrack ranges from a low, airplane-engine drone to the icy, brittle staccato of windows breaking. For me, the combination conjured 9/11 (yes, still), even if the source material, as indicated in nearby texts, was renovation on a Mies van der Rohe building. The second piece viewers encounter is a dark, hulking replica of one of the trailers that former U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell pointed to as proof that Iraq had biological weapons. Experienced with that breaking-glass sound seeping in from the video, this sculpture conveys the shattering of a closely held idea: that a government might actually use the truth as a rationale when millions of lives are at stake. How do we pick up the pieces when what we've trusted -be it modernist architecture, moral certainty or military officials -lets us down? This interpretation might seem too literal, but it's inescapable for me.

3. To What Earth Does This Sweet Cold Belong?

To May 29

Following the sensory and spiritual drubbings of the Plant's main-floor exhibitions, I was seeking a little hope and comfort when I visited this second-floor group show. I found it in the remarkable little sculptures of Toronto's own

Jennifer Rose Sciarrino. Here, Sciarrino presents three tiny mountains crafted out of white paper and glue. There's also a dozen of her ingenious replicas of natural crystals and minerals, which are created from resin, plaster, epoxy and other artificial materials. These works pay homage both to the beauty of nature and to the talented hand of the artist, producing a kind of Caspar David Freidrich effect in miniature. In a show that aims to mix deconstruction and wonder, Sciarrino's work happily tips to the wonder end.

Credit: Leah Sandals; National Post

Illustration

/ ; Steve Payne, The Power Plant / Thomas Hirschhorn's sprawling installation Das Auge (The Eye).;; Caption:

DETAILS

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