

The Power Plant's auteur de force VISUAL ART JUST THE FACTS Four video artists trying to tell us something in remarkably strong summer show

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ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

All the noise by, about and surrounding [Trecartin] - who, at 28, is a rising international superstar, the show-stealer at the New Museum's "Younger Than Jesus" show in New York last year - drowned out the other artists here, Sharon Lockhart, Peter Campus and Joachim Koester. Which is a shame, because it's abundantly clear that curators Gregory Burke and Helena Reckitt intended the latter three as a thoughtful foil to Trecartin's gruesome, juvenile chatterfest (and I mean that in the best possible way).

Lockhart contrasts decay and vibrancy, drab grey and colour, alive and not, infusing the most inhuman environments with the unmitigated joy of a child at play. Warmly elegiac but quietly provocative, Lockhart engages with a trenchant standard of contemporary art: modernity's transformative wake, and what use to make of its industrial castoffs. Significantly, she does this with a quiet ambivalence that edges towards optimism - a faith in humanity's ability to find small joys in the unlikeliest places.

Next door, Koester's twitchy 16-mm films, all three made since 2007, seem channeled from the early '70s, when primal movement pieces emerged in modern dance. Whatever Koester's reference point, the work is physical, kinetic and elemental - and, notably, silent, its own hectic energy in full contrast with Trecartin's brand of the same.

FULL TEXT

Where was I? Oh, right: About a month ago, the Power Plant opened its slate of remarkably strong summer exhibitions, but all anyone could talk about at the time - myself included - was the seven-room Ryan Trecartin funhouse, an overwhelmingly complete exhibition of the video virtuoso's maddeningly hectic, kaleidoscopic oeuvre.

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Most clearly, I remember the surge of relief as I emerged from the immersive Trecartin installation and slipped directly into Lockhart's Podworka, a gloriously elegant piece shot in Lodz, Poland.

Quietly intimate and refreshingly spare - Lockhart, herself suffering from a recent bout of burnout, made Podworka partly as creative catharsis - it shows six groups of children playing in abandoned industrial zones: In one, the camera sits quietly in the shadow of an alleyway as a soccer ball tumbles past, closely pursued by a bounding preteen boy; in another, two small children in bright Sunday clothing play gently atop a rubble concrete slab under the watchful gaze of an elderly woman.

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Upstairs, Peter Campus, a video art pioneer - people like Bill Viola cite him as an influence - shows something old (1974's *Anamnesis*) and something newish (2009's *Inflections: changes in light and colour around Ponquogue Bay*). In the latter, Campus has devised an ingenious (and undivulged) technique that transforms simple video of an idyllic bay near his upstate New York home into squared-off volumes of colour and light.

Here, Campus toys with the age-old gulf between representation and abstraction, and turns it into a formal quandary: Abstract video, by its own nature, is an oxymoron, but Campus pushes it as far as it can reasonably go. That he accompanies the video pieces - there are six - with a soundtrack of squawking gulls amps up the playful dissonance.

Anamnesis, meanwhile, has never seemed so current. The viewer enters a long, dark room with a glowing blank screen at one end. As you approach, your image wanders into the frame from the side in soft focus. Step one way and your ghost image lingers in place, joining you after a palpable heartbeat.

Campus was saying something here about the mediated experience of viewing, and being viewed, through the artificial lens of technology - a preoccupation of Trecartin's, too, specifically tied to the burgeoning look-at-me culture spawned by YouTube, Facebook and their ilk.

Trecartin's take, however, has a potent gracelessness about it, which is surely part of the point; grace, as those familiar with the video work of Bruce Nauman or Paul McCarthy will know, isn't essential to good art, but in the face of such cartoonishly gruesome work, its absence makes for tough sledding.

Enter Campus, whose simple gesture here accomplishes nearly as much with so much less. Campus offers an intimate moment, spawning a complex set of revelations that implicate and involve you directly - something to experience, not endure, which, given the choice, I'll take every time.

WHAT: Artists Explore Screen Space

WHEN: Until May 24

WHERE: The Power Plant, Harbourfront Centre

Credit: Toronto Star

Illustration

Caption: The children in Sharon Lockhart's *Podworka* (2009) find small joys in an industrial zone of Lodz, Poland.

DETAILS

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