

Kristan Horton,  
*False Generator 2nd*,  
2010, inkjet print  
mounted to DiBond,  
85 cm × 110 cm  
PHOTO COURTESY  
OF THE ARTIST



## KRISTAN HORTON: THE ECHO CHAMBER

SILVER FLAG PROJECTS, MONTREAL

BY DAN ADLER

Kristan Horton has diverse interests. This variety was provocatively present at Silver Flag in Montreal, to the extent that those unfamiliar with Horton's practice might have mistaken the monographic medley entitled *The Echo Chamber* for a group exhibition. Although actual audio components were absent from the gallery chamber, I was struck by the ability of Horton's works—which seemed at first to differ so substantially in terms of their materials, styles and subjects—to speak to one another in unexpectedly intuitive ways. This echoing activity often took place at the level of bodily sensation.

I first confronted a group of *Blow Drawings* (2010) that represented words but, like the show as a whole, were scrawled in a manner that resisted being easily read. Rendered in black on unframed white pages of differing sizes, the depicted terms included "hue," "whew," "who" and "few," suggesting a playful rhyming exercise and alluding to the arbitrariness of language. But my initial impressions were enriched by a sudden bodily realization that the author had wrought

these words by sucking up, spraying and spewing pigment onto paper. I speculated on how spoken words (and also artmaking) coincide with inhalation and exhalation, how the mixing of medium and saliva can be a means of understanding words, on the process of making use of multiple senses (taste and touch, as well as smell), and on the melding of media (painting, drawing, writing and performance). Horton's calligraphic efforts—which recall Bruce Nauman's liquid word paintings from the 60s—exhibit letters sprouting unruly little legs, antennae and hairs.

However, I cannot dwell on these drawings for long, having being drawn away from the insect-like protrusions towards *Bronze Roach* (2008). Given pride of place on a humble pedestal covered with white paper, this tiny thing similarly serves as a humble monument to another series of inhalations—not fluid this time but cannabis smoke. I muse again about the prior performance of the body that made the object possible. Horton's cast refers to the brittle cigarette paper, creased and bent, perhaps from shared use, evoking the cumulative pressures of many pairs of lips socially compressing the joint while the wafting scent and the sense of naughty illegality coalesce with the drug's effects—all this encapsulated in bronze for posterity. But I am equally

struck by *Roach's* lack of descriptive detail, the absence of colouristic or narrative features, as though this were part of a larger whole that is unknown to me. While perusing the white geometric form supporting the minuscule bronze, I consider the roles that abstraction and absence play in this show, an echo chamber inhabited by fragments—partial imagery that often seems to be awaiting content—that can be seen, felt and heard in concert with one another.

As with the aforementioned roach and drawings, the preparation of the photocollage *Guinness: 24 Rotations* (2005) could have led to dizziness and delirium—this time the combination of alcohol ingestion and the artist snapping digital images while circling around a beer, another hint at his penchant for studying non-precious objects at hand in the studio. Twenty-four successive images of this beverage are combined within a circular picture containing just a couple of discernible letters, numbers and hues (green and brown) that has been literally inset into the gallery wall. While the work's palette and triangular faceting are reminiscent of similarly circular, cubist still-life works—which also refer to everyday cultures of the studio and the café—I walk away from this Guinness with a buzz derived in part from this work's status as a non-representational and hallucinogenic vortex, and in part from the sheer orbiting force of circulating snapshots that may be enacting a process of converting photography into sculpture and architecture.

But then I consider *Guinness* as the tentative beginning of a tunnelling operation, echoed by *Walnut Nuclear Power Station, Issue No. 2* (2010), 32 pages taken from a graphic novel representing a subterranean site where, presumably from the title, an atomic facility is being built. However, narrative details here are few and far between. Men wearing mining helmets wander through the cave-like spaces of a construction zone that is punctuated only by a few ladders and arches held in place by timber buttresses. As a result, I focus on the formal features occupying relatively large compositional territory: the geological strata, the white lines dividing pages into boxes, black hatch marks—these framing, geometric and incidental details become unhinged from the central narrative, for instance, pointing to the notion, rather than to the reality, of preparing for the production of power.

This speculation is encouraged by another fragmentary image: the photograph *False Generator 2nd* (2010). Like *Issue No. 2*, it is likely lifted from the larger context of a series that may document attempts to represent the generation of power—in this case a

generator, which is rendered in this picture as being made from plywood and Styrofoam. The photograph offers only a partial view of this recreated contraption, so its surfaces take on an abstract and non-referential significance, straying from the narrative of making a model that would explain the function of the original (or future) machine. Supplementing this story, I strive to understand the shifting between metal and wood and photograph as a conceptual journey that, in dialogue with other voices in Horton's *Echo Chamber*, led to rewarding reflections about many notions, ranging from altered perception to the making of replicas. ▶