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"Interview w/ Kristan Horton" ...Otino Corsano

Extract from the forthcoming exhibition catalogue *Free Sample*, documenting the exhibition organized by Kelly Mark at Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery, Halifax. The publication contains new artist interviews by Otino Corsano, original Persiflage by Hugh Briss, and documentation on the works of 13 of Kelly Mark's favourite artists. Copies will be sold as of 15 March through msvuart.ca and abcArtBooksCanada.com.



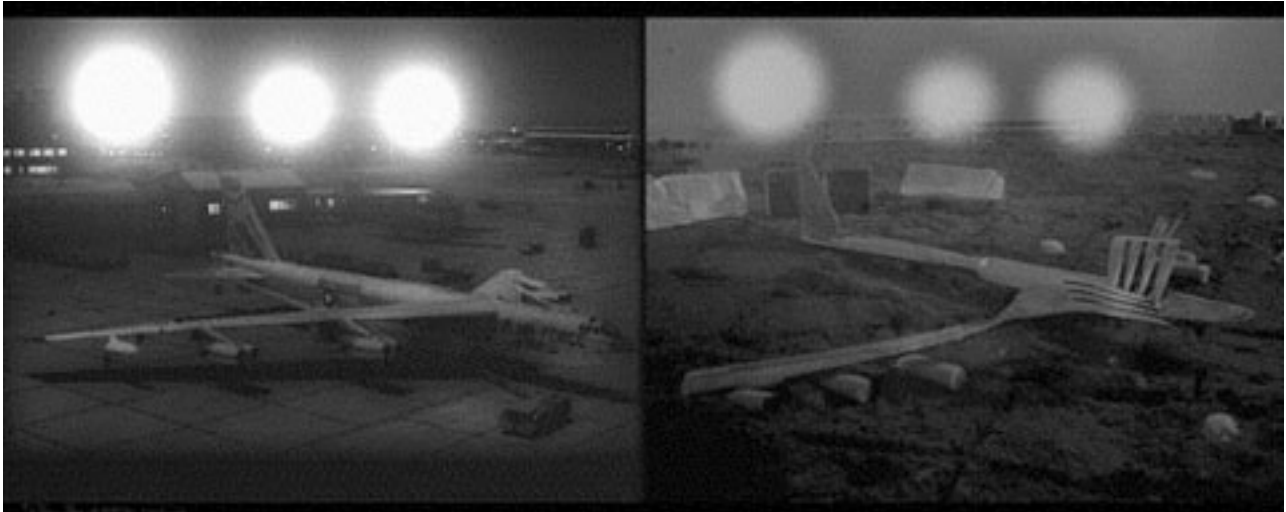
Oracle (1998-2004)

Computer generated image, speech recognition software, books-on-tape: *The Odyssey*, printed catalogue. (17 cm x 168 cm)

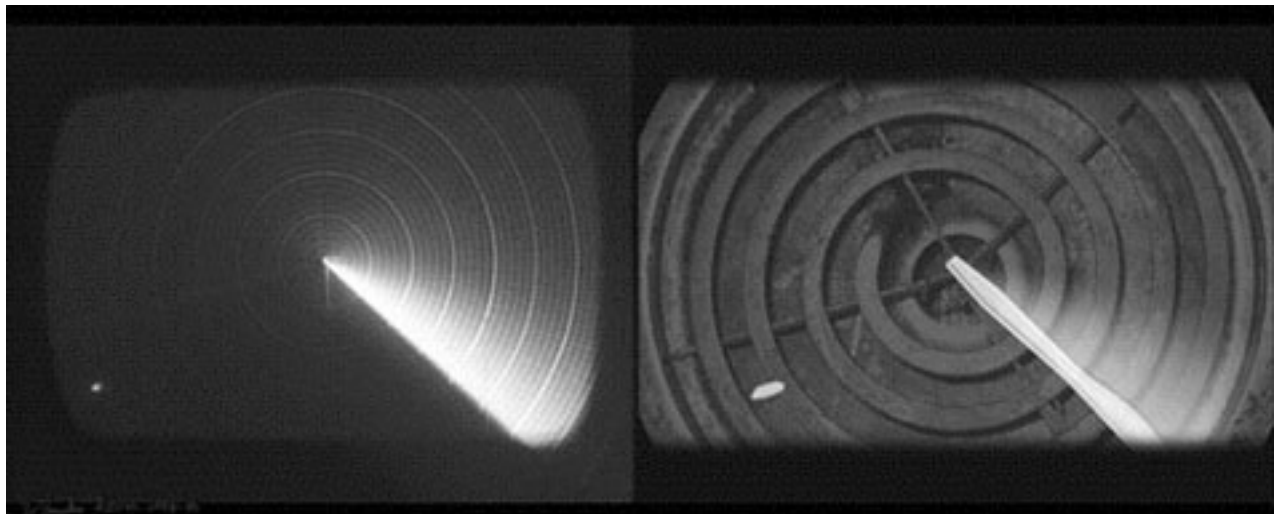
Otino Corsano: There is an intriguing juxtaposition in your work between the art of ideas inspired by possible objects (for example, *Oracle*, a machine turning books-on-tape back into books) and produced works of fascination (eyeglasses constructed from a coat hanger). Your video, *Dr. Strangelove Dr. Strangelove* (2004), seems to exist in both versions: the idea of recreating in miniature scenes from Kubrick's 1964 film using materials found in your apartment makes for great conceptual photography; the finalized vision of the reconstructed new video is mesmerizing. Has creating this work changed your perspective regarding the value of the primary experience of a work physically existing in 'reality' as opposed to conceptual proposals and secondary sources?

Kristan Horton: I agree that *Strangelove* is a coming together of those concerns.

Anticipating results is completely different from producing results. In retrospect, it was important for me to produce work such as *Oracle*. *Oracle* dealt with the case of oral culture in order to negotiate the effects of indexing, such as a book, and later, the effects of voice-dictation. The fact that *Oracle* did not exist made the catalogue a form of indexing fantasy. It remained in the realm of anticipated results. The *Strangelove* project brought a return to working where I didn't have all the answers and it was through producing the work I would discover something. It was a return to an external or material engagement.



dr0018-s003-03 (13" x 19") Archival Print 2005



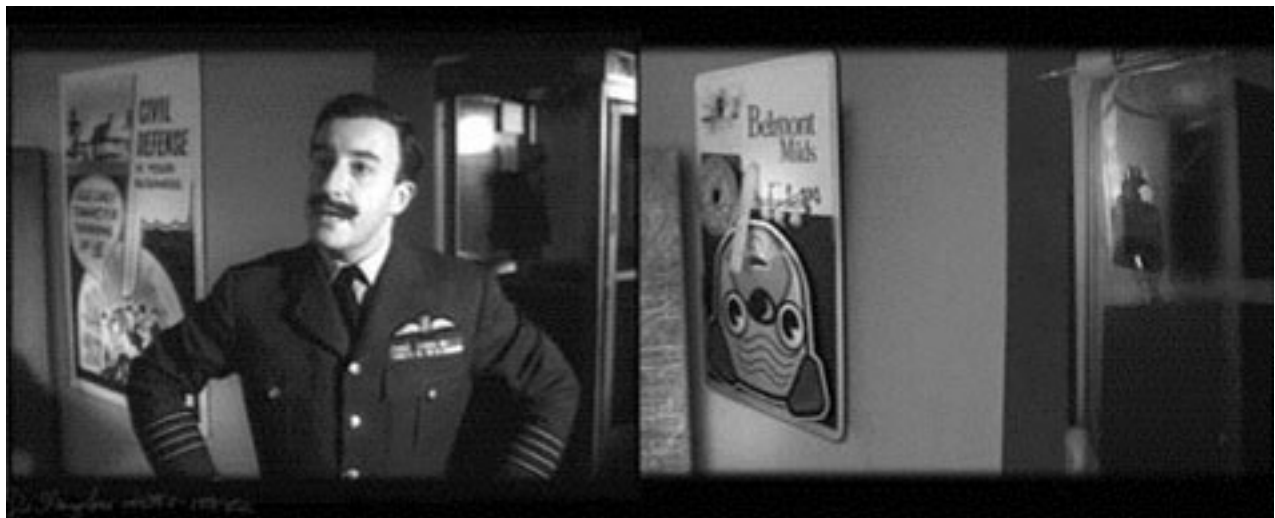
dr0394-s028-29 (13" x 19") Archival Print 2005

Otino Corsano: Although I can think of a long list possible scenarios to justify your reconstruction of scenes from the original *Dr. Strangelove* with new materials, I'd like to know of your shortlist of reasons for sampling this particular film for this ambitious project.

Kristan Horton: That is a particularly good question, to my mind. Appropriation is the beginning of the concern, which by now has a long and varied history. So to truncate these appropriation strategies in a shortlist is to celebrate the following

results or intentions: to bring a sense of immediacy, to transport the viewer, to bring life back into art, and to rewrite history. With *Strangelove*, I began to look at appropriation with these historical views in mind. As I was working on the project I began to think more about the appropriation of the film in the specific conditions it exists in for me. One such specific condition is I have seen the film 732 times now and so I started to think of things in terms of a new word: *exposure*. Then how does exposure relate to appropriation? And so forth. And here I may finally answer your question: I didn't really choose *Dr. Strangelove* because it fit with my ideas for a project; rather, I started with the film and found something there through intense exposure to it.

Like you, I find a number of applicable readings. In fact, my recent favorite observation (in conversation with Chris Carol and Kerri Reid) is at the end of the film the world is destroyed. The reconstruction from the mundane debris provides one obvious reading. There are certain attributes of Kubrick's film that have a relevant bearing. The film is quite absurd, not simply a comedy, but truly twisted in its plot and character treatments. In taking away these elements activating its absurdity, I saw the potential for this absurdity to be activated in a new way. The film is also minimal and stage-like in its representation of the world; this was certainly a brilliant decision by Kubrick. But it's also the condition allowing me to begin an equally absurd relationship to it. *Dr. Strangelove* offers the opening of not being an explicit reality. The film already contains the necessary ruptures for me to make an attachment.



dr0462-s031-02 (13" x 19") Archival Print 2005



dr0206-s011-58 (13" x 19") Archival Print 2005

Otino Corsano: The first idea the project triggered in my mind was personal sarcasm as political comedy. Devoting the time, energy and private spaces of your own living environment to build delicately intricate movie sets out of found objects makes your project appear as hilariously poignant as the original film. Did you feel called to respond to our current “wartime” global environment via a subjective microcosm?

Kristan Horton: The parallel humour is essentially correct. The juxtaposition of the mundane with nuclear war makes Kubrick’s film so outrageous – for example, the survival kits containing lipstick; or Miss Scott’s call to the War Room and General Turgidson’s, “I told you never to call me here, baby;” or the phone call to save the world is nearly thwarted when the operator requests exact change. The project is timely, that is certain, but it was not a response, or at least not a conscious response, to the wartime global environment. It was, however a response to this remote experiential world of cinema which, as your initial question locates, is of continuing concern for me. My concern is with realities and how we use, negotiate and interpret them and, primarily, how we are involved with them.



dr0106-s008-06 (13" x 19") Archival Print 2005



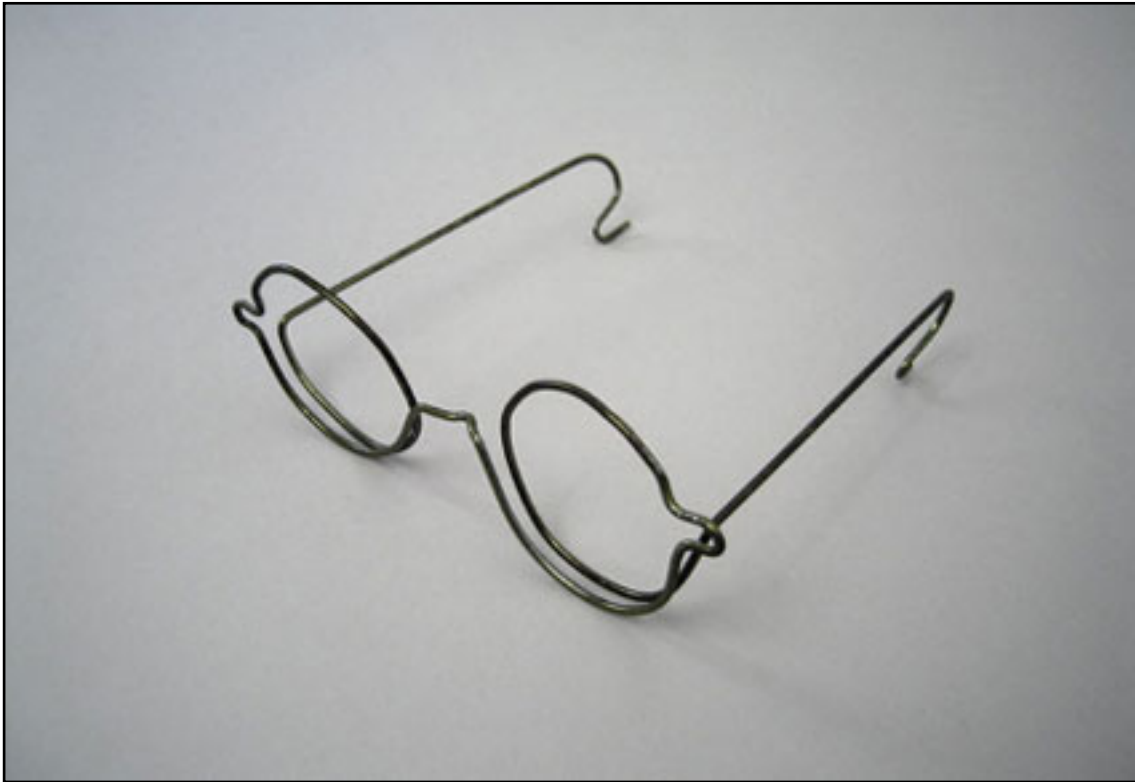
dr0569-s037-41 (13" x 19") Archival Print 2005

Otino Corsano: In the past, you have enabled viewers to appropriate your very likeness via computer-generated imagery. This collaborative work (with artist Max Dean), titled *BE ME*, (2002), empowered viewers to transform your digitized facial features to mimic their own words and expressions through interactive technology. I believe this is a noble project given the amount manipulative sampling artists are responsible for in this day and age, as this “Free Sample” group exhibition attests. Do you think a free exchange of imagery necessarily enables more liberating means of personal expression or is there always some hidden cost to these appropriated solutions?

Kristan Horton: There’s a contradiction to my mind that abuts the proliferation of media and the concomitant refinement of restricted use. If we can’t have direct involvement with what we are being exposed to, then I see an issue of engagement for our cultural life. In addition, the mode used to evaluate ‘fair use’ is mediated primarily through capital. Not a discursive mode, but a non-linguistic one. Money is a non-linguistic form. Addressing social concerns is an extremely narrow enterprise in non-linguistic modes. Parody is the one, albeit odd, exception in fair use.

As consumers, we are being marketed products that encourage us to be producers, such as cameras, computers, and video recorders. Even the ways they are marketed encourage us to take part as authors, “Now you too can be a director.” I can view a film repeatedly at home, but there are restrictions in how I may proceed from there. Alone, there is a conversation to be had around one’s ability to have 732 viewings of a film. In other words, there is a cultural/technological condition that exists that lets people do this today and arguably since copies of anything have been commercially available. The ability for individuals to not only consume, but to produce such things as films is enabled today. The evidence is found in the Dogme genre, Indie genre, and so forth. For me, this reads as a rise in the authorship of a culture - the participation in a culture’s story. When you find yourself in the position of being an author the first thing you want to do is go out and look at what other authors are doing.

The objects I use for *Strangelove* are not manipulated; for example I use a coke can, but I am not interested to cut a coke can up to create a new shape. I don't want to create new objects, I want to use existing ones. For me this allows the 'presentness' they represent to come through in the work. My own use of mundane objects acknowledges a theatrical nature by our intense familiarity with the mundane. This attaches itself to other areas of culture aside from the film, breaking illusionistic space and creating continuity to our consumer life. Limiting what can and can't be used in individual expression also limits what can and can't be made continuous. Such an obstacle could potentially strand artworks or other engagements in hermeticism, or to look at it another way, reduces competition in the public sphere for meaning.



Untitled (for Miss Tincog) 2004
Archival Print & Wire Coathanger (13 cm x 19 cm)

Otino Corsano: Writing reviews of one's own work is generally regarded as taboo. Many of your early contributions to *samplesize.ca* were objective summaries of your artistic projects other writers had failed to cover. The objectivity you employ to address your own work (in the third person) alleviates any concerns over author motivation. Surprisingly, it was quite satisfying to have bias at the foreground of the writing, so the content could be enjoyed without any second-guessing of the questionable relationship between writer and artist. Were these reviews penned to bring light to the poverty of active criticism in our national art community or was it simply self-promotion?

Kristan Horton: There was a moment when Kelly Mark and I were speaking about where my magazine reviews should go on the *samplesize.ca* site – in the gallery as an object, or in the writing section as, well, writing. Kelly thought,

feature the work in the writing section, and I'm glad I listened to her. As criticism, the question of whether they were objects was gone. Now they had to play out in this new exchange. A formal exchange of ideas regarding contemporary art practices raises the importance of that practice for the community. When I find examples of that exchange, say in periodicals or other publishing, where I am challenged to think about certain practices, my commitment to that community is rejuvenated. Accordingly, I value criticism; I value it and recognize it as inseparable from the story of Art. However, when I engaged in criticism it was as an artist and not a writer. I was looking at the report (review) as a site. I think of it as site-specific work. None of those activities I review about myself ever took place. I was trying to make new work with criticism as a material source. I began with the premise that if a significant ratio of my art knowledge came from reviews, then it followed that creating the review itself was a legitimate activity. It wasn't so much to comment on the status of active criticism in terms of poverty, but in fact its status as an active site of consumption, even the primary site of consumption.



Daily Portraits 2003-ongoing

Otino Corsano: Obsession seems to drive your work. Would you agree? Or rather are you activating the necessary fantastic qualities this restructured feature production inherently calls for?

Kristan Horton: I don't think of my practice as being obsessive; I would have to consider a comparison to gauge that more precisely. I remember years ago reading some lectures given by Robertson Davies. There was a passage regarding reading where he urged one to read deeply not widely. I am aligned with this thought. I'm weary of a word like obsession because I can see Raskolnikov in his apartment fevered and sweaty. However, I have become increasingly focused on the work in front of me. This may seem like a strange thing for an artist to say, but at times I think a vista of one's practice opens up where you can see the trajectories leading off in the distance and becoming a focus



Habit Forming (Bits & Bites) 2003
Archival Print 22 cm x 167 cm

- Otino Corsano & Kristan Horton (December 2004 - January 2005)

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