

ows. And yet, in this sensuous reverie, everything is dying. Left to age and rot during the course of the exhibition, the framed flowers become a memento mori—even at their peak, they are en route to death. Even the absurd, hanging T-shirts are signifiers of instability, empty masculinity, and the latter's failures. They are cheap T-shirts, neither fashionable v-necks nor collared shirts, which would otherwise signal a successful entry into adulthood or a white-collar workplace.

The arrangement of commercial objects that rot and float—objects given an almost supernatural agency—also appears in the recent works of Urs Fischer (a solitary croissant dangling from the gallery ceiling of the New Museum) and Tatiana Trouvé (who, to a more oppressive effect than Fischer's absurdities, combines the vocabulary of Robert Morris' cold steel with horror and S&M in *The Antechamber* [2009]). Imbuing ordinary objects with horror, dread or some other spirit again relates to the myth of Narcissus. Although not usually thought of as such, it is a myth of interminable sadness. Narcissus, perceiving himself to be resolutely alone, turned the object of his desire inward. Schaefer's inanimate yet quite lively collection of objects remain distant and aloof—they are objects of desire, but they ward off any notion of reciprocity with viewers. Aggression fills this installation with spaces that are, quite simply, difficult to see or see into: a harsh light shines down on you and the dark holes in the centre of the cinder-block structure prevent you from getting too close to its centre.

Schaefer's presentation—a collection of visual phenomena—makes language feel awkward and writing becomes an ill-formed means of transcendence from this space where there are no verbal guidelines, just visual cues. However, as in a dream, where one encounters bits and pieces that do not make sense on their own, visual analogues begin to appear among the individual works. For instance, the light bulbs dangling from inside the clothing racks refract a gorgeous, amorphous splatter onto the floor, a motif repeated in the painted marks on the cinder blocks, in the ornate curvature of the palm fronds held behind Plexiglas and in the outline of a monstrous figure in the framed ink drawing. And yet, maybe these relationships, these meanings between objects, are mere phantoms, just the lies we tell ourselves to make sense of our surroundings.

Turning the corner to leave the first gallery, you encounter a reverse-projection video playing in the doorway, preventing entry into the last room. In this looped

video, Schaefer finally appears, hidden behind a clownish mask of white face paint and wearing prison stripes. He dances and pulls at his suspenders during awkward movements and at one point drags a metal rod as a prop. His only respite from this Sisyphean performance is a sad primping effort where he crouches down to tousle

his hair. The symbolism is heavy-handed and the artist-as-clown motif has been handled numerous times before. However, in this exhibition, it is an apt reminder of dwindling expectations; because if this exhibition is a comedy, the joke delivers no respite from the fragile lightness of being. ▶

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 miniscule 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. ▶

ADRIAN BLACKWELL: MODEL FOR A PUBLIC SPACE [KNOT]

JUSTINA M. BARNICKE GALLERY, TORONTO

BY ALEX SNUKAL

With Toronto under the overbearing and brutal shadow of the G20 this June, Adrian Blackwell's *Model for a Public Space [knot]* (2010) made a perfect foil for the Security Fence erected to keep the leaders from the people. Yet ironically, under the guise of security, the University of Toronto was closed for the weekend, making Blackwell's installation inaccessible for the duration of the conference. *Knot*, on view since March at Hart House, was presented as part of Extracurricular: Between Art & Pedagogy, Part 2: Beyond Institutions, a conference examining the relationship between art, education and activism, and organized by Maiko Tanaka.

Both the Security Fence and *knot*, as models of public space, describe divergent spatial modes of political organization (or disorganization). As the Fence forecloses the possibility of political disagreement by blocking access to the arena of politics and, through its police guardians with (fake) expanded legal powers, demands identification from anyone who approaches it, *knot's* porous structure makes no demands on its subjects—least of all identification—and allows any number of entry points, uses and positions from inside or outside its bounds. In this sense, *knot's* function is neither to resolve nor to exclude the antagonisms of the political sphere—a desire that was at the centre of the state violence on display during the G20—but rather to create a public space that allows for difference.

Adrian Blackwell, *Model for a Public Space [knot]*, 2010 (installation view at Hart House, Toronto). PHOTO JESSE COLIN JACKSON



Adrian Blackwell, *Model for a Public Space [knot]*, 2010 (installation view at Hart House, Toronto). PHOTO JESSE COLIN JACKSON



In a poster accompanying the installation, Blackwell included a selection of drawings and photographs documenting a variety of circular schemas for political and personal interaction. From Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International*, to a number of Jacques Lacan's schemas, to Lygia Clark's walking and living structures, each image suggests a topological organization of political or social structures. Indeed, the construction of *knot* itself suggests that all interactions within it take place on the same plane—just raised and turned in on itself—a Möbius strip of social relations. The structure begins as a single plane of flooring that is cut by circular saw and propped up on scaffolding at different levels. What was once a contiguous square surface becomes a long, narrow walkway that swoops, climbs and turns in and around on itself. Beginning as a two-dimensional surface, rather than as a three-dimensional structure, *knot* has a conceptual “flatness” that, supposedly, extends to the relationships between its users through its creation of a non-hierarchical meeting space. Each user, no matter where they are on the structure, is on the same plane.

However, as *knot* becomes three-dimensional, like most diagrams, it loses the precision of the schematic. When encountered in its three-dimensional form, *knot* is as capable as any other space of generating power and hierarchy: it has a centre and a periphery, a top and a bottom, and