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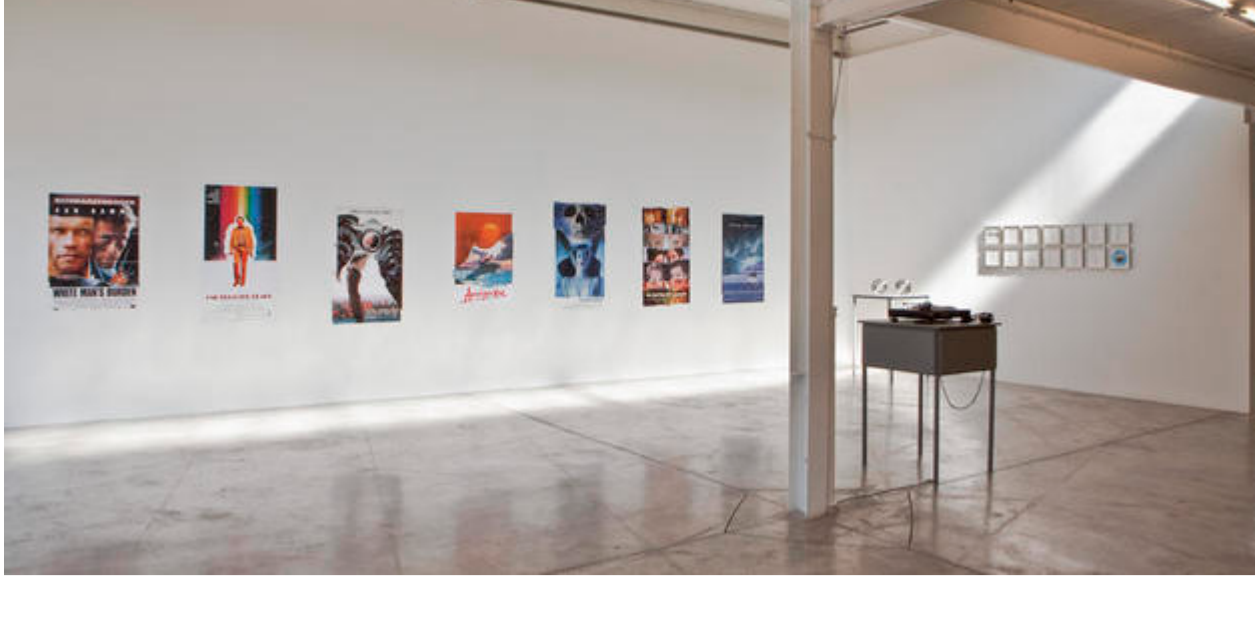
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Tony Romano: "a fist full of flies"

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BY DAVID BALZER March 17, 2010 21:03

EDITORIAL RATING:

To Apr 1, Tue-Sat 11am-6pm. Diaz Contemporary, 100 Niagara. 416-361-2972. www.diazcontemporary.ca.

Getting what Tony Romano does isn't so much a matter of effort as a matter of caring. Romano, who also runs local art magazine *Hunter and Cook* with painter Jay Isaac, has a new show at Diaz Contemporary that, like so much work by young hip white male urbanites, recalls Rodney Graham. There are worse things. Graham's conceptualism is accessible to the degree that it is stylish, playful, absurdist (and thus often ego-checking) and in love with pop and kitsch. Of course, it frequently lobs its wit smugly, and thus with Romano. Accept this, however, and the art can prove fairly entertaining.

The main room at Diaz is full of objects that seem to bear little relationship to one another. On the far wall is a series of collaged movie posters, which can be your way in. Here are films that don't exist: a title copped from Coppola (*One From the Heart*), a tagline from *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* ("The Adventure Is Just Beginning") and Richard Pryor as the lead. If you think that's cute and cool (rather than cheap and boring), proceed to the "Imagine Band" section of the exhibit (otherwise, leave), where Romano posts the lyrics to the John Lennon song in different languages, beside oversized silver-and-tin Lennon-esque glasses and a record player spinning a 45 on which Romano's band sings the song, awkwardly reworded ("Imagine that countries don't exist / That isn't so difficult" etc.).

Better works – the best in the show – are opposite the posters: fake black-and-white location-scouting photographs for non-existent scenes and movies. (Placards placed in the photo tell you what might have been – a production entitled *Love Leaves Me* has its "30F Final Suicide" scene in a claw-foot bathtub.) The show is all about such fake texts and contexts, pastiche blueprints that will never be realized.

A possible exception is the show's conclusion, *Beautiful Monster*, a fully realized documentary on Isaac, Romano's friend. It will cause chafing among those who decry Toronto art as a precious straight-dude's club, and there is a fakeness here too, a lending of retro-gravitas to an only moderately well-known Canadian painter by surrounding him with a skronky score (by Josh Reichmann) and Clouzot-esque cinematography (by Michael Leblanc). But Isaac means it – he talks the talk very well, at least – and so does Romano; if they're fakers, they're the most earnestly aspirational sort.

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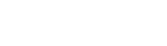
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