



GALLERIES



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Léopold L. Foulem
Récupération

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BY DAVID BALZER March 04, 2009 21:03

EDITORIAL RATING:
To May 3, Mon-Thu 10am-6pm; Fri 10am-9pm; Sat-Sun 10am-5pm. \$6-\$12 (Fri half price 4-9pm). Gardiner Museum, 111 Queen's Park. 416-586-8080. www.gardinermuseum.on.ca.

Why is so much contemporary art that seeks to subvert mores or even expectations tedious? For one, a purely provocative approach, especially when it comes to religion or sex, now seems a terribly dated way to be avant-garde. There's also the inevitable disengagement caused by the childishness, archness or didacticism of the taunt. (A lot of new art seems to care about critics and audiences only when it seeks to taunt.) Where are we left when we understand an artist's point, but aren't remotely shocked by it?

At least Montreal artist Léopold L. Foulem, whose "Récupération" is currently on view at the Gardiner, gives us aesthetics. If one is indifferent to his blunt, arguably superfluous statements on queer sexuality, colonialism and gender, there's the strong curiosity of his creative universe. The exhibit is divided into sections based on the type of ceramics he claims to be subverting (none of Foulem's objects, despite their titles, is usable, which is intentional): "Pères Noël," in which a kitschy Santa mould becomes a mock-lamp stand, -flower pot, -"effigy vase" etc; "Héros," in which Colonel Sanders and Blue Boys adopt various sexually and hierarchically ambiguous poses; "Récupération," involving pseudo-Mexican tureens whose surfaces bear homoerotic motifs; and "Vases & Bouquets" and "Tasses & Soucoupes," more of the same deconstruction of the eponymous objects.

There's the pretty, Pop Art aspect of the project to enjoy, and also the way it engages with its surroundings, for it is in the Gardiner's European Gallery, in the midst of the kinds of objects to which it is alluding. A comparison might be Shary Boyle's pieces in the new AGO, which are really installations, getting an important part of their meaning from context. Yet in both cases one feels the intended destabilization a bit unnecessary, probably because museums, contrary to current museumology, inherently encourage destabilization. The uselessness of Foulem's objects is moot when the historical ceramics surrounding them are also under lock and key, begging the same kind of scrutiny. In making his objects radical abstractions of themselves (to paraphrase his own words), Foulem neglects the viewer's gaze and its own, powerful provocations.

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