



FROM CANADA'S BLACKBERRY® LEADER

SAVE \$100 OFF ALL BLACKBERRY® DEVICES

UP TO AN ADDITIONAL

FIND A STORE

SWITCH TO ROGERS

EYE WEEKLY.com

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 01, 2011

HOME CITY FOOD STYLE FILM MUSIC ARTS FUN

GALLERIES



Comments Print Share Tag on Delicious Digg This

Empire of Dreams: Phenomenology of the Built Environment

MOCCA presents an Empire that just might have been built in a day

Favourite Add to Favorites Recommend: 4

BY DAVID BALZER June 30, 2010 21:06

EDITORIAL RATING:

To Aug 15. Tue-Sun 11am-6pm.
 PWYC. The Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, 952 Queen W. 416-395-0067.
www.mocca.ca.

One should know what to expect from an exhibition called "Empire of Dreams: Phenomenology of the Built Environment" — or, rather, what not to expect. The Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art's summer group show is, as usual, curated by the venue's artistic director David Liss, who likes to jumble together artwork as if he's manning a table at a flea market. Here, the muddiness of the title says it all. This is a show about... well, who knows?

Made possible by the AGO's Matthew Teitelbaum — who, in a nice piece of local comedy, got a \$20,000 award from MOCCA which he then graciously (and pretty much necessarily) returned, on the promise that it would fund a show featuring new Toronto artists — "Empire of Dreams" is not a show about Toronto. The "built environment" referred to in the title is reflected in the participating artists' exploration of, in the very loosest sense, structures.

"Phenomenology" gives the closest thing to a clue: theory-besotted architectural departments use it, following Heidegger, to refer, nebulously, to the study of how buildings are perceived. The show's pieces don't make anything clearer. Sometimes this is the fault of the artists; often it is the fault of Liss, who has not given them a sensitive, coherent context. A few artists simply fail to elicit excitement: Janet Jones (not that one!) wants to present us with the "techno-sublime," but her paintings are sterile streaks of light and angle within fields of black; Jade Rude and Bruno Billio make an incomprehensible configuration of blocks and mirrors (why they need to thank almost a dozen people for helping make this happen is beyond me); Yvonne Lammerich calls a hole in the wall, and a big, raised circle on it, art, like some conceptualist cliché from an '80s sitcom. Print-based artists Sara Graham and David Trautrimas make intriguing work, but it gets lost at MOCCA. (Funny, both are with cramped, storefront galleries, Graham with MKG 127 and Trautrimas with LE.)

Viewers will enjoy David Han's piece, an Oldsmobile Custom Cruiser station wagon that has projections of passing houses on its windows, so that, when you enter it, you feel like you are moving. (There is an audio component, subtitled on the windshield, that consists of dialogue from an episode of Father Knows Best translated into different languages, a likely play on ethnic-driving stereotypes.) An Te Liu makes an amusing network of plastic air filters (pictured, right), which looks kind of like Montréal's Habitat 67, in the gallery's entrance. Tristram Lansdowne and Dorian FitzGerald contribute great figurative work. But there really is no apparent excuse for these artists to be united in this way. It has been said many times that a group show should be greater than the sum of its parts; it follows that these parts grow dim and meaningless if their curator has not bothered to tally them properly.

» EMAIL DBALZER@EYEWEEKLY.COM; TWEET @DAVIDBALZER

Email us at: LETTERS@EYEWEEKLY.COM or send your questions to EYEWEEKLY.COM

1 Yonge Street, 2nd Floor, Toronto Ontario, M5E 1E6

User Comments

Comment Using Facebook Connect or EyeID or Comment Anonymously

Newest first

Not your best moment

me
 Aug 20, 2011 6:09 PM

David, pls leave the art to the experts. This article illustrates that you are not one of them. Thanks.
[Agree](#) | [Disagree](#) | [Offensive](#)

terrible

Critic
 Jul 30, 2010 10:55 PM

Wow, this review is lazy, bitchy, and dumb. The show had its problems but even so, try to to give a damn before you start typing.
[Agree](#) | [Disagree](#) | [Offensive](#)

Respectfully Disagree

Peter
 Jul 18, 2010 5:24 PM

(I'll preface this by saying I always enjoy David Balzer's reviews of art exhibitions...) Without making this too lengthy, I quite liked the the exhibition's concept. It's a difficult feat to curate a show of artists simply under the title of 'emerging.' To bring together a group of emerging artists therefore requires a sort of flexible concept. It could be me, but I'm noticing (and on trend with ArtStars) this rejection of academicism in Toronto's visual arts. Phenomenology happens to be a very annoyingly au courant framework in art criticism. I just finished an intense Masters program in art history, and the readings of Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger's phenomenology had me reaching for a gun and bullet. That said- it was amazing how far-reaching that irritating philosophy was in the discipline. I, for one, was happy to see a more accessible use of the idea for the MOCCA exhibition. More importantly, it was used in a correct context: perception, spatiality and architecture. While some artists were mor
[Agree](#) | [Disagree](#) | [Offensive](#)

EYEWEEKLY.COM Write a Letter to the Editor Masthead and Contacts Privacy Policy Employment Opportunities Advertise With Us Distribution

Star Media Group Sites canadianimmigrant.ca insurancehotline.com swaymag.ca

More Star Pass Sites TheStar.com HomeFinder.ca toronto.com Wheels.ca Ourfaves.com



Copyright 1991 - 2010 EYE WEEKLY Newspapers Limited. All Rights Reserved. Distribution transmission, Republication of any materials is strictly prohibited without the prior written consent of EYE WEEKLY. EYE WEEKLY is a division of Toronto Star Newspapers Limited.



TOTAL ONLINE PUBLISHING SYSTEM

Select a City

[ABBOTSFORD](#)
 83% Off at U Weigh

[ALLISTON / INNISFIL](#)
 Half Off Music Le

[AURORA / NEWMARKET](#)
 62% off a Niagara G

Toronto Listings Finder

FILM MUSIC CLUBS ARTS

Film Finder Films | Theatres

All

Any Movie Genre

Any Movie Rating

Any Movie Title

Find

Film Chart Grab this finder

FROM CANADA'S BLACKBERRY® LEADER

SAVE \$100 OFF ALL BLACKBERRY® DEVICES

UP TO AN ADDITIONAL

FIND A STORE

SWITCH TO ROGERS

Related Stories

CONTACT decision maker
 Don't know what to see at Toronto's biggest photography festival? Check out our handy CONTACT primer.

Refined crude
 In his ROM photo exhibit about the impact of oil, Edward Burtynsky once again creates haunting images of modern landscapes

The projectionist
 UK artist Lindsay Seers plays with film history in her Images Festival installation.

MORE INSIDE

- EYE WEEKLY Guides
- Fringe Festival 2009
- Pride Guide 2009
- Toronto Jazz Festival Guide 2009
- Cool Summer Guide 2009
- Bar and Patio Guide 2009
- Green Living Guide
- Love and Sex Guide
- Cheap Thrills