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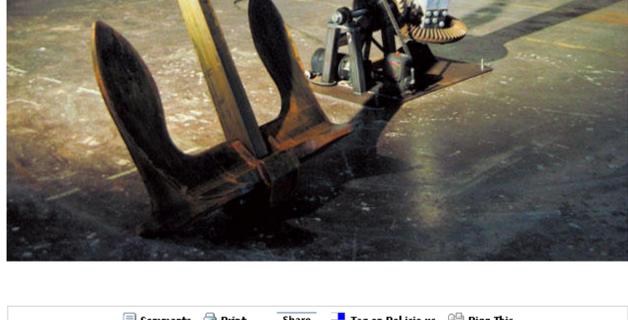
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 01, 2011

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GALLERIES



Stephen Richards Rock Bottom

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BY DAVID BALZER April 15, 2009 21:04

To Apr 26, Wed-Fri 11am-5pm;
Sat noon-4pm; Sun noon-4pm.
Closing reception Apr 23, 6-9pm.
Forty Seven, 47 Milky Way.
647-436-9109. www.forty-seven.ca.

It's always wonderful to see a new commercial art space in Toronto that's big; most enterprising local gallerists have been forced to open cramped shopfronts – which, yes, can be charming and is due to inescapable facets of the city's architecture but can really limit what's shown. (It's quite possible that small-format drawing and painting have flourished on West Queen West, as well as, uh, Williamsburg, because they hang best there.)

Forty Seven is located on Milky Way, a Parkdale alley just south of Queen between Elm Grove and Gwynne, and it is admittedly fun to go to: clearly an ex-garage or -car wash, which just finished tenure as a furniture shop, it fulfills the urban fantasies most university-educated, suburb-reared art-lovers have but usually go to other cities to find. The debut exhibit by Stephen Richards follows suit. Indeed, Forty Seven's artist-curators Dennis Lin, Jaclyn Quaresma and Jennifer McGregor begin their statement of purpose by declaring that theirs is "not a neutral space": the gallery should "affect the artwork" and "challenge the artist" (i.e., privilege site-specific work), as well as "empower the viewer."

This is largely accomplished with Richards' imposing Rock Bottom, a kinetic sculpture that is classically and impressively late-modernist. Taking up a good portion of the gallery, the sculpture – wrought entirely by Richards himself, a custom metal fabricator – consists of a rotating armature (the gears are visible at the base and are great to look at) carrying a rope, at the end of which is a rusted anchor which is dragged on the concrete floor until it almost reaches the cords that power it, at which point it is lifted up and set back down at its starting place. The concepts here are poignant if hoary and obvious: the machine is lit by dramatic floodlights (best seen, perhaps, at next week's evening closing), its shadow when lifting the anchor visible on an adjacent white wall – an illustration, of course, of the Camusian futility and splendour of this tautological, mechanized act. But it's the overall effect of being there that counts most, of taking in a monumental, austere industrial work in a space whose every facet celebrates it. No gallery in the city currently goes better with your trench coat.

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