

Review

School of Art: Dog Day Lesson Plan

MKG127, TORONTO AUG 8 TO SEP 5 2009

by BRYNE MCLAUGHLIN



Jeff Funnell Artist Anonymous 2000 Detail
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August marks the traditional dog days for the contemporary art world. That's particularly true in commercial galleries, which are either gearing up for the fall art season (i.e. are closed) or feature the ubiquitous "summer group show" roundup of gallery artists. With soaring summer temperatures and last-minute cottage-country getaways on everyone's mind, it takes something a little bit out of the ordinary to pique gallery goers' interests.

MKG127 gallery director and artist Michael Klein offers just such a respite from the late-summer lull with "School of Art," an exhibition of works by five artists who share the common link of having taught and mentored him in his undergraduate days at the University of Manitoba.



David McMillan Valentina, Chernobyl 2000

Toronto-based artist Sheila Butler is represented by a pair of new large-scale figurative paintings with skewed perspectives that pitch and balance with a psychological charge. Excerpts from U of M prof Jeff Funnell's series of drawings *Artist Anonymous* offers a cautionary autobiographical tale of the personal costs and professional pitfalls that marked the artist's early career. Another long-time U of M teacher and widely recognized photographer, David McMillan, presents a set of portrait outtakes from his ongoing documentation of the "exclusion zone" that surrounds Chernobyl. A suite of delicately rendered paintings by Robert Achtemichuk, who is currently executive director at the Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery, depicts a-day-in-the-artist's-life scenes alongside moonlit views of quiet neighbourhoods and downtown streets. Rounding out the exhibition is a quartet of videos documenting the chaotic ingenuity of Calgary-based performance artist, punk-rock drummer and 2009 winner of the Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts Rita McKeough.



Rita McKeough Long Haul 2008 Video still

Teaching is often considered a "thankless profession" but Klein's U of M retrospective makes a refreshing turn on that premise as it delivers a tight survey of works, some rarely seen in galleries, by a set of senior artists and teachers who have significantly influenced not only Klein but generations of other young Winnipeg artists. Consider, for instance, the recent wave of Canadian and international art-world attention paid to artists with connections to the school—Marcel Dzama, Guy Maddin, the Royal Art Lodge, Daniel Barrow and Sarah Anne Johnson, to name a few. The art-school teaching legacies of the University of British Columbia and the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design are well noted, and perhaps this is the beginning of the University of Manitoba's own hall of pedagogical fame. In any case, with September's school year on the horizon, it's a reminder of the parental maxim to "stay in school"—as well as that rarer proverb, "for the wise, learning never stops." (127 Ossington Ave, Toronto ON)

• www.mkg127.com



Robert Achtemichuk Moon Over Roofs 2006