

VISUAL ARTS



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Instant Coffee at MKG127
 Until Feb. 5, 127 Ossington Ave.,
 Toronto; www.mkg127.com

As dependable as their name-sake product (though far tastier), the Vancouver/Toronto collective Instant Coffee (IC) launches the 2011 art season with a madcap assortment of found object towers, gel screens, stoner-shrug messaging and enough hot, neon pink to make Katy Perry drool.

Founded over a decade ago (full disclosure: I have participated in a few IC events, but was never a member), IC is dedicated to finding the joyful in the disposable and, in keeping with the “instant” half of its name, creating art of a determinedly ephemeral nature.

At one point in the collective’s career, IC was better known for its parties (granted, highly artful parties) than its objects – but that was a misreading, on the public’s part and my own. Whatever the “art-delivery system” (a party, an exhibition, a performance), Instant Coffee has always made art as art is traditionally understood – that is to say, art you can carry home.

For their latest exhibition, IC crams the small MKG127 storefront gallery space with absurdist floor-to-ceiling sculptures. Knitted blankets shrink-wrapped into needle shapes stand beside bent loops of tubing slathered in bubblegum-hued electrical tape. A

tall, pointed cone, made from thin strips of fuchsia-coloured scrap wood and dappled with bubbling, probably toxic insulation foam – a gaudy vine trellis – counterpoints a massive, intentionally bland and unvarnished pergola sporting a crayon-toned collection of vintage, beat-up thermoses.

As if that’s not enough, the walls (assuming you can get around the sculptures to see them) carry a selection of exquisitely made prints. One set depicts, aptly, the shadow of an ornate spire. And no IC show is complete without a selection of their signature fluorescent text works (silkscreen prints covered with glowworm-bright gel sheets); each bearing classic IC defeatist slogans such as “Blame Us” or, my favourite, “Feeling So Much and Doing So Little.”

Given the abundant references to garden architecture, the flowers-on-steroids colours and the sleepy texts (“Doing So Little”), the only thing missing here is the same thing that’s missing outside – a plush, dewy green lawn.