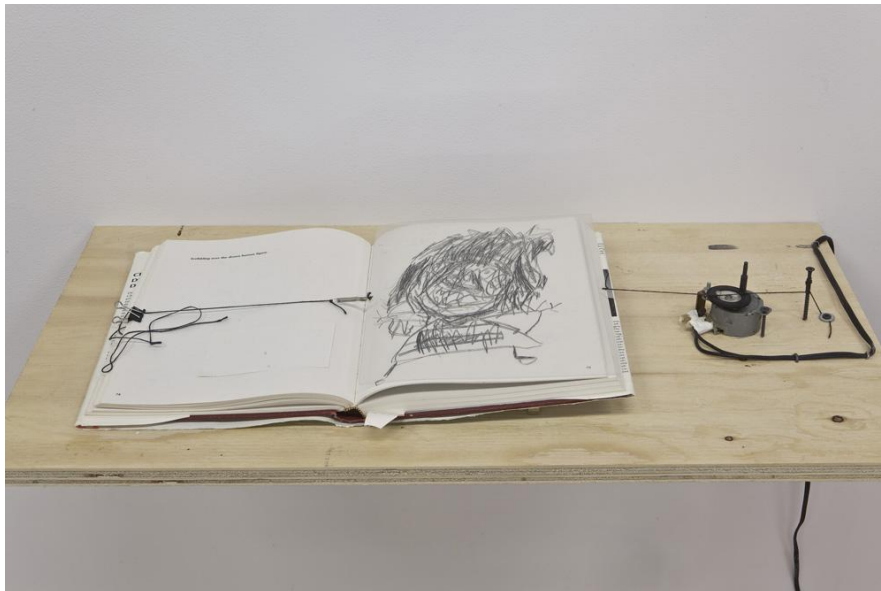


REVIEWS / DECEMBER 3, 2009

Michael Dumontier: Drawing on Minimalism, and Maturity

Michael Dumontier *Scribbling Over the Drawn Human Figure* 2009 Installation view



by Bill Clarke



In 2008, the remaining three members of Winnipeg's Royal Art Lodge quietly ended their collaboration so they could focus on their burgeoning solo careers. Marcel Dzama's dark-haired women and Neil Farber's bobble-headed children were instantly recognizable in the group's collaborative drawings and paintings, but Michael Dumontier's contributions were not as immediately apparent. This exhibition at MKG127, Dumontier's first solo in Canada, consisted of deceptively simple work that suggests he was the Lodge's minimalist, and its most optimistic and childlike soul.

The spirit of Sol LeWitt seemed to haunt several works. In *See-Saw*, Dumontier reduces a playground fixture to its most basic forms—a circle and a thin line skimming its top diagonally from the middle left edge of the panel across to its lower edge. Several small wall-mounted sculptures first appear as straightforward blocks of muted colour, but then reveal themselves to be book covers or mailing envelopes. *Untitled (Record)* consists of a stick of graphite pinned at one end against the wall; rotating the graphite like a clock hand leaves a dark circle the size of a vinyl LP on the wall. The shape of a record is also used to conjure a horizon in the two-panelled sculpture entitled *Sunrise (LP & jacket)*.

Michael Dumontier (from left to right) *Untitled (ball of string)*
2009 ! 2007 *Untitled (stack)* 2007 *Untitled (tree)* 2009 *Untitled*
2008 Installation view

Other appealing pieces in the show included *Untitled (stack)* and *Scribbling Over the Drawn Human Figure*. The former appears to be a pile of human heads, doodled hastily. In actuality, Dumontier cut the heads from old textbooks about child psychology, ones where stick figures drawn by kids were reprinted. Knowing the source material, one expects the piece to convey sadness; however, most of the faces are smiling, which is a relief—these kids just might be alright. *Scribbling* consists of a 1973 textbook, *Children's Drawings as Diagnostic Aids*, open to a spread containing a child's scratchy drawing of a woman in a dress. Over this, Dumontier has placed the same drawing on a clear plastic sheet, which a small motor moves back and forth atop the book. The piece takes viewers down two paths: is the layering of the original image meant to convey psychological disturbance, or is the figure simply dancing?

Despite the two seemingly irreconcilable sources of minimalist art and children's drawing, visual harmony was achieved through an almost entirely white palette and Dumontier's consistently spare and elegant collage techniques. Strangely enough, bucking the trend towards room-filling installations in favour of such quiet work feels like the boldest move an artist can make.

- www.mkg127.com

Michael Dumontier (clockwise from top left) *Untitled (letter)*
*2009 Examiner's cross 2008 Untitled (open book) 2009
Untitled (grass) 2009 Installation view*

Bill Clarke