

VISUAL ART

R.M. VAUGHAN
THE EXHIBITIONIST
 rvaughan@globeandmail.com

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Ken Nicol at MKG127
 Until Nov. 12, 127 Ossington Ave.,
 Toronto; mkg127.com

Ken Nicol is the Canadian art world's secret weapon.

As the fabricator of choice for many of our international talents, Nicol's work is almost constantly on view, if only to the informed. (A note of explanation: Sometimes artists hire other artists to actually construct the work in their heads - writers use editors, after all.) And now it's time to take a good look at what Nicol makes for himself.

Nicol's new show at MKG127, entitled *Hundreds of Things*, is a hilariously sweet enacting of obsessive-compulsive habits, via the intertwined acts of collecting and assembling.

Beginning with the number 100, Nicol offers the viewer such off-kilter treats as *Sculpture made with one hundred beard hairs*, which is exactly what it says it is, and looks like a wire pot scrubber about to meet its last pot. Or, *My name written one hundred times by people I've never met*, a collection culled from addressed-to-Nicol packages, which, when mounted in a single frame, looks as if it was done by someone with dissociative identity disorder - one of whose "alters" has a keen sense of humour.

My favourite work is the set of four photographed sculptures made from Pringles chips - next time you look at a tube, you'll notice that the label advertises "100 chips in every can" - sculptures that layer the iconic, ovate chip shape vertically then horizontally, thus making a potato product weave, tuber macramé. The sculptures come in Regular, Sour Cream & Onion, Salt & Vinegar and Barbecue colours/flavours; a selection of hues/titles that, oddly, does not combine to equal 100 letters.

Also included are number games played out in different coloured inks, on grid paper, a metal sculpture that weighs - well, you can guess - and a tiny wall-mounted sculpture made from 100 corners cut off 100 exhibition invitations - corners cut to create a 100-degree angle between the vertical and the horizontal sides of the invite's rectangle.

Yes, this is a very clever show, but not obnoxiously clever. The 's work is infused with playfulness, and the accompanying information explains what each piece is made of, and/or how it was constructed. Usually this sort of high-concept assemblage is infused with a snotty lack of concern for viewer comprehension, but Nicol gives cold conceptual art a warm bear hug, and a nutty, chatty personality.

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