

Artist Sky Glabush dismantles his hyperreal brand

In another Toronto show, Hanna Hur explores an obsession with the body

MURRAY WHYTE
VISUAL ART CRITIC

Sky Glabush is all over the place lately, in a good way. The London, Ont.-based painter spent a good many years crafting large, hyperreal canvases of forlorn scenes — denuded trees, low-slung bungalows heaped in snow, all adding up to an isolating sense of nowhere — but in recent years appears to have devoted himself to dismantling that notion of his personal brand.

In 2011, Glabush showed works at MKG127 that included angular, abstract watercolour paintings, a jagged wooden sculpture and a dusty black canvas that featured gravel embedded in a slick of oil paint.

Now, he continues his material enthusiasm with *Display*, a show of mostly collage pieces of varying sizes that quietly reveal the inspired jumping-off point for his recent about-face.

Glabush explains that the show started as a found image of a display booth at the CNE in 1963 for the Baha'i faith, which his father turned to while Glabush was a child in Saskatchewan in the 1970s.

The centrepiece of the show is a dizzyingly precise graphite drawing of that image, in which Glabush seems to reprise his previous practice of photorealistic rendering, and he's not gotten rusty: the picture is virtuosically intense in its precision. Over it, he lays a tight grid like a screen, casting its hyperreality in a subtle, gauzy haze.

All on its own, it has a hypnotic presence, but it's also jarring in its complete lack of formal relationship to the pieces around it. Or is it? Nearby, Glabush presents works that are rough, minimal and seem vaguely



TONI HAFKENSCHIED

Sky Glabush's *Display* began with a 1963 image of a CNE display booth.

Rauschenbergian in their seductive material-and-image confusions: a flat grey painting overlaid with a large swatch of window screen; small pieces of cobbled-together ephemera (bits of note paper, an indistinct clip of a newspaper photo) hang adjacent. Less successful, but points for pushing hard against type, is a series of rough ceramic pots lined up tidily in the gallery's entry.

Together, they sketch a dubious sense of a decentred, fragmented world view that runs counter to the certainty of faith, which, I think, is the point of the Baha'i booth filtered through the visual equivalent of doubt. This is no pot shot, if you'll pardon the pun: Glabush's father turned to the faith in a hippy-utopian moment when he was a child, and the artist's wrestle with materials beyond the painted surface are at once highly formal and deeply personal. Glabush makes art for the best reasons: to make sense of the world, both in full and his own. This, of course, is an exercise in futility and his foregrounded doubt — in material representation of ideas, the personal and universal, and craft (how else to explain a sudden turn to pot-

tery?) — may well be his most fertile ground yet.

At Daniel Faria, Hanna Hur's *Mirage!* (exclamation mark hers, not mine) is its own little paradox in several ways. The title's exuberant declaration, of something fleeting and deceptive, suggests something playful here, a fooled-you gesture that holds true at first glance.

Hanna Hur made most of these works while recovering from a lingering, serious illness; her obsession with bodies accounts for the uncertain haze

Slight, forlorn string installations hang in the space, helping give shape and frame to the ethereal small works that hang throughout: figure drawings, mostly, rendered in pale blues and washed in a milky white that gives them an oblique, barely there presence. Curling lines form spare figures: bodies in repose, in harmony or at odds. They are unfinished in that high modern way — think of Matisse's dancing figures, maybe — a collection of dynamic marks that more suggest than make



Hanna Hur's *Moves* on display now.

a whole.

The modernist nod seems highly ordered, both homage and critique. If you read, though, you learn that Hur made most of these works while convalescing from a lingering, serious illness; her obsession with bodies, her own and in general, function and malfunction, seems to account for the uncertain haze.

A set of three works here eschew bodily form for apparent function. Erratic and abstract in the same subtle tones, the works appear to mutate and seethe in front of your eyes. They're a knockout of muted chaos and frustration, a quiet surrender to forces beyond our control. She calls them *It's a Jungle in Here* — giving names, for Hur, is important — and they give the graceful forms surrounding them a different, more ominous life. Outwardly, with the right discipline, a body's motion and form can be controlled and beget beauty, as through art. Under the surface, chaos reigns.

Sky Glabush: Display at MKG127 and *Hanna Hur: Mirage!* at Daniel Faria Gallery continue to April 26. Glabush will speak with Robert Enright on April 12 at 4:30 p.m. at the gallery.