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TERENCE DICK

NOEL MIDDLETON AT NARWHAL CONTEMPORARY | MICHAEL DUMONTIER AT MKG127

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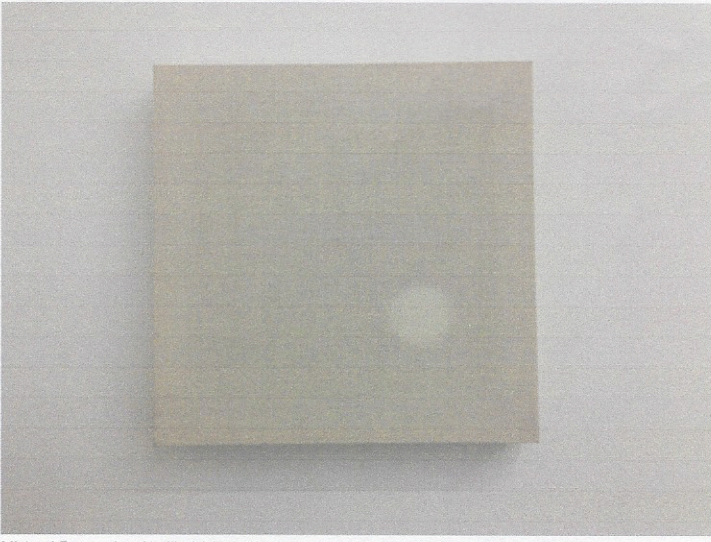
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Back in his punk rock days playing with the Birthday Party, Nick Cave sang, "Junk sculpture turning back to junk" as a lament to and/or celebration of entropy. However, another way to think of it is as an earlier, and less refined, version of Martin Creed's *Work No. 232, the whole world + the work = the whole world*, which is to say, art appears in the world just as it disappears from it, not by being created *sui generis*, but by being assembled from what's already there. This recycling, whether in the form of junk sculpture, readymade, assemblage, or your standard painting/photo/bust, forgoes transcendence for a temporarily discrete immanence that, sooner or later, falls back into the indiscernible chaos and/or cosmos.



Noel Middleton, *Trade II*, 2014, steel, setting compounds

The upcycled remains of **Narwhal Contemporary's** previous inhabitants serve as material and inspiration for **Noel Middleton's** current occupation of that space. Plaster-cast debris, electrical piping, and assorted remnants from the demolition that carved out a white space to be filled with art have been completely blanched in knowing reference to the clichéd (and somewhat inaccurate) remains of classical civilization, but updated through a surreal aesthetic (triggered any time I see a disembodied nose) and the aforesaid junk sculptors who draw poetry out of the mundane and overlooked. There's an added layer of logic here with a trio of busts representing the contractor's holy trinity – plasterer, plumber, and electrician – ensconced amid piecemeal columns that might have been minimalist had they not been so abject. In our ruins, just as in our junk, we are witness to our discarded dreams and failed ideals. What remains is a wonderful, though unresolved, flux (see Middleton's indiscriminate pile of casting fragments) and moments of beautiful serendipity (see the moulds of fruit-packing trays that absorb a tinge of purple fibre).



Michael Dumontier, *Untitled (clock 02)*, 2014, wood, linen, acrylic, clock movement

Whereas Middleton is a renovator, **Michael Dumontier** is a carpenter, and a specialised one at that, honing in on edges and trim. He sticks to the vertical for all his works currently on view at **MKG127**, and, when seen from a distance or only as jpegs, they can resemble carefully graphed wall drawings. However, a thin strip of shadow pushes them out into the world to give them the barest whiff of a third dimension and send them into an entirely different aesthetic category altogether. Some, like his nail silhouettes or the keyhole floating free of any visible door lock, are visual gags that risk being belittled due to their modest size and even more modest temperament. Others, like the false doorway illusion in painted steel and string (with carefully placed knot) or the triangulated chairs balanced against each other with a pleasing symmetry, play with perception like a radically reduced M.C. Escher. It's only when the slight of hand softens to include a tinge of romance – as in Dumontier's deceptively simple faint painting of a moon that reveals itself to move through its rotation in a ghostly fashion just underneath the translucent linen that serves as the surface but also the screen for the work. In this instance, instead of rising off the wall, the art completes the far more conventional trick of punching a hole through it to give the illusion of a window to another place. This representational space travel takes seemingly flat work a smidgen into the third dimension. When it comes out into the gallery, it's curious. When it goes in to the netherworld, it's mysterious. You choose which one you prefer.

Narwhal Contemporary: <http://narwhalcontemporary.com/>

Noel Middleton: Order of Operations continues until February 7.

MKG127: <http://www.mkg127.com/>

Michael Dumontier: Shape Notes continues until February 7.

Terence Dick is a freelance writer living in Toronto. His art criticism has appeared in Canadian Art, BorderCrossings, Prefix Photo, Camera Austria, Fuse, Mix, C Magazine, Azure, and The Globe and Mail. He is the editor of Akimblog. You can follow his quickie reviews and art news announcements on Twitter [@TerenceDick](https://twitter.com/TerenceDick).

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