

## VISUAL ARTS

## Pink towers, axe sculptures: the hot shows



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There's something adorably old-media about a year-end review; very Maclean's collector's edition, very Rex Murphy.

The conceits of chronology seem hardly viable in the new-media age. Technology, with our addicted participation, has defeated time-based readings of art and culture – if you don't believe me, see how quickly you can find your childhood favourites online (*The Donny and Marie 1978 Christmas Show*, anyone?).

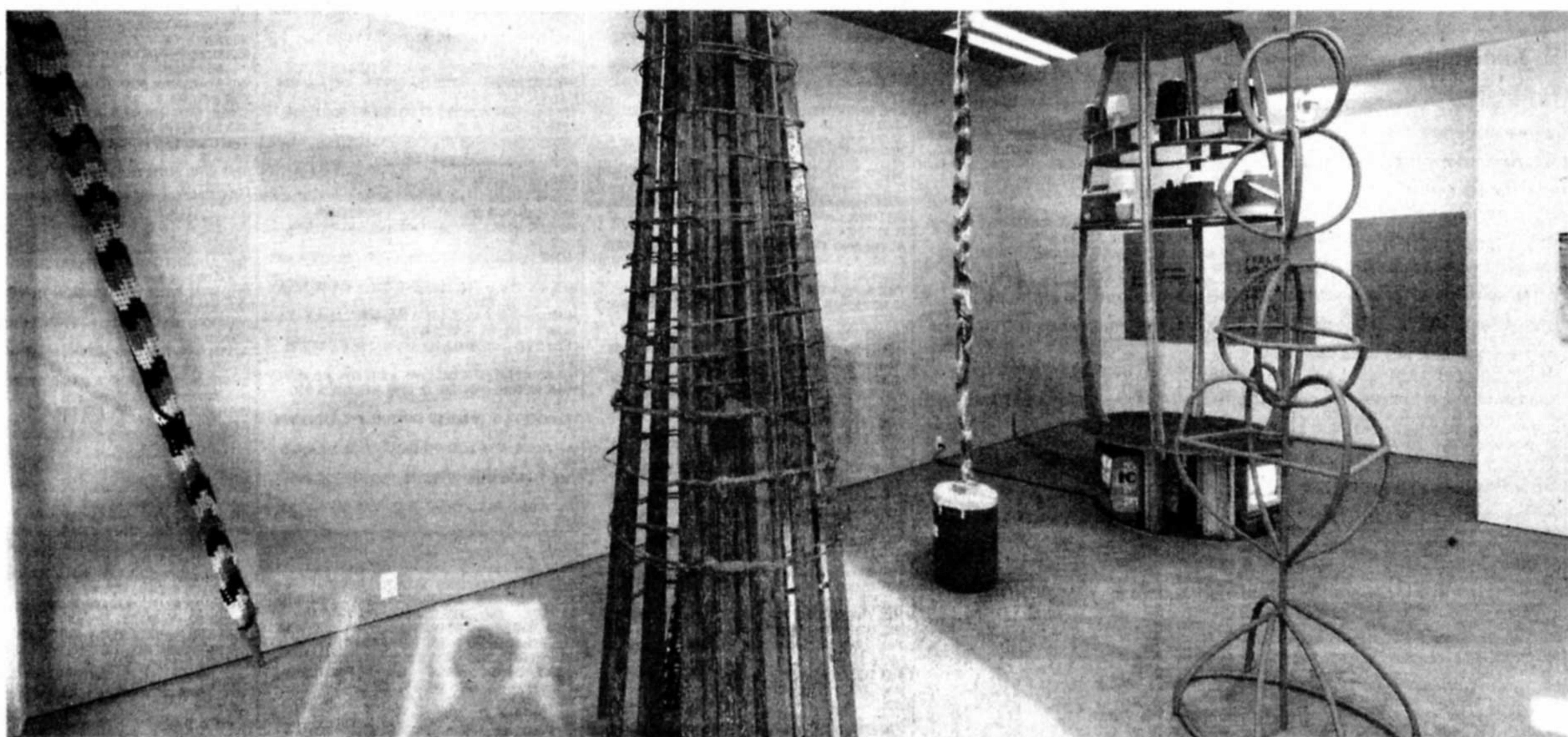
But what the holly. Allow me, then, to flick on my phonograph, stir the coal fire, pour myself a Bosom Caresser (with egg yolk and grenadine, naturally), and recite my fondest memories of the year in art, 2011. Where are my slippers?

**Instant Coffee, There is No Romance in Taking a Risk**  
 MKG127, Toronto

The year started off with a hot pink ka-boom with this layered, nutty and abundantly inventive assembly of works by Instant Coffee (IC), a Toronto-Vancouver collective. Loosely founded on studies of L.A.'s famous Watts Towers, IC's show offered a near-replica of one of the towers, in bubblegum pink, and a collection of their signature life-message silk-screen prints – sly, goofily abject phrases that would be at home on any slouching nerd's T-shirt. How about a sequel? The CN Tower's right here.

**Louise Noguchi, Marker**  
 Birch Libralato, Toronto

Part documentary, part video art spectacle, Noguchi's *Marker*, projected large on the Birch Libralato wall, quietly, and without



Vancouver-Toronto collective Instant Coffee created an inventive show based on studies of L.A.'s famous Watts Towers. Could the CN Tower be next?

## NEW SHOWS

**That Was Now**  
**at the Drake Hotel**  
 Until Feb. 6, 1150 Queen St. W., Toronto

If you're going to spend your holidays face-down drunk in swanky bars, might as well surround yourself with quality visuals. The show features Diana Thorneycroft's hilarious, cranky Canadiana, Yuval Pudik's hallucinatory post-Pop drawings and Sergei Sviatchenko gleeful reworkings of Tarkovsky film stills.

**Veiled at the Textile Museum of Canada**  
 Until Feb. 12, 55 Centre Ave.

Given the culture panic over what Muslim women choose, or choose not, to wear over their faces, this playful exhibition exploring veils as signifiers is well timed. Grace Ndiritu's recasting of the "veil dance" is especially sharp.

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judgment, inspected, then produced new meanings from, two profoundly resonant spaces: a site dedicated to an early Canadian missionary (who went looking for a fight and got one), and an unapologetically patriotic memorial to Japan's Second World War dead. In Noguchi's video, neither space is easily unpacked – but both look oddly lovely, in their own haunted way. Beauty and horror, pals to the end.

**John Marriott, New and Selected Works**  
 Optica Centre for Contemporary Art, Montreal

Long overdue, this giddy assortment of Marriott's sculptures, multiples, installations and videos concisely scratched the surface of 15-plus years of Marriott's high-grade, big-brained artistic output. Toronto-based Marriott will never be a mass media phenomenon because his work, while always full of fun, is too considered and not easily branded. But he could become a national treasure, if we treat him right. Marriott's core gesture –

taking the snore-inducing art-about-art game and turning it on its didactic head – reveals just how academic conceptualism has become. Might we have this show in Marriott's home town, please?

**Lucy Tasseor Tutsweetok**  
 Tannenbaum Sculpture Atrium, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto

The first thing you see are rocks, soft grey rocks. Then, you take a good, long, nose-to-the-glass look, and you see faces; melting, shifting, hiding and giggling. And then you breathe in again. The fact that Tutsweetok's fluid steatite/soapstone sculptures, which remain at the AGO till April, were made with an axe only makes them the more remarkable. If, like me, you can barely cut paper with scissors, you recognize that Tutsweetok's practice operates outside normal understandings of the word "skill" – and, more important, that the aim of the sculptures (well, this is my take), to depict a mystical understanding of humanity as an interconnected bio-entity, not a mass assortment of untethered indi-

viduals, could perhaps only be conveyed via means that were once (mis)read as primitive and untutored. Contemporary culture emphasizes privilege and speciality at the expense of older (but proven) concepts of shared energies, community power – and dare I say love.

**Dorian FitzGerald, Honi Soit Qui Mal Y Pense**  
 Clint Roenisch Gallery, Toronto

The last exhibition of new works I saw in 2011 also happened to be one of the best. FitzGerald's technique – a high-tech version of Paint-By-Number, wherein the image is delineated with clear caulking and the segments pour-filled with paint – is mesmerizing and engulfing. Hyper-real from even a few feet away, the paintings self-deconstruct into bubbling amoeboid shapes up close – which is exactly as alarming as it sounds. And FitzGerald's choices in subject matter – objects and spaces loaded with dark histories – are conversation starters, if not donnybrook provokers. Herculean is the new pretty.