

ARTS + REVIEWS

WHO'S AFRAID OF A FEW WINDOWS?

Joy Walker's massive installation looks inside the Dunlop Art Gallery — and beyond BY ALEX J MACPHERSON

Joy Walker's massive installation on the Dunlop Art Gallery's east-facing windows hints at the contents of the gallery's current exhibition, *Who's Afraid of Purple, Orange and Green?* Like many of the female artists whose work is on display inside the gallery, Walker appears to be riffing on the male-centric legacy of the mid-century modernist movement. "Untitled," which consists of dozens of long vinyl strips, both echoes and disrupts the gallery's rigid modernist façade, as well as the movement's weighty past. However, Walker prefers to think of her work in broader terms.


"I'm using these formal qualities, straight lines, and then introducing this element of chance," the Toronto artist says. "That's been a big theme in my work over the last few years." The installation appears to be in motion, its straight lines warped by some unseen force. It is both orderly and chaotic, rigid and malleable. "For a long time I worked with the grid in a strict minimalist way," she continues. "But then I started to play with it a little bit, and get a little bit looser. ["Untitled"] has a post-minimalist thing going on, when I'm letting the thing do something else, rather than leave it static."

"Untitled" can be read as a subversion of mid-century modern aesthetics and ideas. But it also reflects a much deeper understanding of how repetitive patterns have been used in artwork over the last several

centuries. “It just so happens I studied textile design, which leads to repeating patterns,” Walker says. “Grid systems have been seen since ancient times. In weaving, for example, which is one of the oldest forms, and in the lacing of yarns.” In other words, she is playing with a history that reaches far beyond the middle of the twentieth century.

At the same time, “Untitled” is also rooted in a much more specific history. Unlike many works of art, which are designed to operate within a carefully controlled gallery space, public installations must interact with a vibrant and generally unpredictable environment — in this case, Regina’s downtown core. “I didn’t want to have an autonomous work of art,” Walker says. “For me, it was really important that [the installation] had a relation to the windows, to the building, as well as to across the street.”

This operates on several levels. First, “Untitled” slices the reflected streetscape into thin strips that mirror the work itself, as well as offering viewers a new way of seeing Victoria Park. Second, the movement of the sun across the sky casts an ever-changing pattern of shadows across the building’s lobby; it is a moving, shifting negative of Walker’s original installation. Third, the vertical lines in the work itself echo the blinds in windows up and down the street. This also creates a dialogue with “Pavilion of the Blind,” a kinetic painting by Jennifer Marman and Daniel Borins that dominates *Who’s Afraid Of Purple, Orange and Green?*

Like the works in *Who’s Afraid of Purple, Orange and Green?* “Untitled” is rooted in history and illustrative of the present. With just a few strips of vinyl, Walker created an installation that challenges the legacy of the mid-century modernist art, explores our fascination with patterns and shapes, and re-energizes the world in which it exists. “I’m trying to engage everything around it, and manipulate it with the lines, break it up,” Walker says. “In a way, all these things came together at the same time. Thinking about all those possibilities, it really excited me to have that opportunity.” 

Joy Walker: Untitled