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CSA Space: Small is good

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CSA SPACE SMALL IS GOOD

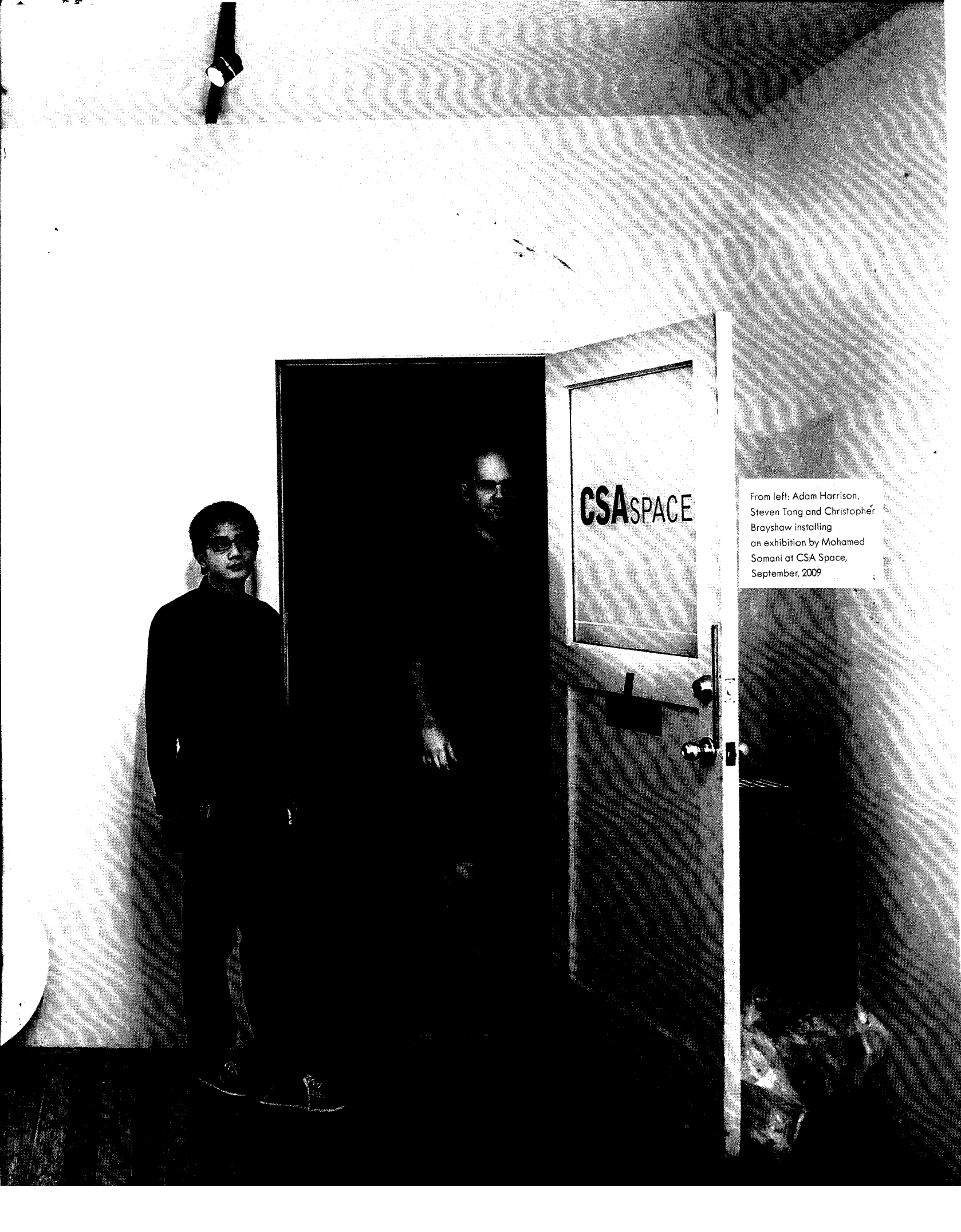
BY GABRIELLE MOSER
PHOTO HUBERT KANG

VANCOUVER In a city whose downtown is overrun with pristine minimalist architecture and glass-box condos, Vancouver's CSA Space gallery offers a welcome reprieve of hardwood floors, solid drywall and industrial lighting. It also presents some of the city's most innovative visual-arts programming. Started in 2004 by Christopher Brayshaw, Steven Tong and Adam Harrison, CSA is not a place you stumble across. To visit it, you get a key from Pulpfiction Books—Brayshaw's indie bookstore in Mount Pleasant—and go up a long flight of stairs to an intimate one-room gallery. In the last year alone CSA has played host to works by an impressive roster of Canadian artists, including Ian Wallace, Alex Morrison and Isabelle Pauwels.

Meeting with the three co-directors at a bar across from the gallery, it is hard not to share in their enthusiasm for what they do as they joke, tease and talk on top of one another. "We came up with a very simple curatorial thesis when we started CSA," Brayshaw explains. "We show works that are representative of the curators' own aesthetic judgment." Unable to find any existing gallery model that seemed right for what they wanted to do, Brayshaw, Tong and Harrison created CSA Space out of their own pockets, which allows them and their artists carte blanche. Harrison adds, "Part of the reason we've tried to remain as independent as possible is to have the freedom to work with anyone we're excited about. And that ranges from exhibitions where it's the artist's first show to established artists who have commercial representation." Curating singly or together, the trio has created a remarkable breadth of programming, from Derek Brunen's chaotic installation of 150,000 red "sold" stickers on the walls to Ian Wallace's spare textual collages and Mohamed Somani's colour-saturated paintings and drawings.

The diversity is a product of the co-directors' flexible working relationship, which is about a combination of mutual respect, serious engagement with the artwork and a healthy level of disagreement. It is also partly due to the unique characteristics (some might say limitations) of the small space: "There's something about the scale that allows people to focus on one particular project or idea that might not be possible in another venue," says Tong. The formula has earned CSA Space a well-deserved excellent reputation and there is no plan to expand or change anytime soon. Given how rapidly the rest of the city's cultural landscape is transforming, CSA's sustainable, serious and committed focus might be its most radical contribution to Vancouver. ■





CSASPACE

From left: Adam Harrison,
Steven Tong and Christopher
Brayshaw installing
an exhibition by Mohamed
Somani at CSA Space,
September, 2009