



Faculty of Art

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Glitter Train [Review of Reid Diamond. Tableau Vivant & Phoebe Street Project. Toronto]

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Reid Diamond
Transformer 1999
 HO scale model train, vinyl
 lettering, wood 1.2 m diameter
 Photo Peter MacCallum
 Courtesy Tableau Vivant Gallery

Reid Diamond ◀◀

Glitter Train

Reid Diamond has been a fixture in Toronto's art and music scenes for more than fifteen years. Yet, like many of the generation of "permanently emerging" artists apparently too young to be established and too old to be discovered, his artwork remains overlooked. A recent two-gallery exhibition at Tableau Vivant and Phoebe Street Project in Toronto went some distance toward correcting this.

The works at both locations were language-based—mini-narratives shorter than the shortest short story, with an easy conversational feel. In every case, Diamond turns language into an object. At Phoebe Street, *Glitch* (1998) tells the story of a band on tour that heads out from Brandon, Manitoba, then turns west into a refracting sun that blinds them. The text, on three walls, looks gorgeous in silver glitter on long bands of blue glitter. The bright sparkle of the text and blue bands makes the story almost impossible to read when the gallery's lights strike it head on—the piece visually mimics what it tells in words.

It is characteristic of these works that something physical in the work acts out what the words relate. *Glimmer* (1998), for example, a rough, mordant piece, tells of a grave in Esterhazy, Saskatchewan, that glowed at twilight—it's done in glow-in-the-dark paint. I thought that this tactic was nothing more than making literal something in the text, but now it strikes me more as being an attempt to demonstrate something consequential

that would get lost in the narrative-like structure that language imposes. Visual events in the space of the gallery play out against past events which, because they are past, can only be presented in language. The freshness in Diamond's works rests not in a new style or form, but rather something like a moment of perception; the works break through a language in which an earlier transitory perception had been stored. There is something witty here: a happy playing with a form—language—which can't help but impose its particular order on the world.

At Tableau Vivant, *Transformer* (1999) is a pun on the linear flow of language. Two stories, almost limericks, appear on a model train that circles the gallery above head height: one is printed on the outside of the train, the other on the inside. In one story, Reid is mistaken for the aging punker Art Bergman; in the other, he's informed that he's not Art Bergman. Each undoes the other, and to parody this, the order of words flowing by is like a palindrome that can be read forwards or backwards. Reading, too, is parodied by being operated by the model train. You don't scan the text; it passes by under its own power. Obviously, the piece is another example of art about art—just the sort of embedded pun on which both shows trade.

The surfaces of glitter sparkle like a Diamond. Every work wants you to Reid it. ■

by ANDY PATTON