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Within a Budding Grove Clint Roenisch Gallery, Toronto

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these paintings we can have a genuine experience that brings us close to something that was as important for the Greeks as it should be for us today. Walker's paintings remind us that beauty is a very necessary part of human experience. **RANDALL ANDERSON**

Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset

THE POWER PLANT, TORONTO

Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset typically make site-specific work that discusses the mechanisms of the gallery. Their recent installation "The Welfare Show" was exhibited in Austria, Norway, Britain and, last spring, at Toronto's Power Plant. In it, they attempt a critical dialogue on the welfare state. While the exhibition fails to convincingly tackle this huge and elusive system, the

MICHAEL ELMGREEN

and INGAR DRAGSET

Modern Moses 2005

Wax dummy, ATM

PHOTO RAFAEL GOLDCHAIN



work is relevant to the systems of art institutions.

Upon entering the gallery, the viewer is greeted by a sculptural installation that occupies a small constructed nook. Two small stainless-steel baggage carousels with black rubber surfaces have been stacked and studded with bright flashing lights. The two-tiered structure functions as a stage and is equipped with a stripper pole. Alongside are a bucket and a mop. The installation is about the mechanisms of display, and also carries the implications of exploitive labour and classically sexist roles. Its iconographic presence in the recess signals the artists' ongoing dialogue about placement and interaction more than any particular concern about social welfare.

A connecting installation is entered by portholed doors. It duplicates a hospital hallway, complete with gurneys and a wax-figure patient lying on one of them. The exaggerated brightness of the hallway and its eerie, intruded-upon silence hasten one's exit. Through another set of swinging doors is another stage set, this time a hospital waiting room. It opens at one corner onto the gallery's large exhibition space. At one end is a full-scale baggage carousel bearing a lone black bag, endlessly turning. Another wax figure, this time a baby in a bassinet, lies abandoned at the foot of an ATM that has been installed in one wall. On another wall a broken set of stairs rises to a door that reads "Administration." All of the works operate separately as illustrations of the theme of welfare.

The most successful work is a site-specific outdoor intervention. The gallery's smokestack, visible to traffic on the nearby Gardiner Expressway, typically reads "The Power Plant." For their show, however, Elmgreen and Dragset have changed the words to read "The Powerless." It is a simple and intriguing intervention. One can read it as a reference to the building's former function as an industrial heating plant. Now, however, it is connected to a different kind of power—philanthropy. Inside, at the base of the smokestack, numerous tiny brass plaques honour the gallery's supporting patrons. The artists may have intended this work as a critique of privatization in the postmodern welfare state; however, it most effectively reads as a comment on the privileged isolation of artists and art institutions. **SHELLY RAHME**

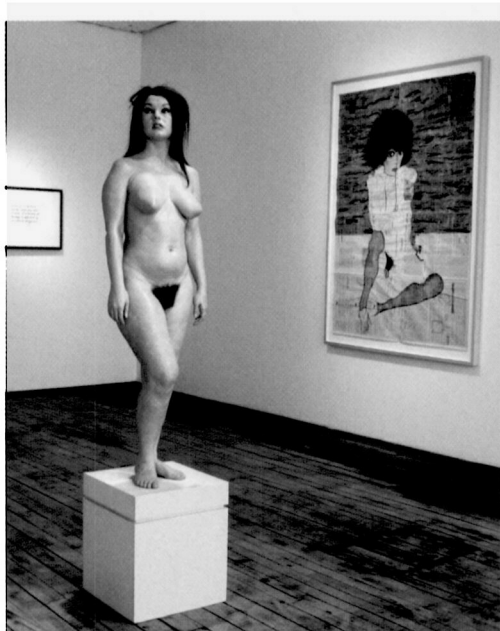
Within a Budding Grove

CLINT ROENISCH GALLERY, TORONTO

Despite its lyricism, the phrase "Within a Budding Grove" (which comes courtesy of the celebrated Proust translator C. K. Scott Moncrieff) is a startlingly prudish rendering of *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, Proust's title for volume two of *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Perhaps Clint Roenisch translates Proust better than Scott Moncrieff does: by using his line as this show's title, he highlights the sex that Scott Moncrieff underplays.

Some of this sex is prurient—the grappling that rakes imagine while contemplating lightly clad pubescent breasts (Proust's "young girls in flower"). Thus Egon Schiele's familiar sexual angst is present here via appropriation in Gabriel Vormstein's *Tiny*

Installation view of (left to right) Marcel van Eeden's *Untitled* (n.d.), Evan Penny's *Ali* (1984) and Gabriel Vormstein's *Tiny Feet* (2004) in the exhibition "Within a Budding Grove"



Feet (2004). The troping of male frustration as universal existential quandary hasn't convinced anyone for decades (*Last Tango in Paris* looks infantile now); however, by redoing Schiele's nude on pages from a German newspaper, Vormstein balances Schiele's iconic combination of mastery and lechery against the browning newsprint's desanctification of the image, bringing its sexuality into our everyday world (as does Massimo Guerrera's drawing of a threesome whose participants merge into each other).

In other words, everyone can get laid, despite our myriad imperfections. Or, as Evan Penny's *Ali* (1984) argues, because of them. Unashamed of her

THE EXHIBITION USES SEXUALITY'S UNIVERSALITY TO TIE US TO NATURE

dimpled, unpolished nakedness, Penny's hyperrealist sculpture parades everything fashionistas eschew. She is anti-sexy, and thus compellingly—because believably—sexual. It's easy to imagine her filling her lover with desire.

Of course, animals and plants get laid too, in their way, and here Scott Moncrieff's use of "budding" is right. Beauty and innocence aside, flowers are plants' genitalia (as a wonderful botany chart, included through happenstance, demonstrates). At this point, the exhibition uses sexuality's near-universality to suture us into the nature that we long to escape. The exhausted woman in Peter von Tiesenhausen's *Burden* (2005) merges into her surroundings, while in this context Spring Hurlbut's subtle piece from her *Oology* series (1994–95), featuring an egg inserted into a page illustrating types of eggs, empha-

sizes that our sexuality confirms our animal character. Extending this line of thought, Marcel van Eeden's fragment of a science book's description of our cells and Jack Burman's excruciating photograph of a hydrocephalic baby's preserved head position us as biological specimens.

Neither forcing an issue nor illustrating a theory (though those can be good, too), "Within a Budding Grove" assembles a range of discussions (literary, artistic, scientific, philosophical) around the conditions of our existence, with the show's witty eclecticism leavening its thematic weight. **CHARLES REEVE**

Peter Flemming KOFFLER GALLERY, TORONTO

Humans and machines have coexisted for centuries now, fostering the illusion that we are separate species. Fascination with the mechanical has caused humans to generate a machine metaphor that is often applied to society as a way of promoting efficiency and interpreting reality. It is possibly the greatest mistake we have made.

Peter Flemming's exhibition at the Koffler Gallery taps into the absurdity of humans and machines imitating each other. The machines ply at pointless tasks, yet do their duty with a serene beauty. Paradoxically, while machines are usually designed to aid humans in boring or difficult tasks, these works harness the attendant's energies to ensure their continued expression.

Manual, the more complicated piece, consists of a mobile beam fixed low in the centre of one room with a large wheel at its extremity. Motors drive the beam in laborious circles while a hopper containing sand deposits its load at intervals in an ever-widening area. When the cycle is complete, a switch is thrown and the beam changes direction. This circuit activates a broom that sweeps the piles of sand into an elegant spiral, gradually moving it to the centre. When the cycle finishes, the attendant has to reload the sand into the hopper.

A similar mesmerizing process is evident in *Canoe*, a vessel filled with water and constructed out of aluminum, clear plastic and a wooden paddle. A motor drives a mechanized arm that dips the paddle into the water and pulls a wheeled mechanical structure across the expanse until a switch flips and it traverses in the opposite direction. Reflections off the water are cast on the walls. A video camera attached to the structure transmits an image of the paddle paddling to the monitor at the front desk.

Both activities could be performed with more efficiency by human hands. The machines are not utilitarian then, but rather have taken on an animus. They express personality through their construction and graceful movement. They evoke human insanities, like perpetually cleaning the floor or moving aimlessly back and forth, and there is a distinct tragicomic element to this exhibition, which asks profound questions with farcical methods. The machine structure of society suppresses individuality, so Flemming elicits the spectre of machines becoming unique individuals, supplanting us. We wait, listening