



Faculty of Liberal Arts & Sciences

2001

## Blue Republic. Monochromes. Pekao Gallery. Toronto

Tuer, Dot

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been placed alongside a stuffed rabbit intended as a taxidermied specimen. Hurlbut forces us to understand both elements as equal, and thus questions the role of realism in presenting the museum collection. In this equivalency, the objects reside in a space where posturing is not possible. At times, this dialogue presents an impossible taxonomy, as in the display of a headless monkey skeleton beside a tiny skull. The suggestion is that these objects go together, yet the impossibility is apparent.

While the objects and specimens speak of the cycles of life, the installation is neither jarring nor disruptive. Rather, it encourages contemplation and reflection, allowing the individual viewer to fill the space with his or her own voice. The objects are presented in a way that denies any knowledge of their chronology or status. By mixing time periods—ancient, historic and contemporary—the installation brings the viewer into a timeless reverie. Like the museum, it creates a final resting place for objects and artifacts made immortal by their simple inclusion in a public collection.

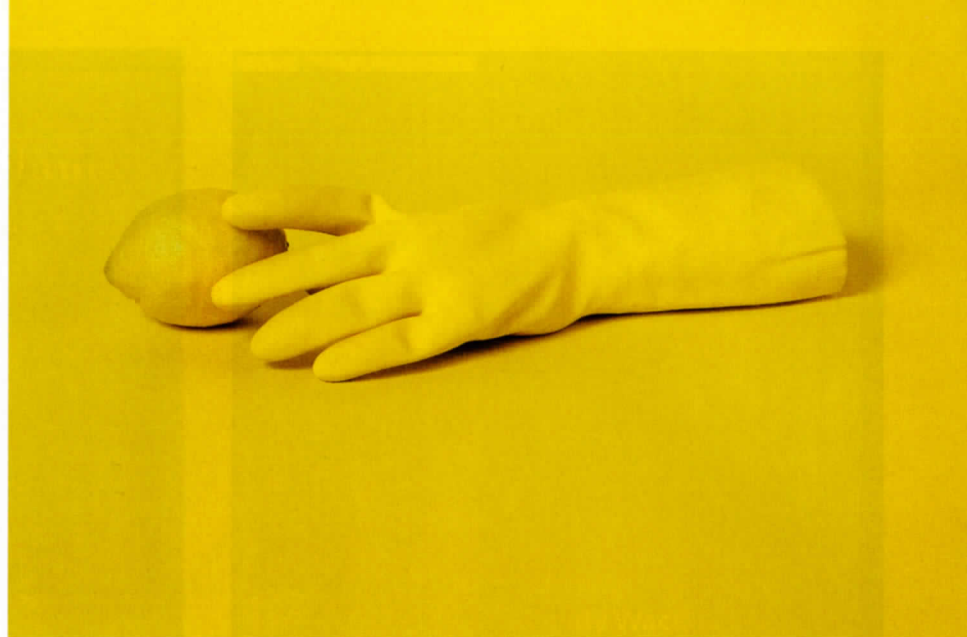
At the entry of the gallery a text reads, “*All things are equal in repose./Toutes choses devenant égales dans le repos.*” Ultimately, Hurlbut’s installation is a meditation on what comes before that repose—the fragility of life and an awareness of mortality.

SARAH NIND

## Blue Republic

Among the galleries that have sprung up off the beaten track of Queen Street and Yorkville in the last few years, Peka Gallery is one of Toronto’s better-kept secrets. Located on Bloor Street, near the Dundas West subway station, it is a cavernous, below-street-level space that has hosted a number of interesting shows by local and international artists.

Take the recent exhibition “Monochromes” by Blue Republic, a two-artist collective of Radoslaw



BLUE REPUBLIC *Stolen Colours* (detail) 1998–99 Cibachrome print, painted wall, readymade Dimensions variable

Kudliński and Anna Passakas. Working here in photography and sculpture, minimalist in form and conceptualist in their approach, Blue Republic has orchestrated a finely tuned series of works that take everyday objects, vibrant colours and the primacy of physical labour to unconventional conclusions. The works are at once familiar and surprising—a wooden table reduced to a fine pulverized dust spreading across the gallery floor, Cibachrome images of an electrical cord emerging from a pile of sugar, two plastic handles crowning a pile of flour.

In this exhibition, labour, as a repetitive life-force, unites the mundane and the mythic. *Planet Handle* (2001) is a small plastic readymade attached to the floor that inverts Atlas’s monumental task of resting the world on his shoulders, obscuring the heroic origins of labour by inviting us to lift up the earth beneath us. In *Limited Activities* (2000–2001), a broom handle protrudes from a slit in a wooden box. Like Sisyphus, in his never-ending labour rolling a massive rock up a hill in Hades, viewers can use the broom to sweep plaster debris back and forth inside the box. Another work, *Constellation Auschwitz* (2001), suggests a more sinister and political reading. On one of the walls, a sprinkling of tiny blue dots maps the locations of the Nazi labour camps that were scattered throughout Europe during the Second World War. Ephemeral rather than overt

markers of a repressive history, these tiny stars allude to the chaining of labour to a coercive system of production.

While each work is an individual piece, their arrangement creates a larger installation of correspondences and readings. In the rectangular gallery, one long wall has been painted bright yellow; on the opposite wall, *Constellation Auschwitz* provides a delicate blue contrast. The canary-coloured wall has an unpainted white strip at one end, demarcated by paint cans and a roller, as if the artists had mysteriously abandoned their task and left behind the evidence of their intentions. In the middle of the wall, another photograph of a yellow rubber glove and a lemon recedes, chameleon-like, into the larger colour field. At each end of the gallery the Cibachrome photographs of flour and sugar are framed by deep red and blue backgrounds. Within the images, the traces of labour disrupt the formal symmetry of colours. The pairing of food staples with a plastic handle and electrical cord jolts our perceptions about how objects and energies converge.

As a whole, the exhibition expands the artists’ ongoing project of exploring the intersection of everyday objects with the residues of economics and history. The result is an original rethinking of a minimalist tradition that is both visceral in effect and intellectually engaging.

DOT TUER