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LAWRENCE PAUL YUXWELUPTUN Installation view of "Colour Zone"

ovoid shapes—a Northwest Coast design element—floating on colour-field backgrounds. These new works might lead those familiar with his art to think he is mellowing, but first impressions can be deceiving—his ovoid paintings are as politically charged as his landscapes.

In *Neo Totem Pole, NWC Series, Number IV* (1998), a ten-foot-high cobalt acrylic on canvas, six ovoids are stacked on top of each other, much like traffic-light signals. Yuxweluptun has subverted the form of the traditional totem's features, and in so doing confronts those who believe they can interpret the poles without being part of their history. People do not read and understand a totem pole by identifying its figures; instead, the combination of figures and their placement serve as an aide-mémoire for those who already know the identity and story of the totem pole's owner. Traditionally, this story would be passed from generation to generation through narrative, song and celebration.

In *Solid Cement Indians* (1998), Yuxweluptun employs the ovoid to reference off-reserve Native people and to comment on the urbanization of Native culture. Here, several solid black ovoids are uneasily grouped near the bottom of a primary yellow canvas. Through the use of this single colour, Yuxweluptun symbolically unites the ovoids. They seem to congregate for comfort, but at the same time remain separate from each other. Yuxweluptun has managed to animate the

ovoids, making them appear jostled, tense, out of place; in doing so, he pays abstract homage to the Native people who walk on the cement sidewalks of the cities—the struggling urban Native surviving in the mainstream world.

It is fitting that Yuxweluptun would make use of modern art movements that owe a great debt to Native cultures. Early surrealists and abstractionists shopped freely among art objects they regarded as primitive, appropriating their outward appearances while misrepresenting their original internal motivations. In this show, Yuxweluptun stakes his claim on these movements and takes back control over how his culture, and contemporary Native Canadian existence, are represented.

LORRIE BLAIR

Spring Hurlbut

In her most recent installation, *the final sleep/le dernier sommeil*, at Toronto's Royal Ontario Museum, Spring Hurlbut has created a work that not only challenges ideas of traditional museum display, but also serves to blur the distinction between scientific and artistic thought. In transforming the ROM's Roloff Beny Gallery into "a museum within a museum," her installation gives mythological status to the ritual of collection and categorization as a means to understand social and cultural evolution. And, as in the museum itself, Hurlbut's intervention asks us to consider the immortality of the objects displayed.

Created for the museum's Institute of Contemporary Culture, *the final sleep* assembles hundreds of natural specimens and cultural artifacts selected by the artist from the museum's holdings. Many of the objects are specimens collected and preserved for scientific research, and have not previously been shown in public. Included for display are such diverse items as fish specimens in antique glass jars, cat mummies from ancient Egypt, study skins of birds and mammals, embalming-fluid

bottles and baby bottles. The shift between natural specimen and cultural artifact is a subtle one. A pair of women's shoes, pearled and feathered, makes an elegiac connection between mammal and human. A specimen of fossil dung, some fifty million years old and of unknown origin, bridges the transition between human and mammal.

For all its silence, *the final sleep* is not mute. A symphonic rhythm resonates in the placement and colouration of the artifacts within the gallery. While the dark tones of the display cases create a sombre effect, the overwhelming sense of the installation is of being surrounded by whiteness. All the objects on display—from albino study skins and bleached-out skeletons to silk baby boots and rhinestone-encrusted purses—serve to emphasize this "whiteness." By presenting these diverse objects without a multimedia or audio component, Hurlbut has created a "museum" where artifacts are exhibited without the illusionary devices that are common to popular public display.

Hurlbut's choice and juxtaposition of the displayed objects, and their apparent lack of hierarchy of position or importance, present several themes for the viewer to contemplate. Mammal study skins, meant for scientific research, have, for instance,



SPRING HURLBUT *Mammals-Albino* 2001 Study skins, vitrine

Photo Brian Boyle © Spring Hurlbut/ROM Collection

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.

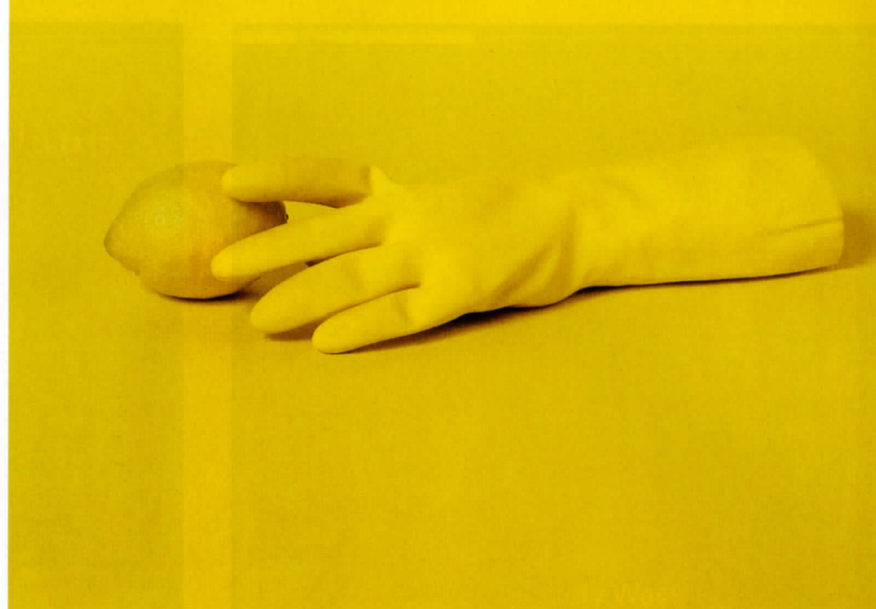
SARAH NIND

Blue Republic



Among the galleries that have sprung up off the beaten track of Queen Street and Yorkville in the last few years, Pekao 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 ready-made 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 Sisypheus, 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