

DICK AVERNS in Calgary 07/19/11

Pulse at Triangle Gallery | Iran do Espirito Santo at Illingworth Kerr Gallery | Diabolique at The Founders' Gallery | KOAC

posted by Dick Averns - July 19th, 2011.

Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue: a quirky marriage of art and place unfolds in this report from Calgary at its busiest: Stampede central. In the throb of the season last week I headed downtown to the **Triangle Gallery** for their opening of *Pulse*. Police were busy corralling crowds due to the royal tour, and whilst I admit to being sucked into the spectacle of witnessing a cowboy-hatted Kate, I also enjoyed some low tempo and more diverse options that offer exceptional respite and contemplation, far from the madding crowd.



Eveline Klijn, *Sublime Waste*, 2010-2011, hand-cut, recycled Styrofoam cups and clamshell containers

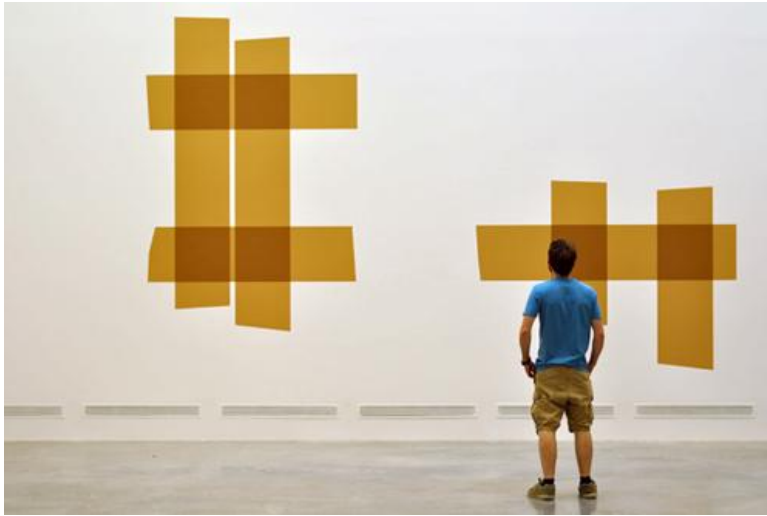
First up, let's take the *Pulse: Alberta Society of Artists at 80 Years*. Curated by **Mary-Beth Laviolette**, this exhibition presents twenty-two artists structured into historical and contemporary groupings. It is foregrounded with a sense of the old, including ASA founder **A. C. Leighton** alongside **Maxwell Bates**, **Walter J. Phillips**, and **Henry Glyde** - all of whose works here mine seams of landscape or portraiture. A highlight is Bates' work, *The Family*, a portal to early Canadian modernism almost camouflaged as Prairie folk art.



Barbara West, *Teabagging*, 2011, knitted textile sculpture, found object

With the show heralding eighty years of the Alberta Society of Artists, a subtext is how the role of art clubs has changed within broader society. Laviolette speaks of an evolution where art societies began shrinking from fashion in the 1970s. It is here that the contemporary rank and file reveal their hand. Generationally, the ASA has apparently become a nucleus for female artistic husbandry (here chancing my arm with a feminist idiom), to the extent that the eleven contemporary *Pulse* artists are all women, including **Kim Bruce**, **Bev Tosh**, **Eveline Klijn** and a standout work by **Barbara West**. Her *Drinking Games* speak to the

issue of gender and dominance via an interactive installation plying craft, sculpture and performativity: the more one drinks in the work, the greater the exposure to alcoholic excess. West's *Games* are emotive and prescient, casting the viewer as an intoxicated character in scenes of film noir proportions. It's definitely "no holes barred" and perhaps a mouthful for the uninitiated, particularly with *Teabagging*: "You lose consciousness on your own sofa. A male 'friend' pries open your mouth and carefully drops his testicles into it."



Iran do Espírito Santo, *Tape*, 2007/2011, latex on wall (photo: Dick Averns)

For a different sort of escape, there is something new this summer up on the hill at the **Illingworth Kerr Gallery**. Venice Biennale veteran **Iran do Espírito Santo** and a small army of artists from Brazil and Alberta have created a retrospective of his large *Wall Drawings*. Tonal in composition, monumental in scale, these beguiling and painstakingly rendered works are derived from the everyday, presenting themselves as minimal and surreal. Visually arresting and highly contemplative, I imagine there are some folks who would pass this work by with a "So what?" But as curator **Wayne Baerwaldt** discusses in his exhibition text (catalogue and documentary film forthcoming), we have an artist that "mines an ambiguous middle ground or grey area in which to place intrusions, obstacles, new materials and light as transformatal elements."

What could be new here is the transformatal: not a word readily found in dictionaries, this nomenclature and the artwork suggest an experience that is both transformative and hybrid in form, dancing with Minimalist installation aesthetics, architectural frameworks, drawing and painting. Renderings of chain link fencing, panes of glass and an oversized sheet of black plywood become apparitions. Light is quintessential, both as energy and a source of inertia for the Op Art affect that resonates from highly crafted surfaces. Visit in the dog days of summer when the gallery is quieter. An unlikely restorative experience awaits.



Douglas Coupland, *The Gorgon*, 2003, aluminum and fibreglass

Turning to the borrowed quotient of this article, the touring show *Diabolique* will soon open at **The Founders' Gallery**. Already exhibited at Galerie de l'UQAM in Montreal and the Dunlop Art Gallery in Regina (the show was curated by then Director/Curator **Amanda Cachia**), this is an international group show addressing violence and conflict, particularly war. The roster of artists is impressive and includes the late **Nancy Spero**, **Jake and Dinos Chapman**, **Shirin Neshat**, **Douglas Coupland**, **William Kentridge**, **David Garneau** and **Rebecca Belmore**. Some have critiqued the show as a hodgepodge whilst others have favoured the project, notably Canadian Art who ranked it in their top ten for the year in 2009.

What is undeniable is that war is sadly endemic, occupying myriad spaces in our society to the extent that in recent years, I would argue it has precipitated an ascendant platform for war art. I can't recall the last time a group show of this tenor came to Calgary and admittedly my writing on the show before it opens may be ambitious, but this is indicative of the ambitious nature of both the show and the latest host venue. As Founders' Gallery and Military Museums Executive Director **Tom Doucette** notes, "*Diabolique* represents new territory for an embryonic and emerging arts presence at The Military Museums." From my preview, be sure to make time for **Matilda Aslizadeh**'s nineteen-minute DVD *Hero of our Time*. It at once exposes new artistic heights and sobering lows of humanity apropos child soldiering.



Katie Ohe in her sculpture studio (photo: Dick Averbs)

Looking forward, in case that's given you the blues, there's a beautiful pale sapphire form being seen around town these days in the logo for the new [KOAC: Kiyooka Ohe Arts Centre](#). Named after the highly respected duo of senior artists, painter **Harry Kiyooka** (brother of the late Roy Kiyooka) and sculptor **Katie Ohe**, the KOAC is a laudable legacy project that is seeing their acreage and property vested in a mission to "promote contemporary art through exhibitions, workshops, symposiums and lectures." Included in the project will be their substantial art collection, home, studios, and beautiful grounds overlooking the Rockies. There's a three-year schedule to modify infrastructure, transform wetlands, and build a sculpture park and art pavilion, for which renowned architects Zeidler are creating the plans. While the project is not yet fully operational, a registered society and charitable status are in place for this fall's fundraising launch. Reminiscent of Barbara and A. C. Leighton's former home and studios, now the Leighton Art Centre, the KOAC validates one critic's account from nigh on half a century ago. It was none other than Clement Greenberg who wrote of Ohe's ability and emerging reputation. With the KOAC now fostering a new marriage of art and space for generations to come, here's more evidence that some societies are back in fashion.



Dick Averbs is an interdisciplinary artist and writer whose exhibitions and performances have been presented internationally. Recent essays appear in *Diabolique* (catalogue), *Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration, Convergence* (scholarly anthology) and periodicals including *Canadian Art*, *Front*, and *On Site Review*. He was deployed to the Middle East with the 2008-9 Canadian Forces Artists Program, culminating in a major solo show *War Art Now*, at Calgary's Founders' Gallery. Dick teaches at the Alberta College of Art + Design. He is Akimblog's Calgary correspondent.

Triangle Gallery: <http://www.trianglegallery.com/exhibits/2011pulse/>

Pulse: Alberta Society of Artists at 80 years continues until August 24.

Illingworth Kerr Gallery: http://www.acad.ab.ca/wh_2011_06_iran_do_espirito_santo.html

Iran do Espírito Santo continues until September 24.

The Founders' Gallery: <http://www.themilitarymuseums.ca/whats-new>

Diabolique opens on August 11 and continues until November 13.

Comments (newest first) [+click to add comment](#)