

use of chalk signifies the potential clearing away of accepted certainties. His particular interest in the imminently erasable or replaceable recalls the pedagogical rebelliousness of Joseph Beuys's 1970s blackboard drawings that similarly critique assumptions about what constitutes (artistic) knowledge.

Brown's largest work to date, *Mirror Mirror*, is also an assemblage of numerals and letters: the English alphabet and the numbers 0 through 9 are rendered as mirrors, applied separately to the gallery wall, along with the words *Yes*, *No*, and *Goodbye*. These are components from a Ouija board, and may indeed be employed to detect and communicate with paranormal forces. In addition, the work contains another set of these words and characters, but they are offered in reverse. Brown represents them diagonally and diminutively as if they were receding into space, perhaps another gesture towards an alternate dimension; this reflection of a mirror suggests a *mise en abyme*, or a chain of significations that is potentially infinite—as well as an allusion to three-dimensional existence. *Mirror Mirror* is reminiscent of Robert Rauschenberg's "White Paintings," 1951, monochrome works with reflective surfaces intended to establish a dialogue with street-based, everyday reality, including ambient phenomena that are beyond conscious or deliberate perceptual awareness, and yet a potentially revolutionary source of new knowledge. Brown's project further recalls the sound-based investigations of Rauschenberg's friend John Cage, who shared a fondness for combining mundane phenomena—including realities normally dismissed as mere "noise"—with

minimal composition, and a mélange of mathematical and spiritualist sources, all in an effort to expose and investigate new levels of consciousness.

Theologians judged Georg Cantor's work, especially his theory of transfinite numbers, as a challenge to the uniqueness of the absolute infinity of God. Sacrilege is, I would argue, a suitable subtext for reading much of Brown's practice, which consistently combines references to the supernatural and scientific, moving fluidly and freely between spaces that include the living rooms of mystics and the hallowed lecture halls of technical colleges. ■

"Infinity Plus One" was exhibited at MKG127, Toronto, from September 10 to October 8, 2011.

Dan Adler teaches art history at York University and is writing a book about the aesthetics of contemporary sculpture.

VISUAL ART

"Please Lie to Me"

by Michael Rattray



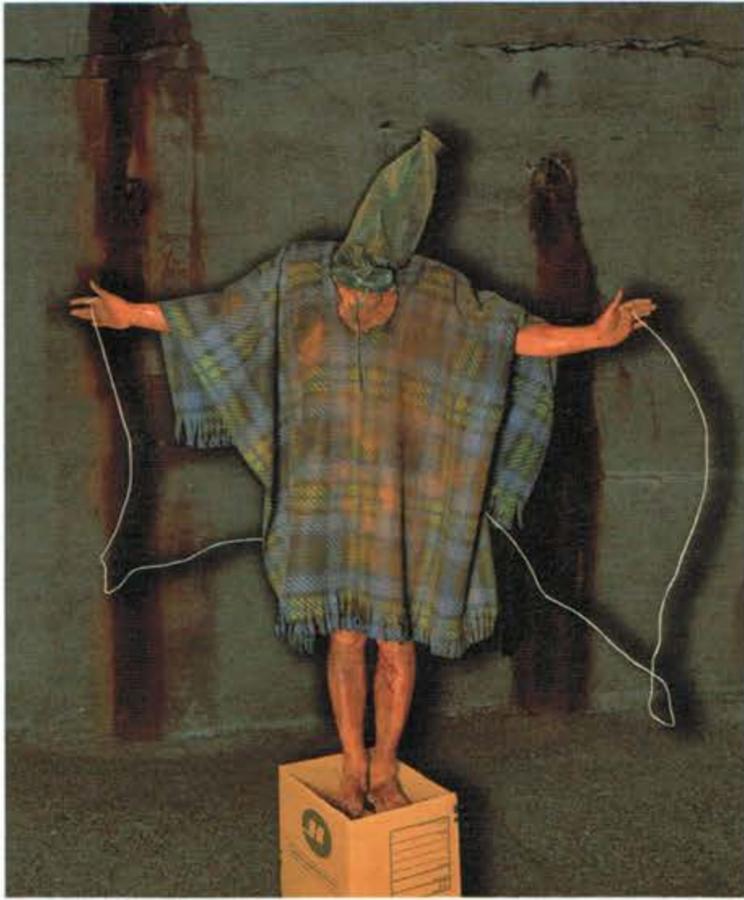
November 2011 marked the 15-year anniversary of Galerie Art Mûr in Montreal. To celebrate, owners Rhéal Lanthier and François St-Jacques devoted the entirety of their gallery space—two levels of approximately 14,000 square feet—to exhibit the work of 21 artists drawn from an impressive international stable. The exhibition, "Please Lie to Me," offers much commentary on the current state of contemporary art. Lanthier, in his curatorial statement, poses the question: "*Est-ce que détourner son regard de la vérité est un mensonge? (Does averting your eyes from the truth constitute an illusion, a lie?)*" In response, many of the works interrogate symptoms of our technologically dependent society. Several zero in on the inequality of the global market, the symbiotic relationship between the developed and developing geographic spaces of global capital, while others address the quotidian moment, one that is commodified, generalized to an accessible ubiquity that absolves the need for action in favour of awareness. If there is a common theme to the exhibition beyond Lanthier's open call to reflect upon those truths of our society perhaps too difficult to bear, it is one that asks the viewer to participate, comment and reveal.

1. Susan Bozic, *I Can't Believe I Found My Match*, 2005, C-print, 76 x 102 cm. Edition of 10. Images courtesy the artists and Art Mûr, Montréal.

2. Clinton Fein, *Snapshot Heard 'Round the World*, 2007, Type C chromogenic print, 60 x 45".

3. Evergon, *Margaret Standing (Front)*, 2001, *Margaret Standing (Back)*, 2001, selenium-toned black-and-white prints from Polaroid negative, 229 x 122 cm each. Photograph: Michael Patton.

4. Nadia Myre, *Indian Act* (page 13/56), 2000–2003, seed beads, stroud cloth, thread, Indian Act, 46 x 38.5 cm.



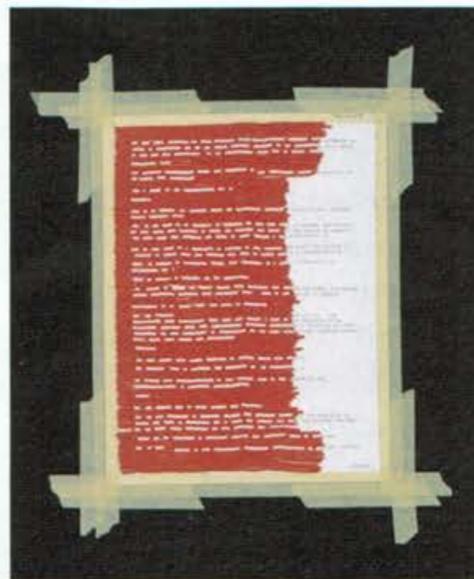
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Karine Giboulo's *Democracy Village*, a carefully executed mixed-media sculpture, places in proximity an often abstracted binary: the urban architectural monolith and the shanty-town slum. *Phase I* consists of an architectural form modelled after the Rem Koolhaas- and Ole Scheeren-designed CCTV (China Central Television Headquarters) building in Beijing. Installed atop the fractured, mirror-faced skyscraper is a golf course, while built around and in-between is a shantytown. Both appear parasitic, but through careful juxtaposition the new modern structure is revealed in its false neutrality. Above, the few enjoy a time of leisure; below, many sustain, build where possible and consume the leftover detritus of a consumer society dependent on market capitalism. A symptom is exemplified by the scrolling stock exchange numbers appended to this would-be triumphal arch—real-time fortune tellers of a new world order.

Visualizing the consequences of the global condition, Clinton



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Fein's works re-picture the amateur aesthetic of documented prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib. The works are intimate, finely crafted portrayals that mimetically encounter the way in which torture is romanticized and deemed acceptable under certain circumstances: ends justifying means by way of repetition. This affect of dissemination, how an image is internalized, subsequently played out in the corporeal and neutralized, is explored by Jonathan Hobin, who pictures children doing what they do best: playing out the social world around them as both coping mechanism and enculturation strategy. Thus, "In the Playroom" envisages children acting out societal fears glorified by mass-media representation.

In contrast, Susan Bozic situates herself in an image space where, alongside a male-mannequin, societal expectations are revealed. Consistent titles such as *He let me pick the movie*, 2005, *Carl takes me to the nicest places*, 2005, and *I can't believe I met my match*, invoke the constructed nature of gender relations and the way in which expectation is developed through the repetition of institutional codes. Likewise, Dina Goldstein provides semiotic evidence about the bodily truth of augmentation. *Belle*, 2009, from the "Fallen Princesses" series, pictures the process by which a female client, appropriately attired in a fairy-tale outfit reminiscent of a Disney character, becomes animated.

"Please Lie to me" explores the way in which the image, and by extension art, both aestheticizes and disassociates us from the naked truths of the world. Concomitantly then, the work of Evergon brings us face-to-face with an all too repressed symptom of the living condition: age. Printed in black and white and larger than scale is a portrait of the artist's mother, Margaret. A stoic and deeply personal image, Margaret is pictured both facing and from the rear. Naked, the image invokes

William Kurelek

by Alison Gillmor

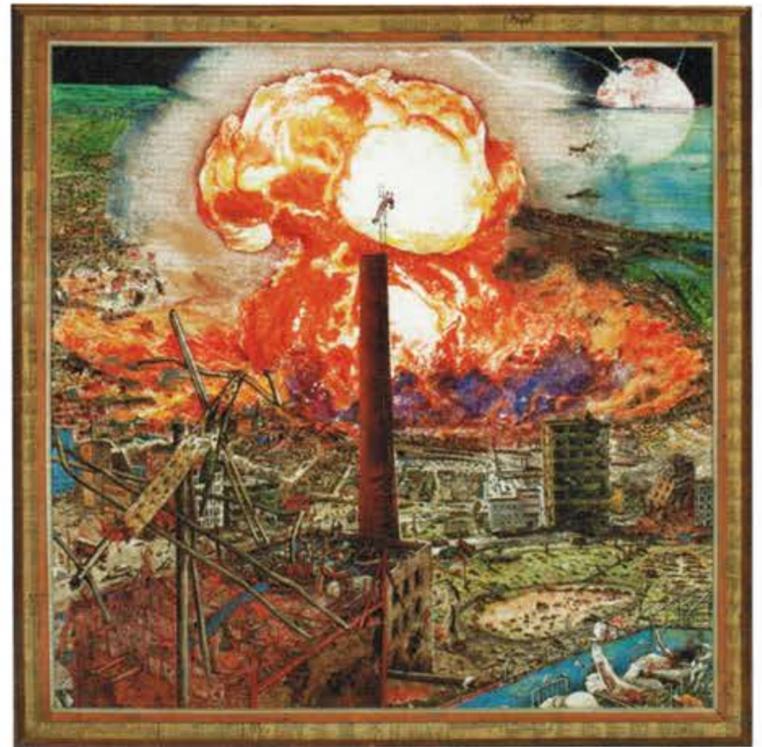
the strength of the human form, perhaps worn through time but nonetheless aware, determined, inquisitive. On the lower level, strewn across the gallery floor, is Renato Garza Cervera's *Of Genuine Contemporary Beast VI*, 2005–2007, a simulated human-skin rug, replete with gang tattoos and fingers appropriately arranged to signify allegiance and set. The flayed corpse acts as a primal, somatic representation of the ways in which people are rendered as a contemporary version of the Greek barbaros. Nearby, Nadia Myre's "Indian Act" carefully overtakes, and makes its own, a document determined to control, construct and represent. Beaded red and white, each page abstracts something that need not be repeated, nor glorified. Nonetheless, the reality is ours to bear. ■

"Please Lie to Me" was exhibited at Galerie Art Mûr, Montreal, from November 5 to December 17, 2011.

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It probably irked the 1961 Canadian art world when Alfred Barr Jr., director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, chose a realistic painting of farm life by William Kurelek over several abstract works for the MoMA's collection. At the time, Modernist hardliners defined abstraction as stringent, self-criticizing and contemporary, while viewing narrative painting as nostalgic, naive and cluttered with literary subject matter.

The ongoing re-evaluation of Modernism has suggested that these polarizations aren't much use. In fact, as this revealing and ambitious retrospective suggests, Kurelek's work remains stubbornly unclassifiable, being a prickly, difficult and deeply discomfiting mix of technical virtuosity and personal obsession, modern anxiety and medieval wrath. Co-curators Tobi Bruce, Mary Jo Hughes and Andrew Kear have gathered more than 80 paintings and works on paper, carefully exploring the sharp hinges along which Kurelek's vision developed—his meticulously detailed visual memories of his prairie childhood and his startling, intense religiosity. For Kurelek, who converted to Roman Catholicism in 1957 after a suicide attempt and a devastating episode of mental illness, religion was sometimes a refuge and more often a cudgel with which to beat a frightening and incomprehensible world. Kurelek's profound piety, in particular his besetting sense of humankind's sin, will seem alien to many contemporary viewers, but it is also a site of struggle and uncomfortably naked expression. In the end, it's the sense that Kurelek's works have been created in the grip of inescapable emotion that makes his art feel modern.



Early in his career, Kurelek made the conscious decision that his "potboilers," as he rather dismissively called his depictions of Ukrainian-Canadian culture and the seasonal rituals of rural life, would underwrite the so-called "message" paintings of his religious mission. The show's curators suggest that the relationship between these two genres is complicated. Many viewers—and I'd include myself here—probably knew Kurelek primarily from his bestselling children's books, *A Prairie Boy's Winter* (Tundra Books, 1973) and *A Prairie Boy's Summer* (Tundra Books, 1975), carefully rendered visual records of hard work and simple pleasures proceeding under the cloudless clarity of a big western sky. This exhibition deals frankly with viewer expectations, setting out both the sunny art we think we know and its dark counterpoint—aggressive, disturbing and driven works like *I Spit on Life*, a watercolour created some time in 1953 or 1954, whose despairing title is matched by its horrific gothic imagery.

Several works are obsessively introspective. *The Maze*, painted

William Kurelek, *This is the Nemesis*, 1965, mixed media on Masonite, 114.8 x 115.6 cm. Art Gallery of Hamilton: Gift of Mrs. J.A. McCuaig, 1966. Corporate Collection, Toronto. Photograph: Robert McNair. © the Estate of William Kurelek. Courtesy Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto, and Winnipeg Art Gallery.