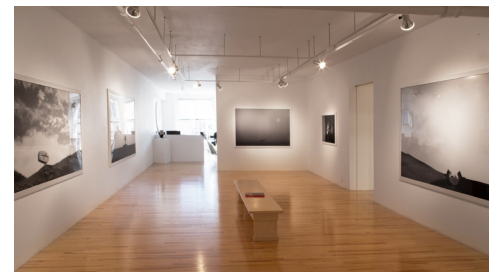


## EXHIBITION REVIEWS

## Milutin Gubash

by James D. Campbell



Milutin Gubash  
Galerie Trois Points  
Montréal  
August 29 – October 3, 2015

This stellar exhibition—including large-scale photographs, sculpture, and installations—marks yet another high point in a long string of significant exhibitions at one of Montreal’s strongest and most uncompromising gallery spaces.

This iconoclastic artist interrogates issues of identity and history with startling, unforeseen ways and means. In the outsize photographic works from the Monuments to Communists series (2014), Gubash particularizes (if not memorializes) sculptural monuments commissioned under Tito in the former Yugoslavia during the 1960s to 1980s. He installs a poignant remove between the Communists’ intention to have the monuments immortalize their common citizenry (while seducing the West with evidence of sublime artistic industry), and those same monuments’ lamentable current abandonment amid social amnesia and rejection, like lonely sentinels seemingly lost to history. Gubash is able to have his cake and eat it, too—the work spans worthy documentation and incisive critique. More importantly, perhaps, he redeems the monuments

as purely aesthetic icons of his own practice, and so they stand tall outside their own original history and once hoped-for use-function. These strange abandoned menhirs take on a new life inside the artist's own work, and the poignancy of these apparitions on hilltops or (literally) lost in the mist is almost viscerally felt.

Gubash also includes a densely packed grouping of his Lamps (2015) that hang from the ceiling in a familial aggregation. The lamps all betray a signature vivacity and chromatic eccentricity. On an adjacent wall are a number of gorgeous preparatory sketches of the lighting fixtures. The actual manufacture of the lamps themselves deserves mention, as the artist sends his sketches to an aunt in Serbia, who ferrets out the materials needed for construction at local flea markets. She then transports the materials unearthed in these scavenger hunts back to Gubash in Montreal, who is responsible for their final assembly into functional 'lamps'. This brilliant subversion of the IKEA aesthetic pays tribute to family, community, and questions the authenticity of the culture of mass-making by mimicking contemporary modes of goods production.

Ordinary Folk is the title of this show, but is somewhat misleading. The artist's Serbian aunt who forages so industriously for the lamp parts and, for that matter, the gifted artist himself, are hardly 'ordinary folk'. They are extraordinary people. Still, the point is well-taken and Gubash has, with humour and integrity, extended his ongoing interrogation of sundry ideas of authenticity and perceptions of cultural, political, and social identities.

And it is no coincidence that the sculpture that rules the proverbial roost with cocky bravado (despite its small size) is titled A Rooster Named Milutin (it's just a coincidence...) (2012). The rooster wears a bag over his head, and reminds us in miniature of the large sculpture of the artist wearing similar headgear. Milutin might well be a latter-day incarnation of "The Unknown Comic," the stage name adopted by Canadian actor and stand-up comedian Murray Langston, best known for umpteen comic performances on The Gong Show, in which he invariably appeared with a paper bag over his head. But the headgear here is not meant to disguise the artist (as though anonymity is possible or even desirable, and it is not), but to celebrate him, and thus the element of narcissism that is endemic to Gubash's work emerges into the foreground, unmasked and self-present.

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James D. Campbell is a writer and curator based in Montreal who contributes regularly to Magenta Magazine among other publications.