

VISUAL ARTS

Unlike with unlike: We like it



R.M. VAUGHAN
THE EXHIBITIONIST
 rvaughan@globeandmail.com

Eight of Sixty at General Hardware Contemporary
 Until June 30, 1520 Queen St. W., Toronto; generalhardware.ca

The summer salon show is traditionally a breezy sort of affair.

Comprised of works culled from a gallery's stable, and/or smaller (and thus easier to sell) works or artist multiples, plus a few hits from the fall-to-spring months (i.e. works that didn't sell the first time around), the summer salon is often the best way to get to know a gallery's holdings, curatorial impulses, and overall tone. The summer salon's cobbled together focus not only allows for, but expects, the viewer to engage in equally casual, commitment free inspection.

Currently, there are at least five excellent salon shows on offer - at Pentimento Fine Art, Lausberg Contemporary, Robert Kananaj Gallery, Susan Hobbs, and at Propeller Centre.

General Hardware Contemporary's Eight of Sixty is about as happily lazy-hazy as it gets. The show's nominal rationale - a selection of works by gallery artists who were also in the massive 60 Painters show, just completed at Humber Arts and Media Studio - is really just a good excuse to put a very disparate selection of works together for the fun of it.

Take, for instance, the madcap post-painting paintings of Joe Fleming, wonders of excess. Fleming uses construction scraps and found objects to create short but very thick pile-ups that leap off the wall. Then he slathers his hoardings with gobs and bucket wallops of candy bright paint. Weirdly, this messy sounding scheme results in works that betray a ruined elegance, the allure of the dishevelled (what is known in club culture as being a "hot mess") - all of which makes me suspect that despite the outward slap-dash action, Fleming is a highly calculating painter.

In no reasonably curated world, however, would Fleming's work ever hang beside the cool, archly playful, Euro-chic collaborations made by John Armstrong and Paul Collins. Armstrong and Collins use crisp photographs of hip urban settings and architecturally fussy interiors as backdrops for a series of clever, reference-laden paintings, most of which, in their thin fluidity, resemble stills from a rotoscoped film (an animated film wherein images are painted directly onto the film frames). These works are so fine and dandified, they practically walk about the gallery in top hats and pinstriped pants.

What, then, do the works share, underneath their at-first-glance bald differences? A fascination with the textures created by the application of paint (from chewed gum wad pimply to onion skin thin), as well as a highly considered take on the mixing of diverse materials. Plus a keen sense of fun.

Similarly, Matt Crookshank's utterly gonzo, paint on paint on paint abstracts, works that revel in the accidental and the alchemical - Crookshank is a master at mixing different types of paints to create unholy, crackling and bubbling effects - ought to have no business resting beside Jinny Yu's nearly invisible, minimalist painted aluminum sculptures.

Yu takes simple sheets of aluminum that have been factory painted dead white on one side, and folds the sheets, or bends them, until the desired shape is achieved. Then, she applies an almost transparent, single brush stroke layer of dark glaze to the unpainted side of the sheet. Normally, I despise this sort of conspicuous, precious minimalism. But Yu's works are so over the top with their apparent lack of dynamism, emotion, or even surface visual detail, that they can easily be read as parodies of minimalism.

Despite their severity, they are quite pretty, especially when they are moved about and light reflects off the various bent and angled planes. Yu might be my gateway artist, finally, to minimalism.

And, perhaps that is the larger point of crazy quilt shows like



Matt Crookshank's gonzo abstracts (like The Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness, above) are shown beside Euro-sleek photography, at Eight of Sixty.

Eight Of Sixty - to cause the viewer to regard very unlike works in new contexts, outside of their familiar terrains and company.

Without Armstrong and Collins's tidy picture postcards, one

would perhaps see only the mess, not the finesse, in Fleming's works. Without Yu's nearly pathological distrust of gesture one might not fully appreciate Crookshank's gleeful recklessness. The extremes on either

end of the art production spectrum inform each other.

Eight of Sixty is a gallery version of a summer fling, and, just like the real thing, it works best when the players are sexy strangers.