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Electroplating in Blue, Red, Yellow, and Green

by Reid Diamond

Sandy Plotnikoff, YYZ Artists' Outlet, 140-401 Richmond Street West, May 13 to June 10, 2000

Robin Styba, Propeller Centre for the Visual Arts, 303-96 Spadina Avenue, May 10 to 27, 2000

A quick scan of current art activity in Toronto reveals an increasing embrace of business models as a mode for presentation. In the late eighties and up to the mid-nineties, a faux-Marxist finish dominated the art scene with many self-generated group exhibitions calling themselves "collectives." Prior to that, many artist-run galleries adopted numeric or geographic addresses as their identity monickers: Gallery 44 (an intended address that fell through), Mercer Union (named after Mercer Street), and YYZ (a nod to Toronto's airport code). These no-brand names signalled an intent to operate outside of capitalist systems and, instead, ground themselves to the physical notions of community. Their generic names seemed like a constellation of related activities. We now have a new set of art space names around town - such as Art Firm, Art System, and the now-defunct Money House - which mimic the language of entrepreneurial activity. The intention of this type of usage may be subversion, if you follow the legendary comedian Lenny Bruce's idea that by annexing the language of the bullying powers, you will gain control of it. The fall back though, can be that the dominant powers set the agenda, resulting in an inconclusive call and response dialogue. In this new model, it's often the artists who are commodified, and discussion of their personalities takes priority over their art.

Artists Sandy Plotnikoff and Robin Styba have solutions on how to represent one's self within the ever-increasing flow of financial-style thinking and image making. Instead of amplifying their own personae in their self-portraits, they elect to use their bodies as conductors of visual currents.



Sandy Plotnikoff, untitled photograph from Coordinator series, 2000.

Photo: Christina Felderhof. Courtesy: the artist

Plotnikoff dons various COLOred cotton kangaroo jackets purchased from used clothing outlets. He then has himself photographed in locations around the city, in places where the COLOR of his garment relates to where he is standing. In a red hooded jacket, the artist is standing in front of matching-red life jackets on the Centre Island ferry. The camouflage effect brings the background to the foreground. In another image, a woman is seen wearing, by chance, the same COLOR clothing

Plotnikoff is wearing. The result forms an unsaid human interaction. Plotnikoff is the host here, but as any good host knows, it is about the entire event, not just who's in charge. His cotton jackets enable him to offer us a shared sense of environment and relationships, formal and social.



Robin Styba, *Husha Husha*, 2000. Courtesy: the artist

Robin Styba uses the great indoors for her location shots. In a series of photographs that are suggestive of a cinematic sequence, she poses with a variety of props while wearing party hats and a dress, and while seated on a couch. In one photograph, Styba attempts to peer through two rocks, binocular-style; in another she holds up a gallon-size jar of mystery fluid (blood, or Coca-Cola?). In *Husha Husha*, her party headwear blends into the background wallpaper, and she makes a gesture with her hand that carries a duality to the situation - an expression that could be the moment before exhilaration ... or after disappointment.

Both artists attempt to declare their presence, but they also suggest the necessity of the viewer to acknowledge the scenario in order to complete the transaction. They are conduits for the oscillations we feel as we negotiate our commodified landscapes and situations - inner and outer, visceral and virtual, positive and negative.

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