With Crystal Column and Clear Shrines of Pearl

With Crystal Column and Clear Shrines of Pearl is a continuation of themes that Lauren Hall has been exploring in her sculpture over the last few years. Marked by her use of common materials ranging from silver bubble wrap to pink and blue polystyrene, her forms have tended to evoke the arctic landscape—glacial forms rendered using protective insulating materials. More recently, her work has expanded to incorporate tropical climates, by making use of sand, glycerin and repurposed parabolic louvres. These unlikely choices are linked to Hall’s interest in extremes. While her use of ordinary materials to activate space suggests a predilection towards minimalism, this runs counter to her affection for idiosyncratic landscapes. Furthermore, her poetic titles suggest an affinity for the Romantic tradition. The title of her current installation is appropriated from the writings of Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822)—specifically the poem Alastor—Or, The Spirit of Solitude, first published in 1816. Shelley not only lived the epitome of the Romantic lifestyle but his writings were drenched with lyrical allusions-alleging the Poet’s body and blood with that of the transcendent landscapes that he experienced in his travels.

With Crystal Column and Clear Shrines of Pearl transforms the gallery space into a cave-like setting evocative of the Shell Grotto in Kent, the Reed Flute Cave in China, or most intriguingly the Galos Cave in Chicago, a franchised “salt cave” located in a strip mall which the artist recently visited. Stalactites and stalagmites are a recurring form in Hall’s work. Cleverly using polystyrene and cellophane to suggest these natural mineral accretions, the installation also incorporates coloured sand, salt pellets and scented glycerin scattered across the floor. Hall’s intent is to mimic a cave covered in crystalline surfaces, to create a space that is both removed from the everyday and yet simultaneously soothing and welcoming. A pseudo-shrine that echoes the bifurcated status of modern caves and grottoes; places of mystery and ritual that have degraded into gaudy attractions, uncomfortably trapped between the metaphor of Plato’s cave and Superman’s fictional Fortress of Solitude.

Influenced by her own travels from Alaska to Florida, Hall’s installations are by no means an attempt to recreate the Romantic sublime. The reference to Shelley is used to induce introspection and invite viewers to consider the work beyond its purely material properties. Her make-believe cave evokes the way in which we now experience the sublime, as a tourist destination. Suggesting both the simulated quality of packaged holiday tours and the manufactured lushness of retail environments, Hall’s installation illustrates our increasing disconnect from the natural world.

Ivan Jurakic


Artist Biography

Lauren Hall received her BFA in Fine Art from the University of Waterloo. She has exhibited her work in Canada, the United States and Europe, and in the group exhibitions of Art Toronto and Toronto Art Fair. In 2010, Hall was a recipient of the Ontario Arts Council’s Talent Ontario Award and in 2011, she was the recipient of the Ontario Arts Council’s Emerging Artist Grant. Lauren Hall’s work is represented by Peak Gallery, Toronto.

www.lauren-hall.com

List of Works

With Crystal Column and Clear Shrines of Pearl, 2011

Polystyrene, cellophane, sand, salt, soap, glycerin, scented

Dimensions variable

Image (Right): Clear Shrines of Pearl (detail), 2010.
Clutch

Clutch is both a noun and verb. It is the mechanism used to engage and transmit power from a motor to a drivetrain. Alternatively, it also refers to a sudden reflexive grasp or a narrow escape from a critical situation. These definitions persuasively articulate the essence of the process involved in making the art works of Steven Laurie, Brandon Vickerd and Zeke Moores. Combining the allure of Princess Auto, NASCAR racing and the fine points of U.S. Customs regulations, these artists do not simply build a toaster from scratch. They wear their working class roots on their collective sleeves. They’re into motorcycles and motorcycles and, with fellow enthusiasts for custom parts and services, they take pride in the fabrication and assembly of their work. They like making stuff and, while they’re not particularly good at explaining themselves, they’re laughing with people; they’re laughing at people. Their works can’t help but provoke familiarity and affection even as they mirror the paradox of a consumer culture running on empty.

— TAPE PARK

List of Works

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Dimensions</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chopper #2</td>
<td>Steven Laurie</td>
<td>Steel, styrofoam, automotive paint</td>
<td>244 x 208 x 71 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chopper #1</td>
<td>Brandon Vickerd</td>
<td>Steel, styrofoam, automotive paint</td>
<td>549 x 213 x 183 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUV</td>
<td>Zeke Moores</td>
<td>Steel, engine, small tire, exhaust tip, etc</td>
<td>183 x 81 x 81 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mud Flap Project</td>
<td>Steven Laurie</td>
<td>Mixed media: Poulan chainsaw engine and exhaust tip</td>
<td>61 x 28 x 28 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donut Machine</td>
<td>Steven Laurie</td>
<td>Mixed media: chainsaw engine and exhaust tip</td>
<td>244 x 208 x 71 cm</td>
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</tbody>
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Artist Biographies

Steven Laurie completed his MFA at the University of Victoria and graduated from the Lander College of Art and Design with honors. He has exhibited his work in Canada and the United States, and is the recipient of grants from the Canada Council for the Arts, Toronto Arts Council and Ontario Arts Council. He is the art director of the Toaster Project, and teaches sculpture and contemporary media at the University of Victoria.

Brandon Vickerd received his BFA from the University of Western Ontario and his MFA from the University of Guelph. He has exhibited extensively in Canada and internationally, and has received numerous grants and awards, or has been shortlisted for the 2011 Turner Prize. He is an Associate Professor at the University of Victoria.

Zeke Moores received his MFA from RISD. He has exhibited extensively in Canada and internationally, and has received numerous grants and awards, or has been shortlisted for the 2011 Turner Prize. He teaches research at the University of Victoria and is currently a visiting professor at RISD.

The Toaster Project is a collaborative effort by Canadian artists Steven Laurie, Brandon Vickerd and Zeke Moores. Combining the allure of Princess Auto, NASCAR racing and the fine points of U.S. Customs regulations, these artists do not simply build a toaster from scratch. They wear their working class roots on their collective sleeves. They’re into motorcycles and motorcycles and, with fellow enthusiasts for custom parts and services, they take pride in the fabrication and assembly of their work. They like making stuff and, while they’re not particularly good at explaining themselves, they’re laughing with people; they’re laughing at people. Their works can’t help but provoke familiarity and affection even as they mirror the paradox of a consumer culture running on empty.

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1 This description is largely excerpted from an as-yet-unpublished essay about Steven Laurie’s work that will appear in a publication coinciding with a future solo exhibition of the artist’s work in 2013 at the Art Gallery of Ontario.