# SEASON FIVE

## WATERLOO

University of Waterloo Art Gallery East Campus Hall 1239

Hours:

Tuesday to Saturday 12:00–5:00 pm

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### **Addendum to the Tommy Westphall Universe**

Dave Dyment's subject matter is culture, particularly film and television, and his practice is predicated on the remix of images and information culled from the internet and other sources as content for his critically incisive work. *Addendum to the Tommy Westphall* Universe takes its cue from an online meme that proposed the television series *St. Elsewhere* (1982–1988) as an axis connecting hundreds of different television programs within a shared continuity. *St. Elsewhere* ended with a controversial scene suggesting the entire run of the series existed in the imagination of Tommy Westphall, the autistic son of a character on the program. Since various characters from the program had made appearances on other popular television series, including *Homicide: Life on the Streets, Hill Street Blues* and *Cheers*, the hypothesis suggested that these crossovers inferred that all of these fictional programs belong to the same universe.<sup>1</sup>

The Tommy Westphall Universe is a conceptual foxhole that appeals to pop culture obsessives. The Westphall hypothesis is not only predicated on characters making guest appearances on different programs, but also shared fictional brands such as Morley cigarettes popularized by *The X-Files*. Dyment drills deeper still to extract images of actor Ed O'Neil reading the same fictional newspaper in both the final episode of *Married with Children* and the debut episode of *Modern Family*. These observations of television marginalia amount to a kind of obsessive compulsive disorder that aligns perfectly with Dyment's penchant for sorting through the detritus of popular culture uncovering conceptual and narrative tropes—from doomsday scenarios (*The Day After, Tomorrow*, 2012) to the persistent use of establishing shots to determine cinematic history (*Timeline*, 2011/2014).

Dyment's *Addendum* is an homage and expansion of the Westphall hypothesis.<sup>2</sup> His monumental hand-drawn cloud diagram maps out an aggregate universe connecting hundreds of disparate television series, including crossovers between live action and cartoon television shows, an aspect purposefully left out of the original. This revision expands the hypothesis from approximately 290 television programs to over 600. By expanding the limits of the Westphall universe, Dyment invites further speculation about the plausibility of the hypothesis and its implications. His work at once revels in the arcane details endemic to fandom while being symptomatic of the inherently invasive nature of all broadcast media. His drawing and props correspond to the theory of a shared fictional universe, but also infer a point of contextual slippage between fiction and reality as the lines separating content, marketing and new media blur.

Addendum to the Tommy Westphall Universe invites a form of critical fandom. Dyment assumes the role of fiction archeologist, leading us through a landfill of originals, spin-offs and crossovers to explore underlying narratives, shared contexts and alternate realities.

— Ivan Jurakic

#### **End Notes**

- For more information visit: http://thetommywestphall.wordpress.com.
- 2. Addendum To The Tommy Westphall Universe was originally published as a book project in 2010 and reprinted in 2014.

Images: (Top) Addendum to the Tommy Westphall Universe (detail), 2015. Photo: Scott Lee. (Bottom, left to right) Married with Children, Season 11, Episode 24, Chicago Shoe Exchange, Air Date: June 9, 1997. Modern Family, Season 1, Episode 1, Pilot, Air Date: September 23, 2009.



#### Artist Biography

Dave Dyment's work pulls at the seams of the fabric of a fictional universe in search of shared associations and alternate meanings. It is an investigation into the language and grammar of music, cinema, television and literature, in order to arrive at a kind a folk taxonomy of a collective popular vocabulary. He has exhibited across Canada and internationally, and was recently featured as part of Looking Forward, Montreal Biennale 2014. He lives and works in Toronto. Dave Dyment is represented by MKG127, Toronto.

#### List of Works

Addendum to the Tommy Westphall Universe, 2015 Hand drawn acrylic water-based marker on wall 366 x 732 cm

The artist would like to thank Matthew Varey,
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January 15-March 7, 2015

Gallery One

### Michelle Bellemare

When push comes to shove

Tommy Westphall Universe

Gallery Two

### Dave Dyment

Addendum to the

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#### When push comes to shove

In one form or another, Michelle Bellemare's sculptures appear to be readymade facsimiles of recognizable consumer products ranging from plastic food containers to electrical power bars. They seem obvious at first glance yet each involves a methodical process of design and fabrication that bears close scrutiny. These works are complex and psychologically loaded explorations into the human condition.

Bellemare's works are at once approachable and forbidding. She references common household items yet always manages to incorporate some form of subtle material modification. Regardless of their original function, her sculptures operate as analogs of the human body. They purposefully evoke its vulnerabilities, as well as its resilience in the face of physical and psychic trauma.

Despite their economy, Bellemare's projects involve a time-consuming process of prototyping and testing the limits of materials that routinely demands months of research and preparation before actual production. Eschewing almost all trace of the artist's hand, many of her sculptures appear to be machine-made. One might almost imagine them being put together on an assembly line, and yet counter-intuitively each is a meticulously constructed one-of-a-kind object.

Bellemare's attention to detail, from the thickness and colour of a material to its placement in a room, reflects a deep commitment to the design and production process as well as an inherent need to get things right, to create aesthetic objects that manifest an elevated degree of veracity. Bellemare may reference prosaic off-the-shelf consumer goods but psychologically her works operate on another level. Her sculptures may be improbable but they must seem plausible.

Casket is a visually stunning monument that perfectly mimics the Ziploc brand containers commonly used to store leftovers. Bellemare elongates the basic form,

increasing its scale to correspond with the length of a human body, essentially creating a consumer-friendly coffin that seduces us with its reassuring familiarity. From the opaque container to the cerulean lid with the smart snap corner and familiar logo embossed on top, this casket soothes our anxieties about aging, frailty and death by sanitizing, compartmentalizing and displacing our fears with its smooth, space-saving design.

Cushion is another pointed proposition. Leaning against the wall, what at first glance appears to be a common garbage bag is revealed to have four upholstery buttons neatly but purposefully embedded within its squat shape. The household comfort promised by the familiar buttons is undercut by the cold reflective sheen of the plastic, suggesting nothing less than a discarded human torso. The truncated form contrasts our desire for comfort with the disposability of those most vulnerable in our society, particularly the homeless.

Sleeping Bag is very much what its name implies, a custom-made sleeping bag that has been fastidiously sewn together using lengths of tensor bandage to articulate the exterior, while the interior is lined with quilted gauze. Lying on the floor like a pleated sarcophagus, the soft sculpture appears to be a cozy and inviting retreat, a healing cocoon. Conversely, it also evokes a stifling sense of claustrophobia.

Moving forward falling back is an unnerving kinetic sculpture featuring a larger-than-life hourglass filled with over 66,000 replica pills modeled on Tramadol Hydrochloride—a prescription painkiller. Triggered by motion sensors, the hourglass turns clockwise causing the pills to cascade from the top chamber to the bottom over a three-minute duration before repeating. The result of over two years of research and prototyping, *Moving forward falling back* is the most complex sculpture the artist has produced, a successful marriage of creative design and mechanical engineering.

Performing both the inevitable passage of time and an endless cycle of medication, the installation addresses our societies predilection to push our bodies beyond

Bellemare's sculptures are inherently performative. Each is designed to accommodate the artist's body, and suggest a possible use or function. The lid on Casket is removable and resealable, and could conceivably be used to store a medium-sized body. Sleeping Bag is fully functional, albeit extremely impractical to use. To varying degrees, all of Bellemare's projects implicate the viewer in a familiar 1:1 scale relationship. Like bodies, they tend to sit or slump or lean to reiterate the unyielding pull of gravity.

Gender inequality, economic inequity and an aging population are common themes, fears that we face as individuals and as a society. If there is a sense of foreboding that animates Bellemare's work there is also an underlying absurdity. How else might one hope to explain a larger-then-life Ziploc container or a fully operational six-foot high hourglass filled with a lifetime supply of Zytram XL? Bellemare's projects are fueled by the ebb and flow between the abject and the absurd. The tensions and anxieties we sense in her work mimic our own, highlighting the uncomfortable ways in which consumerism preys on our deep seated fear of mortality.

When push comes to shove speaks to our troubling times. The tangible materiality of Bellemare's sculptures leaves us with a palpable sense of the human body on the brink of collapse, persisting despite its fallibility and shortcomings.

#### — Ivan Jurakic

Cover Image: Moving forward falling back, 2013/15. Photo: Scott Lee. Interior Images (from left to right): Casket, 2006/07. Photo: Isaac Applebaum. Cushion, 2009/10. Photo: Isaac Applebaum. Sleeping Bag (detail), 2011/12. Photo: Isaac Applebaum. Moving forward falling back (detail), 2013/15, Photo courtesy of the artist.

#### List of Works

Casket 2006/07 Copolyester vacuum formed Tupperware tray and removable lid 198 x 60 x 41 cm

Add it up, 2007

Adding machine calculator tape, shadow box frame 188 5 x 17 x 8 cm

#### Cushion, 2009/10

Garbage bag, metal buttons, bungee cords, PVC pipe, garbage (cans, bottles, plastic packaging), grommets, expandable foam, protective polymer coating 79 x 43 x 84 cm

Sleeping Bag, 2011/12

Tensor bandages, gauze, down filling, linen, aluminum screening, interfacing, metal boning, thread, zipper, tensor bandage clips, embroidered tag 173 x 51 x 18 cm

#### Push 2014

Fimo polymer clay, powder pigment, wall mounted shelf 9 x 11.5 x 14 cm

Moving forward falling back, 2013/15 Handblown borosilicate glass, stainless steel bracket, 70,000 injected molded polypropylene plastic pain pills based on Tramadol Hydrochloride (Zytram XL 100MG tablet), internal mechanism, motion sensors 182 x 60 x 98 cm

#### Nervous System, 2015

Sculpted and cast plastic powerbar and plugs, armature wire, heat-shrink, LED bulbs, Lithium Ion Polymer Battery, Micro USB charger, variable resistors 213 x 89 x 35 5 cm

#### **Artist Biography**

Michelle Bellemare is a sculptor whose work explores how the properties of different materials can embody emotional or physical vulnerability in relation to the demands of contemporary life. Her approach is relational, experiential and phenomenological. She is a graduate of OCADU. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally at the Koffler Gallery, the Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Diaz Contemporary and Centre Clark in Montreal. She is the recipient of several Daniel Gruetter, Ivan Jurakic, Tredegar Kennedy, grants from the Canada Council for the Arts and Ontario Arts Council. She lives and works in Toronto. www.michellebellemare.com

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