

Review

## Myfanwy MacLeod: The High-Art Lowdown

CATRIONA JEFFRIES, VANCOUVER NOV 5 TO DEC 12 2009

by JOSÉE DROUIN-BRISEBOIS



Myfanwy MacLeod *Hex II - VIII 2009* Installation view Courtesy Catriona Jeffries / photo Scott Massey

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In her show of recent works entitled "Gold" (as in "greatest hits") at [Catriona Jeffries](#), [Myfanwy MacLeod](#) continued her exploration of relationships between illicit activities and art history. MacLeod has become known for her forays into modernism's iconic moments as well as for delving into popular culture and the vernacular. She combines, blends, confuses and distills references as diverse as [Donald Judd](#), abstract painting, superstition, folk art and hillbilly life.

The major piece in the show, entitled *Everything seems empty without you*, is a perfect example of this complex merging of "high" and "low." Inspired by the image of a homemade moonshine still MacLeod saw on a postcard, the large installation is composed of seven wooden boxes and four steel barrels (three black and one cadmium red) connected by metal pipes. When I first saw the piece, I immediately thought of Judd's plywood boxes. Like Judd's sculptures, MacLeod's square, wooden containers are repeated and pristinely crafted. But in contrast to the famed minimalist's work, they also appear to be made out of used, recycled wood and metal, creating a tension between form and material. In a functional moonshine still, fruits ferment, produce alcohol and release fumes while being processed from one container to the next; each step purifies the contents until a potent liquid, free of most contaminants, is obtained. This process can be compared to modern art and specifically to minimalist art-making, where ideas and forms are distilled to their essence.



Myfanwy MacLeod *Everything seems empty without you* 2009 Courtesy Catriona Jeffries / photo Scott Massey

Alongside the sculpture were displayed seven paintings of hex symbols, like those found on barns to ward off evil spirits or bring good luck for harvest. These “folk art” designs include hearts, trees of life, rosettes, stars, circles and geometric patterns pregnant with their own stories, mystical content and associated beliefs. In this show, they were recreated and inserted into an art-gallery context as bona fide paintings.

A large, bright, accompanying canvas entitled *Ain't nothing ever happened* served as a metaphor for MacLeod's way of working. Here, abstract forms were woven into each other, creating a pictorial quilt suggestive of another form of craft—this one associated specifically with women's work.

In her recent works, MacLeod does not criticize what we generally consider “low” culture, but learns from different vernacular traditions, elevating them so that they can be considered on the same level as “high” art—all the while reminding us that capital-A art is also made by regular folks. She shows us how some people exist outside the system, making their own drinks, growing their own crops, crafting their own blankets and, as MacLeod does in her own practice, recombining recycled materials into their own new forms.

- [www.catrionajeffries.com](http://www.catrionajeffries.com)

3/19/2010

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Myfanwy MacLeod *Ain't nothing ever happened* 2009 Courtesy Catriona Jeffries / photo Scott Massey