

Slacker art

Vancouver artist Damian Moppett finds the show. And it started, quite by accident.

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The everyday counts as art. The everyday counts as art. The everyday counts as art. Repeat that mantra 20 times an hour, and you'll get halfway to understanding a lot of recent exhibitions. It's not that the observation's wrong; it's dead on, as talented artists from Marcel Duchamp to Gathie Falk have been proving for decades already. (Falk's everyday-as-art is making a glorious showing right now at the Vancouver Art Gallery.)

There's still the question, however, of whether an insight can still count as insightful when it's come around so many times. That's why the excellent new work of 30-year-old Vancouver hotshot

balances a Q-tip that impales a cigarette at either end. Aesthetic apotheosis. With the most meagre of materials, in the most modest of surroundings, art gets made, and fast-eyed Moppett snaps the whole process with his camera.

And now the results of that single evening of casual making and shooting have been blown up in huge colour, and hung on the gallery wall as important art. In fact, they've displaced the highly polished, gently ironic everyday-as-art photos — immaculate pictures of carefully fashioned balloon-and-Lego constructions, for instance — that Moppett's known for. Works in progress for this show got bumped right off his roster when he printed



For Moppett's new works at Catriona Jeffries, he photographed instant sculptures made of film boxes, canisters and Q-tips.



offspring of established Calgary painters Ron and Carroll — scores its points by overturning the old axiom, instead of just repeating it. In his latest show at Vancouver's prestigious Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Moppett Jr. doesn't search out bits of quotidian functionality that can count as high art — the urinal as fountain; corner-store fruit as *nature morte*. He discovers bits of functionless, highish art already present in the little acts of creation — like Post-It note doodling or paper-clip construction — that we all engage in. It's not about turning everyday objects into art; it's about recognizing that esoteric art-making is an everyday activity.

It all starts quite by accident. While shooting some casual fashion snaps of friends, as groovy young artists are wont to do, Moppett begins to fiddle with the tableful of junk in front of him. Three Q-tips get stuck inside a roll of film. *Voilà*, a sculpture. Another roll of film holds up a trio of Q-tips, that holds up a steel puck, that holds up a lighter, that holds up a cigarette — a monument. A roll of toilet paper supports a lipstick stuck inside a roll of packing tape that holds up an empty film canister that holds up a Q-tip that pierces a card that

gets serious

*high art in everyday doodling for his latest
incident, with a tableful of junk.*

up his party pics, and recognized the gold they hid.

Moppett's new work isn't about the aesthetics hidden in the world around us. His photos aren't pretty. They aren't even about redefining what counts as pretty, which is what other works of snapshot slacker art have been busy doing for the past few years. They are, I think, forthright documents of casually excellent acts of artistic creation. Or, if not quite that, at least of the inevitable fertility of human creativity. You just can't keep a good hand down — or any other kind of hand, for that matter.

Picasso collaged scrap paper into still lifes. Calder made high art of wiry doodles. There are the barest

hints of both in Moppett's work, but he goes them one further by refusing to force the transformation — he captures Calder's before they turn ambitious.

Sure, it's a commonplace to say that most good art has its roots in the world. (I've spouted the cliché myself.) But it's also subtly wrong. The world itself is entirely art-free. It's the human mind that's full of art, and will impose it on just about anything it comes across. Even on Q-Tips and toilet paper. Even late at night, halfway through a party.

Damian Moppett: Impure Systems is at the Catriona Jeffries Gallery, 3149 Granville St., Vancouver, until March 11. Call 604-736-1554.