

— Philip Monk

Fathers and sons and daughters. It was inevitable that the successful discourse Vancouver crafted around its art practice — the so-called Vancouver School — would end in generational rivalry. Once transmission had run its course in a generation or two, we could expect deviation and resistance (if not outright rebellion) to its clearly defined programme. Yet, what if it were the art works themselves, not the discourse around them, that embodied resistance? What if such works created a new order while surreptitiously waving good-bye to the one out of which they developed? Such questions could be put to the works gathered in this exhibition — even against their acknowledged intentions.

Vancouver in the 1980s caught the attention of the nation and world with artists such as Jeff Wall, Rodney Graham, Stan Douglas, Ian Wallace and Ken Lum. Their photo-conceptual art was soon labelled the Vancouver School because of, on the one hand, the consistency of medium and reference (the urban landscape of Vancouver) and, on the other, their influence on an immediately succeeding generation of young artists. But with the next, current generation, a division appears to have taken place — some artists following and others deviating from this dominating tradition. *Bounce* presents three of the most prominent younger artists working today in Vancouver — Brian Jungen, Myfanwy MacLeod and Damian Moppett — who have boldly branched out in new directions.

The aim of this exhibition is not to register a polemic — read as Oedipal — or, indeed, to reward the bad seed simply for its deviation. Rather, it attempts to foreground — in the most dramatic way possible — a difference in practice within Vancouver and a reopening of dialogue with art outside the city. To this end, the predominately sculptural dimension of the artists' practice is emphasized, although other non-photographic media are included. To fully underscore the nature of a change, one underlying premise of the exhibition was to say no to photography.

Of course, the oppositions I set up here are almost purely rhetorical. The pretense of generational rivalry is used to get the ball rolling while being, at the same time, a bit wicked. Some might see this as “Vancouver envy” — evidence of a rivalry between the art communities of Toronto and Vancouver, rather than of any generational one. Yet, from my position in Toronto, I concede and applaud their artists' success: Vancouver rules. But, I

also recognize that a powerful rhetoric has built up around the Vancouver School, much of the artists' own making, produced through their own lucid writings, which not so subtly cross-referenced its select participants. Through this writing, we were persuaded that this terminal city on the edge of empire was world historical. Such is the triumphant tactic of an argument from below that makes the weaker one stronger. A successful rhetoric then, it not only directed our interpretations of the art it justified, but also seemed to determine what work could be made in Vancouver.

Jungen, MacLeod and Moppett participate in a rhetoric as well. But blinded by the prevailing one, would we know it? This rhetoric does not stage itself in the same way as its predecessor, nor does it pose itself in opposition to it (despite the occasional snipe from below). But, there is a cheekiness in the work of this group of artists that would, if they did belong to the Vancouver School, see them expelled for lack of a melancholic skepticism steeped in the rigorous theory of the Frankfurt School. And in fact, the initial reception of their works was partly negative — with epithets of juvenility, triviality and banality applied to the range of cultural references that so obviously departed from the logic and curriculum of the Vancouver School. Scott Watson's exhibition 6: New Vancouver Modern, the first institutional endorsement of a new Vancouver zeitgeist connected to artists elsewhere (MacLeod and Moppett were included), was the recipient of such comments. In his Canadian Art review of the exhibition, even the sagacious and supportive artist and teacher Ken Lum was ambivalent — attributing the glibness of the technically refined art works to the proliferation of art schools. Though perhaps it was only an issue of attendance at the wrong schools — where insemination had not taken.

At issue here is the possibility for a new language to appear and be recognized when it differs from the prevailing discourse and when it is obscured by submersion within other cultural codes. With the work in this exhibition, the Vancouver-specificity of the earlier photo-conceptualists has given way to more broadly shared cultural references that stem, in part, from popular entertainment and youth culture. Common to these artists' work is their playful, if at times perverse, handling of the ready-made materials of mass culture, whether objects or images. Other commentators, such as Kitty Scott, have already noted

the movie industry having replaced the Vancouver milieu as subject matter for younger artists there. Like Toronto, Vancouver is the disguised backdrop for many Hollywood productions. This simulacral inversion — Vancouver School in denial — is perhaps the reason why younger artists seem less interested in filmic representation than in the margins of the movie business — the products and services that Vancouver now supplies. This displacement to behind-the-scenes attunes their work to that of fathers they might seek out elsewhere, such as installation and performance artists Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy, who likewise work off the margins of the movie industry, though at its source in Los Angeles. Does this make our artists' work mere brat-pack play among the debased detritus of commercial culture? Or is there a logic operating within their works?

Whatever logic there is functions within the familiar terrain of everyday culture by recycling the high and low images society routinely produces. Conversing critically with all aspects of culture — popular, commercial and institutional — through its own images, the artists make works that are more rhetorical than abstract and more dialogical, than logical. Jungen, MacLeod and Moppett do not reproduce the systems to which they refer as much as they re-code our potential use of them. They talk back in languages that are impure, comic and hybrid.

Damian Moppett

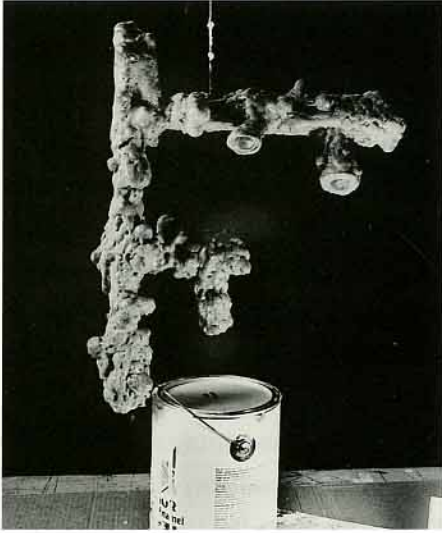
To operate with efficiency, profit or effective communication, a system protects its internal structural purity from the predations or noise of outside contamination. Yet, in reality, the “outside” is already inside, expressed as a hierarchy of high and low — though the latter is repressed. An intentionally impure system, by contrast, recognizes this contradictory inhabitation and promotes the unsmooth working (or unworking) of its apparatus. It incorporates a mechanism and a space to unbalance itself or to upset its own power relations. Sometimes this is just canny good sense, a precaution against social unrest; at other times, it reflects a consensual recourse to the disorder necessary for the redistribution of affects and property, as in ritual and potlatch.

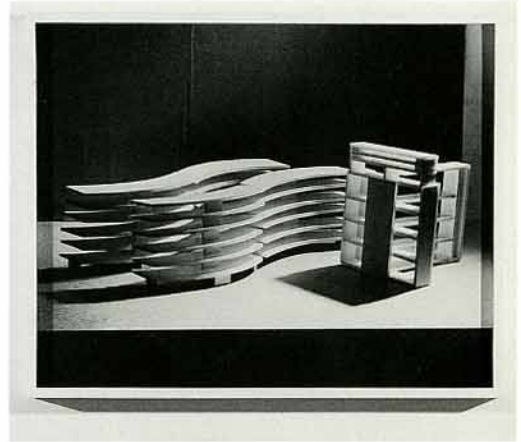
Having already called one of his photographic series Impure Systems (1999–2000),

Damian Moppett — [Vein/Artery in Studio, 1999-2000](#)

[The Four Seasons and the Three Graces \[Spring\], 1998-1999](#)

[The Four Seasons and the Three Graces \[Aglaia \[Splendor\]\], 1998-1999](#)



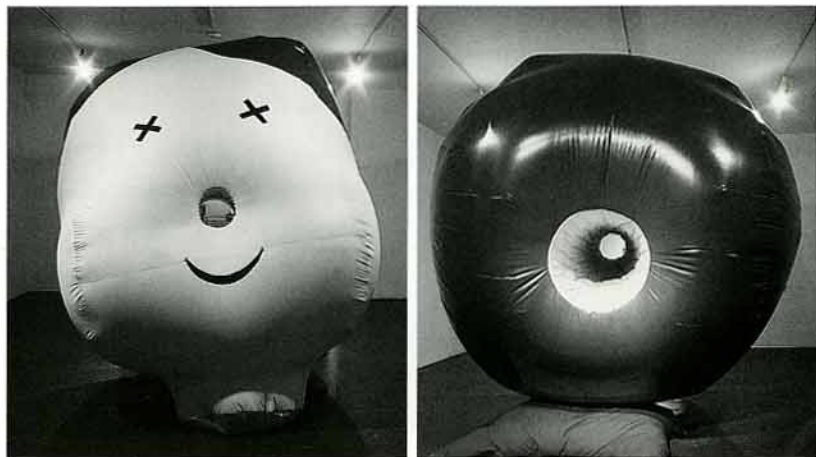


Damian Moppett has displayed an interest in such power dynamics. In the new work exhibited at The Power Plant, Moppett has sought examples of the impulses toward disorder that are repressed within capitalism and has returned for inspiration to their riotous expression in the pre-capitalist past. Thus, he has copied Peter Paul Rubens' [The Kermis](#) (c. 1631), a painting that depicts a Northern European peasant festival. The Kermis, or peasant festival, was one of the widespread annual celebrations that, since the Middle Ages, temporarily and symbolically overturned social hierarchies — for instance, the fool would be crowned king. What is unique about Rubens' depiction is that it is posed from the peasants' view of things not, as was typical, from the overbearing heights of their tolerant lords or landowners — those to whose possession the paintings would be destined. Moppett's [The Kermis \(After Rubens\)](#) — like his complementary [Drunken Silenus \(After Rubens\)](#), [The Triumph of Bacchus \(After Rubens\)](#), [The Fall of the Damned \(After Rubens\)](#), [The Garden of Love \(After Rubens\)](#) (all 2002) — is not a comic travesty of Rubens' painting, but a masterful copy. Earlier

(in 1998–99) Moppett had created another series that upset aesthetic hierarchies by pairing copies after François Boucher's rococo paintings of nobility's sylvan fantasies with juvenile monster drawings of intestines à la Basil Wolverton or Ed "Big Daddy" Roth. Collectively entitled The Four Seasons and the Three Graces, the pairing placed both aesthetic genres — one upper class, the other lower — on a scale of kitsch. Moppett attempts no such rudeness towards Rubens. Instead, he seeks a contemporary complement to the elder artist's peasant festival and elaborates it in part through a fantasized projection.

Moppett finds his parallel to the peasant festival in the socially unsanctioned antics of skateboarders who commandeer public spaces rather than use the parks allocated to them. He then attempts to "institutionalize" this antagonism to authority by designing anarchic non-conformity into his own fantastical skateboard park constructed in maquette. Less utopian than subterranean, the two levels of Endless Rustic Skateboard Park (Bacchic Peasant Version) (2002) replicate and conflate the cross-sections of a city's underground and the body's dermal structure. The upper level is a labyrinth of tubes (sewer systems/arteries and veins); the lower level is a collection of biomorphic skate bowls and ramps (the earth's caverns/the body's fleshy tissue).

The maquette is absent of figures corresponding to those joyous peasants who animate the Baroque spatiality of Rubens' painting. Consequently, we have to imagine the useless activity of the skateboarders' spatial doodlings as a spontaneous taking possession of place. This temporary assertion of right within public or corporate space may seem a pale complement to the celebration of Rubens' peasants. Yet, both groups act up within a powerful, dominating



conformity that only temporarily, and under controlled circumstances, tolerates upended hierarchies. “Youth culture” is one such managed situation.

Myfanwy MacLeod

Myfanwy MacLeod's work is always double-edged. Beneath its cute surface is a subversive undertow. If it had a personality, you could say it was passive-aggressive, as if it were the revenge fantasy of a service worker. MacLeod's exhibition *A Brief Overview of Personology* (2000) posed the artist herself within this subservient role; but the work also presents a somewhat abject and apologetic presence—seeming to combine the self-abrogation of slapstick, such as that of Buster Keaton, with the self-defeating, short-fused reactions of hapless cartoon characters, like Sylvester or Wylie Coyote. In the end, though, she pulls the rug under our feet. The comic element in her work takes the edge off even while putting its potential referents on it.

Double readings are inherent to her work. These readings may correspond to the two