



IAN WALLACE
VANCOUVER

Rarely does a small solo exhibition unfold the inner developmental logic of the artist's career. Even more rarely does it also display the concerns of a group of artists, and, indeed, the presenting gallery. Yet, this is precisely what Ian Wallace's exhibition manages to do [Catriona Jeffries Gallery; October 18—November 17, 2007]. Wallace—an artist uniquely capable of reflecting on the trajectory of his own practice—has been influential since the early 1960s as an artist, teacher, mentor, colleague, and friend of other well-known Vancouver artists such as Stan Douglas, Rodney Graham, Roy Arden, Ken Lum, and Jeff Wall. So much so that, in many ways, the interests and trajectories of the so-called "Vancouver School," which is best known for its "photo-conceptualism"—a term by no means uncontroversial—are reflected here in the open space of the gallery.

Wallace's exhibition turns on a singular fulcrum: the moment when conceptualism is both cancelled and preserved within the pictorial medium of photography. Responding to certain readings of his monochromes of the late 1960s, readings which looked beyond the objects themselves to discover figurative, often mystical meanings, Wallace embarked on a self-conscious probing of the other side of painting, that is, the painting as an object comprised of both base and superstructure. Here in the exhibition, the material relationship between surface and support is most dramatically conveyed by two installations—*Untitled (Plank Piece)*, 1969/2007, which consists of five pieces of wood (the support) draped with translucent vinyl (the surface), and *Untitled*, 1968/2007, a photographic triptych of a somewhat similar wood and vinyl arrangement. One of the exhibition's most recent works—actually entitled *Support/Surface I, II*, 2007—is a photolaminate diptych on canvas that seemingly depicts a work in progress in the artist's studio. As such, it reflects back on the earliest work, establishing an uncanny repetition with a difference.

From his monochromes and the subsequent installations, Wallace then moved into photography, crucially

reconfiguring the conceptual into an aspect or "moment." If, as Jeff Wall once observed, photography stands equidistant to painting on one side, and film on the other, it is easy to see this triangulation playing itself out in many of the works on view. What's more, if Wall's backlit cibachromes lean towards the cinema, Wallace's work takes its inspiration from Mondrian's geometrical abstractions—an early interest and influence of his. *Street Reflections*, 1970/1991, is an arresting group of five photographs whose seriality captures the dynamic movement of passersby in the window-fronts of department stores—approximating, perhaps, the visualization of an atonal musical scale.

Theodor W. Adorno once wrote that the modern is the obsolete dimension of modernity. This is precisely, I think, the way to approach the lingering traces of the auratic object within the photographic image. That is, Wallace's photographs display the persistence of certain formal, painterly elements subtly smuggled into the very medium that precipitated painting's historical crisis. The diptych *Voramar Horizon*, 2007, exemplifies this nicely. The first image combines a recognizable horizon with part of the photographic apparatus—a clear assertion of self-conscious realism. In the second image, the apparatus has been relegated hors champs. Turned on its side, the horizontal lines become vertical, which gives an arresting play of geometrical shape as the blue and brown shades are now unhinged from the landscape.

—Samir Gandesha

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Ian Wallace, installation view, Catriona Jeffries Gallery, 2007; Ian Wallace, *Untitled (Black Monochrome with yellow)*, 1967/2007, acrylic on canvas, 90 x 20 inches. Images courtesy of the artist and Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver; photo: Scott Massey