

Steve Giasson's "II" at Skol is a timely reflection of our haunted post-9/11 present

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By Natalie Zayne



Steve Giasson at Skol

Currently on view in the main gallery at **Centre des arts actuels Skol** is "II," an installation by conceptual artist Steve Giasson that seeks to evoke, conjure, or conceptually bring together various elements concerning September 11, 2001. Six pieces of varying materials and intensities comprise the formally disciplined show.

The Buddha of Bamiyan works, I and II, consist of 1008-piece jigsaw puzzles strewn on the floor. The puzzles each represent a statue of the Buddha, from the 5th and 3rd centuries BC, respectively, from a southeastern region of Afghanistan, which were destroyed by Taliban forces in 2001. "GHOSTOFGHOSTOFGHOSTOF" is the enigmatic, almost invisible, script printed on the wall in a large circle. Another is almost immaterial: a spray of DKNY's "Love From New York" is released into a spot in the middle of the room each day by a gallery staff member.

The play of visibility and invisibility, materiality and disappearance culminates in the work featuring a pair of paper stacks that stand together about waist-high in the middle of the gallery. The image of the World Trade Center demonstrates the potential for the destruction of images in our time, a new and virulent form of iconoclasm (W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?*, 13). The towers represented no strategic military importance: they were globally recognized icons of advanced capitalism and were targeted as such. Giasson resurrects this conceptually

and emotionally loaded image and invites us to think about the role that the media, and by extension ourselves, have to play in it.

The towers are comprised of 2,637 pages compiling 30,000 commentaries about a YouTube video that depicted the disaster into an epic concrete poem. As you scan down the endless stream of comments, blurbs and exhortations of the top pages (and imagine all those that lie beneath), you can almost hear the words being spoken by a multitude of competing voices. I was reminded of the exhaustive yet inexhaustible currency of conspiracy theory, of testimonies and memories, and what was literally buried in the rubble. I was also reminded of the cell phone calls and messages sent to and from loved ones trapped in the buildings on that day. Yet I was simultaneously aware of the muted ghostliness of their forms, blanched of the horrific details which became part of them from that day forward. The invitation to help yourself to a sheet of the concrete poetry, in theory dwindling the stacks in a poetic and slow-time re-enactment of their spectacular fall, contributes to this feeling of haunting, traces, and de-materialization.

Naturally there is a sense of a lack of closure to this event—not least because it was but one very visible moment of a history that had built up to it and which has continued its tragic development in its wake, in the new wars and walls that have been erected in this New World Order defined by terrorism. Resurrecting the World Trade Center as the icon it has become remains an important act eleven years later, for we must always be attentive both to the ways it has changed its meaning and to the different meanings it might have from different geopolitical points of view. The potency of the image doesn't reside merely in its topical currency and political implications but, as W.J.T. Mitchell has observed, in its status as an "enigma and omen, a harbinger of an uncertain future"(Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?*, 12).

Steve Giasson is a multidisciplinary artist (installation, video, performance, theatre, photography) and prolific author of books of concrete poetry.

Centre des arts actuels Skol, space 314

Steve Giasson

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