View of "Michael Decker," 2016. Photo: Lisa Anne Auerbach.

and to the antiheroes of society (its cynics, sexists, alcoholics, and loafers). Their mysteriously oscillating sentiments are conterminous with the culture's contradictions and social strains. As knickknacks, the objects served little purpose beyond their punch lines, and yet today they remain inscribed within a complex network of ethics and ideologies.

Discontinued in the early 1980s, the cast-off but seemingly indestructible Sillisculpts accumulated at thrift stores and flea markets. For his exhibition-*cum*–small business "Sillishop," artist Michael Decker offered for purchase 524 of the objects (priced from $10 to $150, based on rarity or strangeness), which comprised a collection that he had amassed over the past decade during weekly trips to secondhand shops throughout Southern California. The third artist-run business to occupy the Meow—a gallery run by artists Lisa Anne Auerbach and Joel Kyack that hosts small businesses as exhibitions in a roughly nine-by-eleven-foot shed—Decker's Sillishop opened on Black Friday and ran through Boxing Day, during which time shelves were continually restocked as customers purchased the tiny found sculptures. Installed floor to ceiling on three walls, the Sillisculpts created an almost oppressive environment, a frenetic space commemorating the scat of a past society.

As an exercise in abundance and uselessness, the Sillishop was an open-ended, nonhierarchical space wherein each object's worth was determined by the artist, who valued not only rarity but the odd incongruity between figure and phrase or handpainting by a former owner. The amassed "sillis" (as the artist called them) served as a vehicle for psychological projection not unlike Mike Kelley's repurposed stuffed animals or afghans. And certainly Decker, like so many other young artists, is indebted to Kelley's seamless positioning of emotion as commodity and nostalgia as product. Other artists have appropriated the formal "setup" of the Sillisculpt as well, including Miranda July—who created her own Sillisculpt-like slogans on pedestals intended for the public to stand on at the 2009 Venice Biennale—and Jonathan Horowitz, whose 2008 work *We the People Are People Too* recast the phrases on a collection of original Sillisculpts to represent various political affiliations of today (e.g., PREDATORY LENDERS ARE PEOPLE TOO). But Decker's installation was significant for its psychic charge, heightened by time, which revealed the sillis' underlying abjectness; as mass-produced memento mori, the objects were doomed from the outset, expendable in their thingness. And yet elevated en masse as an artwork, the dejected silli became a libidinal extension of the enthusiast/artist, embodying a compulsion whose neurotic vitality rivaled that of the culture capable of generating such odd, off-color little things.

—*Catherine Taft*

MONTREAL

Biennale de Montréal

VARIOUS VENUES

The 2016 Biennale de Montréal, titled "*Le Grand Balcon*" (The Grand Balcony) and organized by Belgian curator Philippe Pirotte (with curatorial advisors Corey McCorkle, Aseman Sabet, and Kitty Scott), was refreshingly ambiguous, intentionally confused, decidedly unruly, convincingly contradictory, and consistently chaotic. The curatorial statement mentioned a gloriously diverse range of touchstones, including Jean Genet's strongly political absurdist play *Le Balcon* (The Balcony), 1956—which examines authenticity, representation, truth, and illusion—as well as the Marquis de Sade and an enigmatic portrait by Lucas Cranach the Elder.

Yet these references were overshadowed by the exhibition itself, which had neither an overall plot nor overarching themes. The list of fifty-five international participants offered a cross section of established luminaries, including Kerry James Marshall, Isa Genzken, Thomas Bayrle, Nicole Eisenman, and Luc Tuymans; rising stars, such as Anne Imhof, Njideka Akunyili Crosby, Lena Henke, and Luke Willis Thompson; and a few new names, such as Zac Langdon-Pole, Myriam Jacob-Allard, and Nadia Belerique. Within this mix, Cranach's *Portrait of a Lady*, ca. 1540, played a central, disruptive role. The painting has been altered and partly overpainted on numerous occasions since its sixteenth-century debut, and its inclusion here pointed toward unstable authenticity and questionable narratives given its tumultuous history and somewhat mysterious origin.

The show's standout piece was perhaps Moyra Davey's intimate video *Hemlock Forest*, 2016, which revisits her 2011 video *Les Goddesses*. Including an homage to the early filmic style of Chantal Akerman via a restaging of a scene from the late filmmaker's 1967 *News from Home*, Davey's highly autobiographical work—a meditation on the artist's son's impending departure for college—speaks to beauty, intimacy, motherhood, and loss in a slowed-down world away from contemporary anxieties.

Highly topical was another filmic work, this one by Eric Baudelaire, *Prelude to AKA Jihadi*, 2016, which traces the actual journey of a

Moyra Davey, *Hemlock Forest*, 2016, video, color, sound, 42 minutes. From the Biennale de Montréal.

young Frenchman to Syria. Without ever revealing the motivations behind the protagonist's decision to aid the Syrian rebels (and his likely if unconfirmed involvement with ISIS), the film connects disparate fragments of his mental and physical expedition.

Revelatory was the display of drawings made in the 1990s by Brian Jungen, a Canadian artist of Swiss and First Nations descent. The small, surreal, and often sexual drawings presented relationships between European settlers and Canadian indigenous societies in frequently humorous ways, with many reversing the roles of oppressor and oppressed. Alongside Jungen's surreal drawings was a series of collages and drawings he produced in collaboration with his longtime friend Geoffrey Farmer. Also made in the 1990s, these works on paper weren't shown until 2002; they are dense with references to popular culture and offer clues to later developments in both artists' work, in particular their intense explorations of Canadian identity politics.

A series of eight anthropomorphic sculptures by another Canadian artist, Valérie Blass, effectively embodied the intentionally open premise of the exhibition. Her work embraces oppositions of surface and interior volume, materiality and immateriality, form and shapelessness. Where Blass explored formal ambiguities, the Turkish photographer Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin's work evidenced the rich possibilities of temporal indeterminacy. His stunning series of photographs *Arkadya'da Melankoli* (Melancholia in Arcadia), 2000, taken in a hospital in Odessa, Ukraine, confronts the viewer with colorful and slightly odd scenes of a non-place lit by a television's glow and populated by fluttering curtains, tidily made beds, and a bizarre display of garish wedding dresses.

"*Le Grand Balcon*" was by far the most enigmatic large-scale exhibition I have seen in a long time. That it was still being installed during the press preview seemed almost an intentional statement—resistance to the idea of a finished product ready to be consumed before the biennial caravan moves on to its next destination. The show's endeavor to (uncover the paradoxes) of the bourgeois principle of formal equality by exposing the fact that fantasy categorically resists universalization (as the curator noted) was certainly carried out.

—*Jens Hoffmann*

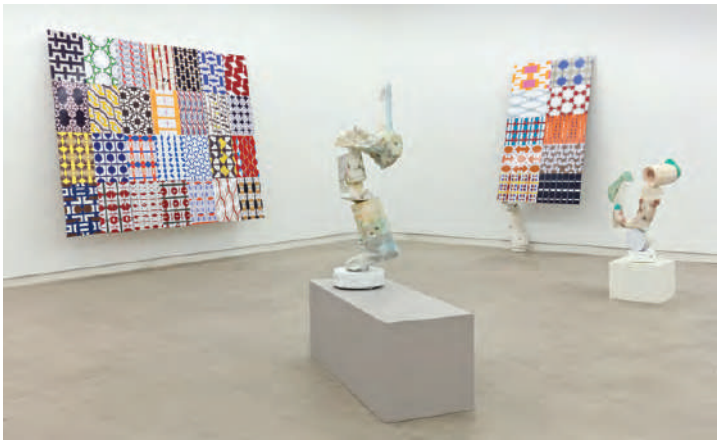
TORONTO

Kristan Horton and David Armstrong Six

CLINT ROENISCH GALLERY

In a world altered to its depths by human consumption, what will endure? Kristan Horton and David Armstrong Six's two-person show "If by Dull Rhymes" seemed to propose that castoffs from our sinking ship have a salvageable future even if we don't. Proliferating commodities provided the material conditions and inspiration for works of literally wasteful beauty, whose elegiac yet playful constructions craftily forecast human obsolescence.

Armstrong Six's delicately colored freestanding assemblages made of plaster, cement, steel, and other materials conjured an undersea garden growing out of ruins. Some took the form of broken columns made of wood and murky Plexiglas, around which other, vaguely creatural forms with botanical titles—*Dwarf Mallow* and *Opuntia X* (the latter named for the cactus genus of the prickly pear), for example, both 2016—materialized. The more organic sculptures were lyrically compiled casts of boots, cans, gourds, and other objects as well as discarded molds. Often fractured or gouged, strewn with holes and barnacle-like beads and glass pebbles, they extruded branches and other appendages. The resulting aggregate forms suggested self-organizing, animated debris straining toward a marmoreal classical ideal. References to historical sculpture abounded; Michelangelo's *Slaves* were clearly a touchstone, as were various modernist paradigms. Other associations, humorous and more serious, also ran through the works. *Dwarf Mallow*, a fishy, beige-marbled and aquamarine form, balanced a cylinder on its boxy snout like a seal. A leggy plaster figure adorned with glass pearls recalled the limbs of the fallen aerialist in Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, as though preserved beneath the waves for centuries. And the bleached remains in some of the other sculptures, with broken-off cast glove fingers and boots, invoked sea-wracked bodies mingled with rubbish, sea-changed into something rich and strange.



View of "Kristan Horton and David Armstrong Six," 2016. From left: Kristan Horton, *Tabarium Consumer Radiation Array 004*, 2016; David Armstrong Six, *Moonshade Walk'r*, 2016; Kristan Horton with David Armstrong Six, *Tabarium: Consumer Radiation Array 001*, 2016; David Armstrong Six, *Dwarf Mallow*, 2016. Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid.

A transformative logic also informed Horton's series of large panels "Tabarium: Consumer Radiation Array 001–004," 2016, each of which juxtaposes colorful geometric patterns created from fragments of used packaging. The basic unit of each design is a flat cardboard tab—torn from a chocolate box, for instance—photographed and manipulated (reversed, rotated, repeated) to form configurations variously crystalline, cellular, and architectonic. The panels themselves, which reproduce but do not physically reuse the discarded tabs, participate in the proliferation of material things, literalizing a seemingly ineluctable pattern. If Armstrong Six's assemblages alluded to canonical Western works, Horton's arrays drew inspiration from African textiles and Islamic tiles and architecture. Conflating global economic and cultural exchange, Horton's decorative forms, spread out like sails, were mounted on wooden pallets (recalling the shipping containers in which they likely once traveled) and angled away from the walls so that their bottom edges extended out into the gallery, like solar panels or shopfront awnings (one propped up by Armstrong Six's "Icarus" leg). Two of Horton's works departed from the tilted-panel format: a pair of framed, tiled prints imaged structures of baroque complexity, created from myriad miniature, digitally spliced maquettes constructed out of tabs. The entity in *Tabarium: Form150920*, 2015, appeared at once a voracious, coralline organism and a patchwork-like interstellar habitat, confounding natural and technological accretions.

A Keats sonnet provided the title for the show. "If by dull rhymes our English must be chain'd," the Romantic poet argued (contemplating the formal restrictions of the sonnet form), poets of his generation needed to construct new rhyme schemes—"Sandals more interwoven and complete / To fit the naked foot of poesy." Like Keats, who wanted to weave the "dead leaves" of ancient poetic laurels into a "garland" suited to an unfree but modern muse, Armstrong Six and Horton have refashioned and animated the husks of inherited forms by