



# BARTLEBY REVIEW

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## Super, Unnatural BC .... Curtis Grahauer

**Nigel Dembicki, Genta Ishimura, Ian Lowrie**  
'86'

*Spare Room*  
2F/222 East Georgia  
Through March 20

Stand-up paddleboard yoga is a curious pastime that perfectly encapsulates the Vancouver "experience". For those who are unfamiliar with this activity, you must be new to Vancouver... welcome! SUP yoga, as it's affectionately known, involves paddling a surfboard on a body of water and then striking yogic poses against the majestic backdrop of the Coast Mountains reflected in the glass towers of downtown.

Does it take place outdoors? Check. Can it be cross-promoted with one of the local, recognizable outfitters (Lululemon, MEC, etc.)? You bet! Is it a fusion of two appropriated cultures? Of course. In this case, Hawaiian paddle boarding is combined with a bastardization of yoga by a consumer demographic more familiar with the Gandharvas, 90's alt-rockers, than with the gandharvas of Indian classical music. Namaste.

Inspired by Japanese rock garden aesthetics, the main part of the installation consists of a slatted wooden pathway elevated over pebbles and a few considerably placed stones, and highlights how unnatural Vancouver's "natural" environment really is. The calm feeling that permeates this enclosed and windowless space engenders quiet contemplation of the environment outside of Spare Room. The aggressive vehicular energy of Main Street and grimy Chinatown alleyways surround this indoor island of Zen.

The studio and exhibition space, as agents of production and dissemination respectively, are in a perpetual motion of depending on and supporting one another. This symbiotic relationship becomes hardened in a city like Vancouver, where the thirst for arts and culture is supplanted by leisure and livelihood. As outlined by curator Sung Pil Yoon on the space's website, "the exhibition room strives to construct (and deconstruct) the concept of space as an environment, situation, or place in order to analyze the experimental stages of spatial design." It is fitting then that *86*, with its references to the prototypical Vancouver lifestyle, is the pilot exhibition for Spare Room.

Thankfully, *86* avoids entering into any tired conversations that revolve around whether or not Vancouver is a city that supports the arts as much as it should. Instead it brings up fundamental points on the local environment to consider what is nature versus naturalized in the context of a city obsessed with nature.



Recessed into the opposite wall are three vignettes of Vancouver life in miniatures. In one, a man in a forest is balling up a Gore-Tex jacket with the intention of stuffing it in a MEC backpack. In another, a couple of seals play at a pebbled shore while a man fixes an oblivious stare towards the unseen horizon. The third is a scene of a man drinking a glass of tap water within a kitchen sharing the inefficiently spacious aesthetic inherent to the Vancouver Special.

There are very few who would argue that we are entitled to access nature and its resources, whether that is hiking the local mountains, doing SUP yoga in False Creek, or getting our hydrate on straight from the tap. Along with this entitlement, however, is also the naturalization of having our natural resources sold back to us. What else could explain the ease with which people pay \$2.25 for a bottle of Nestlé water, freshly bottled in Hope, BC?

**Curtis Grahauer**