



Back to Talented newcomers steal the show

## Talented newcomers steal the show

November 30, 2009

MURRAY WHYTE

The exhibition list is a brain-grabber, to be sure: Richard Serra, Ellsworth Kelly and, oh, right, a couple of other guys. But Serra and Kelly, two proverbial monsters of Modernism, showing in a little private gallery on Queen St. W.? Cool.

That gallery would be Clint Roenisch's, and let it never be said that the proprietor doesn't know how to make a statement. Last year, Roenisch allowed British artists Heather and Ivan Morrison to excavate clay from a hole cut in the gallery floor to build a three-metre high mound of earth, crushed oyster shells and sumac branches by the gallery's front window. The resulting rough monolith stopped passersby in their tracks for weeks.

But such showmanship is really just good business, and while brand names like Serra and Kelly may get you through the door, it's the unknowns that'll keep you there. Their names are Niall McClelland and Jeremy Jansen, two 20something Toronto art world naifs more steeped in 'zines, indie rock and skateboards than this business of art. You may want to remember them, because it's hard to think they'll be unknown much longer.

The show is called "Back to Black and Light," and their work here is more than just promising; at times, it's commandingly good. I'm thinking in particular of a series of pieces by McClelland called "Tapestries," in which he has taken large-scale sheaves of paper photocopied flat-black, and folded and unfolded them in systemic patterns.

The fold lines crack the ink from the page, leaving pale traces of McClelland's literal handiwork; the resultant piece is fantastically engaging and very Modern indeed: simple, handmade and pure, engaged only in its own materiality and the ordering of space.

Add in the Minimalist overtones of the throwaway – copy paper and ink, tonnes of which hit our recycle bins daily – and you've got a tight little package that nods to recent art history with such natural grace that you might think it was unintentional.

But that's the charm of the pairing, really. It probably was. McClelland and Jansen are dead-centre in the Facebook generation, where virtual scenes are as significant as real, physical locations. Their community is found as much in the online, viral aesthetics of the 20-something cross-continental creative scene than right here at home.

Jansen's work has that same atavistic sense, inflected with the immediacy of his scene. Specifically, I'm thinking of an arresting three-metre shard of wood that quite intentionally resembles a telegraph pole, dominating the front gallery.

And the marquee players? You have to step into the back gallery to find a Kelly print, dangling quietly by one corner.

A Serra intaglio print, meanwhile, hangs on the wall opposite, the ink heavily textured and almost impossibly thick. It reminded me of an old Modernist notion, where artistic intent deferred to the material's urge to simply become.



Works by Niall McClelland (at far left) and Jeremy Jansen in the "Back to Black and Light" show.

CLINT ROENISCH GALLERY PHOTO