Vancouver, BC

Contemporary Art Gallery

B. C. Binning and Alvin Balkind Galleries

From June 17, 2011

Ron Tran

Opening reception: Thursday June 16, 6–9pm

Shary Boyle

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Shary Boyle is based in Toronto and has exhibited throughout Canada, Europe and the US. She has had solo exhibitions at the Power Plant, Toronto (2006) and the Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge (2008). In 2009 her work was featured at the Fumetto Festival in Lucerne, Switzerland, in The Likely Fate of the Man that Swallowed the Ghost at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, and included in exhibitions throughout 2010–2011 at The Gardiner Museum, Toronto, the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, the Maison Rouge, Paris and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia. Shary Boyle: Flesh and Blood, curated by Louise Déry and produced by the Galerie de l’UQAM, launched at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Fall 2010 and travelled to Galerie de l’UQAM in Montréal. Boyle’s work is held in museum collections including the National Gallery of Canada and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Boyle received the Gershon Iskowitz Prize at the AGO in 2009 and the following year, a Hnatyshyn Foundation Visual Arts Awards for outstanding achievement by a Canadian artist. She is represented by Jessica Bradley Art + Projects, Toronto.

The Contemporary Art Gallery presents Flesh and Blood, a major touring exhibition of recent work by Canadian artist Shary Boyle. Through drawing, sculpture, painting, writing and performance Boyle creates installations that examine a range of psychological and emotional situations rooted in a fictional world. Her position is at once feminist, yet poetic, located within dreamlike states. Tense with troubled emotions, possessing an expressive immediacy and poised between grace and strangeness, her portraits and ‘genre scenes’ read as allegories of the human condition. Their resolutely symbolic language raises bold perspectives on the present, revealing a conscience haunted by a consideration of the morals of our world today. Centring on heredity, sexuality and death, and the nature of our place within the greater animal kingdom, these conditions form a visual investigation into the complex links between the individual and society as a whole.

A number of characteristics are key to an understanding of Boyle’s work: stylistic contrast and ornamental excess, figurative exuberance and phantasmagorical presence, the mechanisms of seduction, an evocation of a weird, theatricality of subject and manifestations of social politics. Her examination of scenes and subject matter associated with childhood and adolescence, in turn reference surrealist landscapes, fairytales, cartoons and illustrated novels that recall past fantastic worlds or prophetic futures. She updates the variety, excess and hybridity of the Baroque by insertion of a feminist dimension, exploiting the potential for shifting motifs and imaginary space whereby tensions are set up between individual isolation and the notion of community.

The baroque nuance in Boyle’s work becomes evident in her play between form and material, light and dark, image and narrative, individual and collective, human and animal, and body and soul. Sited between straightforwardness and splendour, while retaining a compelling ambivalence, Boyle plays with the notion of beauty as a means to draw us in. Her figurines simultaneously attract and repel, through both the familiarity of the object and of what is represented, and the technical command of material and process.

Boyle’s practice encompasses a series of interwoven genres, a network of relationships, embodied in both her paintings and sculpture. Explicit in the narrative of images created, these are amplified further by the fantastical qualities generated in her light installations and performances. Contrary to the constant spectacle of images that bombard us daily, where initial potency soon becomes commonplace, Boyle counters the risk of overfamiliarity by using visual codes from a range of diverse sources. She adopts freely from historical, aesthetic references including Hieronymus Bosch, Félicien Rops, Ferdinand Knopff and Otto Dix, to the more popular imagery of radical contemporary comic art.

Above
Shary Boyle
Burden I (2010)
Porcelain, china paint, lustre
30 x 36 x 36 cm
Photograph by Rafael Goldchain

Right
Shary Boyle
Dealer, Artist, Curator (2009)
Ink, origami collage on paper
91.5 x 79 cm
The Bailey Collection, Toronto
Courtesy of
Jessica Bradley Art + Projects, Toronto
Ron Tran
A Way to Go
Off-site

Ron Tran studied Integrated Media Arts at Emily Carr University of Art and Design. Tran’s work explores new ways of looking at daily life and the nature of social exchanges. He moves fluidly between various media, from performance to sculpture, in order to make associations between seemingly unrelated objects and concepts. Recent solo exhibitions include It Knows Not What It Is, Charles H. Scott Gallery, Vancouver (2017); Stranger Circumstances, Crawl Space, Seattle, USA (2009); and You Can Do Anything With Them Under Such Circumstances…, Lawrence Eng Gallery, Vancouver (2008); and Distance From A Table To A Chair, The Village And Other Things, Neon Gallery, Brisnap, Sweden (2007). Tran has also exhibited in numerous group exhibitions such as Ways Of Seeing, 6th Berlin Biennale, Berlin, Germany (2010); Triumphant Carrot: The Persistence of Still Life, Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver (2010); Thermostat: Video and the Pacific Northwest, Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, USA (2009); and EAST International 2007, Norwich Gallery, England (2007). Tran has an upcoming residency at the Museo Experimental el Eco, Mexico City.

Our off-site programme begins with A Way to Go, a new commission by Vancouver based artist Ron Tran. His practice focuses on displacing the routine of everyday life. Previous projects include pursuing interactions with strangers, offering to walk them home at night or relocating ordinary objects such as his apartment door, which he removed for six weeks for display in an exhibition.

For A Way to Go, Tran guides his audience on an unexpected route through Vancouver’s downtown core, navigating alleyways and shortcuts. The word ‘alley’ derives from the original French word ‘allée’ which literally translates as ‘a way to go’. For this project, Tran names several alleyways as a means to establish their usage and elevate their status. Unlike traditional methods of street naming, which often reference political figures or historical events, Tran has used personal experiences, such as encounters with individuals and objects, to determine the description of these overlooked places. Following the trail established by the artist, participants are led into an immersive, interactive experience through the use of a GPS enabled mobile device. A series of digital images, audio tracks and video files, corresponding to specific locations are revealed reflecting the artist’s experiences and offering an understanding of his descriptive classifications while bringing to light hidden narratives. A Way to Go creates opportunities to re-examine downtown Vancouver through a project that is decidedly personal and unique.

This forms the first in a series of projects using interactive technologies which take programming outside of the gallery allowing audiences to experience contemporary art within the wider context of the city. Working with Autobox Media, the Contemporary Art Gallery has designed a program that uses Layar Reality Browser to guide audiences on a journey where they can explore and interact with artwork they encounter along the way. These projects will work on any smartphone. Devices are available at the gallery for visitors wishing to borrow one. Please contact reception for details.

Louise Déry holds a PhD in art history and has been the director of the Galerie de l’UQAM (Université du Québec à Montréal) since 1997. She is a lecturer in museum studies and art history, and associate professor for Ecole des arts visuels et métédatales, UQAM. Previously, she was curator of contemporary art at the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Québec City and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, and director of the Musée régional de Rimouski. She has curated exhibitions of artists including Manon De Pauw, Robie Racine, Sarkis, Nancy Spero, Dominique Blain, Raphaëlle de Groot, and the philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, amongst others. Exhibitions include: Métamorphosis, AKBank Sanat, Istanbul (2008); David Altmejd: The Index, 52nd Venice Biennale (2007); Le corps, la langue, les mots, la peau: Artistes contemporains du Québec, Centre d’art contemporain Santa Monica, Barcelona, and Passacage de Ratz, Paris (1999); and Solo Snow: Oeuvres de Michael Snow, Le Fresnoy, France (2011). In 2007 Déry received the first Hnatyshyn Foundation award for curatorial excellence.

Her figures and characters form a family of sorts. Also displaying an original and unique genetics, one encrypted in the artist’s choice of materials, the specificity of her techniques and their inherent meaning. And like most families, functional and dysfunctional members live side by side, harmony and chaos coexisting in an environment that shifts between the magical and the disturbed, from the real to the unreal. This dualism is no doubt what holds Boyle’s fictive world together: its main characters bound by conflicts, idyls, fears, passions and destinies. They are a community even if meaning rests in their singular forms.

By crafting the work herself Boyle sees this as crucial to her feminist standpoint, critically addressing the devaluation of the decorative arts — such as porcelain and embroidery — customarily associated with women’s leisure activities. Instead of working with technicians to fabricate the pieces, the artist’s handmade means of production is designed to simulate the exacting standards of expert industrial manufacture by artisans, demanding a mastery of technical challenges. Yet she embraces convention by studying the porcelain techniques of the great European tradition — for example, Sevres, Meissen, Nymphenburg — and familiarizes herself with oil painting in the manner of the Old Masters. By employing these forms we are seduced by the lustre of glossy paint, the brilliance of the porcelain, the alluring texture of tiny polymer miniatures, and in other works by the fluidity of lace and ribbons, the gleam of polychrome flesh and delicate gilding, and the magic of graceful projections and shadow plays. While the objects themselves remain redolent of the domestic, their formal attributes are used to engage and hold our attention, subverting expectations through that which is depicted.

Regardless of media and genre the works of Shary Boyle confront our gaze head on. No matter how appealing or oppressive, we remain somehow transfixed. The feeling that the gaze is aimed at the viewer is not specific to Boyle’s work, but here, if eyes are considered the site of expression, in common parlance ‘the mirror of the soul’, then they present themselves in many guises. Bulging, popping out of their sockets, staring wide-eyed, blinded, obstructed, masked, shut or deeply sunken, they have a hypnotic, hallucinogenic effect and suggest a troubling intensity. The variety, expressiveness and functionality of the multiple gazes pull us to back to question what it is we see. Boyle reinvents a form of historicity in which we attempt to seek our own figure.

This is an abridged and re-edited extract from the text by curator Louise Déry first published in the catalogue Flesh and Blood accompanying the exhibition. Hardcover and including images of many works in the exhibition, it is available priced $40. Please see reception for details.
Exhibition Opening
Thursday June 16, 6–9pm
Join us to celebrate the opening of our new exhibition.

Shary Boyle and Louise Déry In-conversation
Friday June 17, 6pm
An in-conversation event between artist and curator in conjunction with the touring exhibition Flesh and Blood. Discussion will centre on the development of the exhibition, its various differing presentations and focus on the major themes running through Boyle’s work. Places are free.

Walking Tour
Saturday July 9, 4pm
A walking tour of the interactive work A Way to Go by Ron Tran commissioned by the Contemporary Art Gallery.

Free Guided Visits
Guided visits are free and open to the public, providing an excellent opportunity to engage with exhibitions and develop new skills for interpreting contemporary art.

Saturday June 25, 3pm
Led by our volunteers with Gallery Coordinator, Jill Henderson

Saturday July 2, 3pm
Led by our Executive Director, Nigel Prince

Saturday July 16, 3pm
Guided visit in French led by our volunteer, Patricia Huijnen

Sunday August 21, 3pm
Led by our volunteers with Gallery Coordinator, Jill Henderson

We also encourage visits from primary and secondary schools, ESL groups, university and college students and community groups. For more information or to book a guided visit for your group, please email info@contemporaryartgallery.ca or telephone 604.681.2700.

To mark our fortieth anniversary the Contemporary Art Gallery pays tribute to the one thousand artists who have exhibited at the gallery since our beginnings in 1971.

Our street front windows host large banners listing the names of all the artists who have shown at the Contemporary Art Gallery over the past forty years. This impressive list includes local heroes Ian Wallace, Wanda Koop, Rodney Graham, Liz Magor, Ron Terada, Renee Van Halm amongst others, and Steven Scheerer, who will be representing Canada at this year’s Venice Biennale. The full list of artists is presented on the back page.

Our fortieth anniversary is an exciting opportunity to celebrate our history while also looking forward to the crucial role the CAG will continue to play in presenting the very best in contemporary art from Vancouver, Canada and abroad. This remarkable list also gives us an opportunity to honour those who have helped create, shape and challenge us.

This is just the beginning of a series of exciting celebrations and events held to commemorate the Contemporary Art Gallery’s forty years.