

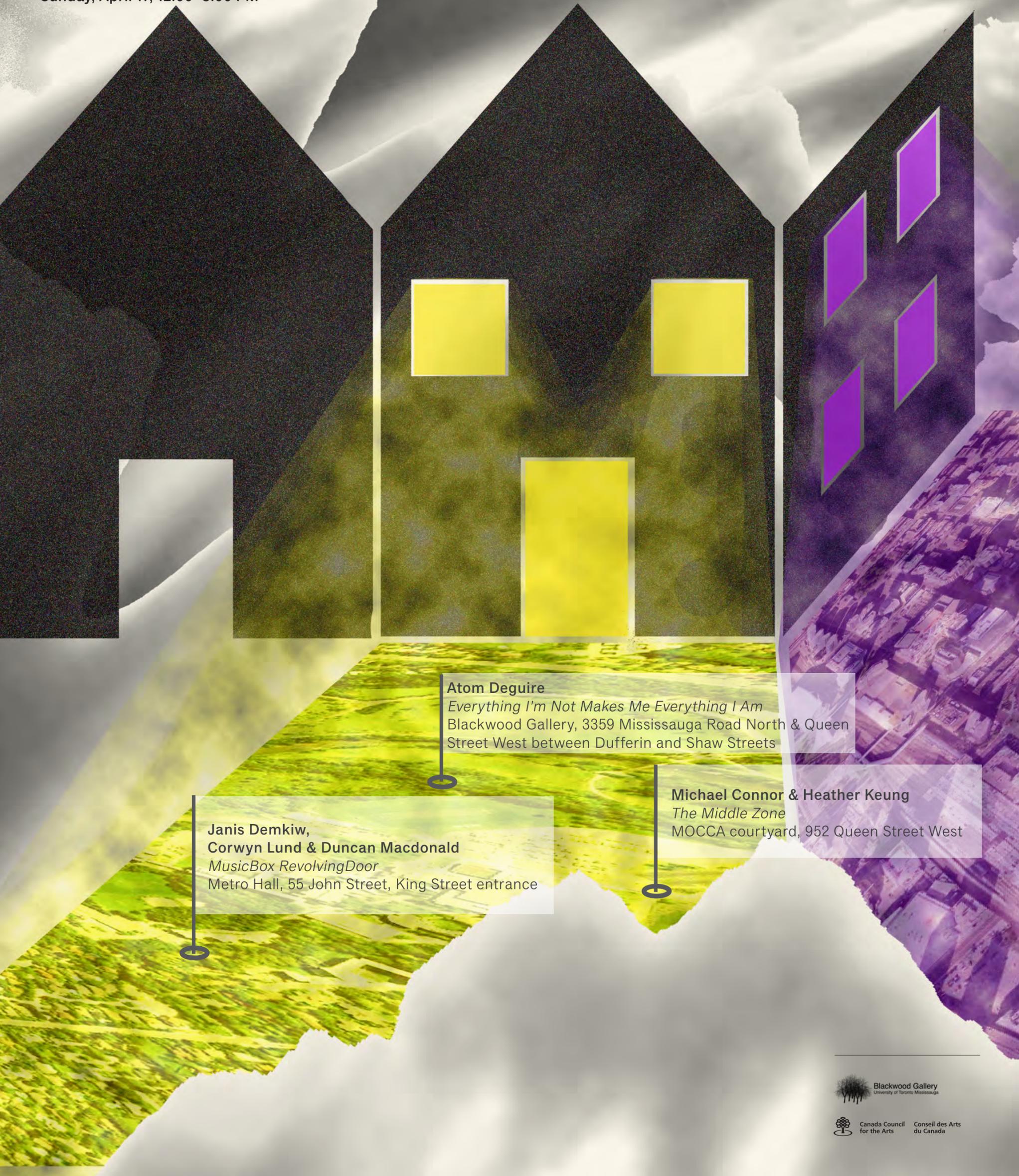
The Good Host

Michael Connor and Heather Keung,
Atom Deguire, Janis Demkiw, Corwyn Lund,
and Duncan MacDonald

Curated by Su-Ying Lee

April 17–May 22, 2011

Opening reception:
Sunday, April 17, 12:00–3:00 PM



Atom Deguire

Everything I'm Not Makes Me Everything I Am
Blackwood Gallery, 3359 Mississauga Road North & Queen
Street West between Dufferin and Shaw Streets

**Janis Demkiw,
Corwyn Lund & Duncan Macdonald**
MusicBox RevolvingDoor
Metro Hall, 55 John Street, King Street entrance

Michael Connor & Heather Keung
The Middle Zone
MOCCA courtyard, 952 Queen Street West

The Good Host

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Opening reception and bus tour: Sunday April 17, 12–3pm

12 noon: Pick up at Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art (MOCCA), 952 Queen Street West, site of intervention by Michael Connor & Heather Keung, and a poster project on Queen Street West by Atom Deguire.

1st stop: Blackwood Gallery, University of Toronto Mississauga, for the opening reception and site of Atom Deguire's intervention (additional events include tour of Karen Henderson billboard and Gordon Monahan exhibition).

2nd stop: Metro Hall, 55 John Street, site of *MusicBox RevolvingDoor*

3pm drop off: MOCCA

Free Contemporary Art Bus Tour: Sunday May 22, 12–5pm

Tour starts at 12 noon at Blackwood Gallery's off-site exhibition at Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art (952 Queen Street West), and then departs for Blackwood Gallery (UTM), Art Gallery of York University, Koffler Gallery off-site exhibition (Sheridan Plaza), Blackwood Gallery off-site exhibition (Metro Hall) and returning to MOCCA for 5pm.

To make a reservation, contact the AGYU at scarte@yorku.ca or call 416.736.2100 ext 44021 by Friday May 20.

Biographies:

Su-Ying Lee lives and works in Toronto. Her curatorial projects include *Under New Management*, an exhibition disguised as a pop-up shop, co-curated with Suzanne Carte-Blanchenet. Lee has curated exhibitions by artists A.S.M. Kobayashi and Kent Monkman, as well as commissioned a project by Harrell Fletcher and Wendy Red Star.

Michael Connor lives and works in Toronto. Connor's experience of restoring an 1850s heritage log home in Peterborough led him to become a professional carpenter in residential framing. Connor has drawn from his studies in art, a diverse range of work experiences, and skills in the building trade to produce *The Middle Zone*.

Atom Deguire lives and works in Toronto. The artist focuses primarily on investigating art production both within and around the architecture of the urban metropolis. Deguire has exhibited across Canada and in the USA, most recently at Haight Gallery, Calgary, and a solo exhibition at YYZ Artists' Outlet, Toronto. www.atomdeguire.com

Janis Demkiw lives and works in Toronto. Demkiw uses found objects and materials to stage spatial disruptions, absurd shifts in scale, and strategic approaches to display—often with the aim of thwarting or teasing contextual expectations. Recent projects include *11:11*, a collaborative structural schematic for an imagined factory, with Olya Mishchenko, Sandy Plotnikoff, Sebastian Butt, and Christine Swintak for the "Toronto Now" series at the Art Gallery of Ontario (The Young Gallery).

Heather Keung is a Toronto-based artist, curator, and Artistic Director of the Reel Asian Film Festival. Her artistic practice includes video, installation, and performance art, and is inspired by physical labour, memory, technology and architecture. Works from this series have recently been showcased in curated

programs in Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, San Francisco, and Buenos Aires.

Corwyn Lund is a Toronto-based artist who constructively re-animates architectural space and designed objects. Past projects include formative public art installations, such as *Swingsite* and *Parlour of Twilight* (Gladstone Hotel, Room 405), and subsequent gallery-based installations (Mercer Union and YYZ). Lund's work is held in private and corporate collections, and is available through Diaz Contemporary in Toronto.

Duncan MacDonald lives and works in St. Catherines. MacDonald is a contemporary artist and assistant professor at Brock University. His artworks take form in sound, performance, video, music, installation, and drawing—constantly exploring the corporeal sensorium and its commodification. Duncan's art is represented by pljm gallery in Toronto. www.duncanmacdonald.ca

Viewing Hours:

Atom Deguire
Everything I'm Not Makes Me
Everything I Am
Daily at the Blackwood Gallery, from 12–3pm and on Queen Street West between Dufferin and Shaw Streets, 24 hours a day.

Michael Connor & Heather Keung
The Middle Zone
Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art courtyard, 952 Queen Street West, 24 hours a day.

Janis Demkiw, Corwyn Lund, and Duncan MacDonald
MusicBox RevolvingDoor
Metro Hall North Entrance, King Street revolving door entrance to Metro Hall (building address 55 John Street). Hours: M–F 7:30 am to 9:30 pm, weekends from 8 am–6 pm, closed civic holidays.



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Located throughout the city, *The Good Host* can be experienced as one or a series of encounters that provoke deliberation. The aim is to unfix the viewer's perception of prescribed uses for urban space, and reconsider their own agency within it.

As a proposition on spatial problems in the urban environment, *The Good Host* draws attention to issues of access to and denial of space, the prescriptive assignment of spaces and the manner in which these conventions shape our consciousness. Through parasitic tactics the artists—Michael Connor and Heather Keung, Atom Deguire, and the collective of Janis Demkiw, Corwyn Lund, and Duncan MacDonald—propose strategies to enable agency, intervene upon, and become auteur of urban space. Their methods include grafting, piggybacking and mimicry. Although these methods are deployed upon the built environment, it is the potential consequences or implications of the structure rather than the physicality or object of the structure that the artists comment upon.

Michael Connor and Heather Keung's occupation of overlooked space, Atom Deguire's revision of gallery space and directional iconography, and Janis Demkiw, Corwyn Lund, and Duncan MacDonald's "revolving-door-turned-music-box" adapt and occupy systems through parasitic tactics. Aply, philosopher Michel Serres characterizes the parasite as noise, "a break in a message" or static interrupting the system.¹ Further, the conception of systems as harmonic and rational is false, and in fact, as Serres indicates, systems work because they do not work.² That is, systems work by means of parasitic noise or interruption, which impels them to evolve. The interruptions created by these artists cause the keepers and users of the spaces occupied to reflect and navigate differently—rerouting, rethinking, adapting, and evolving their relation to the set of circumstances.

The tactic of usurping the systems' or structures' own traits as deployed by these artists is akin to *détournement*. *Détournement* was among the foils Guy-Ernest Debord proposed against the alienation caused by "spectacle." For French Marxist theorist and Situationist Guy-Ernest Debord, "the spectacle represents the dominant model of life. It is the omnipresent affirmation of the choices that have already been made in the sphere of production and in the consumption implied by that production."³ *Détournement* mimics and modifies existing spectacle/media to reveal the implications of the original. Original elements can be taken from anywhere, and, in an act of turnabout, can be used to create a new formulation, correction, integration, or alteration. In the example set by Connor and Keung, an unaddressed exterior niche inadvertently relegated to smokers in an otherwise purposefully defined building is an opportunity to refer back to the phenomenon of the milieu. Waste such as that generated from the industries of art production, renovation, and new construction prolific all around Queen Street West, where the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art (MOCCA) is situated, is pursued by the artists. Connor, himself a builder and Keung a cultural producer, operate with consent from the MOCCA to build upon their courtyard. The parasitic noise produced by the artist/builder and artist/Artistic Director/curator is a constituent of the system. In effect, the pair *détourn* the system, employing it with the production and nurturing of its own parasitic growth.

Su-Ying would like to thank the many people who contributed to the realization of this project including: her advisors Emilie Chhangur, Barbara Fischer, An Te Liu, and Christof Migone; David Liss at the MOCCA, and Nadira Pattison at the City of Toronto for site sponsorship and support; Juliana Zalucky, Exhibition Coordinator at the Blackwood Gallery; classmates, task masters, and moral supporters Ana Barajas and Sandy Saad; friend and Spanish language translator Ulysses Castellanos, and most of all, the artists.

Duncan MacDonald, Janis Demkiw, and Corwyn Lund wish to acknowledge the Humanities Research Institute, Brock University, St. Catherines.

The Good Host is presented with site support from the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, and The City of Toronto in conjunction with Celebrate 27 Arts Fest, a month long partnership program of Toronto artists and arts organizations that celebrates Article 27 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states, "Everyone has the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts, and to share in scientific advancements and its benefits."

Poster image: Mathew Nye
Designer: Martina Hwang
Printer: Captain Printworks

This exhibition is produced as part of the requirements for the MVS degree in Curatorial Studies at the University of Toronto.

© The Blackwood Gallery, Su-Ying Lee, and the artists: Michael Connor, Atom Deguire, Janis Demkiw, Heather Keung, Corwyn Lund, and Duncan MacDonald.

Debord also propositioned to counter the spectacle by expanding the conception of geography through psychogeography. Psychogeography was defined by Debord as "the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals."⁴ The emphasis is placed on the effect of, rather than the prescribed function of the space. Denying us our expectation of gallery as container for art, Deguire's obscuring treatment of the Blackwood Gallery provokes mental and physical repositioning. Viewing the artist's work as such necessitates a reconceptualization of the gallery's relationship to art, and places where we seek art. In a complimentary proposition, situated a distance from the suburban gallery, Deguire's poster project relates the manner in which prescriptive symbols and spaces become didactic and paternalistic. The artist's vinyl and poster applications subtly transfer and reposition symbols and iconography from public space shifting both perception and reception. Through psychogeography, assigned functions as either places of industry or play are nullified, eliminating the separation between art and its surroundings. Installed at Toronto's Metro Hall, a space prescribed for municipal government functions, Demkiw, Lund, and MacDonald's *MusicBox RevolvingDoor* conflates the functions of administrative and recreational space. The installation adapts the apparatus of a music box to the building's revolving door. As pedestrians move through the door, music is plucked out by tines attached to the handle that sweep over "activating strips." Setting the mechanism in motion while entering and exiting the site of governmental power, individual citizens are given unexpected agency. Each rotation of the "revolving-door-turned-music-box" creates a ludic alteration of the structure from bureaucratic to one of play, repeating until it is uncertain whether a division remains.

The predominant characteristic of these artists' practices is their opportunistic interface with a pre-existing system or structure. The ensuing interfaces of their work capitalize upon and push the original function and meaning of the host structure. As inside agents, artist/builder Connor and artist/Artistic Director/curator Keung employ their familiarity with the physical, cultural, and institutional structures of the MOCCA to alter and test the institution's limits. In a different approach, Deguire sends up the prescriptiveness of spaces, and directional signage and symbols. Deguire relocates, appropriates, and at times, outright mimics common understandings and visual language. Revealed is how effectively the system of symbols and directives are entrenched. Together, Demkiw, Lund, and MacDonald exploit playful inventiveness to gain entry to the governmental seat of Metro Hall, piggybacking their scaled-up music box mechanism upon a revolving door. Typically a miniature device, the music box is adapted to architectural dimensions crossing the scale divide, and intersecting the functions of business/art/play.

The implications of these works include: the suggestion of participatory urban planning, where built, economic, and social environments are not exclusively authored by architects and official sanctioning bodies; advocacy of subversive strategies; and, the appropriation and reclamation of space and hybrid interventions.

— Su-Ying Lee

Notes

¹ Michel Serres, *The Parasite* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 8.

² Michel Serres, *The Parasite* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 12, 13, 14.

³ Guy-Ernest Debord, "The Society of the Spectacle," Paris, 1967, *Situationist International Online*. Translated by Ken Knabb. Accessed November 29, 2010 <http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/debord/1.htm>

⁴ Guy-Ernest Debord, "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography," 1955, *Nothingness.org*. Accessed November, 2010 <http://library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/en/display/2>

Image Credits

- 01 Michael Connor and Heather Keung, *DIY Essentials*, video still, 2005.
- 02 Janis Demkiw, Corwyn Lund, and Duncan MacDonald, *MusicBox RevolvingDoor*, 2004, an auditory work of custom spring steel and aluminum fixtures installed in an existing revolving door. Detail view at Kitchener City Hall. Image courtesy of the artists.
- 03 Atom Deguire, *Overtake the Document*, 2008, vinyl, dimensions variable. Image courtesy of the artist.

University of Toronto Department of Art
Masters of Visual Studies

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