



THE CLOSER TOGETHER THINGS ARE
EXPLORING OUR SIMILARITIES, AND HOW THEY EMPHASIZE OUR DIFFERENCES, AT THE SMU ART GALLERY

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The title of this engaging exhibition, *The Closer Together Things Are*, begs a conclusion: the closer together things are, the more alike they are. Or, the easier they are to understand. But just because a phrase invites a conclusion does not mean that such a conclusion is easy or predictable.

On the contrary, at least in the case of this exhibition at the [St. Mary's University Art Gallery \(http://www.smu.ca/campus-life/art-gallery.html\)](http://www.smu.ca/campus-life/art-gallery.html), the conclusions suggested by the title, and drawn from the experience of viewing the works, is anything but easy or predictable. Rather, it leans more towards the oblique, the mysterious, and the thought-provoking.

Most of the works start with a binary conception; things that are alike, yet different. Objects and subjects are paired, physically and conceptually, setting up the dichotomies that fuel this project. Like an exercise in visual acuity, we are initially challenged to find the differences, which in turn, lead us to find out about how we see things, and what we bring to that seeing.

Featuring multiple works by nine artists or artist's duos, there is a lot to see and think about in this exhibition. With sculpture, painting, photography and video, the exhibition is broadly representative of the current trends in Canadian art, particularly from Toronto (six of the 10 artists represented live in that city), and it continues a welcome trend from the local university galleries of presenting touring shows from across the country.

Some of the artists will be familiar to regular gallery-goers in the city, such as Micah Lexier (here represented with collaborative works with Roula Patheniou and Dave Dymant), a recipient last year of an honorary degree from NSCAD University. Lexier frequently exhibits here, and his work is also currently on view at AGNS in their exhibition *The Light Fantastic*. Duo Trevor Mahovsky and Rhona Weppler's work has been seen recently at the MSVU Art Gallery as well as the AGNS.

However, the best reason to see this exhibition is not for what is familiar, but for the cumulative effect of the whole. Whether it is Ève K. Tremblay's photographs and sculptural tableaux, Laura Letinsky's evocative photographs, Roula Partheniou's witty constructed objects, or Luke Painter's quietly gorgeous drawings, the works here reward our time and contemplation.

Kline's paintings, abstract works so subtle that one has to look twice to ensure that there is something to see beyond stretched canvas and the shadow of the stretcher behind (there is: the shadow is painted, an image of the construction of the work), wryly comment on the bombastic nature of so much abstraction, for instance. Weppeler and Mahovsky's sculptures make the surfaces of objects their subjects, through the simplest of moulding techniques: a long line of tea kettles, for instance, made from an unbroken sheet of copper foil, with another line of the traces of hand mirrors, in a similarly unbroken sheet of aluminium foil. These works look like they could blow away in the breeze (which, of course, they could), ghostlike memories of the stuff we surround ourselves with.

In writing about the performances of two young actors in Kathleen Hearn's video, *The Boys*, curators Shannon Anderson and Jay Wilson say, "they are both close to the real experience, but not the real experience." This notion, close to something, but not that thing, is at the heart of the works in this exhibition. There is a constant dance between recognition and surprise. You could argue, of course, that "close, but not" is a pretty good description of postmodernism itself, of an existential state where history seems to have passed us by. A common description of our current times, after all, is "post-truth." More and more, we only know what we believe.

If you believe that truth is just an affirmation of one's biases, then you won't find much 'truth' in this exhibition. But the nearer you get to things, and to others, the harder it is to hold on to such a limited belief. On visiting this exhibition, you will find that truth is right here. Closer than you think.



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