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Daniel Bergeron: "Faces of the City" The artist known as "fauxreel" gives Toronto a facelift

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BY DAVID BALZER September 15, 2010 15:09

EDITORIAL RATING:

To Oct 3, Wed-Sat 1-8pm; Sun
1-7pm. Show & Tell Gallery, 1161
Dundas W. 647-347-3316.
www.showandtellgallery.com.

The paradoxical translation of street art to galleries has been one of the main visual-arts problems of the past two decades, and it remains debatable whether it's ever been fully effective, or worth the effort. Eschewing the well-known tactics of Banksy — who, when working indoors, tends to prefer installations (they have the same anonymous, environmental impact as his more celebrated work) — or

of other graffiti artists who use outdoor objects as canvases, Dan Bergeron, in his first commercial-gallery outing at Show & Tell, presents a dignified collection of photos of his outdoor work, and then several new, mixed-media-on-wood works meant to be hung straightforwardly on a wall.

For those unfamiliar with Bergeron, one of the city's best artists, he is also known as "fauxreel," and has recently been responsible for several very visible public projects, in art-establishment places like the ROM and the AGO, and also and more prolifically on the streets. (You will probably recognize his didactic photo-paste-ups of homeless people carrying signs, many of which are still up around the city; one of his best projects is "Regent Park Portraits," larger paste-ups on the buildings of the titular housing complex, depicting its residents.) His Banksy-ish "A City Renewal Project" from 2008, a recreation of an entire city block inside a warehouse on Lisgar and made with colleague "specter," was witty and affecting, a site-specific treat the likes of which remains troublingly scarce in this city.



At Show & Tell, the photo documentation (apparently Bergeron is very assiduous about documenting every project he does) is of his "Face of the City" series, for which he pasted up parts of faces on textured surfaces. The photos are pretty, unsurprising since the work itself is photo-based; Bergeron knows how to frame his creations to show their intended nuances. Interestingly, most shots are flat, head-on. "Tara" — in which a woman, painted on a concrete underpass and looking a bit like Warhol superstar Viva, gets her hairdo from vine overgrowth — is shot on a sunny day, and is gorgeous. If the intention here is simply to personify, and vivify, city infrastructure by endowing it with faces, Bergeron has succeeded exquisitely.



In this respect, the new works are, admittedly, not as special as they might have been had they been done on buildings and the like, but they still testify to Bergeron's commitment to aesthetics — his shrewdness and deliberateness in replicating and engaging with the real. A cool effect is created by his distressing of blocks of wood for a substrate, as if they are pieces of weathered fences, but what shines, as in the street work, is his humane acuity. The searching eyes, the parting lips, the always-prominent, anchor-like noses: when you look at Bergeron's work, it always looks back.

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