

that is intrinsic to its overall mandate, which includes engaging wide audiences.

window walls as an exhibition space, pinning its programming to the street, using them in a manner and were originally designed to display merchandise rather than offer a view. The gallery uses the they don't let in light or air. They are an extension of the facade of the typical Vancouver high-rise to look into as they are for looking out. But the CAG's windows don't actually function as windows,

Vancouver is articulated as a city built with looking in mind. For coupled windows are as much curtains, and everybody gets to watch each other. A voyeur's paradise, so to speak." In this way,

a friend from the States who "told his mother that Vancouver was a city of glass buildings and no

glass towers a key element in establishing the city's character. He described Vancouver through

this connotation by speaking about Vancouver as the ideal place for the voyeur with its skyline of

and with an unwelcome gaze. In his picture book, *City of Glass*, Douglas Coupland's challenges

The word voyeur is over-determined, it is too particular, commonly associated with the perverse

fit encourages the voyeur instead of closing them out.

Blind is an invitation to look. The unified colour scheme, clean and tidy installation and precise

toward the street he is asking the accidental spectator to investigate what is behind the curtain.

what is behind them, but by creating a considered composition and directing the colour-tiled

that takes both texture and colour into consideration. By covering the windows he has concealed

the display. He has faced the curtain out, aesthetically arranging them into a united composition

Here, in Yaletown, in the densely populated downtown core of Vancouver, Brunen has inverted

on view not for those outside who were intentionally shut out but for those inside.

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mode of window dressing and not common to urban condos where blinds and shutters are

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logical place for curtains, but they are out of place on these uniform retail-like vitrines, under this

For Blind, Brunen has tailored an array of secondhand curtains to hang closed. Windows are a

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It is so easy to walk by a place and barely take notice. Even in its heavy traffic location on Nelson

addresses how easy it is to escape notice.

#### Jennifer Pabst

- 1 Douglas Coupland, *City of Glass*; Douglas Coupland's Vancouver, Vancouver, Douglas & McIntyre, 2000, p.128.
- 2 Garnet C. Butchart, *Heart of the Event: Marion, Badion and the Limits of Representation*, *ANTI+THE+IS* (Vol 16: March 2008); Melbourne, University of Melbourne Press; p.127.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.

#### BIO

Derek Brunen's work traverses a broad range of media to examine relations between art and philosophy and their subsequent political implications. His work has been exhibited in the United States, Europe, Japan and Canada, with recent solo exhibitions at the O Gallery in Vancouver (2007) and CSA Space in Vancouver (2008). He has participated in several group exhibitions worldwide at the Sparwasser HQ in Berlin (2008) and the Prince Takamado Gallery in Tokyo (2008). His screenings also have been presented at various sites including the Vancouver Art Gallery (2008), and City TV's 'TV Frames' in Vancouver (2002), as well as the FW Digital Film Festival in Toronto (2002). Recent articles on his work have appeared in *The Georgia Straight* (2008), *The Vancouver Sun* (2007) and *The Globe and Mail* (2007). Also, Garnet C. Butchart has written on his work for *ANTI+THE+IS* and Hagley+Maxwell have written on 2008 his exhibition for CSA Space. He is a graduate of the Emily Carr Institute (2001) and a former member of the Interim Artists Society (1988-2008). He lives and works in Vancouver.

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It is so easy to walk by a place and barely take notice. Even in its heavy traffic location on Nelson Street and Richards the Contemporary Art Gallery, if you are not looking for it, is one of those places that blends into its surroundings. Regardless of signage, changing window projects, recent marketing stunts and over five year's of occupancy, the gallery at times is camouflaged by its environment, regularly being mistaken for the lobby of the high-rise condominiums above. Derek Brunen's project for the gallery's street front windows is recognition of and an invitation to the many casual passersby who might not take notice of the Contemporary Art Gallery and its many activities.

For Blind, Brunen has tailored an array of secondhand curtains to hang closed. Windows are a logical place for curtains, but they are out of place on these uniform retail-like vitrines, under this cement and gridiron tower and in this still developing neighbourhood. Curtains are an outdated mode of window dressing and not common to urban condos where blinds and shutters are more often pulled closed than drapes drawn. They are more particular to suburban homes like the one I grew up in where each window was specially dressed. I remember how my mother agonized over what to do with our two front windows. She eventually decided on three layers, a sheer curtain for the day to soften direct daylight, a heavier drape to close out the night and a third layer that remained tied to the sides. When the first two layers of fabric were closed, the drapes served as a decorative centerpiece in the room. They commanded attention. They were on view not for those outside who were intentionally shut out but for those inside.

Here, in Yaletown, in the densely populated downtown core of Vancouver, Brunen has inverted the display. He has faced the curtains out, aesthetically arranging them into a united composition that takes both texture and colour into consideration. By covering the windows he has concealed what is behind them, but by creating a considered composition and directing the colour-field toward the street he is asking the accidental spectator to investigate what is behind the curtain. Blind is an invitation to look. The unified colour scheme, clean and tidy installation and precise fit encourage the voyeur instead of closing them out.

The word voyeur is over-determined, it is too particular, commonly associated with the perverse and with an unwelcome gaze. In his picture book, *City of Glass*, Douglas Coupland's challenges this connotation by speaking about Vancouver as the ideal place for the voyeur with its skyline of glass towers a key element in establishing the city's character. He describes Vancouver through a friend from the States who "told his mother that Vancouver was a city of glass buildings and no curtains, and everybody gets to watch each other. A voyeur's paradise, so to speak."<sup>1</sup> In this way, Vancouver is articulated as a city built with looking in mind. For Coupland windows are as much to look into as they are for looking out. But the CAG's windows don't actually function as windows, they don't let in light or air. They are an extension of the façade of the typical Vancouver high-rise and were originally designed to display merchandise rather than offer a view. The gallery uses the windows as an exhibition space, bringing its programming to the street, using them in a manner that is intrinsic to its overall mandate, which includes engaging wide audiences.

Still, these windows conceal the inner workings of the gallery and at times feel more like a protective barrier than a viable way to connect with the outside. They close something off. Brunen's gesture to cover the non-windows manages to open them up. To make them more about looking than concealing what is happening behind them. In "Heart of the Event: Marion, Badiou and the Limits of Representation," Garnet C. Butchart talks about Brunen's earlier paintings as "...marking nothing less than an event of visibility."<sup>2</sup> What Butchart suggests by this 'event of visibility' is that Brunen creates a surface that "bridges the distance separating the visible and the invisible."<sup>3</sup> Even though Butchart is speaking about Brunen's paintings, which attempt to collapse abstraction and representation, this play with representation is still evident here. The curtains are curtains but without typical function. They are in their logical place, but are flipped. They cover what is already opaque and invite the gaze rather than detour it. Whether *Blind* as a material presence or cohesive idea holds such grand narratives as pulling the "unseen from the depths of the invisible..." remains to be seen.<sup>4</sup> Brunen's piece doesn't simply ask to be looked at. It draws attention to itself, to its dysfunction, to the fact that it is concealing something that is already concealed. It seems that this doubling is more like a triple layer, like my mother's curtains. It is a covering of something that is already hidden, but it is designed to hold the gaze and to create spectators. The gallery's position may be obvious at this point. *Blind* is an apt metaphor for the CAG as an institution that takes responsibility for its own invisibility. Through signage, window exhibitions, location in this dense area of the city and public campaigns, the gallery strategically encourages the voyeur, attempting to draw a complex and careful notion of what it is to look, and address how easy it is to escape notice.

Jenifer Papararo

- 1 Douglas Coupland. *City of Glass: Douglas Coupland's Vancouver*; Vancouver, Douglas & McIntyre, 2000, p126.
- 2 Garnet C. Butchart. *Heart of the Event: Marion, Badiou and the Limits of Representation, antiTHESIS* (Vol 16: March 2006); Melbourne, University of Melbourne Press: p157.
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 *Ibid.*

**BIO**  
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