

DIAZ CONTEMPORARY

Air Conditioned Jungle

Curated by Gregory Elgstrand

30 July to 29 August 2009

"To the innocent, who had to leave for a moment the wheeled security of their cars, the street is more a jungle than a theatre. One goes there because one must. A site fraught with risks, not chances; not meant for the gentleman [or woman] of leisure and certainly not the faint-hearted among them. The street is the "out there" from which one hides, at home or inside the car, behind security locks and burglar alarms."

-Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (1993)

The group exhibition *Air Conditioned Jungle* turns Diaz Contemporary into a *mise en scène* for the dawdler, the urbane rubbernecker and the gallery-going vagrant to play out urban fantasies within the climate-controlled environment of a contemporary art gallery. Curated by Gregory Elgstrand, *Air Conditioned Jungle* fashions an urban space through the elaborate fabrication of a street scene featuring the work of twelve artists.

The white gallery walls have been covered by brick wallpaper and the concrete floor has been transformed into both sidewalk and street. From high above the scene a few balconies look out over works by Carlo Cesta, Atom Deguire, Mark Dudiak, Brendan Fernandes, Jesse Harris, Joel Herman, Kelly Jazvac, Tania Kitchell, Kerri Reid, Andrew Reyes, Tony Romano and Orest Tataryn. These are works of the street, not mere depictions of it. Smartly manufactured rubbish is strewn about the street or propped up 'gainst the wall; signs on the wall function as signs. A pipe smokes in the corner and a decorated bubble gum machine is chained to a post. A brilliant shiny puddle in blues and whites reflects a soft neon glow. It is a new street in this old, hot city.

Air Conditioned Jungle is a travesty of sorts. The works provide not just the context for this street, they are the content of this new, however temporary, landscape. The immediately familiar context becomes the unfamiliar content. In his account of the Paris Salon of 1859, Baudelaire claimed that he would rather return to the theatre to "feast my eyes on the scenery, in which I find my dearest dreams artistically expressed and tragically concentrated." He continued: "These things, because they are false, are infinitely closer to the truth." Perhaps all the stage is a world. The works are not reflections of the world outside the gallery, the world outside this specific street scene, but together the works interact to form a world of their own. Each world needs the other. The stage needs the world as the world needs the stage.

Gregory Elgstrand is a curator and writer. He has curated and organized exhibitions across Canada and he is a curator of Toronto's 2009 Nuit Blanche. He is co-editor with Dave Dyment of *One for Me and One to Share*, a survey of artist multiples (YYZBOOKS, 2009). Elgstrand and his brother – screenwriter, playwright and director Kris Elgstrand – will launch their occasional publication, *The Legstandard* in late 2009.