

All That Glitters

1000000mph Projects

A text by Esther Windsor, Curator, 1000000mph Projects, 2007
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Architecture represents a religion it brings alive, a political power it manifests, an event that it commemorates, etc. Architecture before any other qualifications, is identical to the space of representation, it always represents something other than itself from the moment that it becomes distinguished from mere building. 'Against Architecture' (Hollier, D.: 1992: 29)

'All that Glitters' is Ouellet's first solo show in London featuring two large-scale installation pieces using photography and sequins. Her past work has interrogated, location and landscape and here features her home town of Calgary, Canada, historically documenting a changing landscape and representing a glittering moment of the promise of money to be made from oil. A 'Gold rush'.

Covering an entire wall of the gallery, a black and white aerial photograph represents in a God's eye view, Calgary with its' sprawling downtown and vertiginous new skyscrapers, stretching into the heavens. On another wall a skyline made of sequins, in black, silver and pearl represent the city broken into jewel like pieces making up a whole when seen from distance.

Calgary is twinned with Dallas, Texas and is the site of an extensive and now economically viable oil source. (with cheap imported sources from the Middle East no longer viable) Calgary as such is now undergoing rapid economic development and intense building of archetypal power architecture, with mirrored, sheer surfaced buildings, glittering and penetrating, a pure blue sky.

Behind the surfaces that glitter is a service industry in competitive development, opening the door to Mexican immigration with swathes of people living in trailer parks and camp sites also creating the Wal-Mart syndrome, where small towns and business close down unable to compete with big business.

Ouellet's landscapes represent an unreal glittering, a simulation reminiscent of the eighties: sequins, shiny surfaces and fabrics, diamante, 'Dynasty' and 'Dallas' the rich bitch, the big suits, bonuses and city boys, champagne,

shoulder pads but also, in black and white document, a literal landscape is shown of a flux and social disarray, a new that forgets the old, a future that forgets history.

The economic depression of 80's in Calgary, the huge social cost of the market 'bottoming out', echoed in other cities, histories and landscapes of the 80's, in homelessness, mass unemployment, poverty and social breakdown, is all but forgotten. This forgetting allows the signs of the eighties to be revisited in fashion and music currently enjoying resurgence. The inevitable boom and bust of capitalism ignored in the immediate need for now. The signs of the 80's ostentatious and anxious, devoid of signification, appear as simulations as history disappears.

In 'The Year 2000 Has Already Happened' Baudrillard takes Canetti's proposition that at a certain point in time, history was no longer real. That the acceleration of modernity, technical factual, of all economic, political and sexual exchanges, (that we denote under the term liberation), means we are liberated to such an extent that we have left through speed, a certain space and time where things can return to themselves, have some duration, some consequence (Baudrillard in Kroker and Kroker 'Body Invaders: Panic sex in America: 1989)

The result is absolute materialism, alienation of 'the real' from representation. Hal Foster borrows from psychoanalytic theory in 'Return of the Real' to suggest that it is the second time an incident happens in history that it becomes a trauma and becomes recognized, like a return of the repressed.

Through a laborious process of production (Ouellet photographed every building built since the year 2000 and production of her wall of sequins landscape requires much mapping, many days and workers) there is a struggle to unite memory and history, technology and experience, the shimmering spectacle with its unprepossessing components.

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