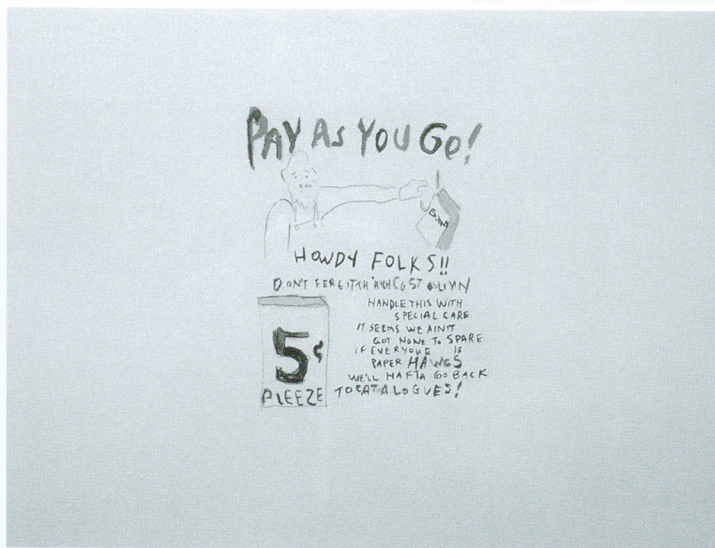


Myfanwy MacLeod / *The Hick Chick*, 2001, watercolour on paper, 28.5 x 32 in, photo by Kyla Mallett, courtesy Catriona Jeffries Gallery

Myfanwy MacLeod
Catriona Jeffries and Or Galleries,
Vancouver
by Christopher Brayshaw

For her latest exhibitions Myfanwy MacLeod offered up debased versions of the rustic. Images lifted from the southern backwoods of Arkansas and Tennessee were presented via conceptual strategies derived from southern Californian postconceptual and performance art. At Catriona Jeffries MacLeod showed framed pencil and water-colour drawings; at the Or Gallery was a scaled-up model of an outhouse. Mike Kelley's and Paul McCarthy's spirits hovered restlessly over both exhibitions, but MacLeod's lumpish, misshapen hillbillies and gun-toting folks from the sticks seemed to me to be friendly monsters, à la the cartoonish gothic creations of Tim Burton or Edward Gorey, lacking the more horrifying aspects of Kelley's and McCarthy's figures.

In the work of artists like Constable, Pissarro and Poussin, the rustic sites an idealized version of human society in the midst of nature. Humanity, it is argued, evolves organically from nature. In MacLeod's recent work, the disintegration of the classical rustic is symptomatic of a larger breakdown of genres or metanarratives in general. Popular art forms such as cartoons and commercial films are like the guilty conscience of a modernism sinking quickly under its own weight, expressing subliminal wishes and desires that can't hope to find expression within the "high" art



Myfanwy MacLeod / *Pay as You Go*, 2001, watercolour on paper, 28.5 x 32 in, photo by Kyla Mallett, courtesy Catriona Jeffries Gallery

forms of their day. One MacLeod drawing makes this conflict explicit, juxtaposing a portrait of Freud with a cartoon vamp who equally resembles Wilma Flintstone, Betty Boop and *Li'l Abner's* Daisy Mae. However, many of MacLeod's juxtapositions of pop and highbrow culture seem arbitrary. The works on paper address ideas that are by now well worn, and they largely lack the viscerality of MacLeod's best sculptures and video projections.

Of the drawings at Catriona Jeffries, the cartoon extrapolations from the seventies film *Deliverance* work best, filtering the film's sinister hillbillies through MacLeod's loose, open, contour-oriented rendering. Also successful is a triple-X sign rendered in six confident black brushstrokes. I like the graphic impenetrability of the sign, to say nothing of its relationship to a whole pornography of images busily eating away at modernism from within, like termites. This image's caustic humour owes something to de Sade and perhaps to William Burroughs as well.

At the Or Gallery, MacLeod's *Tiny Kingdom* is a sculptural reproduction of an oversized outhouse, with a British flag dangling from a short pole on its roof. The work's details are convincing enough – a thick patina of dust coats its boards, and

the glass panes in its doors are smeary with grime. Its scale poses immediate questions like, *Who uses this thing?* and *Why is the door locked on the outside?* Perhaps MacLeod means that we are always shut up in the "tiny kingdom" of our own minds, a philosophical shithouse stinking of modernism's imperialism. Perhaps this is a stretch. Modernism, after all, bears within it the seeds of its own deconstruction. Maybe it is enough to say that MacLeod's sculpture bears witness to modernism's continuing impact on our culture, sometimes as a vital, fertilizing mechanism, sometimes as a lingering stench that history has yet to dispel.

Christopher Brayshaw is an independent Vancouver-based critic and curator.



Aernout Mik
The Power Plant, Toronto
by Sophie Hackett

There are few works of art that are improved by crowds of opening attendees gathered in front of them, sipping wine and chatting. Dutch artist Aernout Mik's video installation *Reversal Room*, is one such work. In fact, the room in question was best when crowded.

Mik transformed the Power Plant's north gallery from a dauntingly cavernous space into a surprisingly intimate one. The new room was made of low walls in an open, pentagon-like configuration. The entrance was wide and the exit a narrow hallway, evidence that Mik sought to fill the room and discourage anyone from leaving, a reminder that architecture has always been used to direct our movements.

Seven panels actually defined the space: five rear-projection screens and two one-way mirrors. The projections (there were ten in total, with five appearing at one time) were all flush to the ground. They involved us in their almost lifesize scale and provided a backdrop for whatever was going on in the room. One set of projections took place in a Chinese restaurant, the other in a restaurant kitchen, flip sides of a space.