

The Drawers - Headbones Gallery

Contemporary Drawing, Sculpture and Works on Paper

Byron Johnston Begins With Zee

August 11 - September 27, 2012

HEADBONES GALLERY

Artist Catalog, Byron Johnston - Begins With Zee Copyright © 2012, Headbones Gallery

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Byron Johnston Begins With Zee



Byron Johnston - Begins With Zee

Byron Johnston has more in common with *The Mothers of Invention* than his California leanings (he went to art school in the sunny state). Just as Frank Zappa took the definition of music to a new level and turned the ideas of what constituted music topsy-turvy, so Johnston turns around our idea of what makes up visual art. Zappa's musical creations rose above the 'pop song' and ended up being praised by serious

music critics through out the world. Johnston as well - without forfeiting invention, curiosity or plain old "fun!" - pulls up what could be termed ordinary, daily materials into the realm of fine arts with such assurance that the acceptance of his unique and inventive art is impossible to contest. Yet above and beyond the marvel of his daring he keeps a firm hold on the object as high art.

The space between found object and art piece is a relatively small one. This space cast doubts and aspersions when Marcel Duchamp (as R. Mutt) submitted his urinal piece titled *Fountain* in 1917. *Fountain* was rejected by the committee for The Society of Independent Artists in Paris although the yearly exhibition had promised to accept whatever had been submitted. The original *Fountain* has been lost although it was photographed at Alfred Steiglitz's studio and this is the documentation of it's existence. *Fountain* was however accepted by the annals of art history and lauded by Peter Bürger, the art historian and theorist, as "a major landmark in 20th century art."

Is Byron Johnston producing "conceptual art"? Conceptual art is defined by Wikipedia as an art in which the concept(s) or idea(s) involved in the work take precedence over traditional aesthetic and material concerns. Concept reigns high in the evolution of Johnston's work but it is certainly not devoid of aesthetic and material concerns. His work is in fact built on a reaction to a material concern that also has embedded within it a conceptual basis. The wall pieces titled, *Audience...Music...Youse #2 & 3*, are an



example of this reaction. The material within the frames (this is a series) is corrugated cardboard that has been walked upon by visitors to his exhibition at The Vernon Public Art Gallery where this same cardboard made up the floor of the installation *Audience...Music...Youse*. It has been cut into a precise rectangle and framed with a material that acts as a foil for the cardboard—beautifying it. The framing of the material has caused it to leap a notch up the ladder of aesthetic acceptance and it is now quite easy to accept it as a piece of art for it has

components that we have traditionally associated with art work—it is displayed on a wall in a gallery, framed and has become a beautiful, phenomenal object.

Musical Canoe illustrates a similar dynamic. Mounted horizontally in conjunction with the canoe's splayed exterior covering above and below it—it has been presented as a vertical format in other exhibitions—the canoe has been altered through the stringing of wires that suggest a musical instrument. The sense of just what we have been presented with is now more



comfortable when we associate the experience with the realm of aesthetics. Is *canoe-ness* more important to the realisation of this assemblage or is the positioning and alterations made to the canoe more endemic to its current meaning? It is within the concept of *Canoe* that the transformation of object into art takes place.

With some pieces it is more of a challenge to close the gap between found object and art piece for the "space" is too wide for an immediate acceptance. The moving, interactive Mobile #2 could be a plaything, a utilitarian cart transporting debris, an invention whose purpose is dubious it also has elements that can bring to mind the grocery carts that the homeless pile high with their personals. Yet, as nothing is accidental in Johnston's work, there is a meaning in this tangle of video tape. The placement of the mirror is such that when the cart is pushed, the "driver" sees an image of himself as he manipulates the sculpture forward. It is much like the relationship between the tangling of the nerve centres around the hypocampus in the brain of one who suffers from Alzheimer's

disease and the difficulty that ensues in forming connections between self and information. Johnston is in essence playing a kind of game with the viewer's head. If Art imitates Life and imitation is the highest form of flattery; but if flattery gets you no where—then where indeed does this art lead us to? It leads to questioning but it also provokes acceptance.

The acceptance comes about through the juxtaposition of material events towards an aesthetic end. Johnston's work can also be fabricated from scratch much as the traditional sculptor forms the raw material into image. Faces has simple chrome irregular ovals that suggest faces with dents that become eyes. The faces are mounted on strips of copper that can be read as necks. When these components are clustered together they form groups or crowds. The shiny chrome surfaces reflect back the faces of viewers standing in proximity to the ovals and due to the materials the 'faces' are shining and radiant. Johnston has used these ovals in Scaled Down and Orange and there is a sense of individuality that ensues. The addition of the white ball in Scaled Down and the orange ball in Orange is like an accessory to an outfit. The small wooden carved figurative shapes in Scaled Down enable the appreciation of the polished wood surface beside the chrome and from certain angles these figurines are reflected in the chrome "face". Furthermore this angle also frames the head of the viewer in another oval of looped steel painted white so that there is a figurative relationship between the piece and the viewer that is very satisfying—even flattering.

Interactivity is an inclusive gesture that plays a prominent part in ZEE. Johnston gives the visitor not only visual satisfaction and stimulation but also allows a component of activity on the viewer part. It is a preordained action, directed by Johnston but the ultimate outcome of his invitation to partake allows for the expression of the participant. The Bombay bicycle horn mounted to Shredded begs to be squeezed and yet how often, how hard and if you even dare to (for art objects traditionally are "do not touch" items); Johnston leaves it up to the viewer. When it is honked, attention comes swinging towards Shredded like a financial wakeup call and the shredded American bills that seem to be squeezing from beneath the lid of the plexi-glass dome mounted to a burnished steel, gain notice.

Urban Insights is played not only by others but also plays by itself. The changes in heat cause the stretched rawhide upon the seat of the wooden chair to swell or contract so that the ball tied by a string to the back of the chair and resting on the seat bounces of its own volition. It creates



a spooky awareness of spirit as if an invisible presence has bounced the ball. This *is* what has happened. A change in temperature has "played" *Urban Insights*.

Kull Scat changes without intervention as the apples rot within the glass tube. Kull Scat has been editioned with the option of different organics enclosed within the glass tubing.

Johnston also plays with perception. Stare long enough at the first grid of *Twine Perception* (a play on twin as well?) and the relationship between the back lines of twine and the front become a mesh. Further discombobulated by the screen on the window behind the piece, a sensation of visual vertigo follows.



Implied animation takes a front seat in the outdoor sculpture *Sorter Conveyor*. The rakish angles of the baby carriage seem to be walking across the antique apple conveyor belt like a clownish tight rope walker. Two once shiny red apples are becoming a brown mush resting on the openings. They are too big to fall through to the ground which would have meant that they were of an accepted size. Yet there is no overt cynicism on the hopes of parenthood in

Sorter/Conveyor—just a wonderful visual zany walk on the wild side.

Julie Oakes - 2102





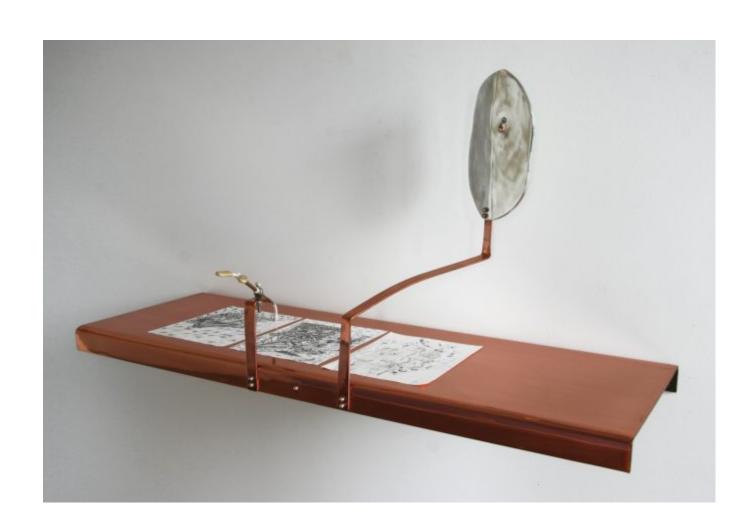






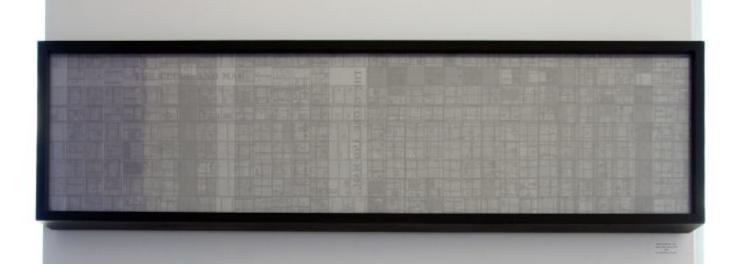








August 1996, Globe and Mail - 2012, Micro-fiche, wood, w48.5"x d3"x h13.5"





















(Untitled) Cart - 2012, Wood, spoked wheels, twine, w84"x d30"x h76"





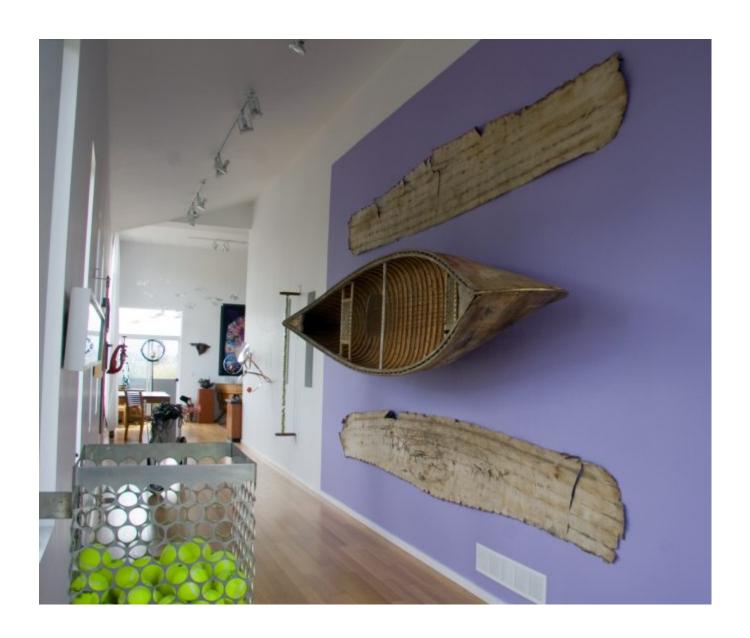










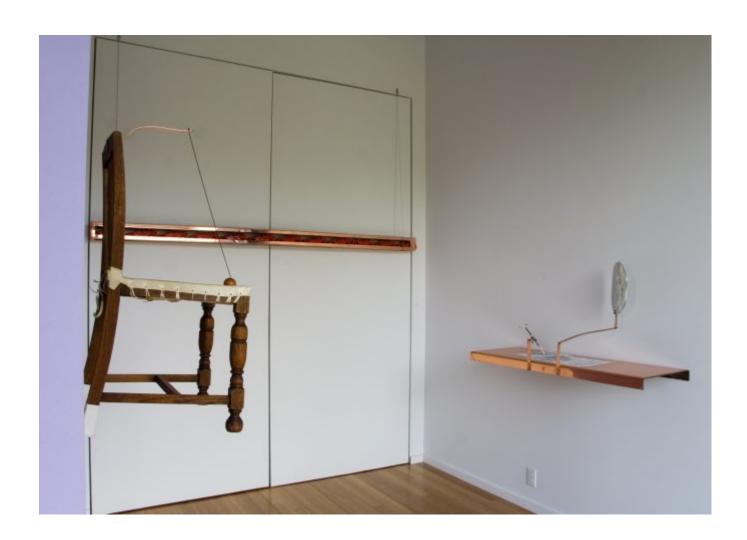


Headbones Gallery - 2012

BYRON JOHNSTON

Born Kelowna, BC. 1945-

1990 1988	Master of Fine Arts, Sculpture, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA Bachelor of Fine Arts, Sculpture, University of Victoria, Victoria, BC Liberal Arts and Video, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC Alberta College of Art, Calgary, AB Shipwright, Vancouver, BC
SELECTED EXHIBITIONS	
2012	Byron Johnston - Begins With Zee, Headbones Gallery, Vernon, BC
2011	Okanagan Eyes Okanagan Wise Okanagan-ise, Headbones Gallery, Vernon, BC
2011	Audience, Music, Youse, Vernon Art Gallery
2010	Woodhaven Eco Project, Kelowna
2010	Single Sprocket Super 16, Kelowna Airport
2009	Boundaries, Kelowna Art Gallery
2009	Dysfunctional Chair, Kelowna Art Gallery
2008	Bellevue City Hall and Park
2007	Arnica Gallery, Kamloops, BC
2007	Alternator Gallery, Kelowna, BC
2006	Sculpture Park, Seattle, WA
2006	University of Wollongong, Australia
2005	Between the Lines, Part II, Gallery of Greater Victoria, Victoria, BC
2005 2005	Urban Insights, Kamloops Art Gallery Oasis Installation, Oasis Part Too, Kelowna Art Gallery, Kelowna, BC
2003	Alternator Galleries, Video, Canadian Galleries
2004	Art in the Park, Bellevue, WA
2004	Eastern Front Gallery, Toronto, ON
2003	Library Installation, University of LethBridge, AB
2002-3	Between the Lines, Art Gallery of the South Okanagan,
2002	CIRCA Gallery, Montreal, QU
2001	Dublin Graphic Studio, Dublin, Ireland
2001	People Place Two, Redmond, WA
2001	Sorting / Packing, Headbones Gallery, Vernon, BC
2000	Bellevue Sculpture Park, Seattle, WA
2000	Nelson Art Gallery, Nelson, BC
1999-0	Arcadia Revisited Part I, Kelowna Art Gallery, Kelowna, BC
1998	Public Sculpture, Commission, Okanagan University campus, Kelowna, BC
1998	Artropolis, Browser, Roundhouse Mews, Vancouver, BC
1997	Stable Show, Headbones Gallery, Vernon, BC



SELECTED EXHIBITIONS (cont'd)

- 1997 Land Biography, Kelowna Art Gallery, Kelowna, BC
- 1997 Topographies, Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, BC
- 1996 Bellevue Sculpture Exhibition, Downtown Park, Seattle, WA
- 1996 East West Collaboration, Galerie Skol, Montreal, QU
- 1996 Windows & Passages, Headbones Gallery, Vernon, BC
- 1995 Early Riser, M. Baden Claremont Graduate School, Los Angeles, CA
- 1995 Turf Installation, Alternator Gallery, Kelowna, BC
- 1995 Dance Festival, Santa Barbara, CA
- 1995 Grunt Gallery, Vancouver, BC
- 1993 Retrospective, U.C.S.B., Santa Barbara, CA
- 1992 Installation Chicago, Chicago, Ill
- 1991 Coastal Project, Santa Barbara, CA
- 1991 Active Presences, Contemporary Arts Forum, Santa Barbara, CA
- 1991 Flower Howie, CAA Conference, Seattle, WA
- 1990 Retrospective, Los Angeles, Arts Council, Los Angeles, CA
- 1990 6061-0, Cal Arts, Valencia, CA
- 1990 M.F.A. Thesis Show, U.C.S.B. Art Museum, Santa Barbara, CA
- 1990 Immobilized, Contemporary Arts Forum, Santa Barbara, CA
- 1989 This will take just a second, University Center, U.C.S.B., Santa Barbara, CA
- 1989 Coastal Project of The Arts, Water Front Space, Santa Barbara, CA
- 1989 Lagoon: The Integration of Nature, Commission, Santa Barbara, CA
- 1989 Six + Six, Masters Graduate Show, U.C.S.B., Santa Barbara, CA
- 1988 Beach Maze, Santa Barbara, CA
- 1988 Visual Arts Gallery, University of Victoria, Victoria, BC
- 1987 Contemporary Sculpture, University of Victoria, Victoria, BC

