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Dean Baldwin BY NADJA SAYEJ

Katharine Mulherin Contemporary Art Projects, Toronto CANADA
April 20 • May 12, 2007



"Nine beef consommés, one iced cucumber soup, one mussel soup," wrote French writer Georges Perec in his Oulipian essay, "Attempt at an Inventory of the Liquid and the Solid Foodstuffs Incurtigated by Me in the Course of the Year Nineteen Hundred and Seventy-Four"—"One blini, one empanada, one dried beef. Three snails." But while his ebullient three-page text is a poem-meets-grocery-list that obviously tries to poke fun at "constrained writing" as a form of literature, Toronto artist Dean Baldwin takes Perec's inventory quite literally by bringing along his 35mm camera to every plate of food he consumed in the course of the year 2006.

Baldwin's show begins with a 2,042-photo piece titled *Attempt at an Inventory of the Liquid and Solid Foodstuffs Incurtigated by Me in the Course of the Year Two Thousand and Six (After Perec)* (all work 2007), composed of buckling C-prints wallpapered on two intersecting walls—pork chops with drooping strands of asparagus, buttery corn on the cob, chunky Greek salad, lobster (before and after), late-night McDonald's, sagging blueberry pancakes, mushy cereal, and a chocolate cake reading "You're Deanomite, Happy Birthday." The photos that didn't fit have been thoughtlessly piled in a corner like recycled trash on the curb.

Perec died a few years after eating/writing his rich dietary itinerary. You are what you eat. But you also eat yourself to death. Any pileup of food is a vanitas pageant in the midst of life, yet Baldwin joins Perec in not diverting attention from the conjunction between food and death through didactic acts. Brooklyn-based Sara Dierck explores fast food in her ongoing *Rock Paper Pigeon* photographic series, from takeout culture to the edible junk packaged and littered across the streets of New York. And Toronto photographer Sadegh Tirafkan uses pomegranates as a gastronomic entrée into Iranian culture and history. Baldwin's ostentatious gluttony immerses his production line of "constrained art" within the rudiments of digestion, from the short-term memory of your intake that its excretion releases to melancholic bouts of indigestion. The undiverted recording of consumerism counters the fast in food and exposes instead the re-past, the repetition compulsion that inspired Freud to theorize death as drive.

On the manic side of mourning—in mirth or in funeral—Baldwin documented his adventure in the culinary arts as the 8-channel video *The Cooked Book*, which he serves up with Chaplin-esque twists and turns. As equally adroit at wielding a DV cam, Baldwin lobs meat in a badminton court, chops veggies while driving a car, and scrambles eggs on a snare drum. The finished products are shown in *Prix Fixe*, a series of triptychs framed as potential menus from which you can pick and choose what you want to eat. *Serviette taken from a restaurant after a meal of Linguine Con Seppie Nero* (pasta with squid, cooked in its own black ink) is a big bib stained with inky blotches showing a self-indulgent evening of getting to gnaw another sloppy meal. In synch with Perec's adroit verbal pacing, his vision of language unbound, *Attempt at an Inventory* reveals unpalatable sections of the fridge, plate, tummy, and toilet as staging areas for what some call life.

DEAN BALDWIN, *Attempt at an Inventory of the Liquid and Solid Foodstuffs Incurtigated by Me in the Course of the Year Two Thousand and Six (After Perec)*, 2007. INSTALLATION DETAIL. COURTESY KATHARINE MULHERIN CONTEMPORARY ART PROJECTS, TORONTO.

Gustavo Godoy

BY KATHERINE SATORIUS

The Happy Lion, Los Angeles CA March 10 • April 14, 2007

Construction is an elastic word, encompassing, as art does, the absolute materiality of wood and metal assembled by hard-hatted workers, as well as the utter immateriality of abstract ideas, fantasies, and edifices of perception. In "What's the Big Idea?", his first solo exhibition, Gustavo Godoy seems interested in construction in both senses, presenting an installation comprised of a jumbled mass of raw building materials (two-by-fours, Plexiglas, rubber floor tread), two poured cement forms, two works on paper, and a metal lightbox billboard with its face removed to expose the fluorescent tubes—a work that strongly resembles constructivist art and also calls attention to the constructed nature of distinctions between traditional art genres.

It's virtually impossible to see fluorescent bulbs on a gallery wall and not think of Dan Flavin's light sculptures, and in this case the association is not superficial. The dozen or so alternating white tubes fitted into Godoy's rescued billboard are like a horizontal cousin to Flavin's mostly vertical 1960s "monuments," which were in turn homages to Vladimir Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International* (1919-20)—a spiraling wooden model for a tower that was to be the world's largest, but was never realized. "What's the Big Idea?" largely takes to heart the constructivist principle of letting material dictate form: two-by-fours and wood scraps jut out at all angles; bits of colored Plexiglas make windows out of oddly shaped gaps; poured concrete appears to describe the larger structure's negative space, as in a Rachel Whiteread sculpture; and sheets of plywood create platforms and a ramp on which viewers are invited to walk. The spaces framed out by the two-by-fours are large enough to move through as well, so exploring the work feels like a small adventure, like cutting through a friendly patch of forest.

The installation's basic elements—the wood structures, the cement forms, and the abstract works on paper, which echo the jagged lines and much of the palette of the other works—offer three distinct spatial modes: navigable space, filled space, and two-dimensional space. It's difficult to see these elements as a unified piece and not as a scattering of individual components, but rather than exposing a flaw in the work, this disconnect only reveals the difference between these genres as a persistent construction. In the end, it's all just material.

The show's title, besides alluding to the conceptual sense of construction, also hints at a lurking political allegory. "What's the big idea?" might ask "What's the master plan here," but it can also be slightly menacing, as in "Hey, buddy, what gives?" Here and there, some of the wood surfaces are painted over, and aside from brown, black, and gray, the only other colors used are those of the American flag. Meanwhile, the installation itself seems to occupy a space between assembly and disassembly, as if it can't decide whether it wants to pull itself together, right its angles into some kind of functional structure, or collapse. But while this reading is almost certainly present, Godoy skillfully keeps it at the level of undercurrent. "What's the Big Idea?" does, in fact, deal with big ideas, but it seems equally concerned with providing a playful escape.

Jimmy Baker BY EVE WOOD

Roberts & Tilton, Los Angeles CA June 2 • 23, 2007

Jimmy Baker, whose new installation of paintings, photographs, and sculpture is titled "Rapture," is an artist of almost Buñuelian foresight, imbuing his imagery with an elegant if sparse, back-to-the-future cast. A modern-day Stylite who pronounces on the state of the world from his Earth station on high, the Temptations of Saint Baker include: the dystopian compression of iPods, here inscribed as *Doves and Hawks*, *Everything to Fear and It's Inevitable* (all work 2007); Iraqi "suburbanization," in the form of open, bullet-riddled doors of Chevrolet Suburban cars driven by Coalition personnel in Baghdad (*Open Invitation*); climate change, as depicted by fractalized prints of the North and South Poles obtained via Google Earth (*The Ends of the World*); and *Night Brings*, an updated, Motorola RAZR-transmitted video message showing the caller, Saddam Hussein, after dropping through the floor to his death (the only part not shown on CNN, though leaked on YouTube). According to Baker, our time—and true terror—is "a sterile modernist utopia [whose] tone of fertility, promise, and the synthesis of humanity and technology (...) will not slow down until it is forced to."

Three more *corpora delicti* incriminate Baker's "rapt-in-plastic," *Star Trekky* prophesying. His *The Future Is Clean*—four ethereal oil, resin, and laser engravings of young hooded "Pod-women" posing as Madonna (of both pop and papal fame)—points allegorically to how the "advent of the click wheel on the iPod was a huge breakthrough, because it only responds to human touch." Glorified with a sexless and almost wanton wholeness, Baker's enrapt women communicate an otherworldly, rather lower form of consummation—signaled here by earPod cables running through hoodie grommets down to the girls' Pod-bellies, underlining a cautionary, more sinister connection. Just like Margaret Atwood's futuristic *Handmaid's Tale* (1985) of enforced connectivity to the womb, these Poddies are typecast as mere sacks or vessels of streaming fertility.

The flip side is *The Future Is Dirty*, yet another, all-male quartet of New Barbarians. Done in the same métier as the squeaky *Clean* series, this time the tonality is all doom and gloom, charged with dread and sexual menace. These scruffy Boomtowners all resemble, so Baker tells us, commonly available laser engravings, here posing as Neanderthal goths surrounded by lo-tech weaponry like chains and crowbars (and even a red gas can in the portrait of Matt, alluding to the *Mad Max* trilogy). Like Caravaggio's often agonistic figures, Baker's bikers seem at once divinely called and cursed, their long dreadlocked hair hanging like thick impenetrable vines in a nuked swamp.

But the real bombshell of "Rapture" is *The Legend of John Titor* series of large color prints, a holy trinity of conspiracy theory, time travel, and American Manifest Destiny. Now a huge cult phenomenon, with a massive Wikipedia entry, the Titor legend refers to an American soldier from the year 2036 who was supposedly sent back to 1975 to "retrieve an IBM 5100 computer (...) needed to 'debug' various legacy computer programs [that were due to] have a timeout error in 2038"—remarkably like the plan to rescue John Connor's mother in the first *Terminator* film. But when Titor makes an unauthorized stopover in 2000 (when his bulletin posts first appeared), he immediately set about posting not only a detailed account of his time machine but also a string of Nostradamus-like predictions, including a Second Civil War (between red and blue states, town and country), WWII (leaving only Omaha, Nebraska intact), and subsequent descent into a kind of mutant "green" wasteland dominated by Broadband, Bible, and Bicycle. All of these retro-Christian scenarios come together in Baker's mock postings of near-future polarization. Scattered totems to technology's failed promise litter the Great American landscape, like a fast-forward view (via Dr. Who's TARDIS) of Thomas Cole's *The Course of Empire* (1834-36). Timmy Baker knows his pop history and isn't afraid to click-and-drag us into the post-9/11 minefield.

(TOP) JIMMY BAKER, *The Future Is Dirty* (ROBERT), 2007, OIL, RESIN & LASER ENGRAVING ON PANEL, 9 x 15 IN. PHOTO ANTHONY CONNOL. COURTESY ROBERTS & TILTON, LOS ANGELES. (BOTTOM) GUSTAVO GOODY, INSTALLATION VIEW OF "WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?" PHOTO JOSHUA WHITE. COURTESY THE HAPPY LION, LOS ANGELES.

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