

Rhonda Wepler and Trevor Mahovsky

by Emily Falvey

REVIEWS



MONTREAL
DARLING FOUNDRY

RHONDA WEPLER and TREVOR MAHOVSKY

by Emily Falvey

It is rare to find a creative practice that harmonizes critical thinking and positive momentum. The Vancouver-based artists Rhonda Wepler and Trevor Mahovsky, however, seem to have mastered this delicate balancing act. The team was long-listed for the 2009 Sobey Art Award, and their imaginative sculptural installations continue to evolve, elaborating an ever more complex and erudite frame of reference. Despite their work's intellectual rigour, it is not overburdened with theory, but instead communicates an inherently playful approach to everyday subjects and media that keeps things enjoyable and aesthetically interesting.

Wepler and Mahovsky's most recent project, which they realized during a residency at the Darling Foundry in Montreal, represents an extension of their earlier *Clutter Sculpture* series, in which various fabricated objects were fused together and covered with globs of polymerized gypsum and glossy enamels. Both attractive and vaguely repellent, these crude yet fragile creations explored what the artists referred to as "the joy and anxiety of objects." In their new work, Wepler and

Mahovsky have opted for a more organic medium, creating an elaborate site-specific installation using papier mâché. Filling an entire gallery space, *Sun in an Empty Room* (2009), whose title is borrowed from a celebrated painting by the American artist Edward Hopper, consists of a wall-to-wall papier-mâché field made out of local newspapers. Emerging from this carpet is an array of hollow, cast forms: rocks, beer bottles, a picnic basket, a teakettle, a pack of cigarettes and so forth. Silver and gold gift wrap gives these casts a luminous sparkle that dissolves almost seamlessly into pink and red as one walks around the installation, a visual transition that cleverly recalls the sun's arc in a summer sky.

Although curators often interpret Wepler and Mahovsky's work as a critique of consumer culture, it is a mistake to read their installations as simply moralizing. While their sculptures do reference the detritus of mass-produced everyday commodities and materials, they also strive for something beyond the physical. As the notion of sunlight in an empty room suggests, these artists are more interested in fostering curiosity and insight than cynical social commentary.

RHONDA WEPLER and TREVOR MAHOVSKY
Installation: *Sun in an Empty Room* [detail] 2009
Newspaper, wrapping paper, glue, foil, polymerized gypsum and enamel. Approx. 457 sq ft overall

It is rare to find a creative practice that harmonizes critical thinking and positive momentum. The Vancouver-based artists Rhonda Wepler and Trevor Mahovsky, however, seem to have mastered this delicate balancing act. The team was long-listed for the 2009 Sobey Art Award, and their imaginative sculptural installations continue to evolve, elaborating an ever more complex and erudite frame of reference. Despite their work's intellectual rigour, it is not

overburdened with theory, but instead communicates an inherently playful approach to everyday subjects and media that keeps things enjoyable and aesthetically interesting.

Weppler and Mahovsky's most recent project, which they realized during a residency at the Darling Foundry in Montreal, represents an extension of their earlier *Clutter Sculpture* series, in which various fabricated objects were fused together and covered with globs of polymerized gypsum and glossy enamels. Both attractive and vaguely repellent, these crude yet fragile creations explored what the artists referred to as "the joy and anxiety of objects." In their new work, Weppler and Mahovsky have opted for a more organic medium, creating an elaborate site-specific installation using papier mâché. Filling an entire gallery space, *Sun in an Empty Room* (2009), whose title is borrowed from a celebrated painting by the American artist Edward Hopper, consists of a wall-to-wall papier-mâché field made out of local newspapers. Emerging from this carpet is an array of hollow, cast forms: rocks, beer bottles, a picnic basket, a teakettle, a pack of cigarettes and so forth. Silver and gold gift wrap gives these casts a luminous sparkle that dissolves almost seamlessly into pink and red as one walks around the installation, a visual transition that cleverly recalls the sun's arc in a summer sky.

Although curators often interpret Weppler and Mahovsky's work as a critique of consumer culture, it is a mistake to read their installations as simply moralizing. While their sculptures do reference the detritus of mass-produced everyday commodities and materials, they also strive for something beyond the physical. As the notion of sunlight in an empty room suggests, these artists are more interested in fostering curiosity and insight than cynical social commentary.