

# ONE DIMENSIONAL SPACE



In **One Dimensional Space**, Modern Fuel presents the work of four artists, **Melanie MacDonald** (St. Catharines, ON), **Leigh Mayoh** (Ymir, BC), **June Pak** (Toronto, ON), and **Kathleen Ritter and James B. Maxwell** (Vancouver, BC), offering the promise of other dimensions.

Making reference to Herbert Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man*, the exhibition tests the thesis that the total administration of the life-world in capitalist society leads to the complacent consumption of a homogeneous culture. From the standpoint of a culture that has been bureaucratized, the works in the exhibition present instances of creative administration: Mayoh's drawings, created at work, are a form of white-collar sabotage; MacDonald's paintings of portraits of realtors investigate the hard sell of subjectivity; Pak blurs the boundaries between art and design, intervention and decoration, executing her work in spaces both public and private; and Ritter and Maxwell make music out of board meeting minutes. The artists position their work in a way that disarticulates its incorporation, enabling the generation of divergent responses and alternative points of view.

## **One-Dimensional Space Photos**

**Melanie MacDonald** lives and works in downtown St. Catharines, ON, and she is an active member of the Niagara Artists' Centre, the region's only artist-run centre. She is also a member of CRAM, a proactive collective of emerging and established professional artists who have a connection to Niagara or CRAM who advocate for opinions and ideas from outside the metro and international art scenes.

**Leigh Mayoh** completed a BFA in Visual Art and a BA in Art History at the University of Regina, and studied Wood Product Design at the Kootenay School of Arts. His artistic practice has shifted from the specific view of "painter" to

the greater position of “artist.” His future projects include site specific work, and installations. He currently lives in Ymir, BC with his wife and four children.

**June Pak** is a visual artist who works closely with time-based and digital media. While her work utilizes the technological means, her subject matter deals with the human-ness in the multiple/fragmented existence of the Self. She teaches Time-Based Media and Interdisciplinary Studio courses at the University of Western Ontario in London and Ontario College of Art & Design in Toronto.

**Kathleen Ritter** is an artist and writer. Her artistic practice draws on the traditions of conceptual art, photography, and site-specific performance. Characterized by its furtive qualities, her work critically addresses the conditions of exhibiting and the institutional structures that surround and mediate the reception of art. **James B. Maxwell** is a composer of concert music, music for contemporary dance, and music for theatre and film. His work has been presented in Canada, the UK, and Europe.

*Images: Melanie MacDonald, from The Realtors, acrylic, 2006.*

## ESSAY by Michael Davidge

### One Dimensional \_\_\_\_\_.

Day after day, Leigh Mayoh worked in an office designing office furniture for other offices. The sheer monotony of his job was such that even clock-watching could become an art form. On a sheet of paper Mayoh would tick away the space in a grid of his own design corresponding with the remaining time in his workday. The grid significantly grew, until each of the square centimeters in it, representing 15 minutes of his shift, became a blank canvas on which to draw. For Mayoh, clock-watching became a means of stealing time back from his employer and reclaiming centimeter by centimeter the self-expression his job denied him. Every fifteen minutes, he completed a tiny drawing in each square centimeter of the grid until it was filled, his workday over. During the course of a year, Mayoh charted the course of his thoughts and feelings while at work, producing *The Grid* (2007), a series of 260 sheets of drawings representing every workday completed, surreptitiously transforming a typically square office workspace into an artist's studio. In so doing, Mayoh secretly tapped into another dimension, giving depth to an otherwise flat environment.

Leigh Mayoh is one of four artists offering the potential of other dimensions in Modern Fuel's *One Dimensional Space*. With reference to the philosopher Herbert Marcuse's book, *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), this exhibition of works by Mayoh, Melanie MacDonald, June Pak, and Kathleen Ritter tests the thesis that the total administration of the life-world in late industrial society has led to the complacent consumption of a homogeneous culture. May 2008 marks the fortieth anniversary of the General Strike in Paris, where students and workers manifested in the streets, schools and factories, joining the unorchestrated but global protest of international radicals, militants and dirty hippies. They all participated in what Marcuse, one of the key thinkers of the era, termed the “Great Refusal.” Largely dismissed as youthful rebellion, the Great Refusal questioned the existing order of advanced industrial society and its forms of administration through the search for and establishment of alternative practices that countered the status quo. An image of the time's efflorescence can be found in an early black and white photograph showing the simultaneously brave and naïve act of an American flower child (who grew up to be the flower man known as Hibiscus) sliding the stem of a carnation into the gun barrel of an MP. In the political preface to his book *Eros and Civilization* (1966), Marcuse notes that, against the deadly efficiency of the military industrial complex, the protest encapsulated in the slogan “Make Love Not War” appears childlike and ridiculous. Such protest appears ridiculous, according to Marcuse, because the organization of late industrial society is such that its technological advances and increased standards of living have made opposition to it appear irrational. This society, which successfully expels opposition against it or reduces it to the terms of its own arrangement, Marcuse paints with the epithet “one-dimensional.” Given the perceived failure of the Great Refusal, one would imagine that the scenario depicted in

Marcuse's book would be even further entrenched today. But from the standpoint of a culture that has become more and more bureaucratized, the works in *One Dimensional Space* present instances of creative administration: Mayoh's drawings are a form of white-collar sabotage; MacDonald's portraits of realtors investigate the hard sell of subjectivity; Pak blurs the boundaries between art and design, intervention and decoration, executing her work in spaces both public and private; and Ritter and Maxwell make music out of board meeting minutes. The artists position their work in a way that disarticulates its incorporation, enabling the generation of divergent responses and alternative points of view.

For the most part, Melanie MacDonald takes domestic space as the subject matter of her work. Her paintings teem with objects that are found, if not on a shelf in someone's living room or in a kitchen sink filled with grease and soap suds, then in a flea market as they await a new owner. By painting still-lives of mass-produced tchotchkas, MacDonald returns the hand of the artist to their mass-produced surfaces, connecting them with the lives lived by ordinary homemakers and not multi-corporations like Martha Stewart. With *The Realtors* (2006), a series of twenty uncommissioned portraits seemingly lifted from the ads and business cards of real estate brokers and sales representatives in the St. Catharines area, MacDonald maintains her focus on the home but shifts her attention to what she calls "the purveyors of the bourgeois." By carefully reproducing the portraiture that personalizes their service, MacDonald opens up a gap not only between the original photographs and her paintings, but also between the realtors and the very way they present themselves, best face forward.

Instead of opening a gap, June Pak blurs the boundaries between art and decoration, self and other, and public and private space, thereby increasing a miasmic grey zone that could potentially mutate the poles. Pak's *Paint Job* (2004 - ongoing), a performance and social intervention that has been documented in a series of photos, texts and videos, takes as its starting point a colour swatch called "Algonquin Autumn," found ready-made at a home-decorating centre. A Korean Canadian, Pak uses the Algonquin Autumn palette, with its reference to the Canadian landscape and its cultural representation (most famously in the paintings of the Group of Seven), to raise questions of assimilation, identification and consumption. After consultation with selected homeowners and proprietors, Pak paints the colour they select from the swatch in a square monochrome on the walls of their abode, its placement existing somewhere between the isolating autonomy of the International style of high Modern abstraction and its circumstantial employment as a lovely addition to any modern dwelling. Executing *Paint Job*, Pak confuses the roles of artist, missionary, and service provider, leaving the use of the terms open for redefinition.

To improve her efficiency at chairing meetings and keeping the order, Kathleen Ritter read *Robert's Rules of Order* from cover to cover during her tenure as Chair of the Board of Directors at the Forest City Gallery in London, Ontario. It may be a useful tool, but she also found it to be the most boring book she had ever read; as her mind drifted off while reading the endless versions of meeting minutes and amendments of amendments, she claims she discovered a "perverse musicality" in the rhythm of the order of business. Ritter's project for Modern Fuel, *Call to Order* (2008), has realized this daydream: working with the musician-composer James Maxwell, Ritter has produced a score based on the minutes of Modern Fuel's board meetings from May 2006 to June 2007. Robert's rules of order have been mapped onto Walter Piston's rules of harmony: when the minutes keep to the rules of order there is harmony in the music, when there are deviations the minor mode takes over and the music becomes more atonal. Inspired by the theory of minor practices developed by Deleuze and Guattari (more heroes of May '68) and Demian Petryshyn's application of the theory to the practice of artist-run centres, Ritter's project demonstrates that the creativity, critical thought, and humor put into a work of art can also be applied to the administration of an organization.

Marcuse warned of one-dimensional society's capacity for the containment or neutralization of oppositional thought: it supports pluralism just as long as it adheres to the bottom line. If the good life is good enough it militates against qualitative change, labeling as dreamers those that demand the impossible. The Great Refusal, however, repudiated the thought of Utopia with the thought of a permanent challenge, demanding not a non-space but a spacing that cleared a space for negative thought and not the negation of thought. In a positivistic, materialistic world, it's what gives pause to Jim Morrison's expression, "We want the world and we want it ... now!" Change can only take root through the cultivation of a space within society, and not dropped out, without. The artist-run centre movement of which Modern Fuel continues to be a part was fomented by the counter-institutional thinking of the '60s and '70s.

Artists need a space to present work that is not acceptable within the establishment. Whether these spaces become ones that conform or transform remains to be determined.

**Michael Davidge** is the Artistic Director of Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre.