

October 29, 2003

Damian Moppett
c/o Catriona Jeffries Gallery
3149 Granville Street
Vancouver, BC
V6H 3K1

Mr. Moppett,

You don't know me, but my name's Charlie Munter, founder and CEO of Historic Lifestyle Pictures. We are a locally based independent production company specializing in 'period' short films for the educational market. Banal aspects of pioneer life -- hunting, fishing, trapping and butter making -- provide the bulk of our business. Recently, we began diversifying our product to include life in the 20th-century. All our films are rigorously researched, and of the highest quality.

It has come to my attention that your exhibition, *1815/1962*, will be opening tomorrow at Catriona Jeffries Gallery. My intern, who works nights at a posting facility, has seen the video component, describing it in detail: a 19th-century trapper walking through the woods, communing with nature, constructing a trap from twigs and hemp. Everything is 'period' except for the trap, which my intern drew for me on a napkin. Now, I don't claim to be an art expert (I work in the film industry), but it seems your trap has more in common with Modernist sculpture than anything found in the 19th-century.

Modernist sculpture did not 'begin' until the 20th-century; that a 19th-century trapper should be using it to trap animals is absurd. Absurd yet compelling. So I Googled you. And what did I find but a number of sites linking me to your work on the kermis: drawings, writings, photographs, sculptures -- much of it derived from secondary narratives found in Ruben's paintings (Rubens, as you know, being among the first to represent the post-harvest bacchanal from the peasants' point of view). I also came upon your film treatment for a contemporary restaging of the kermis, using LA skateboarders (has this been optioned yet?). Another site revealed a series of sculptural forms evocative of skateboarding culture -- installed in trees, no less! Intrigued, I gave my intern a list of magazines and catalogues where your work has been discussed, which lead to further readings, to a weekend of nothing but Crow and *October*.

Short of having seen an exhibition of your work, I now consider myself at least conversant with your oeuvre and its relationship to Modernism.

A few things come to mind.

Based on my readings, I have isolated what I consider to be two key moments in 20th-century art: 1) the recontextualization of the utilitarian, purpose-built object as work of art (the 'readymade'); and 2) the Modernist debate over formal works and their ability to advance not only aesthetic innovation but their provision for social commentary as well. Although I have yet to see your video, I can only conclude that these moments are at the forefront of *1815/1962*.

In reviewing my intern's drawing, it seems your trap has much in common with the work of Anthony Caro. (Caro -- a telling referent). A trained engineer, Caro's pursuit of the self-referential art object, his preoccupation with refining sculptural prerequisites (vertical to horizontal, solid to skeletal, enclosed to open, etc.), made him a natural Greenbergian. If anyone were to make a trap, it would be Caro; and if Caro were to make it, the year would be 1962 -- the year he completed *Early One Morning*, the piece which comes closest to my intern's description.

Appropriate, then, that Caro should fall prey to such a trap, following as he did in the wake of Moore (whom he once worked for) and only moments before Andre, Flavin and most notably Judd (currently on display at the Belkin Gallery) compressed sculpture to the primary level, to what is now known as 'minimalism'. The world was changing, and Caro and Greenberg's elitist ideas seemed more in line with a status quo that turned a blind eye to Vietnam, civil rights and urban decay than allowing for an art that engaged (in) social issues. (Not that the 'minimalists' were especially keen to address social issues either.)

Which leads me to Dan Graham (currently on display at the Contemporary Art Gallery).

According to my research, Dan Graham's work has more in common with how to approach an argument than how to solve one. What Graham demonstrated in *Homes For America* (1966/1967) was not the assertion that an art work carry social commentary -- but the opposite. By returning a mass cultural artefact -- that serial structure known as 'suburban tract housing' -- to art discourse (via popular print media), Graham made a case for 'readymade' domiciles carrying issues pertinent to

'minimal'/'conceptual' discourse. The debate was not in the gallery, but reflecting/refracting around us.

When your video was described to me, I immediately thought of Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). If you're familiar with the film you will recall the opening scene, with the australopithecines, which we follow blithely as they 'discover' fire, tool use -- then suddenly this impossibly polished (and instructive) structure known as The Monolith. John McCracken must have literally shit his pants when he saw this, for here was the validation he and others had been waiting for.

The appearance of your 'Caro' might have a similar effect on gallery audiences. Not because we'll be jarred out of the prehistoric and into the science-fiction, but because of questions we might ask of something that only looks like what it seems to be. Because what you're doing is similar to what Graham did with 'readymade' housing. Only this time you're returning the art object to the realm of the social: in this case, an animal trap, a device used to procure the irreducible minimum -- food, clothing, and shelter. And what could be more appropriate, given Modernism's propensity to continually ensnare itself, than a trap.

Why am I telling you this? Well, as I mentioned earlier, we are looking to expand our historical repertoire, and one of the places our researches have taken us is contemporary art -- partly as a setting for our 'period' shorts (a multi-media studio is currently under consideration), but also as a site to recruit artists who write, produce and direct short films. Which is where you come in. If this is something that interests you, something you would like to explore, please let us know. My intern and I will be attending your opening tomorrow and we would be most grateful if you would consider working with us. I will be dressed in a LuLu Lemon tracksuit; my intern, in honour of your exhibition, a rawhide jacket and coonskin cap.

Sincerely,

Charlie Munter
604 708 0062

CATRIONA JEFFRIES GALLERY
3149 GRANVILLE STREET
VANCOUVER BC V6H 3K1
tel 604 736 1554
fax 604 736 1054
info@catrionajeffries.com

ISBN 0-9733038-1-6

Damian Moppett 1815/1962
30 October – 6 December 2003
Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver

Untitled © Catriona Jeffries Gallery
and Michael Turner, 2003.
All rights reserved.