

## Nicolas Fleming: Something that accompanies one everyday and everywhere

Adam Barbu

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## Nicolas Fleming: Something that accompanies one everyday and everywhere

Adam Barbu

**AXENÉO7  
GATINEAU  
DECEMBER 17, 2014 -  
FEBRUARY 7, 2015**

Presenting an exhibition of new site-specific work at AXENÉO7 titled *Something that accompanies one everyday and everywhere*, Montreal artist Nicolas Fleming combines unusual display tactics to re-image the conventional white cube gallery space as a contingent, transitory site for experimentation. With this exhibition, Fleming's work traces a simultaneous additive and reductive play with the gallery walls that asks what it means for a particular site to be "under construction." Overall, Fleming's interest in an interventionist mode of minimalist sculpture allows us to rethink the relationship between backgrounds and foregrounds as our familiarity with the gallery space becomes increasingly blurred and confused.

Central to Fleming's practice is an interest in breaking apart the conventional hierarchy of background, support and object. This exhibition consists of separate, yet partially connected installations that the artist constructed on-site. In both spaces, materials, objects and forms are tactfully stripped, broken down and reconstructed, thus focusing on the intuitive and manual aspect of building present in Fleming's artistic process. First, it is critical to note that this gallery intervention occurs marginally, through imprecise, makeshift structures, primarily staged through the use synthetic adhesive substances, plywood, and fluorescent light fixtures. Throughout the exhibition, conventional aesthetic "imperfections" are celebrated rather than hidden. Signalled by his heavy, unapologetic use of caulking glue and his deliberate decision to leave nails, wires, and knots exposed to the viewer, these installations appear to us as if they were discovered in an ambiguous, never ending *reconstruction effort*. Here, the gallery space is held in a tension between two contrasting ideals – a formalist engagement with the conventional white cube and a seamless, immersive transformation of illusionistic space.

To begin, visitors enter a closed-off, makeshift tunnel constructed out of several large sheets of plywood and a red industrial carpet. In this narrow space, we notice seven unusual objects presented consecutively on the right side, above which Fleming has installed two rows of exposed fluorescent lights. Each object consists of a coloured metal base bolted to the wall and a textured, synthetic element that emerges out into three-dimensional space. These largely mysterious elements seem to range from packing foam, adhesive, to other hardened, paste-like substances. Perhaps the most striking detail is Fleming's juxtaposition of the hard smoothness of metal with the uncanny tactility of the corresponding elements. Faced with these objects, one might consider where and how have these materials have been sourced, mixed and treated in order to arrive at this state. Yet it becomes evident that no matter how closely you look, these materials will not "reveal"



themselves fully. It is precisely this interest in the deferred arrival of formal singularity that connects the range of tactics employed in the exhibition.

The tunnel leads visitors to a large room that contains two converging installations. The first is a tall semi-circular structure made of plywood, mounted with columns of fluorescent light tubes that are divided across the horizontal axis. Fleming maintains the raw qualities of the untreated materials, exposing the markings and stamps on the plywood, the wires, as well as the obvious brand labels on the light tubes. This deep interest in fluorescent light echoes both an acknowledgement of and deviation from the work of influential minimalist sculptor Dan Flavin. Whereas Flavin's work emphasizes a spatial purification of the experience of light, Fleming reveals the displacement of the Phillips tubes in an unaltered, stark, perhaps untidy state. On the opposite side of the gallery space, Fleming has created another semi-circular structure; in this case, it consists of an assemblage of large stretched, unpainted canvases. Emerging from this are seven large objects whose size and shape are mirrored symmetrically around a central vertical axis. This perplexing installation is both sculptural and painterly – three-dimensional objects emerge from partially delimited, flat canvases, and together, these stacked canvases take on a sculptural quality. Here, we are placed at a particular threshold of conventional art historical and museological signification. Is this a collection of painted sculptures or a massive sculptural painting? It is critical to note that in moving closer, we notice that yellow caulking glue seeps and gathers around the edges of the fused canvases. Fleming's mischievous emphasis on the binding agent itself stages a resounding interruption of these normative categories of construction: Focus shifts from the structural support of the art object to that which makes this assemblage possible in the first place.

Apart from these two installations, Fleming has also exhibited a sculptural work located in a long empty room with floor to ceiling windows. At the far end of the space, we encounter a disproportionate, bulky bench-like object that is propped on its side and leans against the wall. Both sides of the sculpture are partially exposed, revealing a strange foam interior,



while its frontal surface is covered with wood that imitates the shade and grain of the floor. When approached directly from this later perspective, it emerges from the ground as an ambiguous hardwood monolith whose symbolic presence shifts according to the curiosity of the viewer.

Fleming's broader artistic practice is motivated by this interest in the relationship between the spatiality of the object and the access granted to the experiencing body. His work highlights the impossibility of a consistent, measurable duality between surface detail and the withheld internal materiality of the object, forcing us to contemplate the perceivable limit of this search for meaning *within* the work. By exposing these fragile boundaries between the end of the wall and the beginning of the work, as well as the artist's ambiguous arrival to and departure from the gallery itself, this exhibition stages a thoughtful re-thinking of affective potential of minimalist sculpture. Positioned in a tension in which materials are carefully arrested in a state of flux, pointing to the very impossibility of composition wholeness, these installations can be read as tactical placeholders to stage an un-representable sense of fragmentation and loss. Accordingly, this finality or coherent form has not, and will not arrive. Returning to the title, Fleming offers the intriguing proposition that this '*something* that accompanies one everyday and everywhere' is in fact the private, alienating experience of an internal-external suspension of proper meaning.

Adam Barbu is a writer and curator based in Ottawa. He has produced exhibitions nationally and internationally that explore themes of displacement and cultural memory. Recently, he was the curator in residence at the Parque Cultural de Valparaíso (Valparaíso, Chile). In Ottawa, Adam works for the international contemporary art space La Petite Mort Gallery.

## Pascal Dufaux : se surveiller voir

Marie Perrault

### GALERIES ROGER BELLEMARE ET CHRISTIAN LAMBERT MONTRÉAL

15 NOVEMBRE 2014 –  
17 JANVIER 2015

Dans le cadre de trois expositions consacrées respectivement à Dominic Papillon, Mathieu Gaudet et Pascal Dufaux, la galerie Christian Lambert et Roger Bellemare présente un corpus cohérent d'œuvres photographiques, sculpturales ou vidéocinétiques récentes de Pascal Dufaux. À une série de machines intitulées *Sondes*<sup>1</sup>, correspondant au travail pour lequel il est le plus connu, s'ajoutent des photographies et de nouveaux dispositifs, *Vanités et Orbites*<sup>2</sup>, montrés pour la première fois. Dans le développement de la démarche de Dufaux, ces derniers étonnent et jettent un nouvel éclairage sur l'ensemble de sa pratique.

Dans un texte, paru en 2013, était abordée la persistance dans ses œuvres, de dispositifs historiques et des traditions du portrait et du paysage, que redéfinit toutefois son recours à la technologie<sup>3</sup>. À la lumière du travail plus récent, il s'avère important d'interpréter sa démarche comme une exploration du régime visuel actuel, puisant aux sources de la tradition artistique, de l'expérience du visible modulé par la technologie, de la science-fiction et de souvenirs personnels. Sa démarche éclectique relève d'une réflexion englobant les cultures numérique et matérielle.

La majorité des œuvres présentées ici se déploient autour de caméras de surveillance et évoquent l'omniprésence de la télésurveillance dans nos sociétés contemporaines. Dans la série *Vanités*, des caméras enrobées d'un modelage sculptural et dirigées vers des éléments de plastique ou de verre filment l'espace environnant à travers ces vestiges d'accessoires décoratifs. L'image captée à travers ces prismes apparaît alors trouble, brouillée par la matière même d'éléments parasites. Cette distorsion évoque, en l'exagérant, l'impact de la lentille sur la vision, un effet que tend à faire oublier la présumée transparence du dispositif. Par ailleurs, l'ensemble des œuvres exposées fait également intervenir des écrans de formats variés, de la taille d'un moniteur à celle d'un téléphone portable. S'ajoutent une photographie des *Images échappées* et des clichés sous verre de la série *Infra-rouge avant la nuit*, reproduisant le rendu d'images de basse résolution proliférant aujourd'hui, mais évoquant également les négatifs de verre et le flou des toutes premières photographies.

Dans la série *Sondes*, le balayage continu de l'espace d'exposition, filmant à la fois les personnes présentes en galerie, les machines se captant les unes les autres et les images qu'elles produisent renvoient aussi à une dynamique de vision caractéristique de l'intégration de la technologie à la culture visuelle. Les différentes formes de l'écran, du téléphone portable à la projection de grande dimension, contribuent aujourd'hui à une certaine ubiquité de l'image, au service d'un outil individuel installé dans les foyers, mais débordant aussi dans les rues