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CANADIANART



BLUE REPUBLIC Installation view of *Speeding from the Beautiful*
Infections series 2004-5

Blue Republic

◀ PEAK GALLERY, TORONTO

Blue Republic's collaborative exhibition "Morning Daily," at Peak Gallery last winter, revealed itself to be a perceptive and melancholic commentary on our social condition. Anna Passakas and Radoslaw Kudlinski, the two artists whose work this is, are originally from Poland. The diverse histories and political circumstances that they have experienced form the background to the work.

On entering the gallery, we encounter an array of materials and media: two floor installations made from debris; a series of paintings of brightly coloured pie charts; two large photos, seductive in their clarity and colour; a worn Persian rug lying on the floor; and, high on a wall, a slightly menacing jerry-built device. The titles help to focus the meanings, meanings that, on closer inspection, may already be available to us.

One of the photos, an idyllic scene of a bend in a country road, is titled *Gaswagen*, from the series *Blind Spots*. Although this could be a photo of a road anywhere, the title—*Gaswagen* denotes a mobile extermination unit invented by the Germans in the Second World War to kill civilians—changes the image completely. A schizophrenic split occurs between the beauty of the environment and the horror of the event that we imagine happened on this spot. As we look down on the rug we think about flying over a territory. Nearly camouflaged Western military insignia are overlaid on it in a form of visual imperialism. The meaning of the work's title, *Untitled*, shifts, as does the title of the pie-chart paintings, *The Last Supper (after Leonardo da Vinci)*. In those works, one's percentage of the pie becomes a matter of survival. Both connote a post-colonial reading dividing us and them, rich and poor. Both ask: whose last supper? And who is untitled?

Meanwhile, we consume and, as Walter Benjamin noted, our pile of debris grows higher and higher. In *Speeding* and *Low Resolution Man*, the artists use the waste of our consumer culture—cardboard, Styrofoam packaging materials and rolled-up magazines picturing glossy fashion models—in two related floor installations that comment on our dystopian urban environments and the people who have been left behind, the low-resolution man in a climate of speedy change. As we look at the device high on the wall, *Morning Daily – ADD Bomb (This bomb will explode in 1,000 years)*, we realize that, to reassure us, the artists have given us a thousand years. The rest of the title seems closer to the urgency of our condition; note the LED screen counting down the minutes in glowing red numerals. Appropriately, this exhibition offers no easy answers but leaves us with a question: what is to be done? JANET JONES