

## Blue Republic's Message is Mundane

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To get to **Blue Republic**, you go through Yves Klein's "Blue Revolution" before turning left at Plato's Republic. You need also visit Peak Gallery now showing "Morning Daily," the new exhibition from Blue Republic's two only citizens, artists **Anna Passakas** and **Radoslaw Kudlinski**.

In "The Blue Revolution," the late French artist felt that perfection could be found through perception in the cool blue of pure ultramarine. In The Republic, Socrates mused on a world "where artists had no place," says Passakas. Blue Republic merges both. "A lot of our work is about perception," she adds, "but from a position of speaking about things we only are interested in."

Polish-born but active in Toronto for more than a decade, both Passakas and Kudlinski bring a highly politicized critical edge honed in Europe into line with a North American indulgence in consumer culture.

"Our main connection with Poland is our lack of trust in a utopia," says Passakas. "Communist rule, imposed on us from outside, taught us to be a little suspicious of certain ideas in circulation. There was a time when artists were very politically involved in things. Lately they are not. But we don't speak only from a political point of view. This show is not just about politics."

When politics is most directly the issue, the results are unnerving. With *Gasvagen from Blind Spots* (2004-2005), the familiar, reassuring splendour of some sort of Government-approved touristy image - a gentle curve along a lonely highway through a dense strand of trees - creates a horrifying anti-message clashing with the title and our understanding of the image.

The Nazis' use of mechanically altered trucks and vans, the "gas wagons," where carbon monoxide was pumped directly into a space filled with prisoners en route to concentration camps, proved to be yet another highly efficient way of doling out death.

"This picture is in a way symbolic and very typical of many places in central and eastern Europe where mass executions took place, where there would be rows of birches along the side of a road," says Passakas.

"We tend to think there's no connection with this and with the present. We don't see a connection between that and Rwanda. With the (60th) anniversary (of the Russian liberation) of Auschwitz, we felt it was our way of saying something about it."

*Gasvagen from Blind Spots* is every bit as much about advertising - a case of making those

old memories sparkle so that today's perception will shine away all that musty old history - as Blue Republic's *The Last Supper (after Leonardo da Vinci)* (2003-2004) is about aesthetic understanding at a pop cult level.

This series of circular pie charts arranged unevenly along a horizontal section of a wall, rather like biblical figures unevenly spaced along a dinner table, "cracks" the famous image the way thriller readers crack Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*.

A tourist-quality travel poster. Bits and pieces of junk making up the figure of *Low Resolution Man* (2005). Tin cans turned into mysterious sculptures for *Speeding (from Beautiful Infections)* (2004-2005).

A good number of Blue Republic pieces "begin with whatever we have in the studio," says Passakas. "The piece *Speeding* is about uncontrollable growth, about cancerous growth. So we tried to use poor, commonplace materials that were appropriate to the topic. And it was appropriate to use tin cans and a lot of cardboard."

Artists have been playing with stuff like this for years, going back to the ready-mades of the 1920s. But re-imagining a reconfigured familiar shape isn't the passport to understanding what Blue Republic is about. It's understanding how the process has now been filtered through the media that matters.

The show's title comes from a mixed-media sculpture called *Morning Daily-ADD Bomb* (2004-2005), which is really an ad bomb. It's due to explode "in 1,000 years," warns Blue Republic after there's just too great a build-up of media junk in the collective imagination.