

# BPA//Exhibition 2021

Thinking about Adam's work, I found myself sitting at the edge of the world. Which is really all I want from art. To be pulled to the lip of a precipice. Winds of the unknown drifting up, creeping into my nostrils. Soft vertigo setting in.

I'm working from certain assumptions. For instance, that most of what we call experience would be better described as the processing of synthetic signals:

Window  
Storefront  
Letter  
Word  
Building  
Essay  
Artwork

You know how when we're very small, the world is this throbbing, immanent swarm? Shapes and colors, pressures and weights, smells and sounds, at once forming and tearing apart your sense of things, like a terrifying and exhilarating infant sublime. Then things start acting, talking, morphing. I don't mean that abstract concept where objects have slumbering consciousnesses that we can't see or feel. I mean silhouettes becoming actual nerve-fraying monsters in the dark. Bedroom shadows cloaking hell-sent villains. Doorways egressing into who knows where. Surfaces—wood grain, rust patterns, plant veins—growing faces.

As time moves on, you start learning to use things, start learning how to move through a world of signs. Start learning to produce. Start learning *how to learn* for christ's sake. There's nothing you can do about it. That's just life. Everything becomes usable.

But fuck that. I want bewilderment back. As a matter of fact, I, you, we, deserve it. We deserve to have at least some of the child brain and heart reinstated within our petrified adult carapaces. To have our dried out eyes replaced with fresh ones, like sticky glowing marbles.

From what I remember, Adam's earliest sculptures were about the size of Kleenex boxes. They were assemblages of both actual and facsimile building materials, which under his treatment had this halfway cartoony look. You could imagine a big bouncy ball coated with glue, left to whizz-bang through buildings and through time itself, aggregating all these little chunks of material evidence.

As the years bounced along, this evidentiary impulse grew, in combination with a fantastical attraction to what we often think of as the margins of the built world. With friends, he roamed around cities and their edges, and collected images, eating up and storing photographic evidence of how our known environments peter out and fray, both at the edges of municipalities, and in their under-capitalized nooks and crannies, particularly in Vancouver, where more of these places still existed back then, stubbornly evading the city's ghoulish takeover by finance. He and other artists

delivered their recordings into the community's imagination, by making them into art, in the form of archives and documents, and inhabitation of the places themselves.

There's no point in denying the nostalgia that drove that work and its consumption. It was a way of escaping reality, of transgressing the crumbling edge of our world, into a more raw and possible place. And who could blame him, them? I for one hated the reality of that time, hated the city's capitalization, and the violently smooth, cultural boredom that it imposed. In contrast, the places that Adam and his collaborators found held the potential for life.



Adam Shiu-Yang Shaw, *where decisions are made*, digital photograph from the artist's archive, 2021.

A few years down the road, Adam began producing his own spaces, both as architectural mise-en-scenes that wrapped visitors in hypnagogic interactions with reality, and also in the form of smaller discreet sculptures that, often reproducing building facades, did the same at a miniature scale.

Lurking within these large spaces were characters, creatures, and signs. The method of their birth was paramount. All were hand-carved, and then cast and painted, with incongruous, unsettling results. I always think of handmade tchotchkes tilting supernaturally. The surfaces of these things, and their architectural settings, were patinated with wax and stain, the latter creating depth by pooling in carved crevices and wood grain. While one part of your brain was dazzled by the theatre of this technique, another part knew full well what was going on. This is what makes the experience of these works spin in the mind, at once familiar and baffling, like altars to oddity, a sacred birthright.

Owing to their cultural touch-points, these pieces were doubled simulations. They echoed the effect of quasi-anthropological museum dioramas, kitsch renditions of history, and multiple other realms of folktale and myth culture, right up to actual building facades, themselves always a tricky mixture of the real and the represented. Adam's stuff has juice, sizzle, power, because it reveals, in a complex and very involved way, in this netherworld of the real. He hoards the dusty magic of these human-cultural forms. Then he makes it sparkle and twitch with new alterity. Lately, he's again been sifting the visual fields of the city, of history, of culture, sleuthing out curious corners and facets.

Like these windows that he's got on the go right now, with their dog-eared corners and cracks, magnetic in their disproving of built order. They tell a tale about how every inch of everything we know can and will, through animating entropy, and clumsy creative human intervention, become a stranger to itself. Adam's role—through selection, sculptural re-combination, facsimile-creation, and surface-alteration—is to focus on and amplify these encounters with the outward-facing skin of the city.

To look at these these re-made chunks of the world is to enjoy a regeneration of the heart, mind, and eyes; it is to feel something moving in the interchange between psyche and flesh. The pieces sort of become scars and lumps, echoes of our own in-built glitches and asymmetries, which



Adam Shiu-Yang Shaw, *continuous mistake*, digital photograph from the artist's archive, 2021.

would be cool and uncanny if they weren't so goddamn upsetting. Like how, when you catch sight of yourself in a mirror, you're sometimes a wholly different creature than you fantasized. Secretly wishing to god that you didn't have that bad side, that thing down there, that missing patch... But it is what it is. Just like these sculptures. They are what they are. Runaway children of perfection. Exquisite freaks by definition.

**Mitch Speed** is a Berlin-based writer. In 2019 his study of Mark Leckey's *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore* (1999) was published by Afterall Books. In Autumn 2019, he presented a solo exhibition at WAAP, in Vancouver. His collected essays are forthcoming from Brick Press.

**Adam Shiu-Yang Shaw** studied at The Royal Academy of Art, Stockholm, and Emily Carr University, Vancouver. Solo exhibitions include *Memory Loss* (2020), *Coyote*, Stockholm; *Can there be Forgiveness?* (2018), Ashley, Berlin; and *F-150* (2018), Polansky, Prague. Group shows include *Vigil* (2021), Galeria Wschód, Warsaw; *But Doctor, I am Pagliacci* (2019), The Loon, Toronto; and *Clerks Quarters* (2018), Pogo Bar, KW, Berlin.

**Poster** Adam Shiu-Yang Shaw, *being and non-being produce each other*, digital photograph from the artist's archive, 2021.

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