BIOGRAPHIES:

Jillian Ross (b. 1989) graduated with a BFA from OCAD in 2011. She currently lives and works in Toronto. Her art exists as physical paintings and constructed digital (rendered) documentation, and the association of these two forms causes confusion as to the Realness or authenticity of either iteration.

Liam Wylie was born in Ottawa, Canada in 1989 and he received his BFA from the Ontario College of Art and Design University in 2011. Working mainly in sculpture, Liam's practice explores the tenuous boundary between the fictional realm of myth, and the empirical nature of science. In particular, he is interested in how these two supposedly opposed factions interact, and often overlap with one another. Liam has participated in many Toronto group shows (2010-11) and has also exhibited his work in the United States (2011).

Greg J. Smith is a Toronto-based designer and researcher with interests in media theory and digital culture. Greg is a designer at Mission Specialist and a contributing editor at Creative Applications Network [CAN]. His writing has appeared in a variety of publications including: *Rhizome*, *Current Intelligence*, *Vectors*, the *Handbook of Research on Computational Arts and Creative Informatics* and *Vague Terrain* (which he co-founded in 2005). – serialconsign.com

DOUBLE BACK

★★★★

Jillian Ross & Liam Wylie

February 17 - March 24, 2012

MATERIAL, IMMATERIAL : JILLIAN ROSS & LIAM WYLIE'S DOUBLE BACK
BY GREG J. SMITH

Everyone carries a room about inside him. This fact can even be proved by means of the sense of hearing. If someone walks fast and one pricks up one's ears and listens, say in the night, when everything round is quiet, one hears for instance, the rattling of a mirror not quite firmly fastened to the wall.
– Franz Kafka[1]

The above parable neatly encapsulates a vital blend of aesthetic and psychological truths that are quite handy to dwell on when confronted with objects or situations that could be categorized as: (*a*) subterfuge, (*b*) post-digital, (*c*) smoke and/or mirrors, (*d*) rendering artifacts, (*e*) not as they seem. While Kafka's metaphor of architectural interiority illustrates the shortcomings of our perceptual faculties, it also suggests that (under optimal circumstances) revelation and self-awareness just may be possible. The punchline of this cruel joke is that the best an individual can hope for is a crude understanding of their own misperceptions. The analogy of the rattling mirror and the unreliable reflection that it casts is a useful lead-in to the discussion that will follow. This essay will parse some of the representa-tional games being played within Jillian Ross and Liam Wylie's exhibition *Double Back*.

The body of work assembled by Ross and Wylie for *Double Back* exemplifies how two distinct practices can be a synthesized to yield a novel, hyper-nuanced meditation on perception and materiality. While the oeuvre of both artists has demonstrated a sustained interest in texture and tectonics, geometric minimalism and the friction between digital imagery and 'the real', the staging of this collaborative venture leverages these pursuits as a methodology for full-on environmental design.

Double Back is much more than an array of paintings and sculptures deployed across InterAccess, it is a robust interrogation of the relationship between the phenomenological experience of 'soaking up' art in a lived, social space versus the disembodied immateriality of a digital model. Ross and Wylie have been shrewd in crafting these two spatial experiences, and the essence of each space bleeds into the other, provoking a series of unsettling questions:

How does a viewer reconcile the physical/digital hybridity of these works? How should we consider materiality within this 'doubled-up' mise-en-scène? In what ways does the contemporary gallery experience echo our encounters with and mediation of art in digital space?

The Physical/Digital Hybrid as Overturned Object

In *Formless: A User's Guide*, Yve-Alan Bois discusses how humans are hardwired to understand objects and aesthetic experiences in relation to perceptual defaults; we stand a certain height from the ground and encounter both the mundane (furniture) and the extraordinary (art) from a specific vantage point. As soon as this standard perspective is jarred, we become radically disoriented. Bois cites Robert Smithson's *Upside-Down Trees* (1969) and their "riddlelike character" to describe how space is read in relation to corporeality:

> And what if the overturned object does not belong to our own bodies? It becomes a kind of black hole in our perception, reminding us that our self-assurance, insofar as it rests on the solidity of our legs, is in fact rather precarious.[2]

While the objects that populate *Double Back* are most certainly right-side up, there is definitely an inversion occurring in the mirroring of the work between the gallery and the digital model. One can't help but wonder, which space is the original and which is the reflection? Or should we consider them to be simultaneous constructions that inform one another? The manner in which the exhibition effortlessly breaches digital space irrevocably complicates any physical encounter with the 'actual' sculptures and wall works.

Texture Mapping as Sleight of Hand

When being used to describe form, the word texture has specific connotations across various creative spheres. A pastry chef, jazz percussionist and industrial designer would use it to describe consistency and composition, sonic density, surface and finish qualities. Ross and Wylie have cultivated distinct explorations of texture within their work; this is evidenced by the former's articulated brushwork, hashing out spartan constellations of debris and geometric outlines on near-bare canvases, and the latter's sculptural objects that simultaneously function as altars of volumetric potential and opaque material studies.

Materiality is worth dwelling on as it is quite central to any encounter with *Double Back*, an exhibition with pieces comprised of acrylic paint, canvas, cardboard, cotton, foam, glass, MDF, plexiglass, steel and styrene. Many of these materials are invoked in the finishes of the virtual objects, but the quality of these surfaces are unnaturally pristine, resulting in works that read as hyperreal artifice. Game studies scholar Ian Bogost has described the goal of texture mapping as the projection of 2D image data onto digital models to "make them appear to have a texture not actually present in the 3D model itself" simulating "appearance, rather than the sensation" of texture.[3] The fact that we can read the grain of 3D models such as *2 Ply and Fot Slab* while only being able to experience them visually is not unusual, but when we assess the sculpture *Zillerstack YW* (a 2x2 array of blue foam beams) and consider the discrepancy between its form and density, it is as if the immateriality of the digital models have informed the construction of the physical sculptures and wall works. Ross and Wylie have deftly blurred the distinction between these domains and charged the viewer with determining the tactile and textural implications.

Networked Art Consumption and the Digital Commons

Beyond the tension between physical and virtual form that permeates *Double Back*, the existence of a digital version of the exhibition also provides some savvy commentary on the consumption and documentation of contemporary art. In an age of visual bookmarking, surf clubs and template-based portfolio services, access to work is ubiquitous and instantaneous; most art enthusiasts encounter photographs or videos of work online long before they experience it in person, or perhaps they never encounter it in the flesh at all. While the projection of the digital version compellingly augments the viewing experience for a visitor to InterAccess, the 3D model also functions as a means of distribution. This environment (constructed in the game engine Unity) will live on as vital, downloadable documentation that expands the discourse surrounding *Double Back* beyond standard archival photography, critical reviews and this exhibition essay. This physical/virtual hybridity also evokes Brad Troemel's notion of 'dual sites', art organizations that compliment informal gallery spaces with prolific online presences.[4] However, instead of using a blogging platform to extend the reach of a gallery experience, Ross and Wylie have authored a navigable companion space populated with digital doppelgängers of their sculptural objects and wall works.

A Room with a View (of another room)

Broader musings on post-digital culture notwithstanding, the aforementioned analogy of the rattling mirror is probably the single best point of reference that a viewer could bring to this exhibition. Like Kafka's parable, *Double Back* is articulated as an abstract architectural experience, but in this case the substance of the reflection is a precisely calibrated object world rather than some distorted existential truth. The Ross and Wylie sculptural object that most perfectly embodies this nuanced framing of views is *50/50*, a window pane resting on a pair of foam blocks that acts as a delicate threshold between two walls, two rooms and two practices.

References:

1. Kafka, Franz. The Blue Octavo Notebooks. Exact Change: Cambridge, 1991. Pg. 1.

2. Bois, Yve-Alain, and Rosalind E. Krauss. *Formless: A User's Guide*. Zone Books: New York, 1997. Pg. 170.

3. Bogost, Ian. *How to Do Things with Videogames*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 2011. Pg. 78.

4. Troemel, Brad. "The Emergence of Dual Sites" in P*eer Pressure: Essays on the Internet by an Artist on the Internet*. LINK Editions: Brescia, 2011. Pg. 68-70.