

Let's begin with a few scenes from Miles Rufelds' video work "A Great Deal of Trust": a slow camera pan across a downtown street reveals a glass of water and some sponges, strangely misplaced from their normal context. A metronome, immobilized and non-functional, sits portrait-style beside a few of those same sponges, suggesting a place where time has stopped and the objects of the everyday have taken over. Moving along, the slight shaking of coloured water in a glass subtly portends something more ominous outside of the frame. Later, a pair of hands go decisively to work on a quartet of the aforementioned sponges, twisting large screws into them, as if to physically and metaphorically displace the very nature of these objects of ho-hum daily use.

It is not hard to identify this work as art: its images float by in sweet chromatic embrace, their juxtaposed objects startling the viewer out of complacency. When presented to us for the first time, they are as strange and incomprehensible as they are electric and alluring. Alongside Rufelds' photography and sculpture, these works come to us as a minimal, understated challenge to the act of seeing, which the artist refers to as "a system of continued intrigue and deferred resolution."¹ In this state of "intrigue and deferred resolution", one might easily mistake these simple objects and actions as being devoid of intent; to think this would be missing something important in the work. Within the machinery of Rufelds' cinematic minimalism, there is something more.

The scenes of banal objects taken in luscious close-up are, I think, a platform for a deeper inquiry that suggests to me a disruptive purpose. It seems safe to say that the aim here is nothing less than the desire to totally disrupt the machinery of perception, to challenge the eyes to see differently and the brain to think differently— not only about what they see, but also about the meanings they would put upon those sights. Rufelds wants to create a visual space where both perceived meanings and the system that perceives them are disrupted. This is a space where one does not make sense— but rather, and importantly, what we see in the work should make the opposite of sense. This is work that calls for an explicit rejection of meaning, of our traditional ways of seeing and understanding.

Once one realizes this, and arrives where the artist wants us to be – balancing precariously on that platform of luscious minimalism-- the result is positively existential in nature. It is work that points us back to the idea that existence precedes essence, and the crisis therein. It is a crisis that seems especially relevant: when ideas are wrapped in the smooth commercial production values of contemporary media, where is the meaning? For Rufelds, the meaning lies in exploring the loop of understanding and knowledge, moving breathlessly from representation to perception, perception to interpretation, interpretation to collapse of meaning, and then back again.

As these disrupted meanings flutter by in Rufelds' cinematic void space, I have to remark on how peaceful and open that space is. For such a large and ambitious project (i.e. the total disruption of traditional perceptual space), the place the artist leaves you in is meditative in its calm, smooth in its approach, and much less jarring that you would expect. For any artist, that is a major accomplishment in itself.

1 Interview with Miles Rufelds, Montreal, September 11th 2015.

Bio

A media and visual artist since 1989, Daniel Jolliffe's work traverses many disciplines and interests including sculpture, installation, sound, public intervention, performance, interactive art, video, and open-source culture. The goal in all of his work is to challenge and query how embodied conscious experience is changed by the intervention of technology.

Based in Montreal, Jolliffe's work has been shown across Canada and internationally, and been covered by Wired News, the Dow Jones News Wire, the Yahoo Directory, Rhizome and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, among others. He has exhibited most recently in the WRO media Art Biennale 2015 and the International Symposium of Electronic art 2015. He holds a B.A in Philosophy from the University of Victoria and an M.F.A in Art and Technology from the Ohio State University.