



# BARTLEBY REVIEW

Issue 19 - July 2014

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## A Passage with Modern Sculptures • Ellis Sam

### **Damian Moppett**

'The Bells'

SFU Gallery  
Academic Quadrangle 3004, 8888 University Drive  
Through April 17

**B**efore noon, all that excites me is the passing of two elderly runners. I like the way they practice their sport in the halls of this university. I am on their weekend racetrack waiting for Simon Fraser University Gallery to open. Although I cannot hear it now, I can anticipate the sound that will greet me. The gallery attendant points the remote at a DVD player, presses play, followed by loop. It seems easy to ring a bell.

Upon entering, the photograph adjacent to the entrance illustrates how the bell is rung before my ears have a chance to dwell on it. The image depicts a makeshift recording studio in which rigid metal rods are angled towards a microphone on a photography tripod. I haunt this photograph without a title like an apparition looking for an object

from the past, whispering to it the name of an artwork: *Broken Fall*. I hope for the object's unpainted ligaments to chime in response. Outside of the image's frame lies a bucket of red paint, soon to baptize its form in the color of the Calder mobile Moppett will caricaturize in a survey exhibition of his work at the Rennie Collection. The contrivance I attribute to this artwork finds a glimmer of consequence in the fact that this exhibition occurred ten months after the 2010 Winter Olympics. I project into the composition of the photograph, where two pieces of paper tacked to one of the studio walls have the word "riot" spray-painted on each of them, an expression that briefly pronounces a spirit of revolution, which hearkens to the struggles of that event.

The details embedded in the composition of photographs are abstracted when they appear as stills in a video. The simplest of these transformations is a photograph of a paint bucket that becomes a bell when placed upside down, caught mid-motion catching the brush at an up-swing, primed to strike its encrusted surface. A succession of images are pulled onto the screen, each placed one atop another. Each photograph depicts a scene from Moppett's studio where the subjects are objects that can be picked apart from their current composition, and located as artworks in an ulterior history of the artist's previous exhibits. Each image is exposed for an equal measure, a pace structured to elude one's desire for narrative; there is comfort in isolating composition from its reference. However, one is not deprived of reference: nearby two vitrines

hold a dizzying array of documents. Beyond their appearance as Moppett's production notes and reference points, they recall histories and settings that situate his artworks from past exhibitions: the sculptural feats of Mark Di Suvero, the eternal stare of Hollis Frampton, a watercolor study of a pot produced in Alberta, a Klein group diagram for a utopian skatepark.

I take a seat on a bench that sits out of the spotlight. The video is cast at an indirect angle that emphasizes the deep volume of its monolithic screen. From this seat the contents of the vitrine dissipates from my view, from my thoughts, as I find my self attracted to two boxes elevated to my sightline, where their presence becomes defined by their design. It is from this reductive perspective that I start thinking about another artwork shaped like this bench, Robert Morris's *Untitled (L-beams)*. For this exhibit, I believe it to have been kidnapped, perhaps drugged or found in the wild. Delivered to this abode, where various acts of accommodation such as dimmed lights soothe its traumatized soul. Sitting here my thoughts circle around this artwork from the past, intoxicated with the possibility of an encounter. Yet nothing in the vitrines, the images in the video, the didactic on the wall or the photographs hold any stock to my experience with this object as anything more than a private one. It is from this position I chose not to stir, nor to riot, nor to raise a sound.

**Ellis Sam**