



# BARTLEBY REVIEW

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Squiggle Culture ..... Ingrid Olauson

**Kristin Abdai, Maya Beaudry, Scott Kemp,  
and Mel Paget**  
*'Beginning The Shape'*

*Or Gallery*  
555 Hamilton Street  
Through January 31

Some of my peers attribute a certain look in recent exhibition making to the hyperactivity of our behavior online. In this content-driven climate, a dual-standard of provisionality and visual opulence has gained currency among our tiny tribe of emerging artists. Based on the recycling of cultural tropes, mainly from the 80's and 90's, I have looked skeptically on at this "look" that presumes a lack of criticality.

In 'Beginning the Shape', the usual suspects are all there. Maya Beaudry's tableaus are blanketed with the energetic patterns of Italian Postmodern design, while Scott Kemp's rubber casts give off the kind of parodic obsolescence that can only belong belonging to consumer products produced within the last decade.

Curator Madison Killo organized the four artists, all recent BFA undergraduates, around a game of telephone where a single shape—a squiggle—would suffice as the primary motif transplanted into each subsequent work. The result was a self-reproducing system that is at once optimistic and paranoid; it would not be a stretch to compare this curatorial prompt to current feedback loops of trends in music, fashion and revisited as contemporary art. This leads me to believe that an impressionable generation of artists are either folding to the *Contemporary Art Daily* paradigm or are deliberately transgressing the politics of an already tired Postinternet argument.

A 3D animation by Mel Paget of an object reminiscent of 90s Net Art is projected on the far wall of the gallery. Despite my above statement about fashion and the Internet, the work manages to nullify any feelings of being overwhelmed by “cool” images through a simple hypnotically revolving object. Although Kristen Abdai’s sound piece, which consists of static discharging from dangling speakers installed between the other works, seems to be the least intrusive to my attention, it is the rejection of youthful enthusiasm in Kemp’s sculptures that is surprisingly shy. The monochrome objects resemble bath or car mats. The way they are draped over elegantly bent metal stresses the flaccidity of the material. It feels like a joke, a really pathetic (but droll) admission about a lack of virility against accelerated capitalism. Where the

contemporary eye is conditioned to target relevant information amidst the noise of surplus content, represented in the show as vibrancy and pattern, Kemp responds to the squiggle, this kind of pattern-seeking with a gesture of playful complicity with the show’s collaborative premise.

The dilemma I presented earlier between the passive aesthetics of web aggregators like *Contemporary Art Daily* and an anti-hegemonic form of criticality we seem to have misplaced when we accepted that raving is cool again, is a dialectic we’ve long since broached. We crossed that threshold when it became necessary to conflate photographic technology and social media in the production of contemporary art (with the advent of micro-blogging artist collectives such as K-Hole and The Jogging). Rather than applauding the moment where excitement over a cultural object gone viral can only last a few seconds, the objects in ‘Beginning the Shape’ submit to the forces that underscore their consistency with Jamie Ward’s analogy of the visual phoneme.<sup>i</sup> Why situate the ascetic heroism of the critical position outside of the digitally-driven “me-world” when artists are more than capable of challenging the free and unmediated acceptance of trending culture?

**Ingrid Olauson**

<sup>i</sup> This review was written in response to Jamie Ward’s essay “On Banality and Convergences” published in *Issue* (Vancouver, Autumn 2014)