

MAP OR BE MAPPED

Peter Dykhuis' *Inventories and Micro-mapping*

RED HEAD GALLERY, TORONTO, ON
SEPTEMBER 5 - 22, 2012

The hustle and bustle of plugged in Toronto lapsed mid-September, when I walked into The Red Head Gallery and pulled out my pencil and my wire bound notepad to view Nova Scotia-based artist Peter Dykhuis' solo exhibition *Inventories and Micro-mapping*.

An active member of The Red Head Gallery since 2004, Dykhuis' new body of work presented itself like a hole puncher—punctuating the clean and pristine gallery walls with a series of conceptualist self-portraits amassed through layered conversations of personal lists and notes, office envelopes, invoices, bold graphics, bright encaustic paint, geometric shapes and the conceptualism of his micro-framing matter, the ever orderly and productive clipboard.

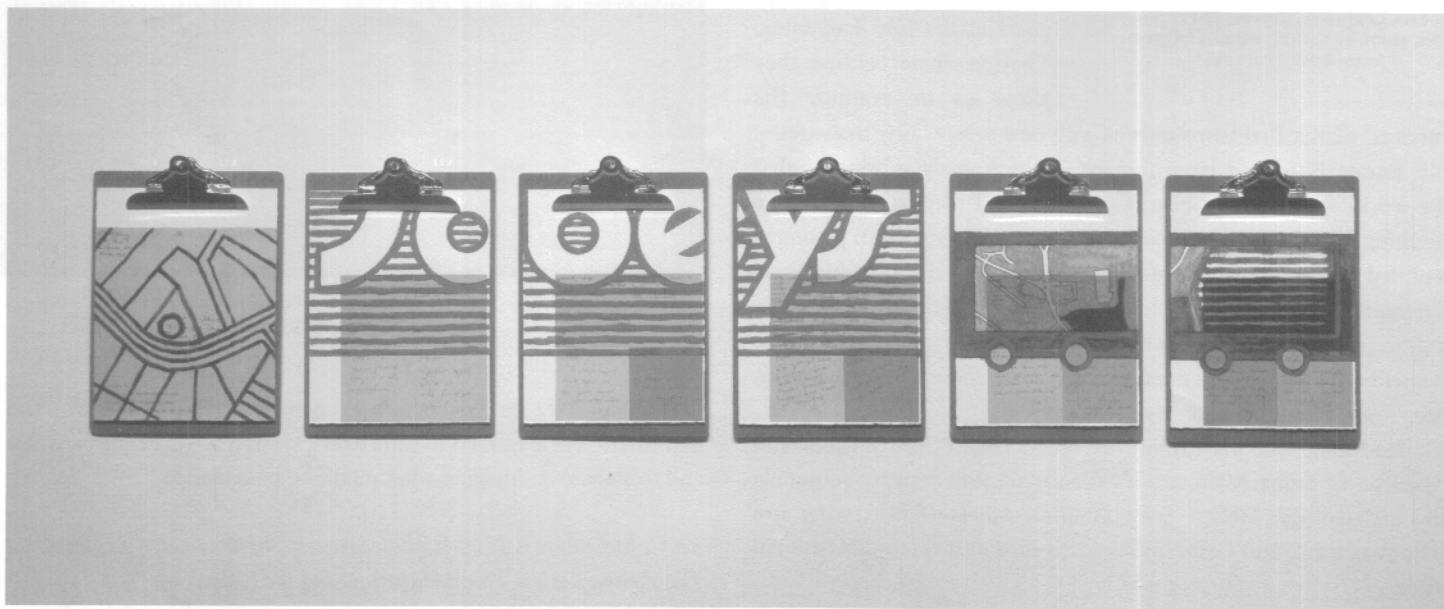
The exhibition brought to mind the words of designer Claudia Dona, who in her essay "Invisible Design," writes: "a day's journey through the city today no longer involves simply the movement from one zone of activities to another, but rather an immersion in a many-dimensioned temporal environment."

Unlike the 800 million active users on Facebook who scroll through their virtual home page and profile feeds daily, Dykhuis sifts through the real analogue notes, personal lists, bills, invoices and mail he's received in the studio, after his day job as the director at Dalhousie Art Gallery. In his collaged maps, assembled and pasted onto clipboards, Dykhuis explores the ways in which we can control,

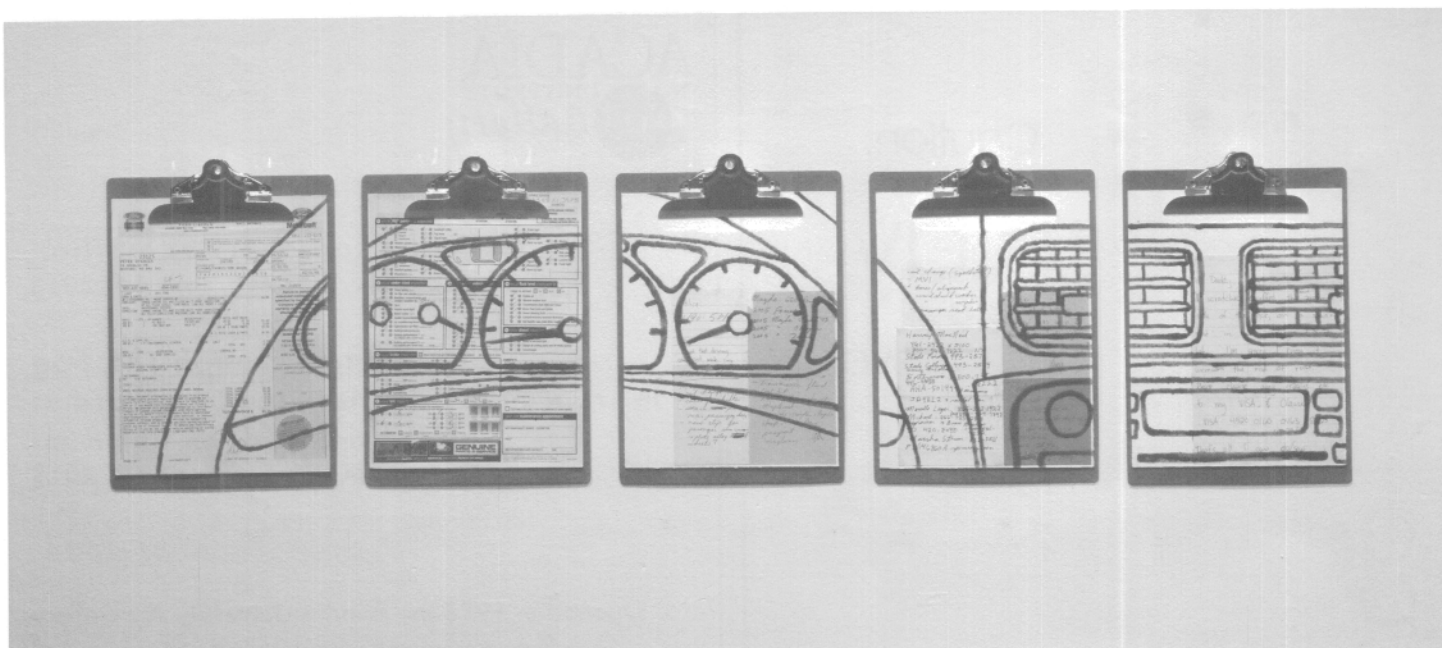
manipulate and move through the everyday detritus of our lives, examining our perceptions of our ephemera and, importantly, who holds the power to manage and manipulate such matter to map and define us.

Viewing the clean and curated lines of 42 collaged clipboards, which Dykhuis grouped together to create eight untitled personal mapped narratives, immediately reminded me of my short-lived days working in a fruit processing plant in rural Ontario. The work there was quantifiable, and I was assigned to quality control—the shipping and receiving of product and information, which I collected on forms attached to and filed temporarily on a clipboard.

Perhaps my nostalgic time-travel reel wasn't all inspired by clipboards; the first work that my eyes planted themselves upon was a collection of seven frames, guiding me—like the script of a film—down the path someone might navigate to enjoy a meal. On the first two frames, sits an illustrated suburban map likely situating a personal home of residence within the context of the streamlined graphic lines bounding an inversion of the Sobeys' grocery store brand. Reminding me specifically of mono-crop corn rows, the military-like aerial mapping and bold green lines and splashy corporate graphic prompted me to consider the ways corporations monopolize the production and consumption of the agricultural



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Red Head Gallery, Toronto, ON. September 5-22 2012.
Photo: Steve Farmer



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industry, while simultaneously marketing a clean and carefree lifestyle. The industrial freight train on the 6th and 7th frames drew my eyes in and down—a series of florescent post-it notes written by Dykhuis' partner run across the bottom of the work, connecting him virtually in a spatial conversation, which further contributes to demystifying the lived food cycle of producing and consuming a day's meal together.

But reading these personal notes between spouses (communicating cooking instructions and directions regarding leftovers) was both an everyday and awkward experience. I felt as if I were looking through the peephole in the family's front door and learning how two busy art professionals negotiate their time together. Such an awareness reminded me of surveillance politics... or wait Facebook, where there exists a fine line of sharing too much information for public access. But such notes, contextualizing human connection in space, make sense within the context of this work and exhibition. They offer his audience a deconstructed perception of what's under the glossiness of marketing, corporate branding and the monopoly of services—real lives are being negotiated and created within particular social, economic, geographic and political constraints.

Driving to the right, Dykhuis presents a blown up manual illustration of his car's interior. He's created a collaged work featuring invoices of mechanical work, auto body inspection checklists, a list of car rental companies and a note from his eldest daughter about her liability in a car incident, which included her personal VISA number to pay for the damages. I winced seeing the full VISA card number and expiry date, thinking that such personal information shouldn't be disclosed publicly. However, what this personal map does well is illustrate what consumers should know about car ownership from an investment standpoint—Dykhuis depicts a tellingly more accurate consumer reality of car ownership necessary for real-life navigation, but not included in the actual manual.

Turning right again, the viewer 'cheques in' to the bank. In this work, not everything is as 'priceless' as the corporate advertisements suggest. The artist narrates that to produce work, matter needs to be consumed and more importantly paid for. This work specifically draws on the use of bank services, particularly the credit card, to navigate work and to experience life. Dykhuis narrates the work by collaging inter-office work envelopes, VISA bill reminders and notes left from his family revealing that the bank called—the last three clipboards indicate the transferring of funds and the paying of bills. Again this work, like a storyboard, illustrates an inverse self-portrait or personal map of the hidden reality of being a consumer—something very private that most people keep under the radar. Like the other work presented in this exhibition, this work also illustrates a real monetary responsibility conferring a particular social and political economic reality within the world, forcing people to negotiate space and make personal and social concessions.

In his book *Spaces of Hope*, social theorist David Harvey suggests that people need to become the architects of a different living and working environment and learn to bridge the micro-scale of the body and the personal and the macro-scale of the global political economy. Dykhuis' new work does just that. Narrating an interwoven analogue conversation which blends a sometimes humorous and at other times very private and thus political correspondence, Dykhuis boldly challenges how we communicate, manage and manipulate personal everyday information, presenting a new geography—a new way of navigating and negotiating space, our privacy, and our social roles to maintain ownership in this saturated technological, yet 'seemingly invisible,' information age. ■

Crystal Melville explores the politics and embodied experiences of the built environment as a published writer and as a professionally recognized artist and filmmaker. She has recently returned to Ontario, after living and working in Halifax, NS for the last 10 years.