

VARIOUS EXHIBIT ESSENTIALS

MICHAEL A. ROBINSON SETS SOME STANDARDS

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visual

(arts)

Those drawn to Michael A. Robinson's exhibition at Pierre-François Ouellette Art Contemporain because they loved his show at Optica a couple years ago, like I did, might be surprised when they get there.

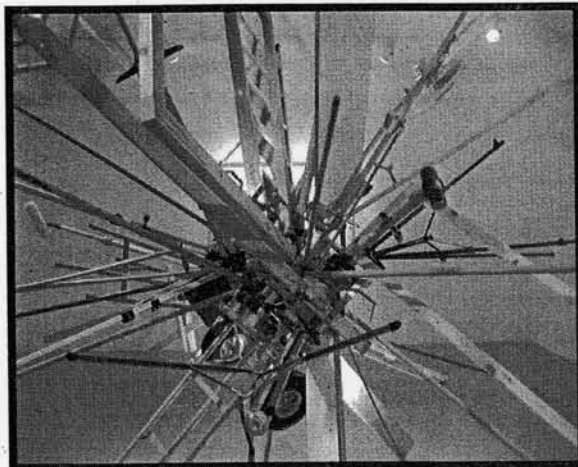
It's not that the quality of the work has in any way changed. I would even posit that it's greater, if anything, for the conceptual freedom and variety it displays. And that's just it: It takes a while for the disparate objects distributed around this solo show to seem like they were made by one person. Robinson's creative drive latches onto many ideas and media, and, as the artist later told me, that is the joy of art for him. He never wants to feel boxed in.

As you walk into the gallery you'll be welcomed by the impressive 7-by-7-foot cubic shape of *My Own Private Modernism*. Made of cedar sticks of approximately an inch in diameter, the cube is formed mainly of space, simply framed by the wooden structure. The naturally varying hues of the wood's grain makes for odd visual effects, with the darker bits seeming further away than the paler ones, even if they're not; sensually, the piece is a pleasure.

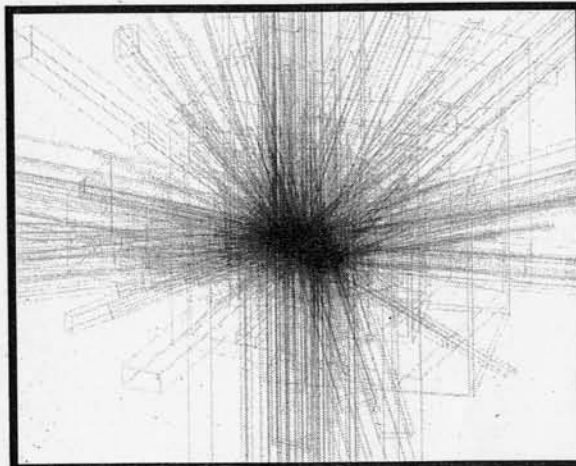
On the wall next to this is one of three large 4-by-5-foot prints hung around the gallery; they look like etchings, but in fact they are digital printouts of a computer-generated 3D object viewed from one specific vantage point. This explains the sense of space they engender: Representing star-shaped patterns made by the intermeshing of similarly shaped objects (rectangles, for the most part), the prints' epicentres, where the shapes meet, are rich with ink and depth. This element is the first clue to a running theme in many of the works exhibited: Robinson has a thing for nexuses.

The most evident, striking and even festive of examples is in the gallery's freshly inaugurated third room, in celebration of its third year of existence. This is where *Various Studio Essentials* is, a great big centrifugal explosion made from studio materials. All joined at the centre of this stellar creation thanks to a handful of vice grips are Robinson's own working tools: a ladder, tripods, a mop, a couple brooms, a working fan, a roller, a coat rack. The work shares with *My Own Private Modernism* its joyful modulation of space, so natural and agreeable to the eye, but brings an additional referential aspect that is fun.

The playful quality is another that



MICHAEL A. ROBINSON, *VARIOUS STUDIO ESSENTIALS*



BLOW

recurs, mostly in Robinson's smaller works, like his inks on paper and the crow-themed installation *Theory of Other Minds*, featuring a real stuffed crow. Who would expect such a whimsical element from an artist who built the cedar cube? That is the pleasure. The drawings, sometimes including elements of collage, are downright silly, and include little meaningful statements in pencil at the bottom like "contest visual representation" and, though this one was erased and barely perceptible, "I can tell them about my theory of emptiness."

Robinson has himself described his work as the point where "frontality, virtuality, banality meet with cartography, virology, and ontology." It may well be, and in future times it may extend beyond this definition. The whole point here is to investigate all things that are of interest for long enough to sustain the artistic process. Robinson's championing of this approach combined with the appeal of his imaginative sensibilities invests his art with rare sincerity and integrity.

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