

The more we understand, the less we can do

The lifelessness and loneliness of **Rainer Eisch's** installation about the limits to human progress is relieved by **Perrine Lievens's** ethereal balcony

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On one level, young Swiss artist Rainer Eisch's monumental kinetic video installation now at the Darling Foundry is about loneliness. Initially, what we encounter in the vast industrial space of the old foundry is a wood cart on wheels. Fitted tightly onto a pair of wood rails running almost the full length of the room, the cart moves to and fro, transporting a video projector on an endless journey. It's a mission without a definite destination, suggesting the absurd relativity of all human endeavours.

Meanwhile, the actual video projection makes its own trip on the long plywood wall set up parallel to the tracks. It functions both as a real movie screen and as some kind of symbolic barrier; it alludes to the tall fences separating ethnic groups in various parts of the world, as well as simply to the notion of separation of here vs. there. Of course, the title of the installation, *Nous serons-nous jamais rencontrés?*, refers to the bleak notion that humanity will never meet up with an "other conscious-

"With (Avec vue), Lievens invites us to ponder the difference between reality, mirage and dreams remembered."

ness," and that ultimately all outer space is one immeasurably thick, perversely one-sided wall with nothing on the other side but more of its meaningless self. A big step for mankind may turn out to be merely a big step into darkness. Certainly, that element is overwhelmingly provided by the Foundry's crushing industrial space, a major spectacle even without the art.

Also evoked is space underground. The mechanical cart recalls those miniature railways penetrating dark mine shafts as well as making reference to the automatic vehicles unleashed by NASA on far-away worlds. The projection itself, moving horizontally along the wall, brings to mind an alien planet, as if seen through a square aperture, the open "window" of light that is the image.

Sadly, the macaroni-like terrain, a kind of Kraft Dinner yellow, seems barren of emotional input or, if we continue the space metaphor, as otherworldly habitat. Ever-changing, yet, consisting of just more of the same thing, the vista is visually composed of millions of minuscule polygons, the computer-generated equivalents of pointillist brushwork.

Certainly, the synthetic brushwork, a witty mockery of Vincent Van Gogh's anguished Expressionist paint daubs, is as resoundingly lifeless as the whole landscape – that is, assuming we can ever rightly apply the term "whole" to a topography that seems to be forever unfolding before us. Perhaps the artist has, in fact, captured the essence of the concept we call Western "progress" – the more we understand, the more we remain stuck in the same place, only more so.

At least, it's nice to imagine that what we learned as young children might be true – cheese is a primary extraterrestrial element. Still, Eisch's night skies, like the real ones that come out every 24 hours, seem strangely lonely, with not even a cow jumping over the moon.

Also gracing the premises of the Darling Foundry is French artist Perrine Lievens's constellation of installations. Most of them, such as the extremely self-effacing facsimile of a floor drain, are entirely earthbound, indeed, almost too abjectly subservient to ordinary gravity. However, one Lievens construction, a life-size architectural balcony made – "drawn" – from white neon tubing, makes what, in the context of this show, might be called a break for freedom.

This powerful and striking work of neon tubing, titled *Avec vue*, is the outlined shape of a balcony, fixed to a blank, whitewashed gallery wall. Yet it is just that, with no door for access. Certainly, this architectural accessory, coyly situated

on a second-floor level, is form without function. Yet, if a viewer could manage to climb onto Lievens's floorless balcony, he or she would find no solid support, just the hot neons providing some kind of grip.

The balcony, all light and no substance, is just for "show." Indeed, with her Baroque, neon hallucination, this image, Lievens invites us to ponder the difference between reality, mirage, and dreams remembered. Have we been down this Latin street overhung with balconies some time long ago? It's worth a trip to the Darling if only to see this balcony, far and away as ethereal as any planet.

Nous serons-nous jamais rencontrés? by Rainer Eisch and **Deux dimensions et demie** by Perrine Lievens, remain on view at the Darling Foundry, 745 Ottawa St., until Aug. 26.