

Kristan Horton

None of This is in My Mind

22 February – 10 May 2025

Oakville Galleries at Centennial Square

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OAKVILLE GALLERIES

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Table of Content

1.....	Exhibition text by Séamus Kealy
7.....	Artist Biography
8.....	Exhibition Floor Plan
9.....	Land Acknowledgments

In nova fert animus mutatas dicere formas.

(I intend to speak of forms changed into new entities.)

Ovid, Metamorphoses

Kristan Horton presents his endless drawing project as an exhibition. Perpetually extending, this singular work, rendered in black ink on kraft paper, speaks to the primal, meditative, and ritualistic aspects of creation. At the heart of the artist's practice is a philosophy of accumulation. The exhibition *None of This is in My Mind* is thus not merely a presentation of a finished product; it is an invitation to witness an ongoing, open-ended process that resists closure. The work is a meditative reflection on labour, materiality, and the negotiation between human agency and external forces. As Frederick Kiesler explored "endless architecture" as the antithesis of modern architecture's dominance, Horton's endless drawing suggests alternative thinking to our spectacle-laden world.

Over the years, Kristan Horton's work has taken on a number of genres, from drawing to sculpture, to installation and photography. Generally one could often define his work as illustrating a history or set of histories in some sort of set of variations. In 2006, his set of large drawings, *Drawings Of A History Of The First World War: Discs 1-8*, were based on the audio book of John Keegan's long historical work of the same name. Each drawing was presented as a spiral, where the narrative from the history written by Keegan is illustrated faithfully, commencing in the center, then spiraling outwards until a large circle of illustrations arises. The depictions were spellbinding, genuine to their source, gruesome and confounding - as the unrepresentable brutality and complexity of the great war involving many nations and millions of fragile

lives became represented in this fragmented, very knowingly flawed manner. These drawings were first exhibited in a touring exhibition I curated in 2006 onwards, called *Signals in the Dark: Art in the Shadow of War*. Each invited artist included artwork that faced war and its representations. These works often had narratives, or they confronted narratives of war. Kristan Horton's work was an illustrated narrative of madness, quietly presented in the form of large, circular, curious drawings. This work both took on the depiction of war and dispelled the delusion of any narrative properly capturing catastrophe. This work was political in one sense, demonstrably sensitive in another sense, and evoked the artist's awe for the subject and the process of using this subject as a material in his artwork.

Equally Kristan Horton has explored other narratives and re-represented them. A number of years earlier, over the course of a year, and virtually every single night, Kristan Horton religiously watched the full 95 minutes of Stanley Kubrick's 1964 anti-war cinematic masterpiece, "*Dr. Strangelove (Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb)*." The artist simultaneously assembled versions of each scene from the film into sculptures using detritus and everyday items from his studio (glue-stick, rubbish bags, cutlery, felt markers, cans of coke, cigarette packaging, and dirt among others). This was a work of *arte povera* in one sense, making use of everyday materials in the artist's immediate studio environment, reminiscent of the obsessive tiny models that German artist Thomas Demand makes and photos. This series of photos by Horton was also a nod to stop animation, and an ode to a master film-maker in yet another sense. The work was surreal in its dual mimicking and defiance of cinematic spectacle. And of course, this work betrayed Kristan Horton's

deep admiration for the authorship of Stanley Kubrick, his genius at work for the greatest anti-war film ever produced; a comedy no less.

After photographing these sculptural sets, and then printing them into black and white photos, he then placed them side by side with reproductions of the original film stills, amalgamating them into single printed images. These wonderful, uncanny photographs doubled the narrative from the film, obsessively evoking the *thingness* of the Kubrick's scenes and the insanity of the comedic narrative which, naturally, explores, depicts and parodies the mechanisms and folly of nuclear annihilation. These photographs were presented in another exhibition I curated called Film as Muse, only a few years back now, at the Salzburger Kunstverein, where I had invited artists who had used film and its narratives as their material, or muse. Here again, Kristan Horton employed a narrative and twisted it into something both recognizable and uncannily distinct from its source.

In 2011, I invited Kristan Horton to have an artist residency in The Model, in Sligo, Ireland, where I was director. There in his desired solitude, which was interrupted only by my company from time to time, he produced a set of photographs entitled Sligo Heads. Each portrait photo was a layer of many other photos done digitally - often of his own face - until the face (and head) are distorted so drastically that we see only a still, warped impression of a face in movement, like a beast. This series, as with his others, had a purpose, a drive, an obsession, a set of parameters, and then, like the other series, it had an end. The artist moves on.

The challenge now is his newest series is an endless drawing, which by designation then should have no ending. That is impossible - unless the artist finds a way out of the mortal coil - and given the artist's history of moving from one project series to another, should we consider its endlessness even more unlikely?

In contradiction to much of the above referenced artwork he has produced until now, this work - entitled *None of This is in My Head* - defies a sense of narrative at every juncture. Produced in his usual solitary way, in his small studio-apartment in Montreal, the drawing began as a set of wrinkles from the potato bags he neglected to discard. The drawings, he says, are performances: "I've been sleeping beneath them for two years. Living with them really. Where it began was that the drawing is not to be me." Beginning with tracing a number of lines from the creases of potato bags, he continued the drawings with ink and rice glue onto kraft paper. Where the tracings were the infancy of drawing, lines and shapes emerged and whenever he could see something representational, he would then bend the drawing away from that, bend it away from himself and anything he could recognize. "None of this is in my mind," literally, is the imperative and the drive of this work.

When speaking about this drawing, Kristan Horton references the long continuous poem *Metamorphoses* by the Roman poet Ovid. Ultimately the poem chronicles the history of the world from its origin to the deification of Julius Caesar in a mythico-historical framework, using the genre of metamorphosis poetry. This poem - running to nearly 800 pages in English translation - retells Greek and Roman classical myths - such as Apollo and Daphne, Perseus and Andromeda, Orpheus and

Eurydice, Pyramus and Thisbe and many others. The poem is heavily cited in Western culture, having inspired Dante, Chaucer, Shakespeare and countless others. The entire narrative springs from chaos, as with many origin myths.

Horton is interested in the formal structures emerging out of Ovid's poem, and since his intention is to avoid narrative at all costs, the process of drawing follows a structure whereupon the device of automatism is deployed. Drawing continues, is collaged, sutured and glued, it is subjected to physical force and a rhizomatic path of onwards and continuity. There are interruptions - such as the water pipe in his studio wall - which is accounted for in the drawing repeatedly by a circular gap. Incidentally, the water pipe is mimicked in the exhibition with curious devices the artist has formed and presented along with the continuous drawing.

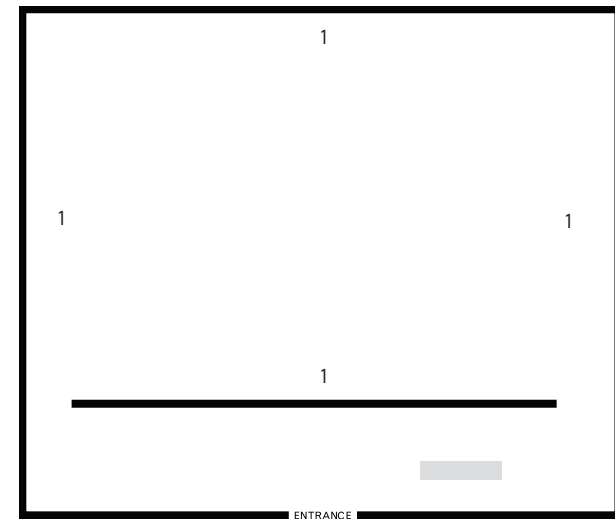
One might ask, what about the rat though? There is indeed a rat-like form and there are other curious representations that are perceptible. The rat, Kristan Horton insists, didn't appear consciously. "I didn't see it coming, so I preserved it." He claims that he was blind to it within the process of drawing, within the trance of drawing where he labours day in day out without much distance from the drawing process. Within the system of eliminating a variety of separate intentions there is the inevitability of separate accidents colliding, which may start to gel, and take some form. "Woman coming out a brick wall," he says. But I do not follow what he means. This sometimes happens when we speak, and I like that. Later I realize that this is a form that he perceived arising in the drawing, as per our innate tendency to see anthropological or representational forms in an abstract morass.

The exhibition is thus this intentional experience: an installation of many drawings resisting the representational, strung together as one paratactic entity. The exhibition is thus this experience: an installation of many drawings strung together as one. The drawings are presented in these square panels, in chronological order as they emerged in the studio. One leads to the other, all of them repeating the wall's confines and referencing the last drawing that came before it. "Is it all a struggle against time?" I ask. "Yes, it is a long and surreal struggle and it ends in exhaustion. It is a performance and it is endurance." And I wonder, what does it mean to draw like this today? The process is an outright adaptation of non-sense, drafting up a non-teleological, non-conforming, non-representational set of images. Kristan ponders on this, and says "Frank Stella once said that he would wish to make a work that no one can comment on. Stella said this as he was painting in a time of distrust with the media, when the public were fed up with the lies about the Vietnam War, for example." Now we might all agree that the lies that we are fed today are magnificently more expansive, now the spectacle of disinformation and the web of delusional reality - which distances us from ourselves, our world - is all that grander. Kristan Horton offers instead a set of meaningless activities he has laboured over with both conviction and self-doubt, and it is far, far away from the universe of screens and false prophets we all crave to escape.

This exhibition is curated by Séamus Kealy.

Kristan Horton has a multi-disciplinary practice that includes sculpture, drawing, photography and video. Using layered processes of construction, both material and virtual, he has produced several long-term projects linked conceptually by their serial and episodic structure. Grounded in rigorous studio research, Horton brings his subjects to life through innovative and experimental approaches to various mediums. He studied at Guelph University and the Ontario College of Art and Design. He has had an international exhibition career since the late 1990s exhibiting at White Columns, NY; Münchner Kammerspiele, Munich; Glassbox, Paris; ZKM, Karlsruhe; Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki; Inter Communications Center, Tokyo; York University Art Gallery; The Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver; Buffalo AKG Art Museum, Buffalo; Salzburger Kunstverein, Austria; Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, Quebec; Alberta Art Gallery, Alberta; SVETOVA 1, Prague, Czech Republic; Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto and The National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Kristan Horton ***None of This is in My Mind***



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- 1 *None of This is in My Mind*, 2025
Black ink on kraft paper.

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Oakville Galleries would like to thank the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation for the open conversation around truth and reconciliation.