

SURREY ART GALLERY PRESENTS

EMERGENT

Patrick Cruz, A.S. Dhillon,
Debbie Tuepah

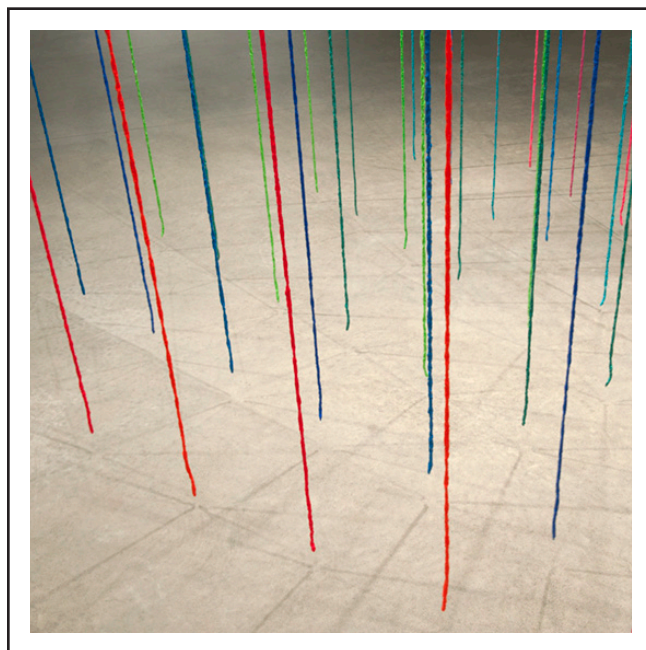
Dangling Modifiers

JORDAN STROM

Artist's Biographies

PATRICK CRUZ
A.S. DHILLON
DEBBIE TUEPAH

List of Works Exhibited



Dangling Modifiers

by Jordan Strom

The word *emergent* can be used to describe an entity's development out of a nascent state. Emergent can also point to the merging of different cultural formations. The 19th century philosopher and literary critic G.H. Lewes used the word emergent to refer to things that come out of "co-operation of things of unlike kinds."¹ The emerging artists Patrick Cruz, A.S. Dhillon, and Debbie Tuepah, like many other artists working today, are experimenters with diverse materials and multiple media, working in the gaps between forms and genres.² In particular, Cruz,

Debbie Tuepah

Disordered Order, 2012 (detail)
acrylic paint, yarn

Photograph by Scott Massey

Tuepah, and Dhillon – all of whom have spent many years living and working in Surrey British Columbia – have chosen time and again to investigate the emergent intersection points between painting and sculpture.

The fissure between the modes of expression we call painting and sculpture has long been explored by artists. Since the middle part of the last century, Frank Stella combined paint and sculptural relief to produce work that emphasized the picture-as-object, rather than the picture as representation. For the past four decades Stella has created picture-objects in which cut-out painted shapes arch and jut forth from the picture plane. Another New York artist, Lynda Benglis, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, poured multi-coloured cans of latex paint across floor surface to create large sprawling painted objects.

More recently, artists as diverse as Americans Jessica Stockholder and Rachel Harrison along with Indian-born British artist Anish Kapoor, have pushed further – and fundamentally challenged – the categories of painting and sculpture. The former has been identified with a recent shift in art practices – referred to as the “unmonumental” – marked by a mode of sculptural assemblage that uses found, fragmented, and discarded materials, creating artwork founded on modesty, informality, and improvisation.³

Distinguished by its often highly ornate accumulations of objects, Patrick Cruz’s artwork likes to flash its garishly coloured and frenetically patterned surfaces. Much of his recent work brings together found urban materials along with irregular accumulations of plaster adorned with brightly coloured shapes and patterns. Continuing in this earlier vein of work,



View of Patrick Cruz’s installation of *SMPTE Hedge* and *Guildford Drift* in the TechLab as part of *Emergent*.
Photograph by Scott Massey.

SMPTE Hedge displays Cruz's fondness for found objects that wear their artificiality with confidence. The sculpture-painting, marked by a seemingly simple conceit, presents six artificial trees that have been spray-painted different colours and placed in a linear configuration that recall television colour bar test patterns. While these test patterns are largely no longer in use, they were long associated with the television and video technology in particular. For many visual artists who have adapted the colour bar as a symbol, its pattern recalled both the geometric abstraction of modernist painting while at the same time representing the inherent structures of the medium of video and the apparatus of television. Cruz's positioning of the artificial trees in a hedge row configuration, acts, in part, to guide the viewer through the darkened room. At the same time, the colour pattern's incorporation into the hedge row suggests television's influence on urban design.

As with much of Cruz's earlier artwork that challenged the right angles geometries of so much contemporary art and architecture, *SMPTE Hedge* uses the diagonal to cut through the ubiquitous square format of the gallery. The diagonal structure encourages a concealed form of looking – peering, peeping –

through the hedge at the partially concealed video animations, suggests a particular form of voyeurism at the center of television viewing, personal computer use and urban life. The sculpture-painting acts as a barrier both reflecting the suburban landscapes found across the two Guildfords, while also challenging their visibility.

As with his earlier grotto-like three-dimensional painted sculptures, the artist's two-dimensional digital images similarly rely on techniques of improvisation and chance. Much of Cruz's two dimensional collage work incorporates digital aesthetics such as personal computer pull-down menus, computer paint-box tools, and QR codes. In *Guildford Drift*, the viewer is presented with two monitors that display colourful abstract imagery that are alternated at different heights on the wall with three additional monitors that present a series of blurred shifting landscapes.

The vibrantly coloured abstract videos are generated by sampling a single image from an SMPTE colour bar and processing these images through outmoded domestic animation programs. The artist manipulates the image to both examine and re-present the raw – pixelated, distorted – fragments of digital information.

In the blurred landscape videos the artist montages together imagery from the streets of Guildford Surrey, Canada and Guildford, Surrey United Kingdom. These three videos – one of which stitches together ambient scenes from both locations – seeks to capture and comment on the increasing similarity between a great number of disparate geographies. At the same time, the work asks how this globalizing tendency may be affected by new virtual mapping systems that give computer users a form of instantaneous presence at disparate geographic locations at any given moment.



Patrick Cruz, *Guildford Drift*, screen capture, courtesy of the artist.

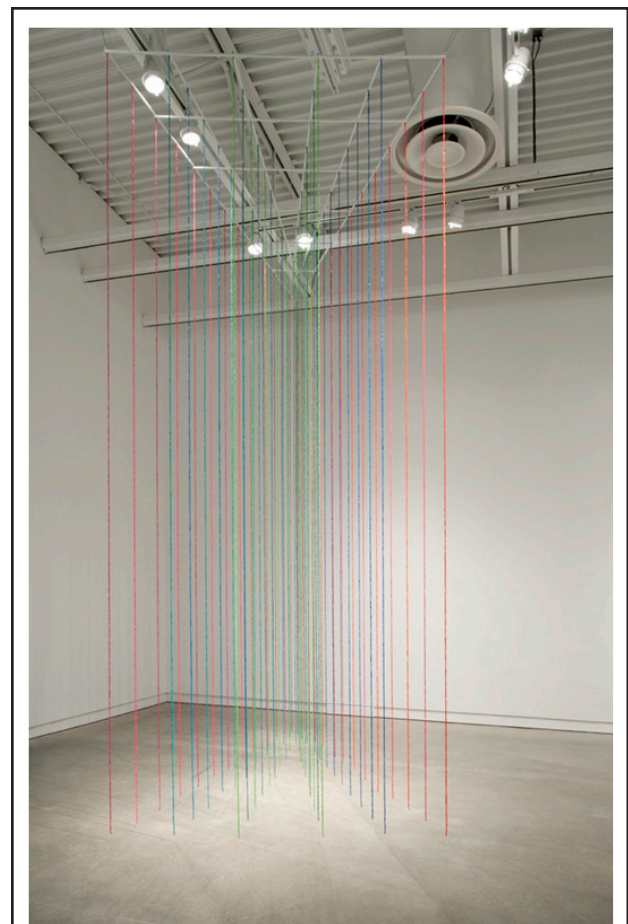
Inspired by the activities of the Situationist International – a mainly western European political and artistic movement of the 1950s and 1960s – and their practice of *dérive*, or unplanned drifting through urban landscapes *Guildford Drift* allows the artist to discover a form that captures the abstract spatial qualities of the neighbourhood he has grown up in. Cruz adapts and ultimately transforms the immersive mobilized gaze of Google’s Street View program (a tool used most often for planning point-to-point car travel). He creates three montages of horizontally sliding images that is suggestive of the diffuse and sprawling nature of streets in the two virtual Surreys. If *Guildford Drift* is an attempt to consider – *pace* the Situationists – the urban environment’s effects on the emotions and behaviours of individuals, it is also a means of considering the limits of our urban environments in a world increasingly shaped with immersive mapping technologies (along with gaming and interactive cinematic formats) that pass for urban experience.

Debbie Tuepah’s approach to painting rarely if ever uses a brush. Tuepah is deeply interested in the materiality of paint, its relation to other objects, surfaces, rather than the gesture of the artist’s hand or the surface of the stretched canvas. She describes her work as deriving from “process driven investigations that suggest dialogues between line, volume, painting and sculpture, craft and high art.”⁴

In Tuepah’s minimalist compositions paint becomes lines hovering suspended in space. Tuepah’s clusters of lines circumscribe, split and adjoin aberrant geometries of interior space. At times, Tuepah’s work recalls the 1960s art of Eva Hesse who worked with rubber and other synthetic materials to ‘draw’ in space. But works such as *Disordered Order* also recall another minimalist New York artist, Fred

Sandback and his hard edged geometric pieces made from acrylic coated yarn. Sandback was motivated to create the “volume of sculpture without the opaque mass... sculpture that didn’t have an inside.”⁵ Tuepah pursues similar trajectories to Sandbeck and Hesse, yet her spaces are more layered and garishly coloured in a manner indicative of their commercial and graphic influences.

As with her ongoing project *Shop Vac Leaf Blower Series* (2009 – present) where she uses indoor and outdoor debris cleaning machinery to blow acrylic paint onto canvases in a manner reminiscent of abstract expressionist Jackson Pollock, Tuepah’s art



Installation view of Debbie Tuepah's *Disordered Order*.
Photograph by Scott Massey.

routinely challenges histories of modern painting. In the creation of her work she strives for the effect of “optical vibrations” on the viewer. The glossiness and uneven surface of her dipped objects adds its own unsettling quality to the line. These combined aspects of her practice make the final environments both appealing and at the same time disturbing.

Borrowing from the graphic techniques of data modeling and data visualization, Tuepah’s aesthetic is strongly guided by the notion that information in our contemporary computerized society is everywhere. Marketing and sales – industries that she has extensive work experience within – continue to inform her work. Her compositions’ dense and often severe geometries suggest that this ubiquity and abstractness of information is dangerous and disorienting. Her 2011 installation *Incessant Notions of Data* was designed around a collapsible aluminum trade show booth. Transient architecture is an important part of her approach; her intent, in part, is to pull the viewer into the architecture of the building. Yet, unlike late 20th century artists inspired by ideas and experience of information, Tuepah’s approach derives a great deal from new computer based data structures and their forms of imaging: new infographics that extend the language of modern charts, diagrams and graphs.

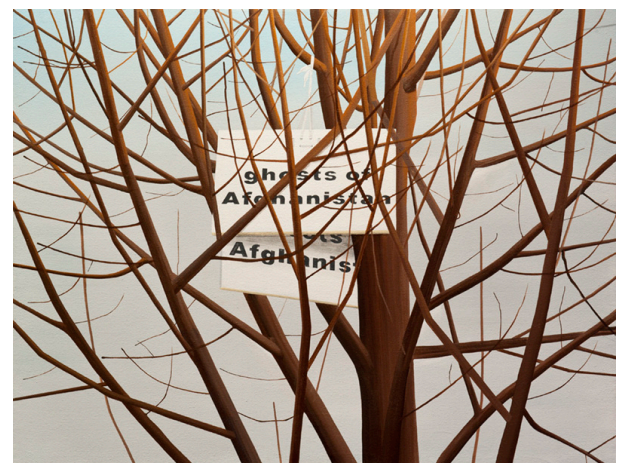
The majority of A.S. Dhillon’s artwork is text or word-based – yet it is a text-based practice that defies easy categorization. Dhillon creates sculpture constructed out of standard white printer paper mounted onto board and inserted into outdoor (and in some cases indoor) environments. He, in turn, paints on to canvas these situated messages as they appear within their temporary locations. These are not forms of documentary painting, but rather depictions of staged events, acts of poetic broadcast. It is a form

of textual graffiti that is manifested in streetscapes and landscapes in a variety of ways: sometimes suspended from power lines, in other instances plastered on to street-side hoardings.

The format of Dhillon’s approach presented in the *Emergent* exhibition, recalls many existing forms of expression: from the teenage pastime of “sneaker tossing” (shoes with laces tied together, thrown over elevated power lines) to the unofficial communal public art form known as “shoe trees” (footwear similarly flung en masse into informally designated roadside trees). Dhillon’s banner interventions, visible here in the painting *Ghosts of Afghanistan Tree 4* (2012) also recall the vertical live streaming of electronic data signboards such as stock exchange index boards or airport flight departure schedules.

At the same time the brevity of the text-images recall political or advertising banners. In this way Dhillon’s text-based artworks combine Pop Art’s love of commercial signage with the political slogan-inspired text art of the 1980s such as that found in the work of Barbara Kruger.

Yet, Dhillon’s work stands apart from these more established forms of contemporary art through its



A.S. Dhillon *Ghosts of Afghanistan, Tree 4*, 2012
acrylic on canvas. Photograph by Scott Massey.

constantly oscillating back-and-forth translation between object and representation. The artist's approach to text, and its insertion into seemingly naturalistic landscapes, in this series of works, evokes mid-twentieth century concrete poetry and especially artists such as Ian Hamilton Finlay, who famously installed his aphoristic 'poem objects' into naturalistic settings. Unlike Finlay, Dhillon chooses to use more ubiquitous temporary materials that evoke the stripped-down approach of arte povera sculpture (and matter-of-fact temporary road-side signage). Like his other sign-based paintings and interventions, these new works invite the viewer to consider how public our public spaces might truly be.

Inspired by contemporary artists who make work that challenge political authority and address questions concerning human rights – Hans Haacke, Ai WeiWei, or Thomas Hirschhorn – Dhillon's art invites the viewer

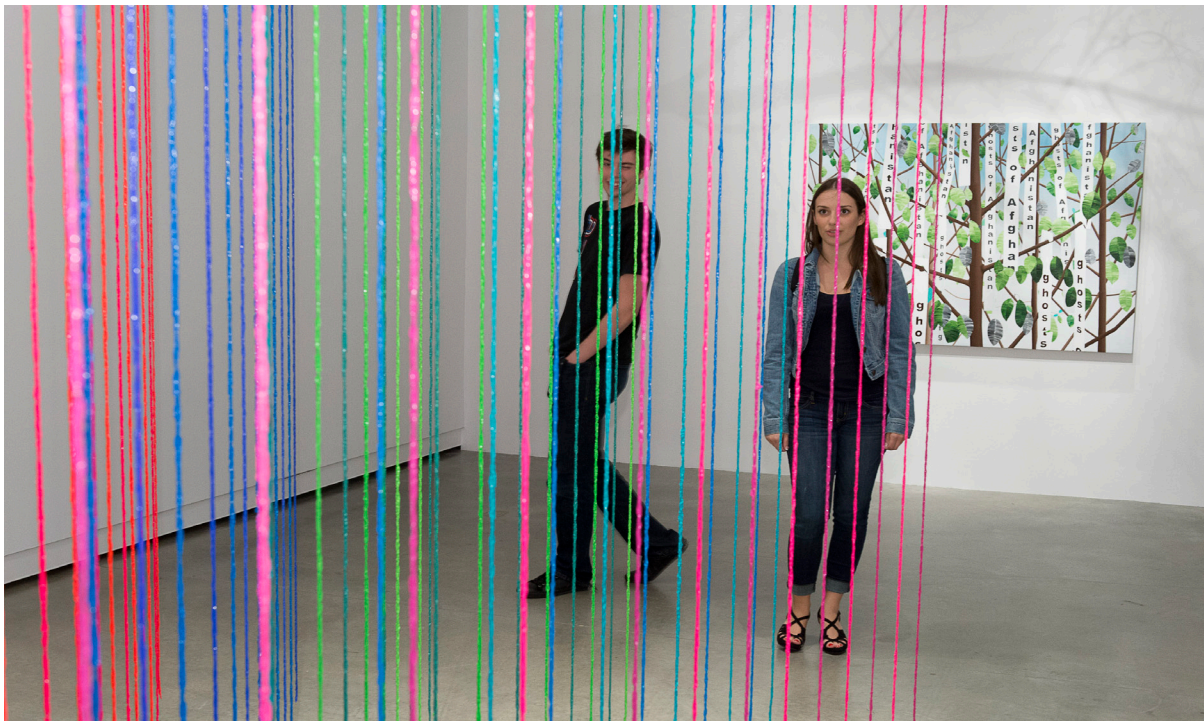
to consider the changing role Canada is playing in broader geopolitical realignments taking place today. The ambiguity of the phrase "ghosts of afghanistan" solicits considerations of its intended meaning. What ghosts? Are the sign-pictures referring to memory of Afghani people from the recent or distant past? Are these ghosts referring to the decisions that lead to wars past, or present, in that country?⁶ Or, are these ghosts referring to those non-Afghani individuals who have lost their lives over the course of the more than decade long war that our country remains engaged in? Are the referred to apparitions the cause of certain Western Nations' past foreign policy actions? The artist leaves these questions for the viewer to consider. Like the repetitious advertising slogans in our public landscapes, the message repeats as visitors move through a series of different spaces, and in doing so, seeps into the subconscious, to return again: "what ghosts?"



Installation view of A.S. Dhillon's of *Ghosts of Afghanistan* and *Ghosts of Afghanistan, Trees 2*.
Photograph by Scott Massey.

All three artists' projects in Emergent share an interest in the grey and often nebulous terrain between painting and sculpture. Likewise, all three artists present work that exhibits a strong sense of both vertical and horizontal space. Tuepah's tall neon strands parallel the vertical bands in the descending banners of Dhillon's painted canvas as well as the striped barrier of Cruz's colour bar hedge row. Likewise, each of the artworks is dynamically activated by the shifting position of the viewer moving through the gallery. The visual effects of the apparent displacement of the artwork – the apparent difference of position, of an object as seen from two different points of view known in the field of optics as the "parallax effect" – unfolds differing levels of sensory experience and layers of meaning in each of the painting-sculpture configurations.

Collectively, the artwork presented in the Emergent exhibition span a diverse field of influences including advertising signage, computer graphics, optical art, text art and landscape painting. Yet, Dhillon, Cruz and Tuepah's works all stem out of a trajectory of art that sees the future in exploring the rich territory opened up between traditional artistic practices. All three of the artists' contributions, in their own way, wrestle with ideas around publicity and public space, and allude to information technologies' and globalization's effects on geography and the potential for meaningful embodied presence in these geographies. In this way they collectively point to reservoirs of vast potential that is currently in development in each of their own work, and within the larger terrain of contemporary art.



Installation view of Debbie Tuepah's *Disordered Order* and A.S. Dhillon's *Ghosts of Afghanistan, Trees 2*.
Photograph by Brian Geibelhaus.

Notes:

1 George Henry Lewes, *Problems of Life and Mind*. (London: Trübner, 1875). p. 412.

2 Emerging artist is a category sometimes given to an artist at the early stages of their career, who is developing his or her voice, and has created a modest body of work.

3 The group exhibition *Unmonumental: The Object in the 21st Century* was presented at the New Museum New York from November 31 to March 23, 2007.

4 Author interview with the artist.

5 Fred Sandback, "Remarks on My Sculpture," 1966-1986 http://www.fredsandbackarchive.org/atxt_1986remarks.html.

6 The s phrase used in this series of works is based in part on the title of Jonathan Steele's *Ghosts of Afghanistan: The Haunted Battleground* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2011).

About the Artists

Patrick Cruz (b. Manila, 1987) attended University of the Philippines College of Fine Arts, and graduated from Emily Carr University of Art + Design. Over the past few years, Cruz's art has investigated the aesthetics and potentialities of image making through contemporary social networking culture. Recent solo showings include birth of a seagull eschewed by a crow in good standing (2012), Small Gallery; Yin Yang Temple (2011), Unit/Pitt; and Made in the Philippines (2010), W00 Gallery. Upcoming exhibitions include a two person project with his brother Francis at the Dynamo Gallery, Vancouver, and an artist residency at Light & Space Contemporary in Quezon City, Philippines.

A.S. Dhillon (b. Cranbrook, 1975) has curated and presented his art in many exhibitions including Vancouver's OR Gallery, Counterpublic, Dadabase, and Gallery 69, along with Holy Home, Munich and White Trash, Berlin. His text installations have been installed in Vancouver, London, Berlin and Munich. A.S. Dhillon has a Diploma of Fine Arts from the Kootenay School of Art and Design in Nelson, and a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Emily Carr University of Art + Design in Vancouver.

Debbie Tuepah (b. Vancouver, 1960) has studied at Carr University of Art + Design where in 2011 she received a BFA degree, and the John C. Kerr Chancellor's Award for academic excellence and outstanding work in the graduation exhibition. Tuepah's work is driven by process and material exploration, and she is influenced by an awareness of social, economic, and political concerns, as well as her previous background in marketing. Her art has been presented at Port Moody's 3D Gallery, Surrey Art Gallery, and Vancouver's Helen Pitt Gallery.

List of Works

Patrick Cruz

Guildford Drift, 2012

MSPaint, Adobe Premiere Elements 2.0, 5 monitors, 3 minute duration

SMPTE Hedge, 2012

6 artificial plants, acrylic paint, 10' x 2'

A.S. Dhillon

Ghosts of Afghanistan, 2012

Wood, plywood, paper, shoelace

Ghosts of Afghanistan, Trees 2, 2012

acrylic on canvas

Ghosts of Afghanistan, Tree 4, 2012

acrylic on canvas

Debbie Tuepah

Disordered Order, 2012

acrylic paint, yarn

Emergent: Patrick Cruz, A.S. Dhillon, Debbie Teupah

This publication documents the exhibition *Emergent*, which was held at the Surrey Art Gallery from June 23 to August 18, 2012 and was curated by Jordan Strom.

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Photography: Brian Foreman, Scott Massey

The Surrey Art Gallery gratefully acknowledges the support of the City of Surrey, The British Columbia Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts.

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SURREY ART GALLERY PRESENTS

a series of publications on exhibitions and projects

ISSN 1918-1302 ISBN 978-1-926573-16-8 Published 2012



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