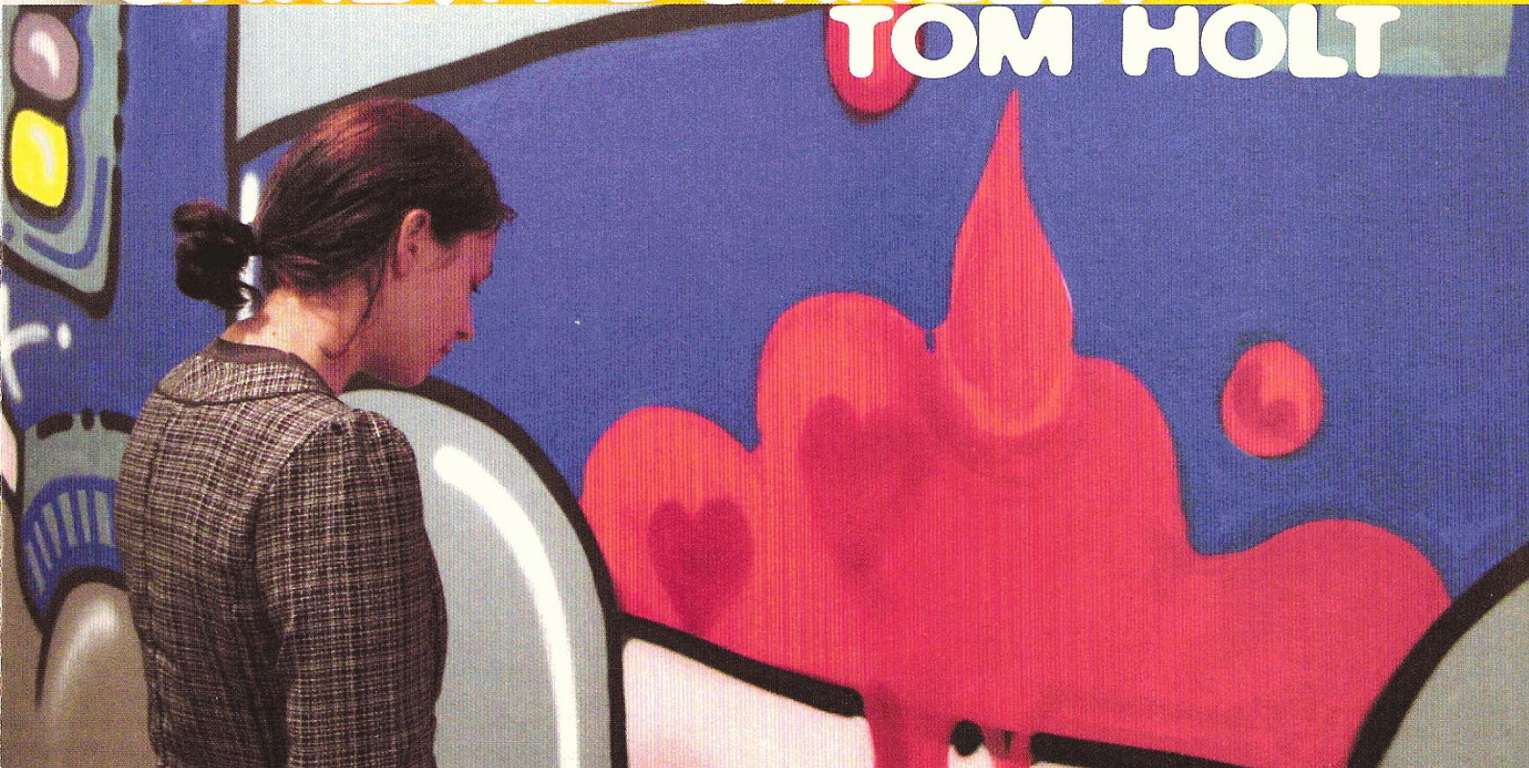
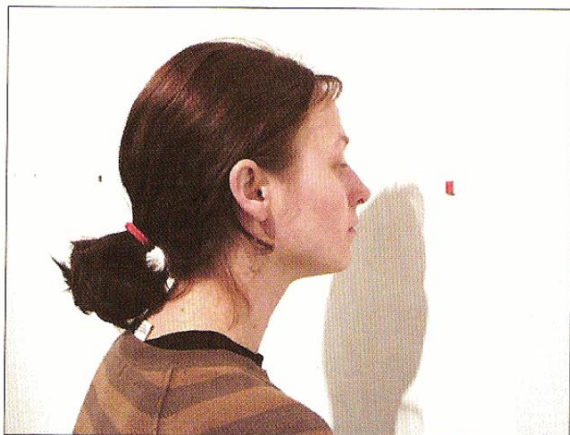




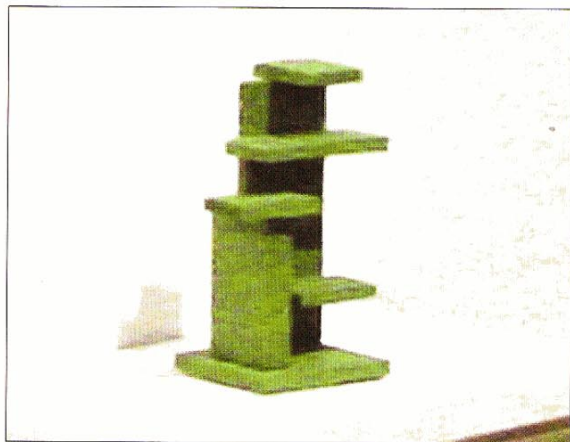
GARETH DONNELLY
TOM HOLT





This exhibition sprang from an impromptu exchange on the notion of being “lost in translation.”

Perfunctory curatorial chat was given to the recent film and to Tokyo itself, but the conversation turned quickly toward a more generalized condition: what is lost or gained in translation? Knowing that art—its meaning, pursuit, and methodology—can slip across borders, the question raised was not one of difference over distance—Brisbane vs. Buffalo—but that of scale and medium (within the practice of painting). If geographic distance—two artists half the world away from each other—can be collapsed, do different scales push the meaning farther apart, or can meaning also be collapsed?

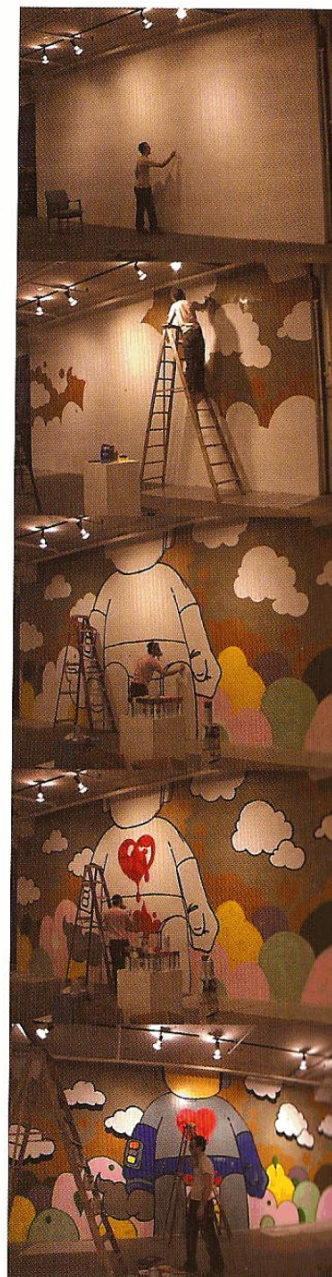


Constructivist Sculpture, 2004
acrylic paint on wood
2.25 x .75 in.

The issue of scale was a “curatorial cheat” to manufacture a situation, within which other synchronicities revealed themselves. In daily practice, Gareth Donnelly and Tom Holt both have the voracious appetite of the enthused hobbyist who cannot get enough of the hobby. Holt’s compulsion is revealed in his ever-present sketchbooks, always at hand: he seems incapable of not sketching at every opportunity. Likewise, Gareth Donnelly can, within minutes, spread paper, glue, and minute materials around him to create tiny sculptures or dash outside to scoop up some North American snow to produce an impromptu, site-specific watercolor.

For both, there is a process of thinking, working, and responding quickly. Yet within the quick draw is a methodical, thoughtful depth. If the question is *how* deep, why wax poetically or theoretically? Wax the board and catch a wave. Let’s say—to extend the metaphor—it’s not just finding the big wave, but how to ride every wave. With minimal curatorial hand-wringing, a decision was reached to be positive about the arbitrariness of the selection. As a Singapore curator recently said to Holubizky—in a comparable discussion about cultural/geographic differences and the choices that are made in forming exhibitions: “the possibility of the arbitrary conjunction, without needing to fill that gap ... allows that juxtaposition to speak. Arbitrary, doesn’t mean [choices] have to go into gravitational corners [in opposition].”

Following up on a recent scenario in which Holt had knocked out a maniacal wall painting during a 48-hour performance piece at the Burchfield-Penney Art Center with fellow Buffalo artist Brian Milbrand, Holt was offered more time and more wall in an effort to observe how these looser parameters would translate into a new work. What aspects of his intensely personal sketchbooks would be writ large? How much of a sketchbook’s intimacy is sustained at a more omnivorous scale? As Holt was blocking out his painting, Gareth Donnelly was circumnavigating the globe for the first time with most of his portion of the exhibition tucked into various coat pockets.



above left: GARETH DONNELLY
Toy Paintings, 2002-2004
(installation view) oil and acrylic on
matchstick canvases

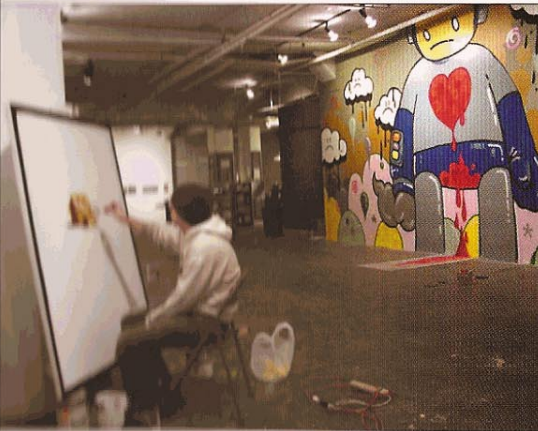
above and right: TOM HOLT
Love life vs. Sex life, 2004,
acrylic and spray paint





TOM HOLT *Joe, Tom, and Colin*, 2004
acrylic and spray paint on canvas

Holt's wall painting holds nothing back. He works with a palette and cartoon style that suggest a buoyant, happy condition, and asserts confidence (you can't be timid and ride the big wave). The work has the boldness and exhilaration of a spray-painted subway train but is not simply an expression of "I Was Here, This Is My Mark/Handle/Tag." There is a discernible pathos in the cinematic, wall-gobbling portrait of a lonely spaceman. It is a superhero construct inflated and deflated simultaneously. Even the clouds look miserable. Yet, in dismantling its own buoyant self, Holt's protagonist/stand-in does not simply bleed from the heart and the crotch, but spills out onto the floor. The angst is so effusive it cannot be contained in a wall painting, no matter how gigantic in scale.



If Holt is confessing here to a brilliant confusion (the title of the piece is *Love life vs. Sex life*), he admits—with equal intensity—to a brilliant affection in his triptych *Joe, Tom, and Colin*. A quixotic ode to friendship, the work collapses a trio of curious references



into an earnest homage. The neo-pagan symbol of a goat's head inside an inverted pentagram and the more bucolic image of a (presumably) rearing unicorn book-end a discreet image of a log cabin, itself punctuated by four gold ribbons on the corners. The vaguely devilish, the vaguely angelic, and a dash of pure hokum—together, they concoct an affectionate camaraderie. The goat's head symbol is actually thought to be Baphomet, the idol of the Knights Templar, whose name in Latin translates as "the father of universal peace among men."

Holt's work alludes to more than the mere sum of its parts. Likewise Donnelly's work is more than the minutiae of modern art references. His literal thumbnails are vulgarized, like the everyday of Holt's work. For argument's sake, the superhero of modern art is reduced to an everyday human-scale. But nothing is held up to ridicule or irony for its own sake; other facets are played out in the displacement. Still thinking, the neuro paths are crossed and all straws are grasped in order to communicate ... something, anything, everything.

Coincidentally, Donnelley went to Tokyo for the first time, en route to Buffalo. He returned to Brisbane with more notational work, subsequently shown as *23 Easy Pieces* (which included a tiny sculpture base purloined in Buffalo), and followed up by *More Easy Pieces*. *Easy Pieces* are Donnelley's way of making the best of a big situation, as his take on "twentieth century art" is making the most of an unruly situation. We can imagine David sitting down with Goliath to "discuss the problems" and believing that the story will end the same way. It could go either way the next time.

The aforementioned Singapore curator also commented that perhaps the problem is not how to start—a novel, a film, or a performance, in essence the staging—but how to end, or how to end an argument or exhibition proposition. The best way, he suggested, was with the work of art itself because it intensifies and clarifies the argument or proposition—not to a conclusion, but towards an ambiguity with purpose. The ambiguity can also be a beautiful contradiction, returning to the errant

start: Japanese "things" are characterized as being small—a compact culture—yet Tokyo is one of the largest cities in the world. Is this simply a juxtaposition of scale, or are we back to the wave analogy, letting the art and culture take the ride?

Nothing is that easy, or what it seems, for either artist. Begun with unpredictability (two artists unknown to each other) and processed through the device of scale, this pairing reiterated that art is not a hill on the horizon—a resolute and eternal landmark, or an objective to be taken—and more like the ineffable waves that comprise the sea.

Or...not like a wave, it *is* a wave: ebbing and flowing, crashing, subsiding, a beautiful ambiguity.

Ihor Holubizky
Unaffiliated writer/curator
Brisbane

John Massier
Visual Arts Curator
Buffalo

top left: TOM HOLT 7 small paintings, 2004
latex, acrylic, and mixed media

GARETH DONNELLY *Toy Paintings*, 2002-2004
(supplemental) oil and acrylic on matchstick canvases



GARETH DONNELLY
TOM HOLT

March 20—April 24, 2004

front cover top: GARETH DONNELLY *Toy Painting*, 2002-2004, oil and acrylic on matchstick canvases

front cover bottom: TOM HOLT *Love life vs. Sex life*, 2004, acrylic and spray paint

this page: GARETH DONNELLY *Toy Painting*, 2002-2004, oil and acrylic on matchstick canvas

GARETH DONNELLY was born in Brisbane, Australia in 1980 where he still resides.

He completed a Bachelor of Art (Visual Arts) at the Queensland University of Technology in 2000. Gareth is represented by Bellas Milani Gallery in Brisbane.

Gareth Donnelly would like to thank John Massier, Ihor Holubizky, staff and interns at Hallwalls, Peter Bellas, Josh Milani, Bianca, Trevor and Paula.

TOM HOLT was born in Carmel, NY where he fostered a youthful passion for drawing.

After high school, he attended SUNY New Paltz where he received a B.S. in visual arts.

Since graduation, Tom has been painting in Buffalo, doing art shows at local venues, collaborating often with his housemate Brian Milbrand and other media artists, and paying the bills by being a framer for the Burchfield-Penney Art Center.

Tom Holt would like to thank Polly Lavatelli, Brian Milbrand, Stephanie Orlando, John Massier and "anyone else who drove me back and forth to Hallwalls every time I needed."

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