



## Kristan Horton: Dr. Strangelove Dr. Strangelove

By Robin Laurence

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### At the Contemporary Art Gallery until August 19

Homage, obsession, appropriation—these postmodern impulses are folded into Kristan Horton's solo show at the Contemporary Art Gallery. The Toronto artist's series of black-and-white photographs (38 on view here, out of a total of 200) examines and restages scenes from Stanley Kubrick's 1964 film, *Dr. Strangelove*. Subtitled *How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, that satirical, cinematic imagining of nuclear catastrophe has become a cult classic, its farcical surface underlaid by a very grim opinion of humankind.

Each of Horton's works consists of a still from the film paired with his hilarious mimicry of that scene. Produced in miniature in his studio, Horton's sets employ the most banal of at-hand objects, such as clothespins, cutlery, screwdrivers, felt markers, plastic bags, twist ties, and bottles of soy and Tabasco sauce. One piece shows an aerial view of dark mountain peaks poking through a bank of clouds, paired with a scene of crinkled white plastic and little piles of dirt. In another work, a night shot of an air-force base, with buildings, parking lots, and runways, is mimicked with a strip of fabric, a small wooden block, and erasers. The instrument panel in the cockpit of a bomber, with its rows of dials and gauges, is reproduced with glass jars, paper cups, and spice bottles set out on a concrete floor. Particularly entertaining—in a macabre way—is a film still of a nuclear explosion imitated in Horton's studio by a cloud of popcorn.

The artist's mimicry is inspired, obsessive, and sometimes ludicrous—a small-scale reiteration of the very qualities seen in the film. Horton seems to relish, as Kubrick did, the overtly sexual appearance of big weapons and military machinery, and the claustrophobia and benightedness communicated by the film's many nighttime and interior shots.

Although Horton's work addresses a raft of issues—notably the widespread use of appropriation in postmodern art, and the relationship of appropriation to homage, parody, cultural copyright law, and the vexed nature of representation—its themes reverberate beyond the art world. Kubrick's profound pessimism about the structures of political and military power during the Cold War is echoed by the contemporary feeling that we're still controlled by an impervious military-industrial complex, intent on overriding democracy, instigating war, and destroying the planet.

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