

GALLERIES

Motionless motion pictures

Kristan Horton's deceptive 'Orbits' are the product of a perpetually busy mind

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VISUAL ARTS WRITER

There's a hecticness to Kristan Horton, a sense of perpetual motion, even when he's standing still — which doesn't happen very much, his active body propelled by an even more active mind.

So it's appropriate that Horton's new show, at Jessica Bradley Art + Projects, is a collection of photographs that strain against their stillness, pinwheeling even as they sit motionless on the wall.

There's a reason for that. Together, they're called "Orbits," which describes quite literally his process: piles of objects, castoffs of multiple projects on the go (remember: perpetual motion), had accumulated on his studio floor. Digital camera in hand, Horton walked slowly around each of them, shooting the piles in a careful sequence.

"At the time, it was to satisfy a philosophical, perceptual concern," says Horton, wiry and thick-bearded, who has the twitchy affability of a nutty professor who's never found his brain's "off" button — and has probably never looked for it.

Horton became intensely intimate with his random pilings. Uploading the images to his computer, he superimposed each image over top of the other in chronological order. He was careful to maintain each image intact as much as possible, while still allowing the overlays not to become a darkened mess.

The result is a suite of images meant to defy an oxymoron: still photographs capturing motion, offering multiple perspectives in a single frame. Photography, of course, does none of those things. A photo is a single point of view, frozen in time. Not that any of that would stop Horton, who has made — playfully, vexingly bending those rules of form, of representation and of perception itself — something of an oeuvre all on its own.

Case in point: Horton's best-known work is probably 2007's *Dr. Strangelove Dr. Strangelove*, his hilarious, 200-plus still-image reconstruction of Stanley Kubrick's paranoid Cold War comedy of the same name.

It was first shown at the Art Gallery of York University, and the resulting catalogue is a Toronto art world essential: using whatever random objects he had at hand, Horton rebuilt the film scene by scene, putting Kubrick's images next to his own: a grounded bomber awaiting takeoff in the twilight which was re-rendered with a knife (the body), two forks (the wings) and



ORBIT: RED PLATE TOKYO, 2009, BY KRISTAN HORTON

Compilations of photos of various works in progress, made by layering one digital photo on top of another. The result, artist Kristan Horton's "Orbits," is what's meant to be an oxymoron: moving stills.

cigarette butts (the engines); an A-bomb detonation with scoops of ice cream.

The images are quirkily absurd, almost Dadaist — except, of course, they're tied to the film in almost painful exactitude. That's where the tension kicks in: the tone of his images — a lush, moody silver-grey — matches the film so closely that your eye is forced into a doubletake. It's first mystifying, then gleeful; Horton dismantles — or over-constructs — the gap between perception and reality, hones it to a finely vexing point, and lets you discover the revelation of the space in between for yourself.

Which brings us back to "Orbits." One work (subtitled *Doorknob* for obvious reasons) turns up in the current Art Gallery of Ontario show, "Beautiful Fictions," a broad survey of the falsities that the manipulations of digital photography can allow.

What makes Horton's take on the subject vitally different, though, is its commitment to the medium's more complex, flawed truth. The "Orbits" are, minus a little post-production clarification, straight documentary images.

Horton's intense rendering of them doesn't play the medium's ability to deceive so much as its lim-

itations to render truth comprehensively. There is no view that's right, only different. That's a root dilemma of photography itself, and always has been; but Horton's quixotic attempt to reconcile this makes clear there are no absolutes — just endless flawed renderings of the same reality. Which, it strikes me, is what he's been doing all along.

Just the facts

WHAT: Kristan Horton: Orbits
WHERE: Jessica Bradley Art + Projects, 1450 Dundas St. W.
WHEN: To Oct. 10.