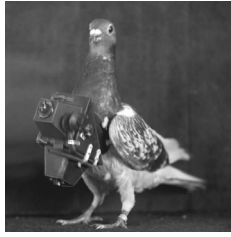


*As a former dove, I know a lot about and the smog and the fog and the about the taste and the smell and on whether you gathered a single bit could harm you at any time but being assured in the fact that simply no one has any time or energy to do so. You just flap your wings a bit and threaten to leave. It takes quite a bit for you to really leave. You don't want to go. You don't want to miss an opportunity. Who knows when a kindhearted woman with a ziplock full of stale breadcrumbs will show up. If that means suffering through some boredom, well, what else is there to do? I return to observing. They are traveling.. traveling...sounds familiar..did I ever migrate? Where did I even come from? Has anyone seen my offspring?*



*peace. Peace is breathing in the smoke clouds of the city and not worrying the lingering feelings of uncertainty of oxygen. Peace is knowing anyone could harm you at any time but being assured in the fact that simply no one has any time or energy to do so. You just flap your wings a bit and threaten to leave. It takes quite a bit for you to really leave. You don't want to go. You don't want to miss an opportunity. Who knows when a kindhearted woman with a ziplock full of stale breadcrumbs will show up. If that means suffering through some boredom, well, what else is there to do? I return to observing. They are traveling.. traveling...sounds familiar..did I ever migrate? Where did I even come from? Has anyone seen my offspring?*



*I go up high. I see the city. It's big. Lots of places for me to land and be almost perfectly still on. Being still makes me feel like I am a part of this great structure. Something bigger. I see myself reflected in the window. That's me. I look just like my brothers and sisters and relatives and parents. I know it's me though. I'm adorable. I can't obsess too much over my appearance. I've seen others fly full force into their reflection and it doesn't end well. Below me everything is going and moving and things are being built and being destroyed. There are new people and familiar faces. I notice they are on a set path, I wonder how it's determined, who goes where and when and why? What am I going to see next? Oh, there is a man I see here a lot. He comes out of the ground, which is a place where dead humans go to rest or something. The stairs lead into a labyrinth, somewhere that someone like me could be lost forever in. We aren't meant to go down there. Perhaps the place humans go to die is the same place that humans are born. Maybe one day I'll work up the nerve to explore it. I'm not very brave. Right now though, I am here, high up with so much room to glide and float and soar. I don't think I'd be able to do or see much from all the way down there. But maybe there's food.*



*My great great grandfather. I was told about him. I come from a long lineage of outsiders. Both observers and participants. He was strapped with a camera and flew away. This is a portrait of him. He's handsome. I wonder what it felt like to carry a camera. He must have been strong. He took these photos. You can see his wings made their way into the side of this one, I have his wings. My ancestors used to carry messages and helped innovate technology. We're still capable of all that. But maybe our work here on earth is over. We are retired. What we were given in*



*exchange is the incredible privilege of doing absolutely nothing. Well, nothing is what humans call it. I call it peace. As a former dove, I know a lot about peace. Peace is taking a deep breath, flapping your wings, getting a running start, and...*

A tour guide of the iconic, Connor Crawford's solo show at Scherben, *Life in the Big City*, takes us through streets and alleys so familiar that they lose their sense of place. Crawford began making art in Toronto, a city known for posing as a movie set for other cities like New York, which informs his portrayal of city life. The nameless Big City shown in his reliefs is a flat façade without concrete foundations to keep it upright. Crawford composes his voluminous, dimensional images around trite images and clichés of the modern city: urgency, productivity, busy workers on the go walking fast while talking on their phones, cigarette smoke rising in the thick air, and trash littering the ground. In Charles Peirce's semiotic, the icon is a kind of sign that figuratively resembles the object it wishes to represent. That is, the icon is a distinguishable, timeless image that refers to a recognizable object regardless of the context. For this reason, icons have long populated art as signifying anchors: from Christ on the cross to a Campbell's Soup Can, they guide the audiences through the tumult of ambiguities found in images towards the safe shore of legible meaning. But what happens when everything in an image is an icon? In a sea of tropes and generic images, specificity flies out the window and what was legible becomes its opposite because it lacks the relative comparison that made it stand apart.

*Life in the Big City* plays with icons, tropes, and surfaces to reveal something about the structure of contemporary life. Crawford's reliefs invoke the semiotic disorders in which we live; it speaks to a human condition where signs have been hollowed and bear no relation to their context, only speaking to one another. It isn't just Toronto playing dress up; in fact, every city is a façade. Through top-down urban planning, cities have been built on bureaucratic principles and detached abstractions; everything organic has been slowly turned generic as sameness washes over in hues of grey and beige. The city is a physical manifestation and logical conclusion of our iconic way of life. Yet these scenes of the city are interrupted by digits. An instruction to paint by numbers? Insinuations of the capitalist passage of time? Schizoid apparitions for the paranoid mind? The numbers punctuate and perforate *The Big City*. They speak to the point of view of a city dweller who, like an NPC in a videogame, walks aimlessly, trying to make sense of an environment built extraneously.

The reliefs in *Life in the Big City* use three-dimensionality to formally gesture towards depth while conceptually playing with its opposite. Crawford invites you to explore the hidden corners of *The Big City* while suggesting there are no corners at all. Perhaps with all their loud cooing, pigeons are trying to tell us we are not so different. We are both formerly wild species that find themselves lost and domesticated in urban settings, both bound by instincts that are rendered useless in a metropolitan world. Like pigeons building their homes with popsicle sticks, humans hold onto legible images and exploit clichés to make nests out of simulacra. And like them, we have no choice but to seek peace and build a life in this dream-like city we call home.