

REPOTTING

a comedy by David Robbins

September 10 - 12, 2010

Opening Friday 7 - 9 pm



Green Gallery East
1500 N. Farwell Ave
Milwaukee



Featuring an interview with the artist
by Andrew Sward

Andrew Sward: Why do you characterize *REpotting* as a comedy?

David Robbins: Because it plays with cultural constructs without taking sides. At the moment, Green Gallery East is the hip gallery in Milwaukee—a city, it's worth noting, that outsiders generally think of in outdated, *Laverne & Shirley* terms. Green Gallery East has established an identity showing the kind of experimental art favored by young artists who've attended art graduate schools. Exhibiting art that asks "what can art be? What is an exhibition? Who is an artist?" links Green Gallery to galleries of similar character in New York, LA, and elsewhere. A commercial gallery that taps into this information stream is new to Milwaukee.



I wanted to play with this novelty. Purely to find out what the effect would be, I borrowed examples of more traditional art from other local galleries to exhibit them at Green Gallery East. Will transplanting these accomplished, traditional artworks—in this case, paintings, pastels, and watercolors of flowers—to a site with an "experimental" identity effect any change in our perception of them? Will exhibiting them after our visit of Green Gallery East? A lot of tricky questions start to sprout. If I knew the answers to any of them I wouldn't have had to make the experiment. That's another thing that makes *REpotting* a comedy: its curator doesn't pretend to any authority!



Why flower imagery? Is it because artworks that feature flower imagery are so common you'd be guaranteed to find them at almost any gallery?

Right, it was partly pragmatism. But flowers are arguably the ultimate bourgeois artworks, too. Decorative, non-committal, devoid of criticality or comment, innocent... You can really push a flower around! So that was another factor: they had no content that would complicate matters.

The artworks you've chosen to display range in value but all are competently made.

Each is an accomplished example of the artist's intentions. I'm not laughing at the artworks I've borrowed or at the galleries which have been kind enough to lend works. Believe me, many of these works are far better than any painting of flowers I could make! *REpotting* is not a "so bad it's good" retreat. I have no interest in camp. The dynamic of work here is very different.

REpotting depends on a contextual shift but it's not the kind we've come to expect from contemporary art. You're not taking something that's outside the art context and moving it into the art context. You're not conferring the label "art" on these pictures. They're already art.



Right, I'm simply re-planting them, in different soil. I'm effecting a lateral shift, from one sort of commercial gallery to another sort of commercial gallery. It's up to you to decide whether they've changed. Have these artworks somehow become "more artistic" by virtue of their being included in a conceptual theater of objects whose intent it is to focus this very question? Or have I only added noise? When we look at this show, what are we really seeing: a cluster of pleasant, calming artworks or the experimental construct of Green Gallery East? What really is the event here? Exactly what is on display? What you see depends on what you're looking for, no? In a way, the project becomes a mirror that shows the audience to itself. Are you someone who's looking for tradition or adventure?

"Set designer" seems just as accurate a description of your role in this as "curator." The artworks in *REpotting* are transformed into props...

I'm using Green Gallery East to reprogram these works. A picture is never just a picture, it's also a vehicle for a host of associations representing different levels of cultural aspiration. *REpotting* briefly re-routes these flower paintings away from the pre-determined narrative of studio-to-gallery-to-collector they are intended to take part in. A group of artworks is diverted, temporarily, into another, less stable narrative. They've entered the Twilight Zone!

"Submitted for your consideration..."



Of course Green Gallery East is itself part of the theater here, it's not separate. To emphasize that, I've locked the gallery door, so that the only way to view the exhibition is through the wall of big windows that faces the street. Taped inside one window is a schematic of the installation, with each work identified by title, artist, gallery of origin, and price. Seen from the outside this way, the little white building that Green Gallery East occupies becomes a vitrine or terrarium. And at the opening, John and Jake, the two guys who run the gallery, and I all wore flowers in our jacket lapels—a nod to the truth that "hip" is as much a construct as "traditional."

"What's a 'hip' gallery?" A hip gallery is one that supports this kind of experiment...

Right. *REpotting* structures that as a loop. "A place like Green Gallery East is a context that supports an experiment that uses Green Gallery East in an experiment about context." Every gallery shows things, but a gallery that can prompt us to ask "what is a gallery?" pushes the notion of display a little farther. A certain kind of artist will always be drawn to that kind of transparency. A certain audience, too.

The lending galleries were another version of hip, though, don't forget. Without their support the experiment couldn't have been made. The galleries that I approached required no convincing.

Is *REpotting* for sale?

How is it priced?

I kept things simple,

pricing it as the sum total of all the artworks featured in it.



Why not double it—price it once as their art and once as your art?

Price doubling is too attention-seeking, too "look at me." It's elbow-in-the-ribs comedy. A more deadpan attitude toward pricing is funnier and more confusing. Linking these artworks and pricing them as a single unit is enough of an intervention.

Do you think *REpotting* reads only in a mid-sized city where galleries that show experimental art are in short supply and stand in greater contrast to the more traditional galleries that predominate in such places?

No. Aren't the factors that have gone into this theater widespread? The same cultural stridations are active everywhere, seems to me. The Milwaukee setting just made it easier to realize the project. *REpotting* became a reality because the low rents there permit experiments without concern for their commercial potential. It's an environment that's more conducive to pure research.

David offers grateful thanks to the lending galleries—

David Barnett Gallery, Elaine Ericson Gallery,

Thomas Harris at 505 Gallery, and Adams Gallery—

for participating in the experiment.