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VISUAL ARTS » REVIEW

Welcome to Electric Razor Co-op



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DAVID TRAUTRIMAS
AT LE GALLERY

\$675-\$2,000. Until Oct. 19,
1183 Dundas St. W., Toronto;
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This edition of Gallery Going is all about distressed and derelict buildings and cities. Some of them are real. Some are fictitious. Some lie halfway in between.

First, to The Habitat Machines of Toronto-based artist David Trautrimas – now at Toronto's Le Gallery.

Trautrimas's digital prints of forlorn structures, complexes and communities begin as photographs of castoff, abject, superfluous objects like old coffee pots, electric razors, oil cans and waffle irons, which he then repositions by re-imagining them at vastly different scales. His *Electric Razor Co-operative*, for example, looks like a modernist high-rise apartment complex. The structure's perforated, semicircular façade, however, clearly betrays its origins as an old electric razor that, with an assist from Trautrimas's skill with Adobe Photoshop, is made to look 30 storeys tall.

It's the same with his dark, brooding *Waffle Iron Heights*, wherein three tarnished waffle irons are shoved together to make a convincing mega-structure soaring up into a dark, overcast sky like some chillingly gigantic tower from Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis*.

Trautrimas's dystopian buildings seem to begin cheerfully enough. A self-confessed magpie, he tells me he picks through garage sales, scours flea markets and monitors eBay auctions, chasing down household objects that he deems transformable into prodigious edifices. "I look for signs of wear," he tells me on the phone from his studio, "for objects with a good patina." For Trautrimas, scratches, dents and missing parts are gifts, not liabilities.

When Trautrimas gets his harvest of household junk back home, he sets the items up and photographs them against a neutral, white Foamcore background. He then roams the city again, taking thousands of photographs of lawns, windows, driveways, parking lots,



The objects in *The Measurement District* began life as a bathroom scale, an old clock and the isolated parts of an industrial scale, and have been shaped into an unwelcoming structure.

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light standards and sidewalks – the infrastructural bric-a-brac upon which he feeds – and then, back in front of his computer, painstakingly creates settings and environments in which his pseudo-buildings will eventually be placed. "Sometimes," he says, "I've had to combine five different curbs to make one sidewalk."

Given his cheerful pursuit of a computerized building program (other structures bear names such as *Sprinkler House*, *Coffee Pot Towers* and *Space Heater Place*), it's surprising how sombre and even sinister the finished ink-jet prints seem. There is a broad axis of caustic wit and wary charm running through each of the works. Take an elaborate piece like *The Measurement District* (pictured here). Despite the perpetual twilight in which the eccentrically shaped buildings of the "District" sit, under that threatening sky, it is amusing to note that the disc-like building at the right began life as a bathroom scale, that the twin towers at the centre are isolated parts of an industrial scale, and that circular structure at the left is made up of the parts of an old Big Ben clock no more than four or five inches in diameter. And yet the buildings grumble away in a sort of pre-apocalyptic gloom, apparently abandoned and, if not actually condemned, then certainly unwelcoming.