

## Peter Dykhuis: Inventories & Micro-mapping

Red Head Gallery, Toronto

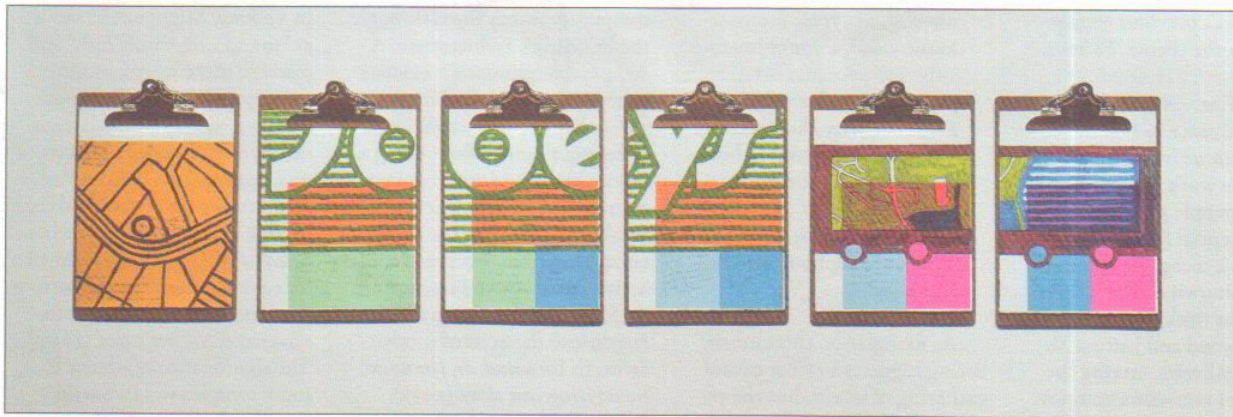
September 5 – 22, 2012

by Kyla Brown

Inventories, ephemeral map fragments, the personal and the everyday are what one encounters in Peter Dykhuis' newest show at Red Head Gallery. And clipboards. Working with mapping imagery and systems since the early 90s, Dykhuis is experimenting with structural supports to suggest maps as person-

al narratives. The use of the clipboards is the biggest move in his newest work, with these supports suggesting an objective of gathering information, of fieldwork and utility. They are the props of surveyors, and of orienteering courses, but rather than being used by students on a field trip, these foundations hold inventories of personal and political life.

Several multiples of collaged and reused paper from the artist's life comprise the work in this show. Each individual work on paper being approximately 20cm x 25cm is mounted or clipped on a bare, brown clipboard, which are hung from the gallery walls in groupings. Here, envelopes, invoices, notes



Peter Dykhuis, *Inventories #14* (Sobey's), 2012, encaustic, mixed media collage on paper mounted on six commercial clipboards, 33cm x 149.8cm  
PHOTO: DOUGLAS WALKER. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

from family and colleagues, receipts for shoes and car repairs attach to watercolour paper to form a backdrop for mapped surfaces. Drawn and painted circles, bull's-eyes, logos, partial maps and closeups of Halifax city blocks float in and out of the collaged ground in colourful and distinctly fragmented map/drawings.

Dykhuis' map-based work has moved from using overtly political imagery (of logos including the globe, weather or war radar) to a focus in this exhibition on the personal and the everyday. Here, communication systems that are closer to home have larger implications in a politically-engaged practice. Inventories of life's categories and roles: father, husband, artist, former director of the Anna Leonowens Gallery at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD University) and current director of the Dalhousie Art Gallery, and a man who loves shoes are considered in this show. These subjectivities, legible among the papered surfaces, suggest activities like family cooking and attending to car payments while living in a suburb of Halifax. These roles are visible as markers within a resulting system of indexing and place-making. With these maps, Dykhuis' aim seems to be to chart the implications of the "web" of interactions in which he exists, and to describe his place in the world.

In Dykhuis' past works, mapping the everyday was important for locating himself within political frameworks, such as Canada Post, or as implicated in the North American Free Trade Agreement. In *You Are Here* (2005), geographic and personal place was indicated

by envelopes addressed "to Peter," as then-director of the Anna Leonowens Gallery, and through department mail as a NSCAD staff member. Such paper documents, while displaying personal information, become gridded supports for a larger map of the region of Halifax and Bedford, Nova Scotia. They also locate Dykhuis' correspondence as an index of work, of relations and activity in the world and the local art community. These formal and indexical qualities show themselves as continuous throughout his practice.

Series and the grid structure are also crucial to Dykhuis' installations. His previous works have also used series multiples and grid structures to construct configurations that resemble maps. These activated visual substrates, made using envelopes, business cards, letters, bills and other personal ephemera, mounted tile-like, become grounds for various layers of encaustic, pencil crayon, marker and watercolour paint that provide a multi-layered and expressive account of his place within social systems. Such substrates act as loaded surfaces of everyday life, while the grid structure suggests adaptability and the potential for rearrangement.

For the viewer who knows Dykhuis' work, this exhibition does not come as a surprise. Layers of personal correspondence remind us of how we negotiate life's roles, as well as how they situate us in the world. This is more pronounced in this subtle new work than his earlier, more political works. *Inventories* reads horizontally as a part of a larger whole, where one can get lost in important details. For example, the presence of a Sobeys logo points to

an infrastructure for selling and transporting food, a large national corporation, and an important Nova Scotia business. It also seems to be a nod to its role in the world of images, as an emblem that is widely recognized. Encountering this direct reference to systems of commerce and visual meaning, I cannot help but also associate it with the largest award for young artists in Canada. Arguably, this corporation is significant to Dykhuis' family's life, but is also a "sign" that suggests larger ideas of demographics and subjectivity — namely, how we might feed ourselves, literally and artistically.

In this exhibition, Dykhuis shows us a systematic and highly personalized account of his own inventories through simple and familiar (visual) language. While the clipboards read as much more "objective" than those of past works, the information accumulated as grounds is far more personal and telling, even surprisingly so. In this way, Dykhuis has married what might seemingly be seen as paradoxical. The encaustic paint, both covering and revealing, is what holds together the highly personal and the subtly political, functioning as a third unknown. Though the vocabulary of this work looks familiar and even "comfortable," it appears to point to something greater, perhaps a place that has not yet been mapped. x

Kyla Brown is a visual artist who is focused on navigating city space, particularly in London, Ontario. She is a University of Western Ontario MFA candidate, writer and instructor.