The gray volumes of conceptualism are filled with somber ciphers which express primarily the inscrutability of socially-critical thought in the form of art. They embody a terrible contradiction. These artists attempted to bridge one of the prison-houses of the art system – the bureaucracy and architecture and to turn toward social life. But in that process they misconceived the very simple means they wished to put behind them. – Jeff Wall

The first thing that I think of is a sense of innocence, and the innocence of believing in art. You know, it's like when you first go to art school, you really believe in art, you believe in its possibilities. [...] Can art be a little more unprepared, a little more innocent, a lot more playful? – Lawson

Michael Drebert's project Available Light presents a playful combination of conceptual experimentation and visual-material form. If the project is post-conceptual, it still stands out within such a nebulous category – mainly because of its hopeful engagement with public space and a distinctly egalitarian ethos. Strategies and forms of historical conceptual art practices continue to provide a kind of feeding-corpse for the evolution of contemporary post-conceptual art markets. Pragmatically with procedures, professional association and commercialism, these markets can seem to mirror those that have existed for the visual arts in general over centuries – markets which have acted, in part, as catalysts for the emergence of socially conscious, conceptually oriented art movements in the first place. I believe Drebert successfully complicates his project in relation to this ironic cannibalization of historical conceptual art for the production of novel mannerist styles. To my mind, Michael Drebert's project refers to a wide range of previously campy contemporary art works that have considered the historical failings and current impasses of revolutionary praxis, social change and political community. Consider the visual/sensual elements within the work of artists as diverse as Sam Durant, Gillian Wearing, Raymond Pettibon, Thomas Hirschhorn, Mark Wallinger, or even local artist Geoffrey Farmer – to name only a few. In this project, the artist identifies himself as an artist working without the constraints, limits or authority of this nominational status.

Through the use of a highly stylized and manually rendered ink and brush script, Available Light refers to a wide range of formerly campy contemporary art works that have considered the historical failings and current impasses of revolutionary praxis, social change and political community. Consider the visual/sensual elements within the work of artists as diverse as Sam Durant, Gillian Wearing, Raymond Pettibon, Thomas Hirschhorn, Mark Wallinger, or even local artist Geoffrey Farmer – to name only a few. In this project, the artist identifies himself as an artist working without the constraints, limits or authority of this nominational status.

Inadequacies of language, representation and narrative are required to reframe (encouraged by a predominance of passive sign systems (encouraged by a predominance of passive sign systems (encouraged by a predominance of passive sign systems (encouraged by a predominance of passive sign systems)) concept structures (encouraged by a predominance of passive sign systems). Drebert's project requires us to imagine for ourselves what he means and how he means it. Given this, the work might actually succeed in being a maddening kind of fire-starter (with all sorts of violent revolutionary implications) for the project.

[...] I believe Drebert has chosen these visual affiliations in order to play with assumed expectations of meaning, his project at www.notsentletters.blogspot.com.

NOTES


6 Jeff Wall, 111.

7 I am referring here to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the “triumph” of liberal democracy within a newly emerging global market place, reaching in a so-called post-ideological and post-religious present as described by Francis Fukuyama in his book The End of History and the Last Man (New York: Free Press, 1992), first published in essay form in 1989.

Jeremy Todd is an interdisciplinary artist living in Vancouver who creates, teaches and writes on a regular basis. His work often considers the formation of cultural memory and its socio-political effects. He was the Director/Curator of the Helen Pitt Gallery ARC (2003-05) and acted as the interim Director/Curator of the Richmond Art Gallery in 2007. He is currently working on an ongoing internet/physical textual project: "ArtMother's Field Guide to Contemporary Art in Canada: 2008" which considers the world of contemporary art in Canada (issues, institutions, artists, curators, critics, etc.) and recently presented at the 2008 Contemporary Art in Canada Conference, Montréal (September 2008).