

Phantasmagoria: Group Exhibition @ Presentation House

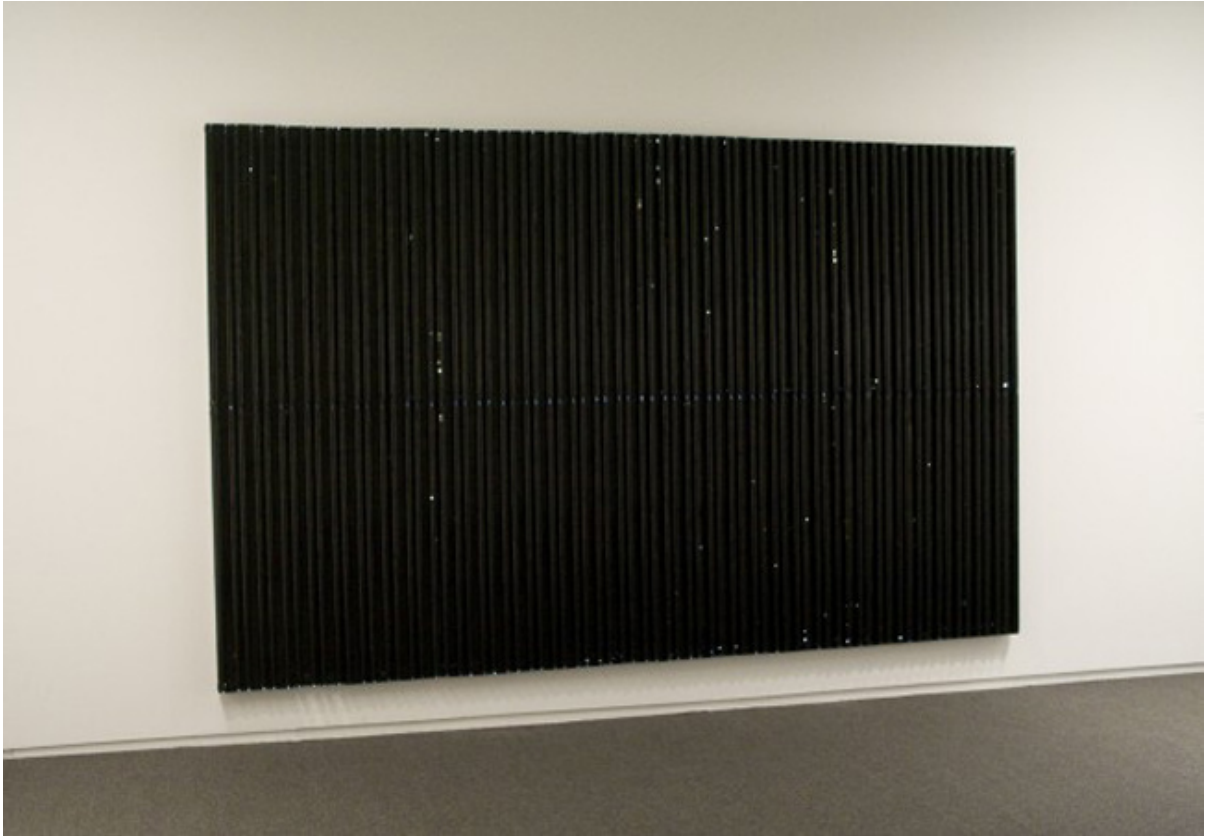
By: [Cayley Malo](#) July 3, 2012, [decoymagazine.ca](#)

Phantasmagoria @ **Presentation House Gallery**, May 25 – July 22,
2012

*Raymond Boisjoly, Christopher Brayshaw, Andrew Dadson, Jessica Eaton,
Julia Feyrer, Allison Hrabluik, Jay Bundy Johnson, Evan Lee, Mathew
McWilliams, Rachelle Sawatsky, Kevin Schmidt, Dan Siney, Corin Sworn, Ron
Tran, Elizabeth Zvonar.*

Curated by Helga Pakasaar and Reid Shier.

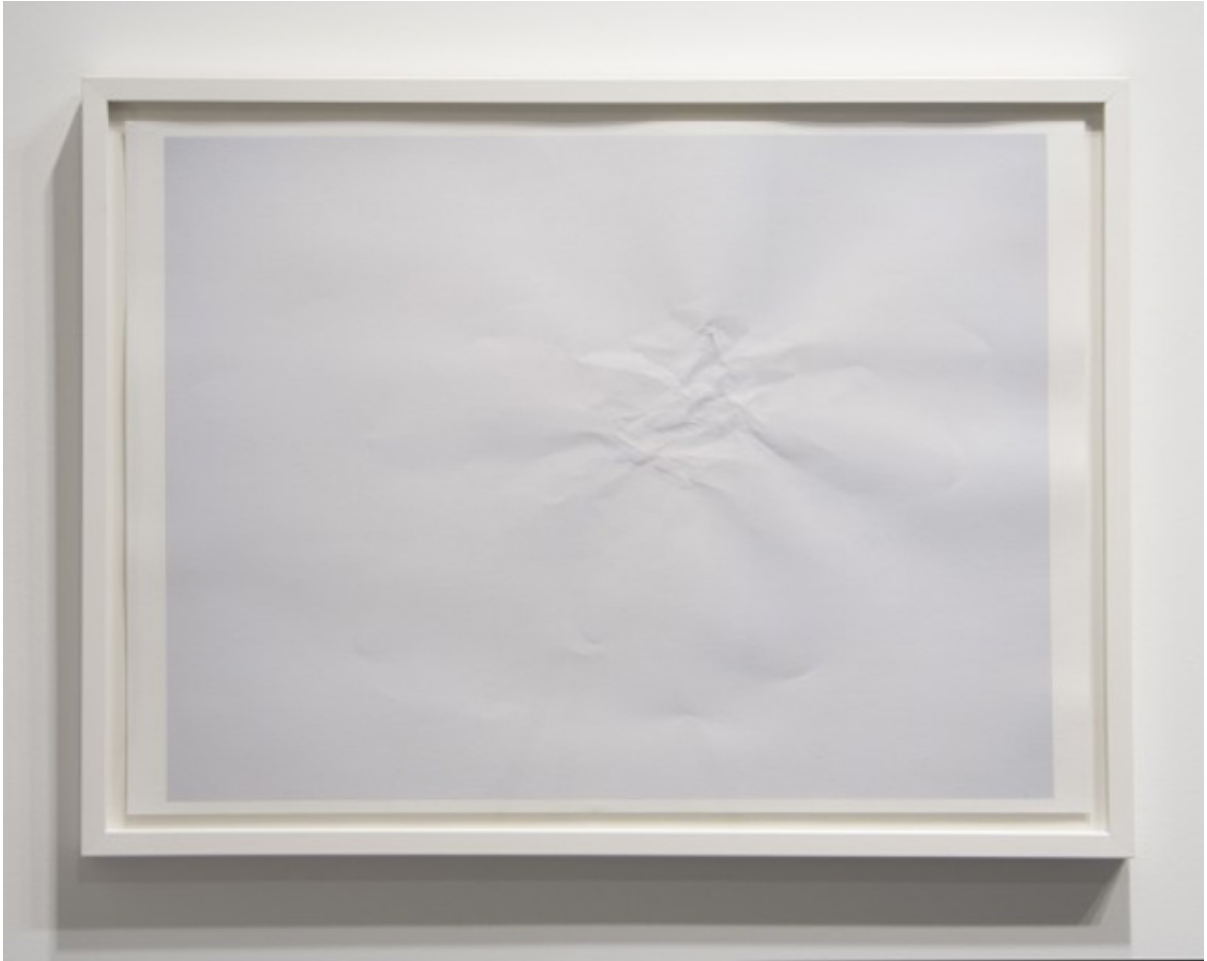
Phantasmagoria, the current exhibition at the Presentation House Gallery in North Vancouver, can be approached two different ways: aesthetically or conceptually. The work shown is quite successful for both the material execution and presentation of process, on the part of the artists. The curatorial presentation and decisions for structuring the exhibition are a little unbalanced, allowing at least two of the projects in the show to be overlooked and making a couple more hard to see. Crossing the threshold into the gallery, the first thing to note is the smell, recognizable as something off-gassing. Unfortunately, this may cause the viewer to want to escape the gallery. Admittedly, I initially overlooked the main atrium of the gallery in order to source out the offensive fumes, out of pure curiosity, and discovered Andrew Dadson's *Black Light*. His one hundred and forty-four fluorescent lights covered in black paint are quite impressive. The way the paint is peeling or the light is shining through the grid of lights is reminiscent of flying over suburbs at night. Whether this interpretation was Dadson's intent or not, my reading of this project seemed to straddle both the traditional meaning and Walter Benjamin's re-appropriation of the term phantasmagoria.



Andrew Dadson, *Black Light*, 2012

I was intrigued to explore the darkened third of the gallery that housed Dadson's piece. The nearest presentation to Dadson's is the black and white photographic collages of Evan Lee's *Maquette for Phoropter*. While straining in the dark to make out the details of the images, I couldn't help but wonder if this was meant to be a visual struggle, playing off the idea of an eye exam. The darkened space really led me around by my senses other than sight. In the dark, it took a moment before I realized that the electrical hum was not from Dadson's fluorescent lights but the track to Allison Hrabluik's *Abut*. It was Hrabluik's piece that first made me wish that the show had accompanying artist statements; I would have liked to learn more about this piece. The hum of the projector and the arc of grey that struggled between black and white held me mesmerized.

The pieces in the main atrium of the gallery spoke most to phantasmagoria as a photographical optical illusion. I was most excited to see Jessica Eaton's work in real life as opposed to their internet counterparts that I've been viewing for the last couple years. Having gone to school with Eaton, I have had the honour of seeing her work evolve over the years and her current practice fascinates me. The colours are brilliant, the work is all done in camera and the results are amazing and worth making the effort to see in person.



Mathew McWilliams, *Paper Works (blue)*, 2012.

Mathew McWilliams *Paper Works* offsets Eaton's brightly coloured prints. McWilliams' work reminded me of Lee's a bit, my eyes strained to differentiate whether the pale muted colours have darkened or shifted over his folds. There is a simple beauty to the presentation of McWilliams' pieces that drew me back in a few times over the course of my visit.

In the centre of the room is Ron Tran's work, which made me laugh out loud when I read its title, *So All You May See It, Yet None See*. Tran has lain out a few sheets of unprocessed photo paper and quite cleverly, in a very tongue-in-cheek manner, spoke directly to the concept of phantasmagoria and the nature of the photographic practice. Having seen past projects of Tran's, this playful and conceptual approach was on par with my expectations and had me smiling as I walked away.

It took me several viewings of Christopher Brayshaw's *Metropolitan(s)* and *CJ* before I realized that he'd taken the images from a Google street view. The first thing that caught my eye and made me stop and really look was the fact that the faces were blurred (and then I had the toggle arrows pointed out to me). In quite a clever but subdued way, this

work seems to speak directly to Benjamin's idea of modernity and fleeting social interaction, being able to travel without having to travel.



Christopher Brayshaw, *War Game Tree*, 2012

During a consultation with my gallery companion over whether or not Brayshaw had actually found and photographed Jeff Wall's *War Game* tree, my companion set off to the Gallery's bookstore to find reference material. In doing so, she stumbled upon the hidden work for the show and promptly dragged me to it. The placement of the placards for the exhibition's web-based works by [Jay Bundy Johnson](#) and [Kevin Schmidt](#) is unfortunate. If it hadn't been for my friend accidentally discovering them and pointing them out to me, I would have missed them entirely. Is there not somewhere more visible that they could have been displayed? The links to both of these projects are available on the Presentation House Gallery webpage and are listed on the bottom of the exhibition write-up but setting up a computer or two in the gallery so that the works could be seen within the context of the rest of the show would have been helpful.



Jeff Wall, "War Game", 2007

Phantasmagoria is a definite must-see. With so many artists in the show, there is a lot of work to see and spend time with so plan accordingly. It was interesting to see the variety and span of interpretations of the show's title and how the curators, in turn, presented the work. Despite some presentational difficulties, there are many opportunities to be drawn into the sensory experience of the exhibition.