

VISUAL ART » REVIEW

Making space for sculpture



GARY MICHAEL DAULT
GALLERY GOING

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**SCULPTURE GROUP SHOW,
DIAZ CONTEMPORARY**

\$750-\$22,000.
Until Sept. 1, 100 Niagara St.,
416-361-2972

Most summer group shows are little more than summaries of a gallery's activities over the previous season. The current exhibition at Toronto's Diaz Contemporary, however, departs from predictability in refreshing ways. First, it's all about sculpture, an increasingly embattled discipline (sculpture tends to take up too much space in a congested word). And second, the show includes work by artists not officially a part of the Diaz stable – an act of considerable curatorial generosity by gallery owner Benjamin Diaz.

It's a big exhibition and a very good one, so it won't be possible here to give every work its due. A couple of pieces clearly stand out, however. One is Kristiina Lahde's *Re-Tread*. The work looks like a full-scale tractor tire, except that its granular texture and porousness reveal that the tire has been fabricated from black-painted Polyethylene foam.

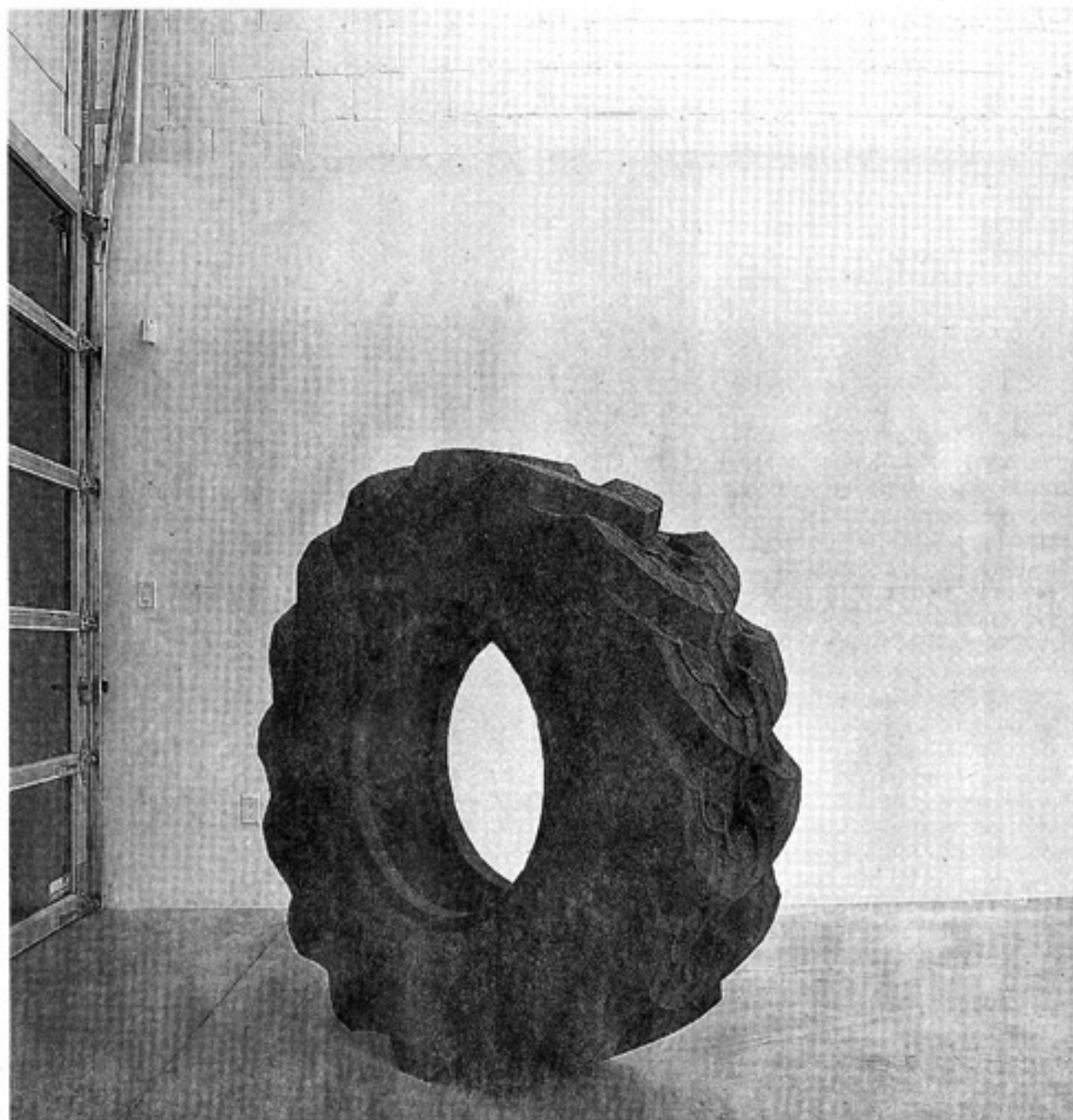
If the design of the tire – which is based on a tire off a

Massey-Harris tractor from the 1940s – seems a little awry, it may be because its treads, according to Lahde, are “made to emulate the neo-gothic carved wood and stone architectural details found throughout Hart House” at the University of Toronto.

Why is this significant? Because, as Lahde explains in her gallery statement, Hart House was given to the university in 1919 by the Massey family (and named after Hart Massey). And here's the point that, for Lahde, informs the work and gives it meaning: “Combining the tractor tire and neo-Gothic patterns, *Re-Tread* brings together the seemingly opposed ideological positions between [sic] the architecture of Hart House and the industry that created it.”

This combining of industrial design history and architectural history, of utility and philanthropy, is admittedly witty. But is it anything more? Probably not, though the work is so elegantly realized that it can be enjoyed as a strikingly intense sculptural object. And whether or not the artist's synthesizing of two design modes is a revelation or merely a dandification of the work itself is a moot point. Post-modern art does this kind of historical digging all the time – and often to anti-climactic ends.

Another couple of pieces – also black – work in similar ways. Andrew Reyes' wickedly titled *Adults* is a gigantic, glistening black plastic reel-to-reel tape recorder, as technically realistic as those charming fake computers and CD play-



Kristiina Lahde's tractor tire *Re-Tread* on display at the Diaz group show. DIAZ CONTEMPORARY/JESSE BOLES

ers that furniture stores like to add to mock-up rooms. “The obviousness of [the work's] monumentality,” intones the gallery's statement, “along with its allusion to

dead technology is the artist's mediation on modernity.” That's how modernity is everywhere – and incorrectly – seen now: as big and dead.

James Carl's two *Woof* sculp-

tures, “black serpentine carvings that mimic Bose audio speakers,” are as sonically mute and as sculpturally forceful as Reyes' tape recorder.

The result of a prodigious

job of carving (and who carves any more?), the two *Woof* works, one big, one small, are thorough cancellations of their original function. I'm not sure it makes sense to expect the viewer (as the gallery statement suggests) to hereby “reconsider the everyday objects of consumer culture.” Reconsider them how?

The last of the black objects in the exhibition are two airplane models by artist-musician Dallas Wehrle. Wehrle has made two balsa-wood Cessnas, and each of them sprouts one extravagantly elongated wing. Why this is so fascinating is not easy to say. Maybe because it feels as if the one long wing has grown (like Pinocchio's nose) while you're inspecting it.

There is a lot of other fine work in the show: Michelle Bellemare's brilliant Tupperware *Casket*, Carlo Cesta's *Vertical Blind*, Flavio Trevisan's ambitious *Public Space (grotto)*, and *Big Blue*, a study in sculptural ambiguity and cultural cross-purposes by Daniel Borins and Jennifer Marman. All this and, as they say, more.

**PHIL IRISH
AND ADRIAN WILLIAMS
AT ANGELL GALLERY**

\$1200-\$5200. Until September 1,
890 Queen St. W., 416-530-0444

Adrian Williams, one of the six founding members of the Art Lodge (that free-wheeling, homespun, art-making gathering of friends and relatives which met every Wednesday night from 1996 until 2003 and spawned the now internationally celebrated Marcel Dzama), has been out on his own for a few years now. He is cur-