

Danny Singer's mural captures a bustling, multicultural Vancouver

KEVIN GRIFFIN
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A detail from *Drive-by*, by Danny Singer, offers us a glimpse of what happens in the shadows of sites we pass each day. Everything is familiar yet easily pushed to the back of our minds. **Photograph by:** Handout, Files

A horizontal mural that replicates the experience of driving through Metro Vancouver while catching glimpses of the passing urban landscape is being shown at Seymour Art Gallery in Deep Cove.

Danny Singer's *Drive-by* mural is just under 11 metres (70 feet) in length and about a metre (three feet) in height and covers three walls of the gallery. With cinematic presentation, the work's continuous image is like a horizontal film strip comprising many city scenes of buildings and people on sidewalks. Some are blurred in just the way a passerby is seen out of the corner of the eye from the window of a passing bus or car. Others are more sharply defined in the way that someone wearing bright red might stand out, or a profile or face might resemble a friend or someone close to you who has died.

The Lower Mainland depicted by *Drive-by* is a bustling, exciting, multicultural city on the move. It's full of recognizable urban landmarks and street scenes: the Japadog food cart, Library Square, East Hastings Street, as well as cyclists and joggers, confused tourists and a woman reaching out to a man on Granville Street. It includes a boarded-up window of The Bay from the Stanley Cup Riot

that reads WE (heart) YOU CANUCKS, and the Panorama Market in Deep Cove just across the street from where Drive-by is being exhibited. The photographs were taken as far back as decade ago but don't look dated. They look like they're from a historical present where memories of today mingle with memories of yesterday.

Standing in the gallery and looking at Drive-by from beginning to end I find it difficult not to turn and move in a way that mimics Singer's own travels through the urban landscape.

To take the photographs in Drive-by, Singer moved through streets in a van that he specially modified. He made a rig that included a camera for the passenger side that faced out the window, perpendicular to the sidewalk.

While on the road, he controlled the camera with a cable. Images were taken with a flash, which tends to "freeze" some figures.

"I drive, I see something, I hit the button and I hope I've gotten something," he said in an interview in the gallery. "Often I find I've shot something I didn't expect. It's very random.

"Using the long exposure, it replicates the idea of travelling. They're not just snapshots. Every shot has an aspect of motion in it."

Singer said movement is a theme in a lot of his work. As far back as the 1960s when he was living in Montreal, he was intrigued with the city's stone facades, which he wanted to capture in a continuous image.

He found an old aerial mapping camera from the Second World War that he thought would do what he wanted. Among the problems he faced was that he couldn't get the camera to focus properly — it was meant to take images from 610 metres (2,000 feet) not six metres (20 feet). But the idea stuck with him of somehow creating images while on the move through a city.

About a decade ago, while working for an architect in Vancouver, Singer found himself regularly driving from the North Shore to Gastown through the Downtown Eastside. The drive through the city got him thinking about architectural memory. A building in a particular spot can be part of the city's urban landscape for decades and then disappear through redevelopment with little but a fading memory as evidence of its existence.

“I felt the same way about what I’ve seen,” he said. “I’m a scanner; when I drive I’m looking everywhere but straight on. The things I see, I don’t know if I’ve seen them now, a week ago, on this street or that street. The whole idea of fragments of memory started to come together.”

During the past decade, developments in digital technology have caught up to Singer’s ideas about photography.

Having developed skills in complicated digital photographic techniques for his commercial work, he began to apply them to his art.

Singer also has done a series of photographs of small towns on the Canadian and U.S. prairies. Many of them emphasize the flatness of the landscape by being produced in narrow horizontal prints. They were shown earlier this year in an exhibition at Gallery Jones.

An earlier and much shorter two-metre version of Drive-by was shown at Artropolis in 1997.

Singer’s Drive-by show, curated by Rachel Rosenfield Lafo, represents a new direction for the Seymour Art Gallery of presenting more curated exhibitions.

Next year, Ron Kong is guest curating an exhibition called Fireworks, which will feature craft works created by fire or heat. Also in 2012, Lafo will be guest curating a second exhibition called Odd Occurrences: Narrative in the art of Kristin Bjonerud, Tamara Bond, Tomoyo Ihaya and Carrie Walker.

kevingriffin@vancouver.sun.com

At a glance

Drive-by: Danny Singer

Where: Seymour Art Gallery, 4360 Gallant Avenue, Deep Cove, North Vancouver

When: Daily to Sunday, Nov. 27. The gallery is open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. seven days a week.

Admission: Free.

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