

**this is tomorrow**  
**Contemporary Art Magazine**

**IAIN BAXTER& / Adam Chodzko**  
**Raven Row, 56 Artillery Lane, London E1 7LS**  
**11 July – 11 August 2013**

**Review by Marianne Templeton**  
**<http://www.thisistomorrow.info/viewArticle.aspx?artId=1948>**  
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Left to right:

Iain Baxter&: *Landscape with Cirrus Cloud*, 1965; *Four Plastic Bottles*, 1965;  
*Still Life with Carrot*, 1965

Courtesy of TrépanierBaer Gallery, Collection Fonds régional d'art contemporain  
Bretagne and the artist; Photograph by Marcus J. Leitch

IAIN BAXTER& and Adam Chodzko make a good double act. For their current exhibition at Raven Row, both artists have been permitted to utilise spaces within the building that are usually inaccessible to the public; both have promptly constructed installations that are themselves inaccessible experiences. Private space is breached, but the encounter is compromised.

Chodzko's installation 'Desert Island' seems to break out of the lower gallery through a skylight, while 'Like This' has absconded to the roof altogether, visible only through a second floor window. Both works exhibit a sort of deliberate formal dyslexia: familiar materials assembled in unusual ways. 'Desert Island' takes the romantic trope of solitude and isolation, and morphs it into a stage of the type constructed by children on which to enact their games of exoticism and imagination: a pile of dirt for an island; a blue tarpaulin for the sea.

Meanwhile, BAXTER& has reworked his landmark 1966 installation 'Bagged Place' as 'Rebecca's Bagged Place', encasing in clear plastic every item—from carpet to ceramic cat statuette—in Rebecca Levy's fully-furnished apartment, which occupies the top floor of the Raven Row building. (Levy lived in the apartment from 1918 to 2009, after which her family donated the rooms to the gallery). The polyethylene sheeting both facilitates public entry into this period interior, and distances the visitor from it by mediating all surface contact and impeding the senses. Familiar domestic scenes become alien; every surface is allocated its own bubble of personal space.

Orchestrating these sorts of situations is business as usual for BAXTER& and Chodzko, whose individual practices—though originating in the 1950s and 1990s respectively—are both built on tactics of encountering, recontextualising and documenting. Both escape the claustrophobic internal reference system of the art world by adopting and manipulating the languages of commerce, marketing, primary production and consumption, and everyday experience.

BAXTER& is a gem. Sidelined for decades, despite his major contribution to establishing Conceptual art's Vancouver School, he is now enjoying a revival following major retrospectives in Toronto and Chicago. A key innovator within the Canadian art scene in the 1960s and 1970s, he pioneered the use of installation and light boxes, and experimented with photoconceptualism and the integration of media technologies into art practice.

Combining a Pop Art attitude to mass culture with the interrogative tactics of Conceptualism, BAXTER& is also known for his ventures into corporate and retail spheres. He founded the company N. E. Thing Co. in 1966 as a joint venture with his wife Ingrid; it dissolved in 1978 when they separated. In 1977 he launched an 'art restaurant', Eye Scream, in Vancouver; it went bust within a few years, after serving up Cubist Salads and Filet Mignon with Wheels (a steak and four mushrooms, assembled like a car) to contemporaries such as Jeff Wall. He has also undertaken

personal rebranding, working briefly under the alias IT in the 1950s, and legally changed his name to include an ampersand in 2005.

The main galleries house a range of BAXTER&'s signature works, interspersed with some Chodzko interventions. It's a testament to BAXTER&'s forward-thinking and experimental outlook how contemporary many of his works look alongside those of the younger artist. A concern with the framing and experience of landscape runs throughout his back catalogue: a painting of rolling hills and blue skies made from moulded plastic; a durational performance designed to be experienced from a moving car; an early lightbox work—'Transcanada Highway Near Fort William, Ontario, Canada'—of a photograph taken through the windscreen on an N.E. Thing Co. road trip, showing only the road ahead, an insistent visual symbol of irrepressible linear progress cutting through nature.

BAXTER& has a genuine concern for social issues, particularly how we live with and relate to our environment, but his approach is never a retreat to pre-industrial nostalgia. Rather, he seeks ways to renegotiate physical and conceptual systems of production and consumption. As Canada's literal road to modernisation and economic expansion, carrying both primary resources and tourists along the border, the Trans-Canada Highway is a recurring motif for BAXTER&. So are other places and objects that reflect the output and surplus of industry, or the formal language of manufacturing structures and networks.

N. E. Thing Co. documented many of these structures—piles of timber; anonymous concrete slab buildings; stacks of empty fruit crates—and then declared them as either ACTs (Aesthetically Claimed Things) or ARTs (Aesthetically Rejected Things). ACTs tend to be visually reductive, as N. E. Thing Co. sought to locate the notoriously rigid aesthetics of Minimalism back in the landscape of the functional, from which their forms came. Several ACTs are on display at Raven Row, each labelled in scrawling black marker and stamped with a gold foil seal. These small acts of officialdom, of bestowing and revoking credit, and of certifying abstract values through stamps and certificates, transfers the onus of the art critic to the administrators of a socially-minded bureaucracy. It's witty and refreshing to see these faux-modernist objects subjected to banal research and management systems, surrounded by a jargon other than artspeak.

The strategies of product development are another means by which BAXTER& wrests art making away from its internal logic and recontextualises it within the network of everyday commodities. Things are processed, developed, integrated and improved. 'Pneumatic Judd' and 'Blown Out Flavin' revise physically and conceptually weighty Minimalism artworks as soft sculptures, drooping and full of (hot) air.

Chodzko also riffs on notions of mass and measurement with an installation of shelves laden with stones of varying sizes, fixed to the wall of a base of a stairwell (such that one must start up the stairs in order to properly view the work— interrupting the passage of other visitors, naturally). Each stone is labelled with the name of an object: 'book'; 'angle-poise lamp'; 'Makita drill'; 'handbag'; 'drenched handbag'. It's absurd, and about to become even more so, for the works' title— 'Props. For memorising the gravity of mime objects.'—reveals this to be Chodzko's proposed teaching kit for mime artists keen to improve the realism of their act. The scenario immediately plays out in one's mind. Chodzko's works are usually located before or after the act: a potential performance, or the remnants of one. (It is not always necessary for the performance to actually take place.)

Funny, enthusiastic, and always seemingly one step ahead of the curve, BAXTER& and Chodzko are each continually reinventing what it means to be an artist. This exhibition shows what Conceptual Art can do when it breaks out into the real world.