

Rooms Are Never Finished
by Nadia Kurd

In here it's deliberately dark so one may sigh
in peace. Please come in. How long has it been?
Upstairs- climb slowly- the touch is more certain.
You've been, they say, everywhere. What city's left?
I've brought the world indoors. One wants certainty...

Agha Shahid Ali, from *Rooms Are Never Finished* (2002)

The title of this essay, borrowed from poet Agha Shahid Ali's book of the same title, is an apt descriptor for the performative drawings presented in Matt Shane and Jim Holyoak's exhibition *Greyscale Rainbow*. For Shahid Ali, a room's interior is a metaphorical space that is both infinite, full of tactile memories and future possibilities, but one that can also never be fully completed or enclosed. Working along these similar lines, the large scale, architectural-like drawings presented by Shane and Holyoak create visceral and engrossing spaces that act as gateways to other pictorial worlds. For in *Greyscale Rainbow*, the walls of the gallery occupy the drawings, doodles and notes that Shane and Holyoak collaborate to make. The images, best characterized as a visual stream of consciousness are filled with a number of morphed animals, symbols and ink splatters. Imaginative and surreal, the work draws in and absorbs its viewers into a world that has been brought indoors.

What the viewer is ultimately presented with are not only a series of images ranging in scale and tones of grey, but remnants of a month long performance that has transgressed the lines between studio, gallery and home. Shane and Holyoak achieve these sensibilities by taking up residence inside the gallery and pushing the idyllic conventions of drawing to a more physical terrain. As a result, the viewer is immersed into a space that requires them to navigate through and touch the drawings created in the gallery. Moreover, the images produced during the exhibition have been quite literally 'lived with' and continue to evolve for the course of the show. These drawings are also reflective of the duo's working process, which as Holyoak writes, "is a blend of intention and chance that employs life drawing, drawing from found sources, as well as imagination and memory. I vary my techniques frequently while maintaining monochromatic constraints." Yet despite the 'monochromatic constraints' placed on the drawings, the shades of grey, black and white are neither dull nor passive- but provide an aesthetic that is graphic and responsive to the gallery's space. This is primarily due to the nature of the Shane and Holyoak's unique history of collaboration and by extension, the influence and contributions made by the viewer. For the length of *Greyscale Rainbowt*, Shane and Holyoak readily invite their viewer's to join them in their creative revelry.

Due to the interactive nature of *Greyscale Rainbow*, the gallery becomes a site where the physicality and mark making of drawing become explicitly connected. In other words, the scale and placement of the drawings, combined with the progression of living and making art in the gallery, bring together a range of experiences that help to connect how we understand the nature of collaborative work. Such an allegorical way of working, reminiscent of the theatrical nineteenth-century paintings of artist ateliers are in *Greyscale Rainbow* brought into the real-time space of the gallery. However, unlike the studio painting, there is no final 'end image' in Shane and Holyoak's artistic practice. Rather, what is left is a sense that this project could carry on almost indefinitely without exhausting the multiplicity of the images or the parameters of the space.

Without a doubt the journey that Shane and Holyoak embark upon can only be described as a series of passages through border zones and endless landscapes of images- open to anyone ready to join them. *Greyscale Rainbow* is at once grounded in the history of performance art and as a result, free of the two-dimensional conventions of drawing. It is this experimental and collaborative spirit of their work that allows for the collapse between artist and viewer. When brought into the gallery, these landscapes and zones become clearer to see, and therefore more interconnected because of the levels of engagement required from both artists and audiences. Indeed, the collaborative work of Shane and Holyoak shows the ways in which the rooms can never be finished and that perhaps the distinctions made between art, life and collaboration can never really be made. The month long exhibition of their work in *Greyscale Rainbow* offers us a glimpse into the complexities of collaboration, and allows us to amplify our own levels of gallery engagement.

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Sources:

Ali Shahid, Agha. *The Rooms Are Never Finished.* New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002.

Holyoak, Jim. *Artist Statement.* <http://www.monstersforreal.com/gallery/main.php> (Accessed 25 August 2009).

French translator: Colette Tougas

This text is part of a writing series by members of articule, reflecting on the works presented during the gallery's 2009-2010 programming season. Nadia Kurd's text has been produced for Matt Shane and Jim Holyoak's exhibition *Greyscale Rainbow*, presented from September 4 to October 4, 2009, and is also available as a pdf on the gallery's web site.

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