

BORDERCROSSINGS

A MAGAZINE OF THE ARTS

Jeff Wall

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Chris Dorosz

Chris Dorosz is an industrial-strength painter. He uses industrial materials as the substance of his art, while he uses the impermanence of media culture as his subject. In May of last year at Winnipeg's Plug In Gallery, he exhibited a series of paintings made from innumerable staples arranged on four-foot-square, stretched and primed canvasses. They formed images that the artist "stole from prime-time television": some catwalk models from *Fashion TV*, the set of *Wheel of Fortune*, Puff Daddy doing his bad boy thing, three figures from a fitness show working out against a Caribbean oceanscape, and The Spice Girls. From a distance the images settle into a fuzzy resolution, a sort of pixelated pointillism; up close they look like the myriad components of the fine art of Japanese cloisonné. These paintings are full of irony: their subject is the nature of transitoriness; the process of their making involves hours of painstaking, repetitive work.

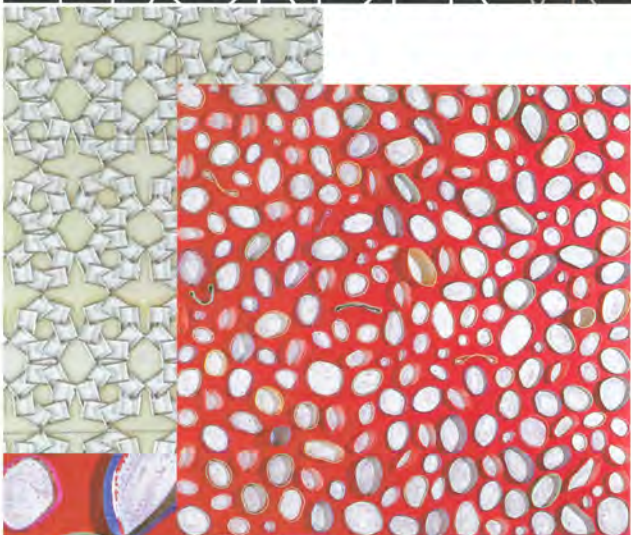
Dorosz began experimenting with unusual materials while he was still a student at NSCAD (the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design) in the mid-'90s. He did one series of paintings made from stretched wool afghans that he had collected at Value Village; another of Vego-matic paintings in which he painted on a piece of glass and then scraped the pigment off with a razor blade; still another series using plastic bags. "I started collecting things off the street and that led me into the rubber bands," he remembers, tracing the origin of his most recent body of work. "For some reason there was an abundance of rubber bands on the street in Halifax. It was amazing to me that in this age of technology people were still carrying packets of paper around under their arms and in the

The Philosopher of the Bottom Kitchen Drawer

winter time the elastics would fly off in the park. So my painting became a sort of historical document." The rubber-band paintings are a breakthrough and back-breaking as well; he orders boxes of rubber bands weighing 25 pounds each and goes through a gallon of paint a day. "They're hard to do. I'll lay on my stomach eight hours a day for a month to complete a single painting. Or I'll lean over the staple paintings for eight hours a day. It's hard work, but it becomes zen-like, like lying on a bed of nails."

Dorosz views his painting as serious fun that connects him to his own personal history. He is related to the Yeats clan that includes the painter Jack and the poet William Butler; he had an uncle who used to draw cartoons for Disney; and he went to a Montessori school as a child, where he drew whenever he wanted. "I had this funny sense of fate when I was little," he recalls. "I can remember drawing the Taj Mahal on my Skidoodle, and when I was seven I started replanning the Sistine Chapel ceiling, drawing large sketches of the figures and changing their poses."

By the time he graduated from Ryerson in 1992, he had made a firm decision: "I wanted to work alone in my studio and create things that are important to me and that talk about my experience." He was attracted to the rubber bands because "they just screamed domesticity and comfort. That's what life is made of, these small moments, the happenstances, the meanings we attribute to such things. These all come from a very personal space." Dorosz thinks of his painting



as an activity supported by a firm philosophical base that goes beyond issues of perception, duration and scale. "I would call it the philosophy of the bottom kitchen drawer," he says without a stretch of irony, "where everything can be seen in the microcosm of the rubber band." ■



(above) Janet Morton, *Newsflash*; *Mme Defarge eat your heart out*, 1995, installation Queen St. storefront. Photographs courtesy the artist and The Museum for Textiles, Toronto.

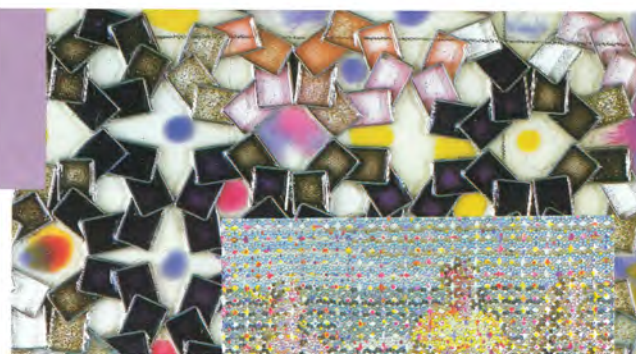
The Collectress

"I'm an obsessive collector, somebody who at the end of the week has this little pile of things that goes from my pocket to my bathroom counter. I don't seem able to throw things out." What Toronto artist Janet Morton has made out of her *salon de refuse* is a collection of objects unique in contemporary Canadian art and no less unusual in Canadian fashion: a 16-foot-long woollen work sock called *Memorial*; 229 colourful moths embroidered out of lace and beads and velvet; *Felled*, 300 work socks from her 10 years in the tree-planting business, reformed in the shape of leaves, some of which are attached to the gallery wall, while others are scattered on the floor; and *Cozy*, 700 sweaters from the Buy the Pound store

that transform a Ward's Island house into a surrogate tea pot. (*Cozy* will be installed in the spring of 2000 in downtown Toronto, where she will also have a one-person exhibition at The Museum for Textiles.) She has also knit a cardigan for a giraffe, a balaclava for a rhinoceros and work socks for an elephant. "I've done sketches for other animals too," she says. "It was a practical thing. I didn't have a studio and was working out of the smallest room in my house. It was a way of working large in a small space." The other positive thing about knitting was that it allowed her to combine productivity with congeniality. "I'm very social about my knitting; I take it out in public with me. I'm like a chain-smoker knitter."

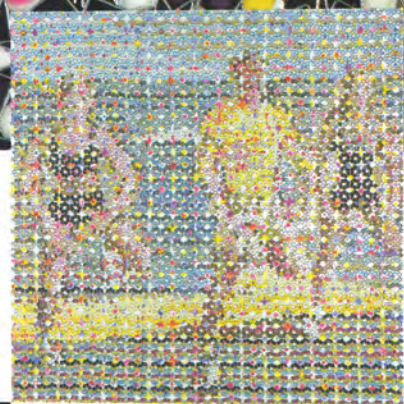


Felled (detail), 1997, 300 leaves made from used wool socks, 460 x 120 cm.



Chris Dorosz, *1/2 hr Caribbean Workout*, 1999, staples, acrylic/gel medium, sparkles on canvas, 4 x 4';

(below) Janet Morton, *Newsflash Blanket*, 1995, installed at The Museum for Textiles, 270 x 700 cm.



(facing page, top left) Chris Dorosz, *Screen 1* (detail), 1999, staples & gel medium on canvas, 4 x 4'. All photographs courtesy the artist and ARTCORE Gallery, Toronto.

(facing page, top right) Image from an *Accelerated Culture 1*, 1999, elastics & latex on board, 32 x 32". Detail below.

(facing page, bottom right) Image from an *Accelerated Culture 3*, 1999, elastics & latex on board, 8 x 8". Detail above.



Big Mitt, 1994, hand-knit acrylic wool, 470 x 140 cm.