

VISUAL ARTS » REVIEW

And you thought a cube was just a cube



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ROULA PARTHENIOU AT MKG127
\$500-\$5,000. Until May 17,
127 Ossington Ave., Toronto;
647-435-7682

In 2005, Toronto artist Roula Partheniou exhibited some exceedingly beguiling small works which looked for all the world like used books, but were, in fact, small canvases carefully painted to look like used books. She gave them the Duchampian designation, *Handmade Readymades* – after the great Dada artist Marcel Duchamp’s puckish classifying of the everyday objects he picked up in hardware stores (a snow shovel, a bottle rack), back around 1913, as “Readymades.”

But judging from her current exhibition, *100 Variations*, now at Toronto’s MKG127 (Michael Klein Gallery at 127 Ossington Ave.), Partheniou has returned to and continued the kind of process-based work that has engaged her for almost a decade.

It was back in 2000 that she undertook her *Plans for Living Series*, for which, in the course of three months, she made arrangements and then rearrangements (more than 80 of them) of her furniture objects and possessions. Then, in 2003-2004, Partheniou exhibited her *Cube Recording (for Sol Lewitt)*, a document in the form of a wall drawing which diagrammatically offered her particular solution to a 2X2 Rubik’s Cube, showing her progress, move by move, over the course of the entire year it took her to come to a solution.

“The completed drawing,” she notes on her website (www.roulapartheniou.com), “represents one of the over 43 quintillion possible solutions to the cube.” The allusion to Sol Lewitt, by the way, references the fact that the famous American minimalist frequently employed the cube in his art

both additively, as a building block, and as a solid to be subdivided into subsidiary cubes.

For her new *100 Variations*, Partheniou – animated as always by the serious joy of game-playing – began to make black and white photos of the hotly coloured cube. She noticed, as a result, that the red and green sides of the cube were now the same shade of grey.

This, of course, seriously skewed the fact that, with the colour drained from the cube – with two of its sides now interchangeable – new relationships suddenly opened up within the cube’s performative complexities. The cube would now be both easier to solve and more complex in its ramifications.

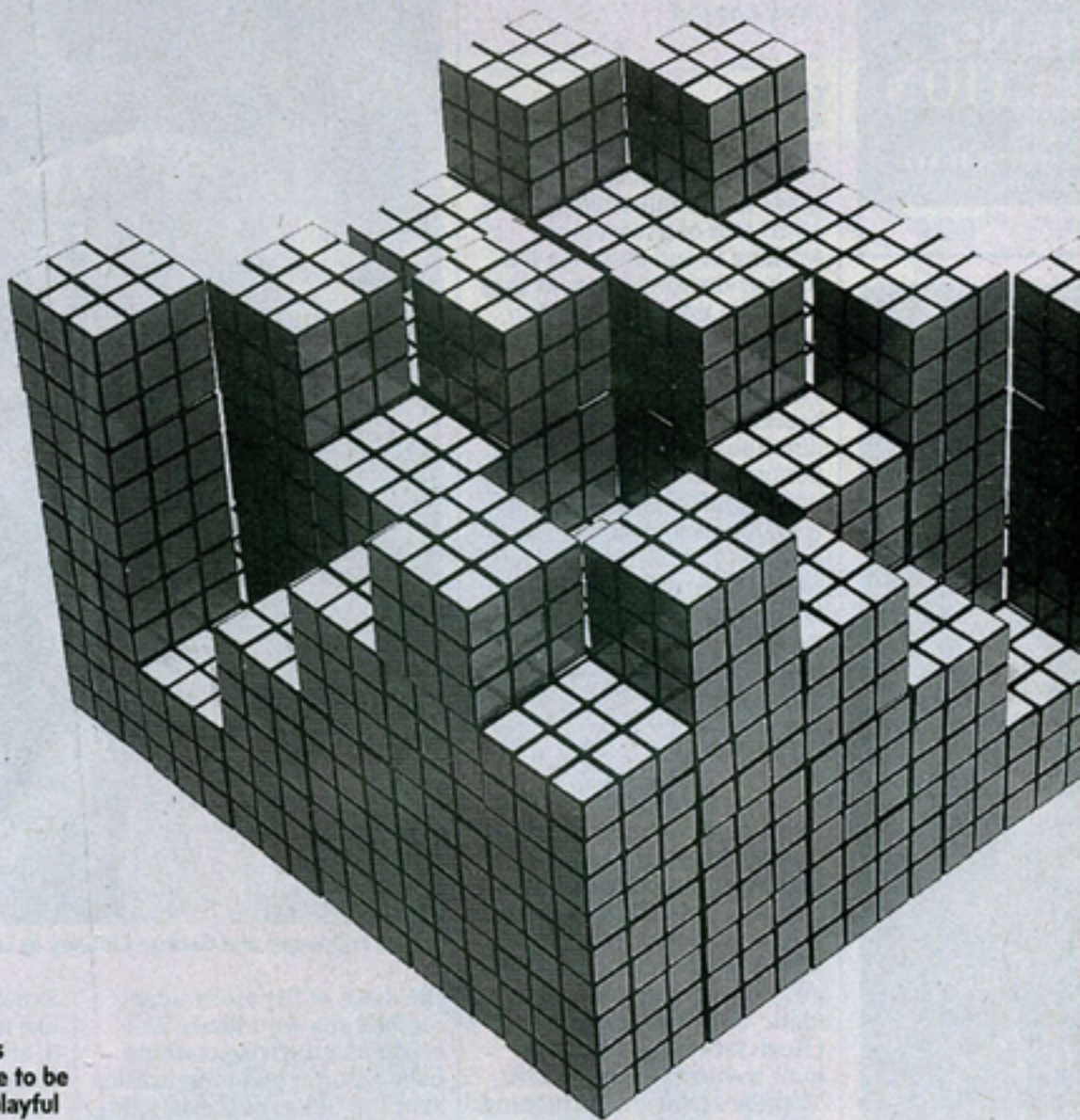
For the exhibition, Partheniou offers what she describes as a photo-documentation of

“a sculptural document.”

“I gave myself 100 cubes to work with,” she told me when we talked recently, “each of them stacked in the same orientation.” And while there are two actual, three-dimensional, scaled-up cubes in the show, most of the exhibition consists of small photographic groupings of three different cube-structures.

Whatever appeal *100 Variations* has for the systematically exacting, or for anarchic aficionados of exactitude gone awry, there is a great deal of pleasure to be derived just from the playful density of the exhibition, from its almost architectural there-ness.

There may be illusions aplenty here, as well as mathematical and optical fictions at work, but the whole exuberant installation nevertheless seems as solid as rock.



Roula Partheniou’s 100 Variations: There is a great deal of pleasure to be derived just from the playful density of this exhibition.

NICOLAS BAIER AT JESSICA BRADLEY ART + PROJECTS
\$5,000-\$11,000. Until May 3,
1450 Dundas St. W., Toronto;
416-537-3125

Montreal-based Nicolas Baier is one of those artists whose work seems absolutely brilliant and inevitable right after you’ve seen it. By which I mean, you’d probably never think of making photographs in Baier’s way, but once you’ve seen him do it, no other method seems direct enough and fearless enough, or fluid and reflexive enough.

Nobody I know but Baier would make a work like *La formation des nuages (Clouds Forming)* by carefully photographing a condensation-stained sheet of butcher paper stretched across a shop window – and exhibiting it as if it

were a delicate landscape drawing (a Claude Lorraine worthy of your respectation (which it merits)). Who but Baier photograph a crack in greenish marble (Pissarro offer it, cheekily mess side down under Pissarro an expressionistic landscape).

But the highlighting and exhilarating is surely Baier’s *Series*. Here, in this tentative work, the artist posed photographs segments of the mirror vanities – all of the distressed, much of the backing rubbed away them, in itself, evidence “the vanity of humankind or, at least, of the narcissism. What messy, scrubby, abject photograph beautiful? The poignant, frayed echo of their