

**LaBelle with MobArt**

by Robin Peckham

**Charles LaBelle**

The Hong Kong Museum of Medical Sciences  
No. 2 Caine Lane, Mid-Levels, Hong Kong,  
China

2010 May 28 - 2010 June 27



Organized by the nomadic commercial gallery project MobArt in a space lent by the privately administered Hong Kong Museum of Medical Sciences, a gloriously approachable heritage building and former bubonic plague clinic positioned off a small terrace in the crowded blocks just off Hollywood Road, this exhibition offers a thoughtful take on the relationship between the body and the built environment at a level rarely witnessed on the local exhibition circuit. Charles LaBelle has organized a portion of his ongoing project "Buildings Entered" (1997-), which consists of a photographic archive of every building he has physically entered for the past thirteen years, some of which are occasionally realized in drawings for specific exhibitions; this particular set of drawings is executed on the pages of *Corpus*, a set of theoretical and literary musings on the notion of "body" and its many textual allusions authored by the Continental philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy. The bulk of each page is whited out and covered over with the sketches in confident graphite strokes, leaving visible only highlighted and underlined excerpts that provide clues to LaBelle's personal interpretation of the text from one page to the next. The sheets are then displayed in five glass vitrines on angled wooden tables in three rooms, arranged in paginated order, a curatorial decision that draws significantly more attention to the continuity of the text than has been the case elsewhere. The buildings selected for reproduction are all somehow related to the body--some more directly than others: a strip club, a tattoo parlor, a prison, and a tent all make appearances--and engage with the particular textual excerpts on their respective pages in occasionally fascinating ways.

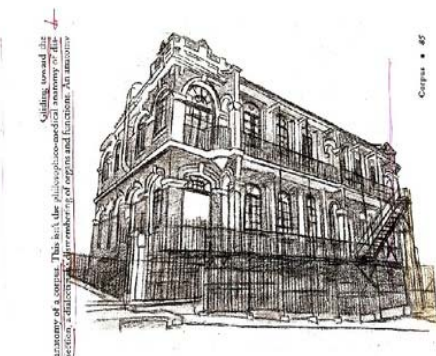


This is clearly a mature project at this point, and the tight but not quite domineering relationship between site, text, and drawing is a major coup for the gallery. Most enthralling is the almost accidental aesthetics of the database that emerges when the project is positioned in this way, encouraging a variety of paths through LaBelle's archive not simply limited to the paginated linearity on offer but also including a geographic arrangement, a chronological retracing of the artist's steps, and even a psychogeographic road trip across both continents and library stacks. Despite this openness to interpretation, however, a nagging feeling remains that the project leans too heavily at times on the gravitas and prepackaged theoretical narrative of the poststructuralist texts on which it manifests itself. This is ameliorated by the obvious touch of the hand of the artist and the sense of his personal reading of the books involved, but it may prove worthwhile to observe how

future installments of "Buildings Entered" evolve; a higher level of diversity in the accompanying textual material could take the drawings themselves in new directions, building on the rich historical, literary, and personal allusions no doubt inherent to the stories behind the structures in question while engaging with philosophical practice beyond the established canon.

-- Robin Peckham

(Images, from top to bottom: Hong Kong Museum of Medical Sciences; Installation Shot; Marie Le Veaux's House of Voodoo New Orleans. All images courtesy of MobArt and the



artist.)