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BGL is Having Better Fun, with Fewer Mistakes



BGL

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The Quebec-based trio, **BGL**, can be counted on to have a damn good time. Comprised of **Jasmin Bilodeau**, **Sébastien Giguère**, and **Nicolas Laverdière**, the collective has been making waves [soldering lawn-chair refuse into fair rides](#) (see [MASS MoCA, "Oh, Canada"](#)) and slapping white cube galleries with dead flies since meeting at **Université de Laval** twenty years ago. "We were each of us working in painting, when we met," says Lavadiere. "But we quickly abandoned it for installation. It was much easier for us," he laughs. Bilodeau nods, "we transformed all the places we rented. We played with what was already there. It was a kind of institute piece, every time." Giguère grins and shakes his head.

After numerous awards, public commissions, and solo exhibitions, BGL has arguably transcended its scrappy beginnings. But its agenda has maintained an all-important seed of mischief, savvy, and outsized fun. The collective regularly approaches Nuit Blanche commissions - the world over, it would seem - with more conviction and spirit than the cities can appear to hold themselves, on those flagging all-nighters. They drop rainforests into office buildings, office buildings into alleyways, and whimsically-faux street fires which run the length of Paris warehouses. Their media runs the gamut of fiberglass, taxidermied animals, and found refuse, and is easier to categorize by what, in fact, they don't use – or haven't. Until now.

A summer exhibition at **Diaz Contemporary**, “Better Mistakes,” suggests the trio is far from finished exploring its possibilities – both in terms of media, and the referents their chosen media draws on. Though a seemingly conventional choice, for the group, even a kind of reversion to its beginnings, BGL is painting again. Bilodeau explains, “We are painting, but we're trying to produce paintings that are more three-dimensional, more sculptural.” Taken from another un-BGL-like medium, photography, the images bear an association to abstraction, while being rooted in images of warehouses and alleyway garage doors. “We were not even sure we wanted to paint – but this is something different, for us. We've been amassing these images for so long, we were pulled to try and make something similar.”

The large-scale vinyl works on display in BGL's latest show are suggestively non-figurative, but based off photographs the group has been amassing for over a decade. The found surfaces they've been photographing are layered with peeling paint that's cracked into weathered visions. In BGL's attempt to simulate the effects, they've rendered vinyl into touchable fresco-like canvases, and have made slyly figurative gestures. The works find themselves at the juncture of paint, photography, and sculpture.

ARTINFO Canada arrived for an interview with the trio a day before “Better Mistakes” opened. Amid a scene of last-minute flourishes and paint, the gallery more closely resembled an artist's studio than one of Toronto's better-known white cube galleries. There lay a napping Bilodeau and Giguère, curled up on makeshift mattresses amid a mess of paint brushes, partially-installed “rides,” and a curtain of hand-painted wooden strings. Diaz Contemporary's owner and gallerist, **Benjamin Diaz**, ushered me in with a finger pressed to his lips, as his beagle tip-toed around, rousing the group with her clicking paws. “It always looks like a frantic mess, when they come. BGL very much treats this like a studio until the last minute,” Diaz reflected, looking more amused than concerned.

When Laverdière returned from running errands, the three slightly unkempt but no less charming figures circled around their spilled paint cans and partially-hinged gallery rides to discuss the new work, the old work, and all the fun they're having in between.

I'm watching Sébastien continue to peel the vinyl on one of these new paintings, as we speak. Is there a point when you know you're done?

Laverdière - When satisfaction arrives! It's intuitive.

Where did the ambition come from to produce painting, at this point?

Laverdière - We have taken a lot of images, for ten years now, of vinyl that was so old it would just come off the walls. We have tons of pictures of these -- but we didn't want to exhibit them. They became visual help for us, though, images for us to copy the effect of. We wanted to show a brand-new painting that, when you see it, you think it's old.

What kind of painters were you when you met at Laval?

Laverdière - Colorful! We were playing with patterns. We were a bit different from one another, but we had the same desire to play.

When you were producing your earliest on-site installations, in your rented spaces, were you doing this for primarily practical - financial - reasons, or was it your prerogative as artists to work with found materials?

Laverdière - Well ... Both. [laughter]. But it was more about being inspired by the place. The idea came from the place itself; we just had to buy some paint. Have you seen what we did with this place [Diaz] in our 2009 show? We made the beams look like they were burned. We are most comfortable converting the spaces we walk into.

Bilodeau – You can see in some of these photographs a circle that's rings out. You can tell that the wall bore a fist-punch at some point. It's beautiful because you feel the impact through time, with these.

Would you consider these abstract works, or, because they're based off a very real phenomenon, are you not thinking of them in that way?

Bilodeau - We are not ... abstract guys. [laughter] The one over there that looks to us like skin, we call it "old skin." It's always associative with us.

Giguère – But maybe pop?

It's a word I do think about, in relation to your practice. Maybe because you appear to be having so much fun, and there is so much color and humor in the work. How do you feel about the word 'pop' in relation your work?

Laverdière - In Quebec, a lot of my favorite artists are pop, so I feel proud -- to keep on doing something colorful and with humor, and to be associated with those guys makes me proud.

Of all the various media you've engaged with, and considering this stock of photos, why have you stayed away from exhibiting photography?

Bilodeau - Photography doesn't have the same sensuality as this, for instance [sweeping gesture to the vinyl paintings]. In a photo you wouldn't have this. Bricolage is very important to us, though -- the touch, the material.

Laverdière - We can marry the pattern to something, and then it becomes something we never thought possible. The other reason is, we are super bad with computers -- we're not keen to modify images. [laughter]

Are you experiencing more freedom in your practice, as you gain success?

Laverdière - Freedom is related to money, and we still have the same bank accounts as we did in the beginning so ... [laughs] We are less shy to try things, now, though. Our expenses are growing ... But we share our successes, you know? We split our earnings.

Giguère - Same as Aerosmith.

Where did the name “Fancy Canada” – the title of your lauded ‘ride’ at MASS MoCA – come from?

Laverdière - There is a story there. It's written on the Heinz tomato juice cans. In French it translates as “Canada Fantastique.” It means something like "super unimportant, and frivolous, and yaya"; we loved it in French. So we translated it to English and liked it that way too.

So the title is yet another found material ...

BGL - Yes!

What was it like exhibiting with so many significant Canadian artists, in North Adams? Did it give you some perspective on what Canadian art is?

Bilodeau - It's a huge country, for us. We were surprised to be chosen, and placed in front of the museum, no less ... It was a big honor.

Laverdière - We met a lot of people, and we knew some of them too; we were super happy to see new work by our friends. We saw work by [Graeme Patterson](#), who we love, and we met [Etienne Zack](#) - he's so fun! We love him.

Bilodeau -- It was a big squeeze, that show.

Why do you make Quebec City your home?

Laverdière - It's cheap, maybe half the price of Montreal. Also we have this big center, called **Méduse**, and we use the workshop. We've been members for 16 years. You don't have to buy all the tools -- it's \$5 a day. We did everything in this exhibition there -- can you imagine?

What is the artist culture like in Quebec City?

Laverdière -- Sexy! Very sexy. [feels himself up]

Go on

Laverdière - [laughter] No it's like a family. And lots of people are crazy, so we fit well in that group.

Bilodeau - We had dinner with the mayor of Quebec, and he said "in Quebec, mostly you share your trick." If someone asks you how something is done, it's a pleasure to tell them. In Montreal, it's not the same dynamic. It's more competitive. "Keep your secret if you want to live."

Laverdière - We were nominated for an award once and we called older artists to get their advice on what and how to present. They were super generous. That's the kind of good dynamic in Quebec.

You worked with ten students at York University, on “Fancy Canada.” What was your experience of leading your assistants?

Laverdière – Well 'leading' is a big word. They were pretty free. But they helped up to produce the flags for MASS MoCA. And we had a student who was really good at welding, and he really worked a lot, he didn't do any of his own work, in fact, just focused on the ride.

I heard that of all the many materials Picasso could weild, welding always eluded him. It was hard on his ego to hire welders to help.

Giguère - Like us! Hard on our ego, too! Yes, we want to learn.

Bilodeau – Yes, soon enough. It will be another thing to play with.

[Contemporary Arts](#), [BGL](#), [Diaz Contemporary](#), [MASS MoCA](#), [York University](#), [Nuit Blanche](#), [Etienne Zack](#), [Graeme Patterson](#)

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