

AKIMBLOG



TORONTO

TERENCE DICK

RICHARD IBGHY & MARILOU LEMMENS AT YYZ ARTISTS OUTLET

November 09, 2016

The painfully impersonal assessment of crunched numbers was nowhere more in evidence than last night as the entire world watched chart after chart slowly tally millions of digits to declare the leader of the most dangerous country on the planet. While the scales tilted inexorably toward someone so flagrantly ill suited for the job he cranks the danger dial up to eleven, I tried to imagine every one of those hundreds of thousands of votes for the red side as a flesh and blood human who I could perhaps understand and even reason with. But the numbers kept coming until all I could see was a graphic map slowly filling with colour. And the more I saw one colour, the more my heart dropped, the angrier I got, the less hope I had, and the less I understood. The numbers kept coming and they were endlessly debated, but somewhere buried beneath them were real people. Those lives – along with those of us on the rest of the planet who had to helplessly stand by as the disaster unfolded – were about to be changed in ways that no one can predict except to say it doesn't look good.

Richard Ibgby & Marilou Lemmens, *Real GDP per Capita and Share of Global Population (2011)*, 2016, wood

My visit to the current exhibition at **YYZ Artists Outlet** had, in a sense, prepared me for such a graphic display of pessimistic outcomes. **Richard Ibgby** and **Marilou Lemmens'** wooden translations of statistical results do a good job of heightening one's suspicion that dismal results are often hidden in visually appealing simplifications. Their models are elegant tabletop renderings of such significant data sets as *Income Inequality in the United States (1910-2010)* and *Wage Growth Across Percentiles for Full-Time Workers*. Each one uses line, colour, and shape to describe a movement or capture a contrast from one field to the next. Freed from context they resemble maquettes for sculptures inspired by the kind of Modernist abstraction that leans to hard edges and geometric arrangement. There's even a touch of Minimalism in them as they reduce all information to the barest of elements and leave a lot of space within their composition for, one hopes, contemplation. However, as in those art historical styles, there is a coldness to their calculated expression that strikes one as inhuman and maybe even a little oppressive.

Richard Ibgby & Marilou Lemmens, *Disparities in Access to Care for Selected Groups*, 2016, wood, coloured gel

The clinical objectivity of the statistical analysis is presented here as the corollary to the rigorous refining of Modernism's pursuit of essences and truth. And just as the latter became a dominant narrative that excluded a polyphony of expression, the former eliminates lived experience in the creation of images that profess to capture the truth. Thankfully, Ibgby and Lemmens resist any

urge to sculpt in steel and wire. Their frail wood dowels and loosely hung coloured string, combined with the handwritten titles on tape that label each work, undercut the authority of these charts by being constructed in a handcrafted manner. They are only models like model airplanes, and as such not to be taken literally. Mistaking the model for the real thing has long been a key to deception and if we're going to navigate the next four years of a US president who already proven himself an unparalleled liar, then we're going to have pay close attention to the difference.

YYZ Artists Outlet: <http://www.yyzartistsoutlet.org/>

Richard Ibgby & Marilou Lemmens: Drawing Rainbows in Unequal Air continues until December 3.

Terence Dick is a freelance writer living in Toronto. His art criticism has appeared in Canadian Art, BorderCrossings, Prefix Photo, Camera Austria, Fuse, Mix, C Magazine, Azure, and The Globe and Mail. He is the editor of Akimblog. You can follow his quickie reviews and art news announcements on Twitter [@TerenceDick](https://twitter.com/TerenceDick).
