

Feature

[Report a p](#)Reece Terris *Ought Apartment* 2009 Detail / photo Rachel Topham

6. Reece Terris at the Vancouver Art Gallery; Cedric Bomford at Red Bull 381 Projects, Toronto; An Te Liu in the Leona Drive Project, Toronto; BGL at Parisian Laundry, Montreal

As noted earlier, sculpture has seen a reawakening in artist studios and galleries across the country within the last several years, and these four projects constitute a few of 2009's more memorable and ambitiously scaled excursions into three dimensions. [Terris](#) collected, transported and rebuilt a multi-decade history of domestic space inside the [Vancouver Art Gallery](#). [Bomford](#) made a penitentiary/detention camp watchtower inside Toronto's energetic [Red Bull exhibition space](#). [Liu](#) converted a vacant suburban tract bungalow into a green Monopoly house that drew the city and the recent financial meltdown into its orbit. [BGL](#) stage-set the coming landscape of climate chaos and called it "Posterity." Together, they pointed to the new comfort with object art as a means of delivering a tactile, body-oriented entry to an ever more fragile-seeming futurity.

Monique Mouton *Untitled* 2009

5. Monique Mouton at Blanket Contemporary, Vancouver

Continuing in Vancouver at [Blanket](#) until December 19 is an exhibition of paintings by [Monique Mouton](#), who has been part of recent abstraction shows at the [Vancouver Art Gallery](#) and [Diaz Contemporary](#) in Toronto. Working rough and small on irregularly shaped panels, Mouton improvises colours, shapes and paint textures into impressively balanced paintings where equilibrium is always tentative and precarious, and goes beyond the compositional formulas of traditional graphics and painting. It's this visible process of assembly with unsteady, personalized elements that links her into the decade's reinvented abstraction of London's [Tomma Abts](#), Vancouver's [Elizabeth McIntosh](#) and Montreal's [Chris Kline](#)—an abstraction that resides not in the material spectacle of paint that largely defined modernist abstraction, but rather in the tracking and nurture of elusive subjective structure. The end results are paintings that honour a constructed, if humble, wholeness that stands as a way of being in the 21st century.



Apichatpong Weerasethakul *Phantoms of Nabua* 2009 Video still

4. Apichatpong Weerasethakul in TIFF Future Projections at the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, Toronto

Thai filmmaker [Apichatpong Weerasethakul](#), one of the standouts at the last [Carnegie International](#), ended up in a projection space at the [Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art](#) during this year's [Toronto International Film Festival](#) at the same time as the opening of the buoyant crowd-pleaser exhibition "[Arena](#)," which was devoted to art and hockey. Weerasethakul's *Phantoms of Nabua* had a shadowy crowd of young men kicking around a flaming fireball, but aside from the soccer/hockey sports link, no two shows could have been more different. While local TV cameras photographed former Leaf Darryl Sittler and the hockey art went begging for prime-time audiences, Weerasethakul's film cast a spell of ambiguous menace and extraordinary beauty that unfolded with loose mystery and relentless logic as the fireball burned away a makeshift projection screen to reveal an unseen film projector in the midst of the night game. For those keeping score, it was Poetry 1, Hockey 0.



"Global Warning" 2009 Installation view Courtesy of Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal / photo Christine Guest

3. "Global Warning" and J.W. Waterhouse at the Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal

We've already made a case for [Stéphane Aquin's "Global Warning" exhibition](#) elsewhere on this site, but as part of this top-10 list it needs some reiteration: this is a remarkably astute show about one of the defining aspects of contemporary art in the first decade of the 21st century. Installed in the underground walkway between the museum's two exhibition pavilions, it is a remarkable exhibition of purchased permanent-collection artworks and gifts including Roy Arden's stellar hockey-riot video *Supernatural*. Just as engaging, however, is the [J.W. Waterhouse show](#) on view upstairs. Its fascination lies not with the art—Waterhouse's paintings are prurient Victorian historical fantasies—but rather with the stagecraft used in mounting the exhibition. It just might have been the best theatre of 2009: a black-painted S&M cavern that made a series of private alcoves for the paintings. If you can't show important art, it's good to know that there are exhibition designers out there who can pick up the slack.



Mark Lewis *Nathan Phillips Square, A Winter's Night, Skating* 2009 Film still Courtesy the artist, Monte Clark Gallery, Clark & Faria and Galerie Serge le Borgne

2. Mark Lewis at the Venice Biennale and Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, Toronto

[Lewis](#) made the notoriously difficult Canada Pavilion work by reversing the entry and letting the spiral pattern of the space widen into a small amphitheatre rather than narrow into a corner—a natural, now-obvious choice if you show projections. Outside the [Biennale](#), at a cinema, he also debuted a surprisingly funny new film about pioneers of the now digitally displaced rear-projection technique that he uses in a number of his films. The sharpest focus on his practice, however, came with

commissioner [Barbara Fischer](#)'s survey organized for the [Barnicke](#) after Venice that included more short films shot at Toronto locations over the past decade. They show Lewis' interest in forcing film into a self-consciousness of seeing, a formal self-awareness that makes the act of watching film's displaced reality become synonymous with real-time perception. It is a double take that honours the distant point of view from which Lewis' films usually begin and roots them in a uniquely Canadian (or is it Torontonian?) consciousness.



Paul-Émile Borduas *Bercement silencieux* 1956 Estate of Paul-Émile Borduas / SODRAC 2008

1. "The Automatiste Revolution" at the Varley Art Gallery, Unionville

A 25th anniversary has a way of pulling thoughts of history to the forefront, and as we come to the end of *Canadian Art*'s silver-anniversary year, we've published a [winter issue](#) about the making of history that underscores the necessity of capturing it to keep it alive. On those terms, [Roald Nasgaard](#)'s exhibition "[The Automatiste Revolution](#)" lands at the top of this list as the most impressive exhibition of 2009. His show retrieves the arrival of a homegrown avant-garde that not only had artistic consequences for art-making across Canada but also had social consequences in helping to spur the modernization of Quebec. It is a show that also stakes an international claim for the Automatistes in terms of postwar abstraction; it sought out a touring opportunity that in the new year takes it to the [Albright-Knox](#) in Buffalo, where the works will sit alongside that museum's key and forward-thinking collection of American abstract expressionist paintings. The show makes a welcome return of Nasgaard to Canadian programming since his days at the [Art Gallery of Ontario](#). That the impetus for his ambitious show comes from a satellite public gallery also speaks volumes about curatorial agendas at larger institutions. Be that as it may, the show, alongside its many public attributes, also brings us into intimate contact with something as simple as a thick, blocky smear of oil paint on canvas that becomes not only part of a [Borduas](#) painting and a defining moment in Canadian art history, but also an historical moment in 20th-century painting. It's an exhibition that reminds us how good art can travel far, whether it's travelling at the moment or not.

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The Automatiste Revolution: Our Painting History, Reframed

This might be the retrieval exercise of the decade, if not the quarter century. Curator Roald Nasgaard, on the heels of his book *Abstract Painting in Canada*, has put together a key exhibition of Quebec's Automatiste movement—the first one ever to travel to the United States.

Global Warning: The Life Below

One of the best shows in Canada at the moment lies beneath Sherbrooke Street in the underground corridor that links the pavilions of the Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal. As Richard Rhodes observes, what was once a lonely walkway now offers a hard-hitting visual experience.