

# OUTRAGEOUS ART BEHAVIOUR: CAUGHT IN TAPE



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One of the good things about this art-critic gig is that galleries, hungry for media attention — any attention — send me invitations to exhibitions and provide me with images of the work long before I see the actual show. I have to admit, this saves me a lot of time.

One glance at a postcard decorated with some ugly paintings or an e-mail packed with jpegs of boring sculptures, and I've spared myself a bike ride across town, as

well as that queasy feeling bad art gives me in the bottom of my intestines.

Sometimes, however, I get fooled. Case in point: When I received the Tatar Gallery's invitation to Joseph Davidson's exhibition of sculptures made out of Scotch tape (you can't make this stuff up), my first thought was not kind. Apart from the fact that the sculptures on the postcard look like peanut-butter jars covered with flat white wax, art made out of common clear tape is as much a non-starter (or so I thought) as a film starring Tim Allen. What could be more banal than Scotch tape? Aren't the landfills full enough?

My second thought was even less Christian: I'll see this stupid show and trash it. Tape art — ha! Why not make lampshades out of Popsicle sticks, Alphagetti picture frames, egg-carton waste baskets?

Well, I type corrected. Against all my better prejudices, these Scotch-tape totems turned out to be wonderfully

odd, luminous objects that continued to chastise my quick-to-judge temperament long after I stumbled out of the gallery with dazzled eyes and a red face. Put simply, Davidson's office-supply art is gorgeous. I love surprises.

Davidson has wisely chosen humble kitchen-sink objects to recast in tape, as anything more fanciful would be overkill. (It's hard enough to believe he made a Palmolive bottle out of hundreds of tiny strips of tape, let alone a dragon, a flower or the Eiffel Tower.) But as you wander through the gallery, the dozens of replicas of liquor bottles, salt-and-pepper shakers, parfait glasses, baby-food jars, vases and toothpaste tubes begin to appear less and less ordinary, and you begin to feel you are looking at the hidden skeletons of objects you've taken for granted all your life, at tubs, mugs and tins dissolved down to a molecular, not entirely corporeal level.

Davidson's careful, shrine-like arrangement of his ghostly canned goods only adds to the funereal feel of the exhibition, as does the fact that the composition of the sculptures — built-up layers upon layers of light-refracting glossy tape — makes each one glow like a phosphorescent mushroom in a dark forest. Light lands on the sculptures but does not settle, sometimes appearing to come from within the works and sometimes from outside. Naturally, the clear tape clouds over and turns off-white as the layers become denser, and viewers will immediately be reminded of alabaster jars (a favourite of ancient Egyptians, who used them to preserve the deceased's liver, heart and other icky internal parts).

The attendant at the Tatar Gallery told me that Davidson's taped art flew off the shelves in NYC, where the still traumatized locals naturally read the empty, spectral shells as memento mori. In our context, the works strike me as mor-

aggressive than sombre. To go to such painstaking lengths to recreate simple dish-soap containers and cupcake wrappers out of tape, to make grand the mundane by way of an even more mundane material, is one very smart way to give the lazy art world a big middle finger, to say to our increasingly banal culture: You want banal, I'll show you banal!

Whatever the intent, the results are eerily beautiful.

■ Joseph Davidson, *Scotch Tape Sculptures*, Tatar Gallery, 183 Bathurst St., Ste. 200, through Nov. 12.

*Joseph Davidson's wonderfully odd, luminous objects made from Scotch tape glow like phosphorescent mushrooms in a dark forest*

