

Review

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David Merritt: Roping Viewers In

MUSEUM LONDON OCT 3 2009 TO JAN 3 2010

by SKY GLABUSH



David Merritt *untitled (you've lost that)* 2009 Courtesy the artist
 David Merritt *untitled (you've lost that)* 2009 Courtesy the artist

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Through 2009 and 2010, [David Merritt](#) is mounting a quartet of related exhibitions. [Museum London](#) recently hosted the first iteration of the project, "shim," while the second articulation, "sham," is on at the [Art Gallery of Hamilton](#) to May 24. A third exhibition, "shimmy," opens at the [MacLaren Art Centre](#) on June 12. The series culminates with "shim/sham/shimmy" at the [Art Gallery of Windsor](#) on November 20.

As seen during "shim" at Museum London, David Merritt's *untitled (rope)* is a beautiful and evocative sculptural installation composed simply of a piece of sisal rope that has been unravelled strand by strand, reorganized and made to hover above the gallery floor. Adjectives like *weightless*, *ephemeral* or *suspended* that could be used to describe this piece also reveal something central to Merritt's practice. The work points towards a kind of lyrical imagery but also resists the way in which images collapse experience into singularity, like trying to grab a puff of smoke.

In Merritt's words, "What I am thinking about is the movement between the amorphous, or between noise, or nothing, or whatever you want to ascribe to something so diffuse it's nameless, towards something that occupies form. Then it slips into something else." Merritt is able to describe the tension between sculptural objectness and the dispersed potential of something perpetually emerging. Put another way, his work revels in the space between the generation of meaning and the performative nature of language.



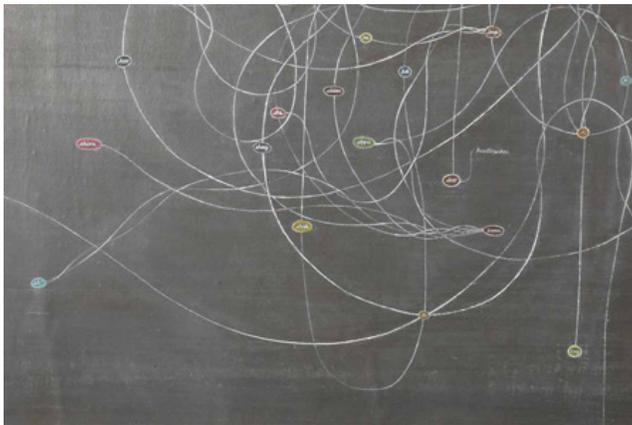
David Merritt *bmi 100* 2009 Courtesy the artist / photo John Tamblyn

As with his sculpture, Merritt's drawings also meander on the periphery between objective clarity and deferred, slippery potential. His reluctantly monumental drawing

bmi 100—a reference to the most-played songs on American radio—is an image comprised of thousands of individual strains that coalesce into a hazy, billowing mass, but it is also an inventory or database that seeks to chart a particular moment in time. One encounters something that is as much heard as it is seen, and this set of residual auditory echoes reveals how deeply words are permeated with memory and inscribed by culture. (Try saying “you’ve lost that loving feeling” without allowing the smooth, crooning melody of the Righteous Brothers to come cascading over you.)

The brilliance of Merritt’s *bmi 100* is its ability to emulate the ephemeral, linear gesture of diagrammatic drawing (read both as image and as code) while opening up the experience to an avalanche of social and mnemonic associations. The song titles are emblematic of the over-encumbered yoke of language; they demonstrate that despite their makeup as mere squiggles on a surface indexing movements of the mouth and throat, words are also artifacts floating in a gumbo of innumerable cognitive links. That Merritt could explore such intricate and difficult problems in a drawing about pop songs demonstrates not only the supple nature of this thinking, but also the vitality of drawing as a visual idiom and its capacity for posing tough philosophical questions.

- www.londonmuseum.on.ca



David Merritt *untitled (wahditty)* 2008 Courtesy the artist / photo John Tamblin

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