

Don Maynard: Through a Glass, Lightly

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This starts with glass. Again.

This time, though, it's not the hot glass of the studio, but rather the commercial and industrial variety. Like Pyrex, that stuff so familiar to us through its use in durable kitchenware for cooking (and maybe less familiar for its use in laboratory glassware). And the setting is of course neither a kitchen nor a lab, but an austere gallery space – your standard white cube. Along one long wall stand 700 long and thin Pyrex rods. The rods are transparent, and actually lean relatively untidily against the wall.

It's a discreet work, seemingly unassuming and visually undemanding of attention. It's entitled *Looks Like Rain*, and it's a work by Canadian sculptor Don Maynard. But appearances, as the cliché goes, are deceiving, for Maynard has wrought a work that is insistently experiential. Its title gives some inkling of things; overall, the angled setting of the rods is of course suggestive of a heavy rain falling.

But that's perceptually static, and this piece is anything but. Walking up and down along the extent of *Looks Like Rain* reveals its dynamic aesthetic core, born of simple physics and human perception. The varied angles of the leaning glass rods randomly catch the gallery lighting, refracting and reflecting it in disparate ways, and the experience is that of tiny bits of light in motion like tiny drops of rain in motion.

It's a simple and elegant piece, minimalistic in structure and material, but not locked into its own tight and exclusive core of self-referentiality. It points elsewhere, proffering the interactive and experiential. *Looks Like Rain* is inclusive.

And that is rather a hallmark of Maynard's work: experiential and inclusive. He's long been based in the university town of Kingston, Ontario, and has exhibited widely throughout Canada and the United States. And while glass is by no means his central material focus, he's done interesting work with it. *Falling to Pieces* was an installation Maynard created as a companion piece for an exhibition featuring *Looks Like Rain*. In a small, almost cramped gallery space, he installed several

hundred mirrors along all the walls, extending from floor to ceiling. The space was poorly lit – purposely, mind – and the mirrors – small and of myriad square and rectangular shapes – were all affixed so as to point off in slightly different directions. This was no funhouse carnival of self-reflections, here, but rather a view – or, more accurately, non-view – of fractiousness, of the incomplete and broken. Human narcissism might have lured us into the space of this work to see and even admire ourselves whole and complete, but Maynard was having none of it. Where Looks Like Rain may have been discreet, Falling to Pieces addressed the discrete, the shards of reflection mirroring (pun intended) the shards that comprise the human self. “I am large,” Walt Whitman wrote, “I contain multitudes.” We think we see ourselves as we really are in a mirror, but we indeed we see only aspects of the vastness that is the self. In frustrating our vanity, Falling to Pieces speaks to that reality. Through a glass, darkly.

Tidal Mass is a gallery installation made up of almost 2000 fluorescent lighting tubes – used fluorescent lighting tubes. As in: they no longer function as intended. Maynard arrays them out across the floor in several long rows traversing the length of the space. Each of the rows, comprised of hundreds of tubes lined up together, undulates from one end to the other vertically and horizontally. The gaps between each row are ragged and uneven; tubes from one row might extend into and intrude upon the adjoining row, and where the gaps are wider the space below the work is made evident, and the whole sculptural mass rises and falls in waves. Again, this isn't tidy minimalism. Tidal Mass is a grid, to be sure, one laid out horizontally and delimited by the gallery perimeter and punctuated by supporting posts across the space. But it resists the static impetus of the grid; the undulating rise and fall of the tube rows of course conveys a sense of rolling motion (the work was inspired by Maynard's readings on the melting of the polar ice cap and how that will affect rising sea levels), and the undulating, uneven gaps between rows convey an almost tectonic sense of shift.

And of course the light. The non-functional tubes may suggest a light source, but they are obviously no such thing. Function has been excised, leaving form to give shape, a shape lit from both above and below, the former reflecting off the translucent white surfaces of the fluorescents, the latter passing through them.

Don Maynard's sculptural work argues reflection and refraction as a means of aesthetic transmission.

Through a glass.

Lightly.