

**hannah\_g – *The MonkeySparrow* May 19, 2015**

***Response: Steven Leyden Cochrane's exhibition, Screen Wall at [RAWGallery](#)***

I'm gonna kick off with a local exhibition that's at the Raw Gallery at 290 McDermot avenue. It's called *Screen Wall*, and it's by Steven Leyden Cochrane, and it's up until the 26<sup>th</sup> of June, so—ah—here we are, some thoughts in response to his exhibition.

There are barriers or crossing-over points that one experiences, especially during childhood, that become nostalgic markers of becoming. Watching late-night TV, seeing people and spaces that look the kind of *alive* you want to be is a rite of passage that many pre-teens and adolescents experience.

Messy late-night, pre-internet shows such as *The Word*, *Rapido* and *Eurotrash* in the UK, and MuchMusic shows in Canada, where everybody looked cool and a bit trashy, and *laissez-faire* ruled.

How do I get there, I wondered?

Looking at flickering images on a TV in a sleeping house or a dark basement, the only one awake and yearning for excitement and coolness, and those images showed how removed I was from that world.

The TV was a window you could never pass through. It was a desperate and important connection to the world outside your family home. It was also a depressing beacon as to how, how far away it was.

Music videos were especially important in that late-night viewing. Powerful images, often sort of obscure, nonlinear narratives, were doused in the special effects the medium offered. Double-exposure, blue screen overlays, bands' bodies became blotchy heat patterns, psychedelic test signals. Incredibly cool.

And Leyden Cochrane brings this kind of video manipulation to the screens of the three or four boxy TVs scattered around the installation, and it caused me to be flooded by memories of being a teenager. He explained to me that he made 2000 frames for the video by importing image files of concrete block patterns—which I'll talk about in a minute—he imported them as audio tracks into a mixing program and then, after fiddling with the volume controls adding echoes, deleting portions he re-exported them as image files. The image data got mangled in the process, causing the glitching and colour effects, and I quote Steven there on this verbatim.

His videos echo the weird and disjointed music videos of the eighties I mentioned before. I remembered the isolation and the yearning for something beyond the town where I lived, and my trepidation of it as well. It's a real push-pull

TV showed the starkness of the barrier between worlds, which I hadn't been aware of in pre-teen years.

With the installation within the installation are several concrete walls, modular in construction and similar to those that separate gardens from back lanes or each other. They differ in that, instead of the repeating petal motifs of many of those suburban boundary markers, Leyden Cochrane has cast his concrete blocks using patterns that he created using Photoshop's 'Content-aware fill' to improvise a mangled version of a screen wall based on the original block patterns. He then wrote a computer script to cut that big, mangled screen up into random blocks, which he reproduced in his casts. Again, I pretty much quote Steven verbatim there.

His walls made me think of those in friends' gardens when I was growing up. The temptation to scale them and spy from them was difficult to resist. They were clearly dividers, but were seductively surmountable, more signifier of separation than prohibition.

Steven's walls are grouted into low garden-fence-like barriers in the gallery and have a destabilizing effect—not due to the expert laying they had but because the lack of uniformity makes them seem less knowable, and so less traversable, than the suburban cousin they mimic. But because of their relatively low height, one gets the sensation of seeing something from childhood, which, although huge then, is now small. One's adulthood is reinforced in a strange way.

His patterning, which is also present in prints hanging on the walls, also calls to mind Middle Eastern modesty screens that can be looked through by those within but are difficult for those outside to see because of the nature of the pattern, or at least it brings it to mind for me. And this resonance emphasizes the unease and mistrusts of difference that often hovers in suburban enclaves, of neighbours obfuscating, their prying and their judgments.

The walls and TVs reference the nostalgia of North American or western European adolescence, which is rooted in being bounded, especially by the family home, with the values it implies, and the escaping-of. As adults we can recognize some of our own awakenings that began in sympathy or opposition to those markers.

The bright green that Leyden Cochrane has painted the walls of the gallery is the true-or-not hue of heightened recollection, of the bright colours and sensations of the past, and it conjures images of square-next-square of mown front lawns. The limey brightness is heady and fun and nightmarish.

But importantly, Leyden Cochrane underscores the flimsiness and overlap of boundaries.

In the centre of the installation, a large pile of black foam replicas of the modules of the concrete walls invites a leap into their jumble. They are light, easy to push around, easy to pile into blocky mound. They are also easy to reassemble into more walls.

And another boundary dissolves when one realizes that, on one of the monitors, a laptop, you can see yourself live, walking around the installation, and your background is the same video as that on the other TVs, but is being green-screened into your video, images of the Photoshopped, randomized concrete block patterns show up intermittently.

And so, in a gallery, in the basement of a building in Winnipeg, an in bright, glitchy primary colours, within boundaries that were created to be purposefully unpredictable, you become the centre of the weird, nonlinear music video. Finally.