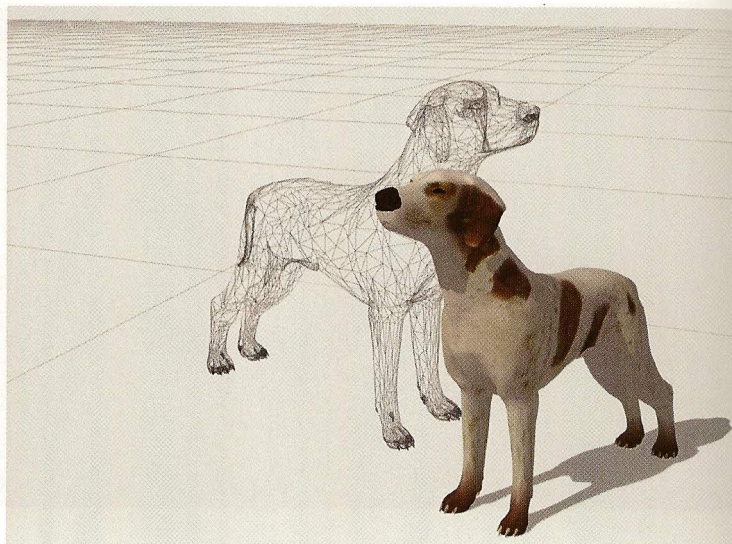




AVANTIKA BAWA
COLUMBUS, GA

In the installation *RE: RE: RE.*, Avantika Bawa pursues her exploration of the specificity of the institutional site as a nexus of internal and external negotiation, that is, as the representation of that specific institution's history and actualization in relation to the broader local culture [The Columbus Museum; August 12—December 12, 2010]. Here, Bawa's interventions—two- and three-dimensional wall, ceiling, and floor paintings and drawings—unfold in and beyond the museum's formal galleries, connecting minimalism, architecture, and institutional structure to tackle conceptual and visual notions of containment and dispersal. Bawa enlists a sparse vocabulary of form, modularity, and scale as well as a visual economy of means to produce works that are notably and enticingly elusive. She approaches the museum as a site that is both a repository of objects and a disseminator of ideas. Long interested in organizing principles, strategic structure, geometric modularity, and sequencing, she responds first to the physical building: specifically the museum's omnipresent rounded Neoclassical arches. The rhythmic formula of the arch—an oblong lozenge shape—becomes the dominant motif for her inquiry. Bawa subverts the triumphant iconic structure, turns it on its side, and renders it anew as both portal and container.

The notions of passage and container distill a paradoxical interplay between absence and presence, empty and full, and perfection and imperfection. With a nod to minimalism, Bawa uses basic materials such as latex paint, graphite, wood molding, wood, and gold enamel, along with repurposed objects from the museum's work spaces, to create optical re-articulations of clear geometric forms within the grid as construct. From this visual hierarchal position, determined line and insistent ovoids—whole, fragmented or truncated—follow a lateral line of continuity that suggests space between and beyond what we experience immediately. She inflects invisible terrain with dynamics that impart a dialogue about interstitial space, while also subtly heightening our perceptual awareness of our immediate environment—in this instance, the Columbus Museum and its local community.



TUOMO KANGASMAA
HELSINKI

In Helsinki, summer is often taken over by a sense of lifelessness. As a stifling, immobile mass of hot, moisture-laden air settles over the city, the debilitating effects of the climactic turn can seem to persist interminably. This weather not only settled upon the city for much of one of the hottest Finnish summers on record, but also penetrated its August art calendar. Luckily, I happened upon Tuomo Kangasmaa's latest exhibition. Tucked away in MUU Gallery's studio space, Kangasmaa's convivial film and video installation *Super Fun* functioned like that desperately needed rejuvenating blast of fresh air [August 8—29, 2010]. His work also undercut the overt sense of anxiousness induced by the sadistic paranoia, anarchistic melancholia, and pedantic abstraction endorsed by some of the city's other galleries.

The buoyant—even amateurish—quality of the work proved so dissimilar from what was being shown elsewhere that it caught me off guard. I even found myself wondering how a gallery devoted to serious media art could present something seemingly so frivolous. While I initially failed to respond to the work's content, the installation's incorporation of a range of time-based media did capture my attention. The exhibition revolved around a contrasting pair of perpendicularly oriented projections: *Super Fun*, 2010, a digitized version of an 8mm film that plays continuously, and *Super-8*, 2010, a short 8mm loop that requires viewer activation. In an adjacent space, *Blonde*, 2010, rounds out the presentation with a succession of digital images of dogs produced with 3D software.

From a technical perspective, these diverse components propose an idiosyncratic mini-history of moving-image technologies, which ultimately led me to consider the imagery and its potential meaning. The deterioration of *Super-8's* loop, for example, primarily spoke of film's inherent fragility and raised questions of origins. Each time the projector is activated, the brief depiction of a boy running in the snow fades a little more. Each time we hear the projector's loud motor, he gains a few more scratches. By contrast, the DVD format of *Super Fun* extends the film's lifespan and juxtaposes simple wintry fun with the casually romantic pleasures of a summer's

Bawa layers formalist acts with historical and cultural significance in subtle, not immediately evident ways. Here, she cogently incorporates two distinguishing characteristics of the city: Columbus owes its prosperity to the presence of a major U.S. Army training facility, Fort Benning Military Reservation, and to the natural abundance of Georgia red clay. The river port city's red brick mills, warehouses, and downtown streets also speak to its former status as a hub for textiles and iron industries, military manufacturing, shipping, and transportation. At the Columbus Museum, Bawa's super flat, deep orange-red, clay-colored oblongs, painted directly on the wall, hover on a horizontal axis with vertical stoppages, creating three-dimensional modulated vessels that conjure bricks, barracks, pull-out art racks, crates, and flat files. Additionally, the clean lines and exquisitely smooth surfaces reference the modernist sensibility of Fort Benning's highly ordered architectural simplicity and strategic containment. Emphasizing the intersection of form and function in both public and private realms, Bawa's work conflates a community's past and present while also alluding to museum stewardship.

The title *RE: RE: RE.* suggests movement. It is vectorial. It speaks to mobility as a negotiation and to corporeal experience as a crossfire of fluid visualization and spacial positioning. Her reductionist installation relies on our excursion to less-traveled spaces of the museum. Intentionally or not, this underscores the artist's fascination with marginality, passage, and transitional space. The installation succeeds as both a site-responsive gesture and an act of institutional infiltration. Bawa's deceptively simple visual inquiry into observation and perception thoughtfully challenges both the museum experience and our sense of place.

—Shannon Fitzgerald

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Avantika Bawa, detail of *RE: RE: RE.*, 2010, mixed media installation, dimensions variable (courtesy of the artist and The Columbus Museum, Columbus, GA); Tuomo Kangasmaa, installation view of *Blonde*, 2010, digital image series (courtesy of the artist and MUU Gallery, Helsinki; photo: Keijo Sundvall)

day. Like *Super-8*, this candid portrayal of a couple enjoying time in the backyard looks like found footage. While the hand-held camera's jerky movement and expected documentation of domestic banalities with subjects uneasy with its presence recall the look of 1960s home movies, the work documents a much more recent past. The film is, in part, autobiographical. The fellow who operates the camera and appears with his female companion also happens to be the artist. Careful observation also reveals an anomaly. The dog seen in *Blonde* has been cleverly montaged into two of the film's scenes. I later learned that the artist's son appears in the film loop, linking this work to the others and altering my take on the exhibition.

If the show initially seemed disjointed and trivial, it gradually became a cohesive celebratory narrative evincing the passage of time. The work focuses on life's pleasures and desires, familial relationships, and the visual manifestation of related memory without falling into cloying sentimentality or affording us the opportunity to wallow in a sense of loss. The portrayals' playfulness and sincerity derive from the subjects' close relationship to the filmmaker. While this may reinforce the idea that film mirrors life, it can also demonstrate the potential extension of the life of film and the possible digital alteration of stories initially recorded on film. In a world where connectivity blurs the distinction between work and home, children's lives are intensively programmed and many individuals take themselves too seriously. By contrast, Kangasmaa's evocations convey a sense of joy and freedom that opposes such practice. This is the show's greatest contribution. No wonder it proved restorative.

—John Gayer