

VISUAL ARTS » REVIEW

Library science gets an artistic intervention



GARY MICHAEL DAULT
GALLERY GOING

mail@garymichaeldault.com

CLIFF EYLAND
AT LEO KAMEN GALLERY

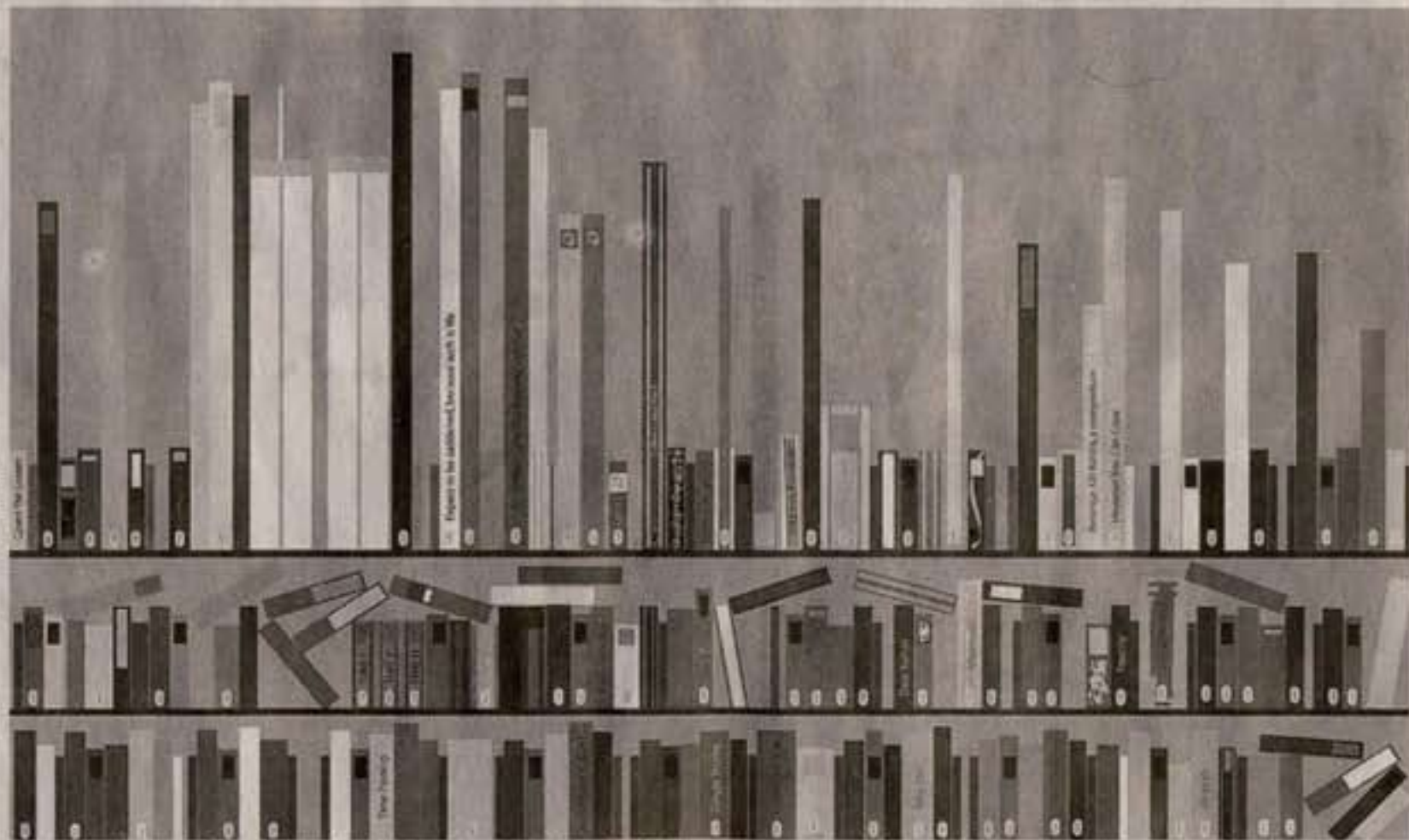
\$350 each. Until March 21,
80 Spadina Ave., Suite 406,
416-504-9515

Cliff Eyland is hopelessly, helplessly in love with books and has been for as long as he can remember. He is also in love, equally, with libraries.

Before he graduated from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in 1982, he had already brought together his triple passion for art, books and libraries in one consummate, synthesizing project: He cut up a copy of H. H. Arnason's *History of Modern Art* – the quintessential art history textbook – into 3 by 5 inch rectangles, and quietly inserted them, here and there, into the school's library catalogue. This neatly replaced the mere listing of books about art with mini-samples of the real thing, thus erasing, in some measure, the distance – an artificial distance, as Eyland sees it – between library and art gallery.

This cunningly, sweetly disruptive act at NSCAD 25 years ago set Eyland on his future course as an artist. Ever since, all of his paintings have been file card size: 3 by 5 inches.

For his current exhibition at Toronto's Leo Kamen Gallery, which is titled, with admirable precision, *Bookshelf File Cards*, the veteran Winnipeg-based artist has once again conflated a number of his interests and obsessions, continuing with his tiny, trademark file card size paintings, but making them, this time out, not little paintings to be insinuated into libraries, but rather little paintings of libraries – or, more particularly, of groaning shelves of books. Though



Cliff Eyland's show features minuscule ink-jet prints and hand-painted passages showing book-like shapes with one-word titles.

some of these works are hand-painted, or at least offer hand-painted passages, most of them are minuscule ink-jet prints, born in Eyland's computer and glued to 3 by 5 inch rectangles of MDF. They show vertical, book-like shapes in hot, saturated colours, many with blocky one-word titles: Rimbaud, Keats, Dickinson. One of Eyland's "shelves" holds a big wide book labelled *Mirvish*, a note of the artist's distress at the closing of that venerable institution, David Mirvish Books. Other "books" bear sweetly parodic, made-up titles: There are wistful self-help books, for example with titles like *Wondering and Time Passing*.

What books are they? Whose are they? Probably Eyland's. "I want all the books in the world!" he exclaimed as we walked through the exhibition recently. "What about digitalized books, e-books?" I ask him, thinking about Google's scanning of the world's books

into their prodigious e-coffers. "I want all the e-books too!" he exclaims again.

It was perhaps Eyland's acknowledging that the world of books is changing rapidly and radically ("we are going through a bookocalypse!" he ventures, pleased with the newly minted word), that led him to a strange little work called *The Large Bookshelf Illustrator Drawing on Paper* (reproduced here). It's called an *Illustrator Drawing* because Eyland used a computer program of that name to make it.

The work came about from his having lived in New York for six months in 2001, leaving again not long before 9/11. In the picture, the lower two shelves and their loads of books are normally proportioned. But the books on the upper shelf have been stretched, by computer, into something resembling the bristling skyline of Manhattan. The white Twin Towers are there too, over at the left – not

as tall, oddly, as other buildings, but as white as ghosts.

How did books get to be buildings? "Because," says Eyland, "I think of buildings as giant books." Worlds within worlds, I guess.