

Toronto, 2006
Pari Nadimi Gallery

Stephen Schofield

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I'm still recovering from the experience of Stephen Schofield's dangling textile doll figures at Toronto's Power Plant in 1994. They come to mind at three in the morning, when resistance to their distressing charm has been lost. Schofield's work is the sort that etches the mind and memory, largely because, among other things, it is *about* mind and memory.

It was unnerving but entertaining to observe his installation *Swell* last summer at the Toronto Sculpture Garden, then his subsequent show at Pari Nadimi Gallery, which saw him continue his deft handling of spooky beauty. The show contained two remarkable sculptures, *Swing: Past Perfect* and *Swing: Past Progressive*, both crafted in polymerized hydrocol, pigment and steel. The works played with the idea of play, in the form of mutated children's swings and accompanying drawings. They also played with the tyranny of time itself, focusing attention on two kinds of frozen past tenses: *we were playing* and *we have played*. Or, more importantly: we were living, we have lived.

Whether toying with terror, or playing with subatomic physics, or both, the works had the intimate immediacy and anxious allure of childhood nightmares embedded in adult artifacts. They turned the sentimental past of childhood and our psyches inside out.

The objects in Schofield's show were also a concrete manifestation of the American artist David Smith's definition of sculpture as "drawing in space." As such, drawings from Schofield's sketchbook were welcome additions to the show. They felt like sculptural skin grafts, highlighting the sculptures. Far from forming a diagram or schematic of the objects, the drawings seemed like sparks flying off the sculptures in the process of their design and fabrication. The six gouaches on paper had the same mysterious charm as the haunted quantum playground.