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The Blackwood looks at its roots

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Students, faculty, friends, and members of the public gathered at Toronto's Art Metropole on Saturday afternoon to launch the Blackwood Gallery's new book project, *Wood Two*. The book is a follow-up to 2010's *Wood*, and it features work that was on display in the Blackwood Gallery in 2010 and early 2011.

The launch made use of Art Metropole's intimate and unique urban location, offering multi-level storefront space for people to gather, chat with those who worked on the book, and, of course, buy a copy.

The preface to *Wood Two* describes the project: "Second-part catalog. Second-part magazine. Second-part annual report." After flipping through the sleek green paperback, that seems like a

pretty accurate description. *Wood Two* features plenty of art, but it also compiles commentary on the exhibitions and interviews with some of the artists to provide a comprehensive background to the work.

Blackwood Gallery director and curator **Christof Migone** served as editor for the book, and he did a stellar job of representing the diverse works of the Blackwood Gallery in a modest-sized book. It highlights works as disparate as the photography lightbox on the outside of the Davis Building, which every UTM student has seen on the Five-Minute Walk, and a Blackwood exhibition that actually took place off campus. *Wood Two* feels like a thorough and revealing guide to the artwork that the Blackwood champions.

“We spent the rest of [2011] and the better part of this [year] assembling and editing this retro-, intro-, and prospective book,” Migone writes in the introduction.

It’s safe to say that the hard work paid off. The book itself is beautiful. The modern design complements the art perfectly without being distracting. The stark, vibrant green cover catches the eye, and the similarly minimalist pages inside are simple but effective.

One of the most expansive (and locally grown) exhibitions featured in *Wood Two* is a collaborative project called “The Projects: Port Credit”. Originally displayed in June and July 2010, the exhibition, curated by Migone, was an off-site project set up on Lakeshore Road in Port Credit. An earlier edition of “The Projects: Port Credit” from the year before was the Blackwood’s first off-site project.

Switching from an unused architect’s office to a condo showroom, the second edition of “The Projects: Port Credit” featured 10 artists whose diverse work is covered extensively in *Wood Two*. From Gwen MacGregor’s proposal for a Port Credit water park to Jessica Valentin’s intricate plans of commuter train performance art, the pieces in “The Projects: Port Credit” seem to envision a more culturally vibrant Mississauga.

Perhaps one of the Blackwood’s most ambitious recent exhibitions—at least, in terms of manpower—was “Location, Location, Location!” Upper-year students may remember the full-size cottage that was housed in the Blackwood Gallery from January to March 2010 as part of the exhibition. Curated by Migone (with collaborative work by **Christine Swintak** and **Don Miller**), the project celebrated destruction and rebirth.

When the historical Thomas Cottage, formerly situated in the middle of the UTM campus, was set for demolition to make space for construction, Swintak and Miller worked with a team to carefully deconstruct it and then rebuild it inside the Blackwood Gallery. The section of *Wood Two* dedicated to “Location, Location, Location!” provides a fascinating behind-the-scenes look at the hard work that went into deconstructing and subsequently reconstructing the Thomas Cottage for the exhibition. From the cottage’s original, natural setting to the various stages of its recreation inside the gallery to its eventual dismantling, Migone meticulously traces every step in the Thomas Cottage’s journey.

Wood Two is not only aesthetically pleasing and full of interesting artwork and essays, it is also an important record of the work the Blackwood Gallery does. It may even serve as a time capsule of sorts. Perhaps there will be new editions of *Wood* years from now that will look very different. New artistic ideas will have emerged, and the Blackwood Gallery will have displayed dozens of new exhibitions in the meantime. But for the time being, it’s nice to have a volume that delves into such a small slice of time. The campus will continue to change and expand—and who knows? Maybe we’ll even get some more Blackwood exhibitions because of it—but *Wood Two* serves as a valuable ode to a specific moment in the art gallery’s history.

At the book’s launch, Migone also released his own project, entitled *Sonic Somatic*. His project explores “sound art and the body”. Both *Sonic Somatic* and *Wood Two* are now available for purchase. Visit blackwoodgallery.ca for more information.

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