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## GALLERIES



### Chris Shepherd: Waiting

BY DAVID BALZER June 09, 2010 21:06

To June 19. Tue-Sat 10am-5:30pm;

Sun 11am-5:30pm. Bau-Xi Photo,

324 Dundas W. 416-977-0400.

[www.bau-xiphoto.com](http://www.bau-xiphoto.com).

Chris Shepherd's photographs of subway stations, currently on view at new space Bau-Xi Photo, are straightforward — almost entirely expository, in fact — but they imply some relevant, engaging things. His photos are devoid of people, and the series is called “Waiting,” in part indicating what he had to do to achieve his results. In one sense, they are affectionate studies of spaces that are ignored by most commuters who pass through them.

Specifically, they are tributes to functional aesthetics. Subways are tricky things: from Seoul to Prague to Paris, they are branded with the sensibility of the eras and countries in which they are built. “Waiting” focuses on the legacy of '60s, '70s and early-'80s design, still perceived as dated and ugly by many, but which confidently defines so much of the TTC, and with which Shepherd doesn't seem to take issue at all. His images recognize distinctive tones and patterns: the butter yellows of Finch and Christie stations; the orange tiles by the telephones at Ossington and Bay stations. Such late-modernism, once so ubiquitous in Canada, has been removed from many public buildings, but the TTC puts it in formaldehyde. Tellingly, Shepherd has not photographed the ludicrously refurbished Museum station, which he concedes is a crowd-pleaser, but which, in its early-'60s iteration, had been one of his favourite stations.

Shepherd's juxtaposition of Toronto photos with New York ones only emphasizes further what we've got to celebrate. The New York subway, which is of course older and much more of a design collage due to the various private and public interests that shaped it, is less consistent

(although there's no mistaking the bolted steel columns). Indeed, Shepherd slips in photos of Lexington Ave/63 Street station for a direct comparison, and he appears to be passing it off as Kipling, with its broad staircases and sensible brown tiles. Neither station may be much to write home about, but our many, bolder versions of this aesthetic find few echoes in New York. In Shepherd's view, i.e., without people, that city's subway seems strangely prosaic; ours has a cool beauty that anyone with half a mind would want to take pride in, and preserve.

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