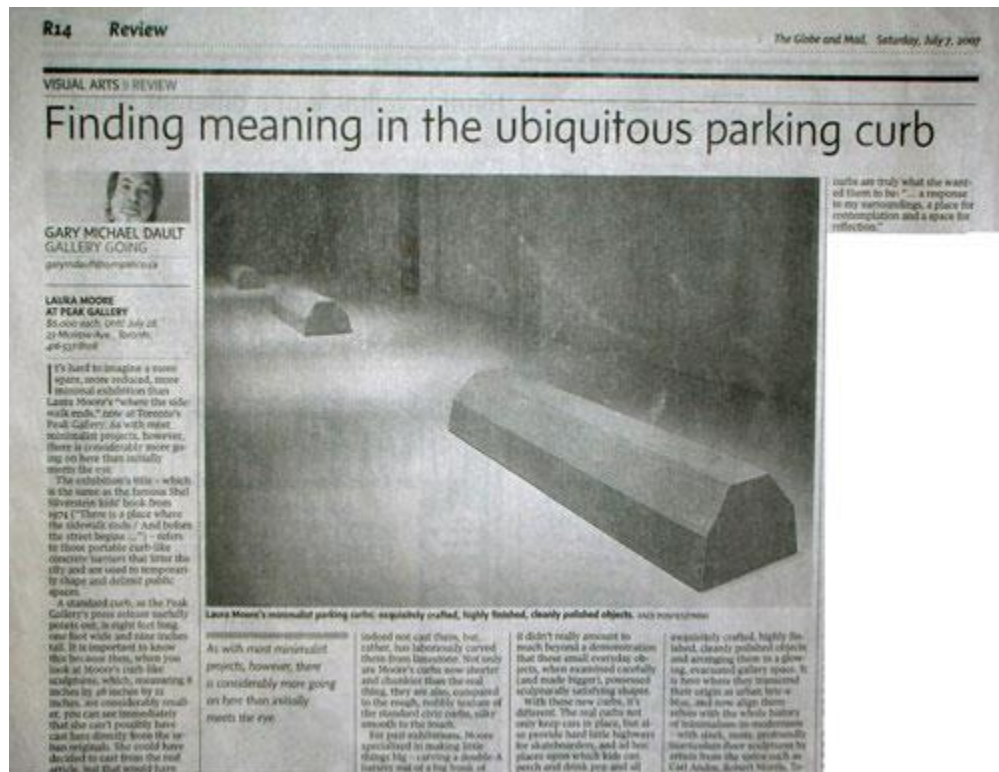


Laura Moore at PEAK Gallery  
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by Gary Michael Dault



Laura Moore at PEAK Gallery, 23 Morrow Ave.

It's hard to imagine a more spare, more reduced, more minimal exhibition than Laura Moore's "where the sidewalk ends," now at Toronto's Peak Gallery. As with most minimalist projects, however, there is considerably more going on here than initially meets the eye.

The exhibition's title - which is the same as the famous Shel Silverstein kids' book from 1974 ("There is a place where the sidewalk ends / And before the street begins ...") - refers to those portable curb-like concrete barriers that litter the city and are used to temporarily shape and delimit public spaces.

A standard curb, as the Peak Gallery's press release usefully points out, is eight feet long, one foot wide and nine inches tall. It is important to know this because then, when you look at Moore's curb-like sculptures, which, measuring 8 inches by 48 inches by 12 inches, are considerably smaller, you can see immediately that she can't possibly have cast hers directly from their urban originals. She could have decided to cast from the real article, but that would have been merely to reproduce the originals, rather than to allude to them, as she has done here, or evoke them.

You can see, in fact, that she indeed not cast them, but, rather, has laboriously carved them from limestone. Not only are Moore's curbs now shorter and chunkier than the real thing, they are also, compared to the rough, nubby texture of the standard civic curbs, silky smooth to the touch.

For past exhibitions, Moore specialized in making little things big - carving a double-A battery out of a big hunk of marble, for example, and hewing individual computer keys from heavy chunks of limestone. This was both amusing and technically impressive, but it didn't really amount to much beyond a demonstration that these small everyday objects, when examined carefully (and made bigger), possessed sculpturally satisfying shapes.

With these new curbs, it's different. The real curbs not only keep cars in place, but also provide hard little highways for skateboarders, and ad hoc places upon which kids can perch and drink pop and all that. Moore's hand-sculpted curbs both honour that spontaneous usefulness - by assuming a human scale - and deny it, by taking the form of exquisitely crafted, highly finished, cleanly polished objects and arranging them in a glowing, evacuated gallery space. It is here where they transcend their origin as urban bric-a-brac, and now align themselves with the whole history of minimalism-in-modernism - with sleek, mute, profoundly inarticulate floor sculptures by artists from the 1960s such as Carl Andre, Robert Morris, Tony Smith and Robert Smithson. Now, given the way they internalize and replay certain moments of minimalist history, Moore's exquisite pseudo curbs are truly what she wanted them to be: "... a response to my surroundings, a place for contemplation and a space for reflection."