At the galleries
October 13, 2007

Thaddeus Holownia is probably a fun guy at home.

Artists and academics I've known whose work is as rigorously measured as this photographer's can be the life of the party during leisure hours. So if Anatomy Lesson – Moose (Corkin Gallery, Distillery District, 55 Mill St. Building 61 until Nov.4) is any indication, the New Brunswick photographer has been a ton of laughs recently.

Anatomy Lesson fills one entire gallery wall with severely organized grid made up of 100 rectangular frames. Each frame displays a silver gelatin photographic print of a bone or bone fragment found in the skeleton of a moose Holownia came across during a walk in Newfoundland.

As luminous as white marble in moonlight, each image is shown against a stark black background. It's something you instinctively try to read. It's as if Holownia, who lectures at Mount Allison University in Sackville, N.B., has unearthed a new type of hieroglyph from a nature source.

This makes for the photographer's most impressive show in recent memory as well as his most dramatic.

The other in Holownia's series, Staff of Life, furthers the artist's inclination to classify things. In this case, images of a variety of common plant stalks are shown against dramatic black backgrounds. Not entirely exciting.

In both series, Holownia raises questions of time passing. Staff of Life speaks to photography's ability to freeze recognition at the point where it becomes memory. These dead stalks are forever healthy looking in the photos. Anatomy Lesson gives a meaningful new life to sure signs of death.

Peter Goddard