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### Daniel Barrow: "Emotional Feelings"

**Celebrated Canadian artist Daniel Barrow wants you to share the shame**

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BY DAVID BALZER    April 14, 2010 21:04

**EDITORIAL RATING:**

To June 6, Mon-Tue, Thu-Fri  
 10am-4pm; Wed 10am-8pm; Sun  
 noon-5pm. Art Gallery of York  
 University, 4700 Keele.  
 416-736-5169.  
[www.yorku.ca/agyu](http://www.yorku.ca/agyu).

One of the best artists working in Canada today, Daniel Barrow makes intensely personal – at times mortifyingly narcissistic – art that, at the same time, defies the kind of navel-gazing we are used to seeing in contemporary galleries. Why? He is fascinated with beauty, both formally – as an illustrator and multimedia artist beholden to the colourful and the elaborate – and conceptually, marrying the most grotesque aspects of introspection (especially body hatred, gay-male and otherwise) with its most romantic ones. He understands that the careful creation of beauty, however solipsistic in origin, can be an

act of supreme generosity.

His new show at AGYU has the hilariously redundant title “Emotional Feelings,” which speaks to the febrile, stuttering type of sensitivity he privileges. Best-known for manually animating his illustrations on overhead projectors, Barrow constructs four impressive works that are paeans to the analog – not in a meaninglessly antiquated way, but which suggest the power and intimacy of speaking through technological obsolescence in 2010. Like a magic-lantern show or phantasmagoria with all the backstage bones showing (as an artist, Barrow deliberately positions himself as the proverbial man behind the curtain, perpetually revealed and concealed), the works are kinetic, multi-layered wall projections, all using a variety of separate machines placed in full view. The subject of these moving light-paintings is misery: in one, a king, dressed in pink cross-garters and high-heeled shoes, rapes a mermaid on his four-poster bed; in another, bedroom curtains blow open to reveal mass, 9/11-style suicide-leaps from skyscrapers.

Most of the works have interactive components that implicate you in the atrocities. You can move the king on the overhead projector, for instance, dictating the rhythm of his humping. In the second room, for a work in which tissues fly out of a Kleenex box (pictured), you can change the design of the box – a selection of maudlin motifs, from crying babies to the entirety of USA for Africa. (Lionel, Cyndi, Bruce: they're all here.) In fact, there's a Kleenex motif, with tissues providing baroque bordering (Barrow makes them look like abstract shapes from Hogarth's The Analysis of Beauty) and a thematic conflation between crying and masturbating. (The show's subtitle might have been “cristurbation.”) The smallest work – digital, but done with dinosaur software – is a two-frame self-portrait: in one, the artist gets chained to his overhead projector; in another, he cries over it, his right shoulder moving up and down what could be a simultaneous sob and jerk-off. Mercifully, Barrow is always funny – the inevitable, satisfying result of a brilliant artist who has devoted himself to emotional excess.

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