



GALLERIES



Comments Print Share 7 Tag on Delicious Digg This

Love great and small In their new exhibit at Jessica Bradley Art + Projects, Duke & Battersby explore perversion and precision

Favourite Add to Favorites Recommend: 1

BY DAVID BALZER November 10, 2010 21:11

EDITORIAL RATING:

DUKE & BATTERSBY
To Nov 13. Jessica Bradley Art + Projects,
1450 Dundas W. 416-537-3125.
www.jessicabradleyartprojects.com

Syracuse-based artist couple Emily Vey Duke and Cooper Battersby have been making videos, illustrations, sculptures and more for over 10 years, but are just young enough to be nominated for the Sobey Art Award, Canada's most prestigious and munificent prize for contemporary artists under 40. (They began showing early, as students at Nova Scotia College of Art and Design.) A new exhibit at Jessica Bradley Art + Projects offers only a glimpse into why the duo might be considered for such a prize. Bradley's space is small, and the show, which revolves around a video, is fairly inconspicuous. There is room, for example, for only one of their tricked-out animal sculptures – Lesser Apes (Turbine), pictured – but not for a whole hall of them, as there was at The Power Plant in 2008.

Still, you should see this show, which closes this weekend, if only for that video, also called Lesser Apes. Duke & Battersby's work is elliptical; it has taken years for this critic to warm up to it, but if you're uninitiated, this is as good a place as any to start. Lesser Apes' narrative concerns a woman, Farrah, who falls in love with a bonobo chimp, Meema. The charismatic Duke, a talented storyteller, voices both characters, managing to convey something both allegorical and realistic at once. The love is told in snippets: passages from Farrah's human-advice manual, "Notes to Meema," and ones from Meema herself, supposedly brought to us via some kind of chimp-human translating device, which is Duke's voice, vocoded.

Typical for Duke & Battersby, Farrah and Meema's love is portrayed as tender and absurd – and this absurdity, partially an entertainment which draws viewers in, soon becomes a matter of great importance. Duke & Battersby deal with many themes, but at the heart of it all is a desire to confront mortality as it is reflected to us (i.e., our species) by the natural world, often in shaming, shameless and hideously frightening ways, but also in gorgeous and, ultimately, morally inspirational ones. Aesthetics play an integral part. Their Power Plant show was called "Beauty Plus Pty," Vladimir Nabokov's equation for "the closest we can get to a definition of art." It is also, of course, the closest we can get to a definition of love, and/or of pet ownership, and Lesser Apes continues to bear this out.

The video contains so many bons mots that you may want to bring a pad and paper. Meema's key statements are about a fave Duke & Battersby topic – perverts – whom the chimp, feeling branded as such, comes to admire. Perverts, she says, either want things other humans don't want, or want normal things, but very badly. Farrah makes a stinging statement about women being the better half of the species, because they read more novels, and thus are more sophisticated, wanting to feel the pain and joy of those they don't know. Most affectingly, there are the lyrics to a tune Duke sings softly in the video's interludes, illustrating a marvellous, tragic paradox that you'll find difficult to get out of your head: "Nobody wants to die / And everyone wants to get high / But we can't get high all the time / And we can't do anything / If not alive."

EMAIL DBALZER@EYEWEEKLY.COM

Email us at: LETTERS@EYEWEEKLY.COM or send your questions to EYEWEEKLY.COM
1 Yonge Street, 2nd Floor, Toronto Ontario, M5E 1E6

User Comments

Comment Using Facebook Connect or EyeID or Comment Anonymously

Newest first



Select a City

[ABBOTSFORD](#)
83% Off at U Weigh
[ALLISTON / INNISFIL](#)
60% off Home Video Tran
[AURORA / NEWMARKET](#)
50% off Gift Basket

Toronto Listings Finder

FILM MUSIC CLUBS ARTS

Film Finder Films | Theatres

All

Any Movie Genre

Any Movie Rating

Any Movie Title

Film Chart Grab this finder



Related Stories

CONTACT decision maker
Don't know what to see at Toronto's biggest photography festival? Check out our handy CONTACT primer.

Refined crude
In his ROM photo exhibit about the impact of oil, Edward Burtynsky once again creates haunting images of modern landscapes

The projectionist
UK artist Lindsay Seers plays with film history in her Images Festival installation.

MORE INSIDE

- EYE WEEKLY Guides
- Fringe Festival 2009
- Pride Guide 2009
- Toronto Jazz Festival Guide 2009
- Cool Summer Guide 2009
- Bar and Patio Guide 2009
- Green Living Guide
- Love and Sex Guide
- Cheap Thrills

