

GALLERIES



Will Gorlitz

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Will Gorlitz: Nowhere If Not Here and Always Ready A Will Gorlitz retrospective

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BY DAVID BALZER February 24, 2010 21:02

EDITORIAL RATING:

To March 28. PWYC. Tue-Sun 11am-6pm. Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, 952 Queen W. 416-395-0067. www.mocca.ca.

How nice to see an exhibit on a painter's 20-year-long career and to know that he has, more or less, gotten better with time. Let's begin, then, with the very best. Wisely, the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art has asked Will Gorlitz to do a special work for their project space in honour of this retrospective.

Based on an 18th-century Dutch allegorical painting by one Johann Melchior Roos, Always Already is an unsettling, speculative series featuring animals, such as zebras and swans, either expired or waiting for death in a snow-covered landscape (pictured). An artist intrigued by acts of looking, Gorlitz has thrust his view into some nightmarish, near-future ice age in an attempt to present life at its most dumbfounding, sublime and cannibalistic. Both tragic and funny, exquisite and vicious, the paintings cumulate to form a Richard Adams-like narrative of the presumed day and a bit that the animals, deposed from their ecosystems — and persisting, one assumes, after the humans who wrought this tragedy have died — spend waiting for death.

The early-'90s series Not Everyone lies just outside the project space (perhaps best to start with these two and backtrack) and presents a contemporary act of looking — surveillance — through a group of tentative, high-angle renderings of pedestrians, all oblivious yet on-task. The rest of the works in the show are figureless, to varying degrees of success. Disappointing are Gorlitz's moon studies from about 10 years ago, which are too austere for an artist from whom we've come to expect such lushness. An amazing counterpoint hangs opposite these, however — paintings of the candy-coloured, raised-relief surface of a desk globe.

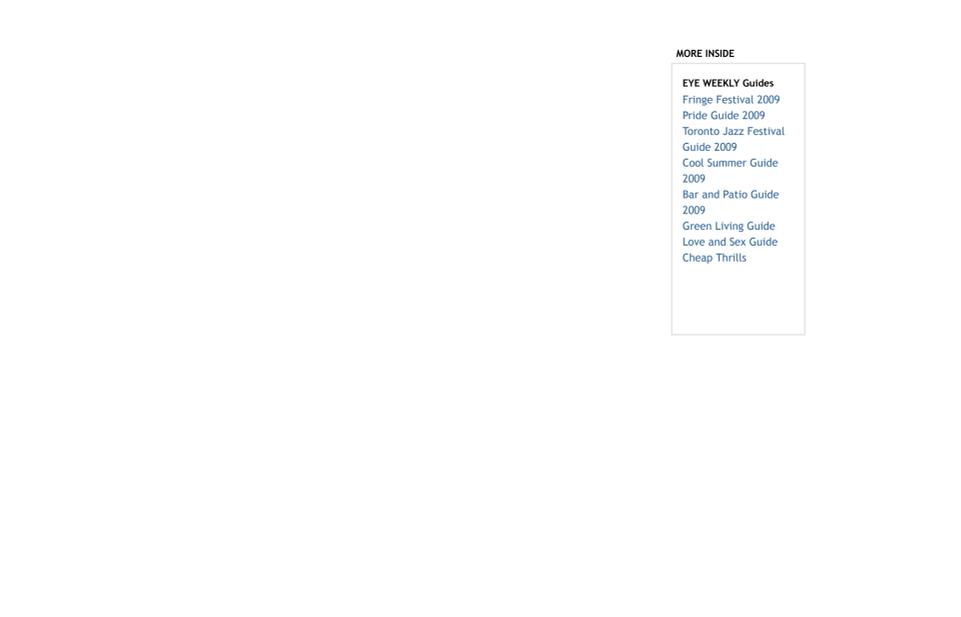
Four late-'90s paintings, perspectives of roads from behind a car dashboard, are, like the globe paintings, diptychs. Gorlitz's trick is to present the two works in these diptychs askew (they really look like they've been knocked crooked by a careless bystander) while the image, which goes across them, remains level. Call it a heavy-handed way to draw attention to the boxy quality of painting, but it's a great metaphor for Gorlitz's ambition, which echoes that of many masters before him. Contemporary art may be full of optical tricks, but Gorlitz's can't succeed without an accompanying, and equally impressive, painterly acumen. His work seems both to stay firmly on the canvas, and to look far beyond it.

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