

Entertainment

DIY projects

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Here, we can learn a lesson from "Pulp Fiction," the just-opened summer show at the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art. Curator Corinna Ghaznavi skips the thematic frame in favour of aesthetic one – apt, too, because there's not a theme to be found here at all.

I don't mean this as a criticism. In fact, it's a compliment. "Pulp Fiction," first staged at Museum London (Ontario, that is) is as fresh and unpretentious a museum show you're likely to find anywhere, an agglomeration of roughly-made objects, drawings and videos that help to embody a scene that has, completely organically and with no real intent at all, made its way from the outside-in.

If anything, "Pulp Fiction" is a survey of a do-it-yourself scene in Canadian art that has flourished across North America in recent years, outside the sanctified realms of the art world proper. By this, I mean most museums (because they're afraid of unknowns), commercial galleries (because they're leery of artists without Masters of Fine Arts degrees) and artist-run centres, which, even in their function as parallel spaces, have limits – entirely apolitical doodling, for one, apparently, and lacquered, oven-baked socks, for another.

Many of the artists know each other; just as many collaborate, trade and drink together. This is work unencumbered with lugubrious theory and political intent.

Not so long ago, that would be more likely to appear at a craft fair than an art institution, but it proves that there's something to be said for critical mass.

Drawing on quirky interpretations of popular culture, the cut-and-staple 'zine scene, and the growing popularity with the graphic novel form, do-it-yourself scenes have insinuated themselves in the Official Art World in an entirely organic way: Among a generation of young urbanites, for sheer relevance, they simply couldn't be denied.

This is a long way of getting to the work itself, which is, by turns, dizzying, accessible, hilarious, macabre and in one instance, disquietingly bleak.

That's an exception, and there's hardly a piece to be found here that sits on the outside, or falls flat; but for my money it's the drawings of Peter Thompson that stand out. From London, Thompson's a clear

descendent of the creepy psychedelia rendered by another generation's dominant quirkily outsider, Robert Crumb; Thompson avoids Crumb's sexually fetishistic weirdities (in this show, at least), but his sharply-drawn technique provides a nice tension with the wildly appealing, surreal forms he draws.

In one piece a giant mechanical head teeters on a ball of fuzz (I think); like in most of his work here, the clustering of images, most of them not of this reality (is that a log ... with feet?) are almost too dense to parse. Small blocks of text float alongside them: "In this dream I had, there was a tarantula, except its legs were hard and ivory-coloured."

Similarly, Thompson's ink drawings collaborations with Marc Bell are dizzyingly involved; a series of them are loosely based on *The Hobbit* (loose, as in very; no Hobbits appear, except in text: "Bilbo kept his stuff in his mom's basement until he moved to his own pad.") Another selection of Bell's work, a little older, is less captivating, but more appealing, if that makes sense: Small and hand-made, they are colourful collages, painted, not drawn, that have a warmth his other work does not.

Warmth may not be a priority for any of these artists (one piece from Seth Scriver and Shayne Ehman is a car hood emblazoned with the words "F--k off" in sparkling blue and orange, which may be an appropriately-outsiderly comment on art institutions in general).

But like it or nor, warmth is the inevitable byproduct of all this hand-made stuff. It is homespun-seeming, in the best way. Like James Kirkpatrick's lovely multi-part installation, "lots of people saying hello." Figures built from leftover furniture pieces, charcoal sketches, a crude projection, and an outstanding canvas – this is cozily personal stuff, to be sure.

There's video here, too, which brings us from warm, in Amy Lockhart's lovingly hand-made animations, *Walk for a Walk* and *The Devil Lives in Hollywood*, to supercool, in Barry Doupe's computer-animated film, which is gorgeous, seductive and chilling: "Stop, you're hurting me," intones a female computer voice as a pixellated chair topples and breaks.

Not quite a wallflower; but at this party, the surly guy in the corner, alone with his drink? Maybe.