

Artist collaboration gruesome, playful and on display now

Marsha Day

The StarPhoenix

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tj atkings., Luke Warman, and Joe Toderian

Esteem for the home Gallery, College Park Mall Runs until Jan. 31 Reception Jan. 26 from 7-9 p.m.

This week, I stepped through the looking glass into Esteem for the Home Gallery, where logic and proportion have fallen on their head, where the White Knight was talking backwards and Alice was 10 feet tall.

The fantastical paintings in the gallery only made sense when I remembered what the dormouse said: 'Feed your head.'

You will know what I mean when you see these large-scale, all-consuming, collaborative works by tj atkings., Luke Warman and Joe Toderian.

My favourite painting is called This Acid Rain tastes like candy. It depicts a futuristic, ruined earth, heavy with boiling skies, sticky-sweet with deadly drippings.

The landscape smoulders with mountains of earthly trash, inhabited by gruesome creatures (and a harmless little white rabbit), where everyone and everything is trapped in a painterly post-apocalypse quagmire.

All at once beautiful, horrible and humorous, these works are ripe with cerebral depth, tongue-in-cheek social commentary and playful rays of hope.

It seems these three artists have mud-wrestled the big environmental issues to the ground, eviscerated the whole smelly mess, cleaned themselves up and put on a Cheshire grin to offer us their findings.

There is much to ponder in this exhibit, but I'll let tj atkings. do the talking from his artist statement.

He defines his personal catharsis by writing "it is a release of tension onto a sacrificial object."

I was feeling cathartic myself, wondering whether that sacrificial object might be the viewer, the planet earth or the canvas itself.

It really doesn't matter because I love a metaphor, and I love that word - catharsis.

Nathan Ellis

Positive Passions Gallery, 300 Third Ave. S. Runs until Feb. 12

I try to approach each new art exhibition with an uncluttered mind, intent on my

purpose to engage in a dialogue with the works, allowing each artist the floor. They work hard preparing for this moment and deserve my full attention.

And so it was that I arrived at Positive Passions Gallery focused on my task, not allowing myself to be distracted by the adult sex toy merchandise, just behind the glass, where my eyes drifted with furtive glances.

This is a solo exhibition by emerging artist Nathan Ellis who works in large format mixed media on canvas, creating images inspired by nature and beauty. The installation occupies foyer, hallways and a large, welcoming meeting space in Positive Passions, a business which promotes positive sexuality and healthy lifestyle through workshops, expert advice, erotic literature, games, enhancers, flavoured lubricators, luxury vibrators - oops there I go again, getting distracted. Now where was I?

Ellis' early influences include comic book graphics (he cut his teeth on The Incredible Hulk and Thor, among others) which is evident in the crowd-pleasing, commercially appealing elements, dramatic use of black and super-human radiance of his figurative work. When applied to wildlife, such as Winter Thaw and Quiet Conversation, this painterly style is moderately toned down, but the sparkling oomph is preserved.

Ellis' modus operandi is his faithful homage to nature, punctuated by the drama of flowing, delicate washes, controlled drips, clear illumination and colourful application of paint. Ellis is a technically accomplished painter, demonstrating skill beyond his years.

It's time to go, and I think I'll exit through the gift shop.

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