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'The Door by the Garden' at Pump Project

by [Iva Kinnaird](#) | June 11, 2018



There are three worlds within [Pump Project's final gallery show at its Shady Lane location](#) in Austin. Underneath an innocuous enough show title, *The*

Door by the Garden, artists Nat Bradford and Tsz Kam use the visual richness their paintings to present more explicit ideas. They team up to form a collective third set of work, linking humans and animals through their primal desires.



Bradford's work hangs like banners, painted front and back on transparent vinyl. The combination of techniques creates a surface which moves from a slick flatness to thick brushstrokes, sticky like painted tar. The images are concerned with this and other dualities — front/back of the image, interior/exterior, and the relative containment/freedom of the figures depicted. Each scene is framed as a still life where a single illuminated window gives just enough information to know it's set indoors. The chambered vase-like small homes, contain flowers and animals which live inside them. The x-ray interior view of the feral animal trapped in the vase is paired with a woman, the bones inside of the vessel of her body. She is continually made more insular with her curled-up posture inside of the house. There are

multiple layers of containment. In the similarly composed painting, *Very Fu* a fire rages inside of the woman's chest and burns through her skeleton. Her body an insufficient container for the enormity of human emotion.



Next we become voyeurs in the decorating hookup between a love hotel and an early '90s roller disco. Cake, sex, baths, and lounging on plush furniture in brightly colored rooms are recurrent through the 20 small paintings. Kam's interiors are full of only the good stuff. We're seeing an intersection of sexual desires and food consumption, so it's fitting that the paintings themselves are as visually delicious as the cakes and candy they depict.



He Likes to Watch

Anthropomorphized macaroni noodles provide a focal point for the miniature narratives and present an amusing simplification of the human form down to being just this tallish *thing* that has two holes. The titles give a voice to the characters of each scene. In *He Likes to Watch*, one noodle sits on another's lap and it isn't totally clear who's doing the watching. Searching the image, my best guess is the jizz-covered abstract blob. The ambiguity creates a fun mental exercise in deciding which things are active players in the scene and which things are their toys.

The worlds of the noodles and beasts collide in a new feral environment lush with fur and oozing cum. In the collaborative work between Bradford and Kam, aka Big Chicken & Baby Bird, the artists transfer human desires into the warped form of man's best friend. Headless dogs are the stars of this new mythology and they are single-minded in their aim to explore and consume everything they can get their paws on.



In the first of three *Gardenscape* paintings, a lone **hippocamp** bathes in a bubble bath while a pack of dogs swarms outside. The headless dogs claw and scratch in sometimes playful, sometimes twisted interactions. Compared to the leashed pets some Austinites bring to art openings, these dogs are not docile. It's as if they've revolted against their servitude to man and ditched their heads to make impossible the bondage of leashes and collars. Losing their heads was the price for ultimate freedom, and now rid of owners, they consume relentlessly to fill their gaping holes.



Gardenscape II (detail)

The noodles, now larger and fused with the environment, burst with white cum that shoots up in geysers and oozes like sludge from a storm-drain pipe. It pours out and onto the swarming dogs and they bathe in the juices. They greet, as dogs do, by sniffing hindquarters, but they go way beyond what is usually permissible, and go shoulder deep up another dog's ass. Is this what we would be doing with absolute freedom? Maybe. They inhale each other, a dogs swallow dogs in an orgy as they find new combinations of ways to fill their head holes. I guess you could say this is weird. But all the dog-on-dog action seems consensual. All good.



Gardenscape III

In the final painting, *Gardenscape III*, the dogs' hunger moves beyond curious probing to become carnivorous. They pull apart a prized hippocamp and feast on its fleshy mass until the beast is beyond recognition.





The artists continue to build this dogged world in sculptural adaptations. The paintings contain the meat and potatoes of their ideas and the sculptures are supplemental. A headless life-size dog (a larger breed, though I couldn't say which type) walks cautiously (his tail says so) toward a puddle to drink. He is hairless save for some back scruff spotted with pink candy nipples.





Two neon, glowing fur pelts, which seem to be made from hundreds of skinr children’s toys, are displayed in a shadowy corner of the gallery. The artists’ statement suggests the dogs voluntarily removed their pelts, as humans mig remove their clothes. In the un-airconditioned gallery space in the middle o June in Texas, I can’t blame them.

On view through June 23, 2018 at [Pump Project](#), Austin. [Closing farewell to Pun Project](#), June 23, 7-11pm.

(Images by Emmy Laursen and Iva Kinnaird)

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