



EDMONTON  
ART GALLERY OF ALBERTA

## DAVEANDJENN

by Nancy Tousley

The deep space of painting is an illusion that DaveandJenn address literally in the thickness and materiality of their work. Their paintings, which can be from two-and-a-half to four-inches thick, are blocks of clear resin, built up in thin layers, on which the artists paint the elements that coalesce into their images. It is an unconventional method of working that enhances their subject matter—dark forests inhabited by myriad creatures and their own doppelgängers—at the same time that it produces it. An object depicted in one of the image layers—say, a leaf on a tree—casts a shadow, while a leafy branch produces dappled shade. Real light illuminates shadowy openings in the trees. Rendered objects such as plants, shelves, skulls, small buildings and creatures appear as if in three dimensions. The forests seem simultaneously enchanted and scary. What dwells in their depths appears as prone to extravagant manifestation as the undergrowth of the subconscious mind, and as directly related to fantasy—a popular genre that DaveandJenn align themselves with.

Out of this forest, the Calgary-based artists, also known as Jennifer Saleik and David Foy, have coaxed a new *dramatis personae*: a group of mythical three-dimensional creatures that emerges in *No End* (2015). The

forest, represented by a wall of 18 paintings made since 2010, forms the backdrop of the gory tableaux. Two sons have beheaded their wolf-like mother. One, the childlike “Slow-to-Start,” rides her back; the other, “The Archer,” guards her severed head. The implied narrative of death and regeneration is a mash-up of the Romulus and Remus legend and the Mesopotamian origin myth of Tiamat, the female symbol associated with primordial chaos, and other stories as well. The scene would be gruesome were it not couched in the visual language of cartoons, toys and puppet shows. Instead, the loops of gore in the gaping neck, the exposed ribs and the swollen, spouting teats of the furry, white, headless she-wolf, whose aggressively alert body is still standing, invite close looking. So do the work’s unusual costume-trunk materials—fabrics, fake fur, a child’s sleeping bag, fragments of a pink cut-glass paperweight—combined with epoxy putty, bronze, wood, steel and acrylic paint, which the artists are becoming adept at fashioning into vivid characters.

DaveandJenn territory overlaps that of David Altmejd and Shary Boyle in which fairytale horrors and grotesquerie are mixed to elicit fascination. As if fantasy were our culture’s answer to myth, the artists weave these genres together to create idiosyncratic worlds. *No End* points not only to the origins of DaveandJenn’s sculpture in their painting, but also to the seamlessness of their universe. As the artists put it, “We paint what we want to make and we make what we paint.” The process is transformative.

Installation view of  
**DaveandJenn’s** *No End* (detail)  
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