

It takes two

Artistic duo DaveandJenn bring structured chaos to TrépanierBaer
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DaveandJenn's *This Sinking Feeling Could Keep You Afloat*, installation view at TrépanierBaer Gallery, 2014. Photo Courtesy TrépanierBaer Gallery.

From the street, the latest exhibition at TrépanierBaer Gallery looks like it will be understated: an alluring title suggesting hidden depth, a single undersized sculpture on a plinth and three small-scale collages. Yet, while the work of artist duo DaveandJenn is absolutely brimming with both figurative and literal depth, there is nothing minimal about *This Sinking Feeling Could Keep You Afloat*.

Filling the entrance hall, the main gallery and spilling into the back rooms, the exhibition is comprised of a collection of large fantastical sculptures and thick chunky paintings, products of the last two years of the couples' artistic narrative, which has brought them increasing renown in the Alberta art scene.

As artistic foils, best friends, and husband and wife, Jennifer Saleik and David Foy — who make up DaveandJenn — began painting together in 2004, went through formal training as a duo at the Alberta College of Art and Design, and since then have received praise and acclaim from all corners.

Through it all they have continued to complement each other perfectly. “We have known each other a long time, we’re best friends and we like working together,” says Saleik. “Dave is naturally more methodically minded and I have a weakness for philosophical ranting.”

These artistic tendencies come through in their work. The paintings, which can weigh up to 200 pounds, consist of layer upon layer of resin. Each coat is meticulously applied to a reinforced wooden mount with a mixture of commonplace and absurdist imagery rendered in between in vivid colours. The resulting works of art are often three or four inches thick, packed with minute details, and walking the fine line between chaos and structure.

Often taking more than two months to complete, the paintings are both a part of a continuing unwritten narrative that runs throughout the entire catalogue of DaveandJenn's work, and a response to ongoing global events.

References to our current place within the scope of human history appear alongside recurring imagery, such as their own interpretation and literal deconstruction of the Capitoline Wolf, who for them represents a figure of creative chaos. According to Saleik, the paintings grow organically with each layer. “They’re not completed until I get a happy little hum in my brain,” she says.

The other half of the exhibition, taking up the entirety of the main gallery, is a series of sculptures, which, like the paintings, occupy the same story arc. Evocative, visceral and more than a little bit gruesome, the sculptures are a testament to the creativity and experimentation that has kept the artistic duo so vital. Incorporating steel and woodwork, textiles, sculpting foam and, of course, painting, they loom larger than life and are generously spaced so as to invite the audience to examine them from all sides.

“It’s almost like 3D painting now,” explains Saleik. “Instead of just looking, you can walk right through it.”

With all the sadness, symbolism and sacrifice of a Grimms’ fairy tale, not to mention the violence, the sculptures tell the tale of two grown brothers facing the harsh realities of the adult world. “A lot of it is about finding your way in uncertain times,” says Saleik of the sculpture and the exhibition as a whole. “Sometimes with grace and sometimes with folly.”

The exhibition is hard to classify. With both painting and sculpture, subject matter that ranges from the wildly fantastical to the everyday mundane, and the fact that as a joint effort, each piece receives the attentions of both artists, the exhibition is many things. Even in their approach, DaveandJenn admit to using equal parts seriousness and absurdity.

Yet don’t be fooled when walking by the front window, because if there is one thing this exhibition is definitely not, it is minimalist.

[This Sinking Feeling Could Keep You Afloat](#) is on exhibition until January 24 at TrépanierBaer Gallery.