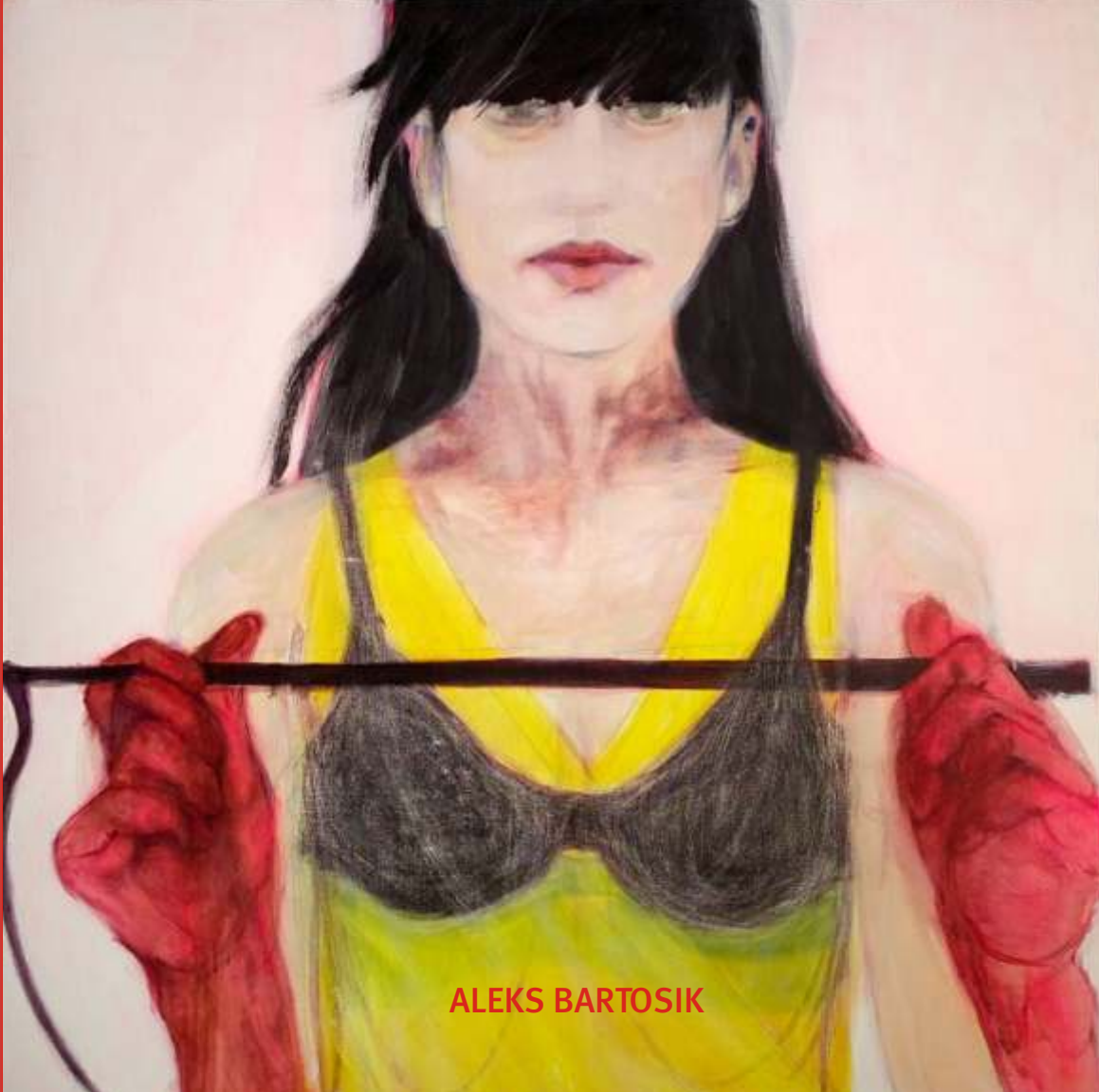


ALEKS BARTOSIK A REQUIEM FOR PASSION



ALEKS BARTOSIK

The Drawers - Headbones Gallery

Contemporary Drawing, Sculpture and Works on Paper

A REQUIEM FOR PASSION
Portraits by
ALEKS BARTOSIK

September 1 - October 2, 2011

Essay by James D. Campbell

Artist Catalog: A Requiem For Passion - Portraits by Aleks Bartosik
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Dark Karma: Uncensored Thoughts On The Art of Aleks Bartosik

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RICH FOG



Micro Publishing

Dark Karma:

Uncensored Thoughts On The Art of Aleks Bartosik

Picture this: Outsider artist Henry Darger prone on the gurney -- stripped, prepped and in constraints, waiting for a sex change op with no anaesthetic in sight, surrounded by his endearing Vivian girl heroines who are all holding steel tongs, trephines and Liston knives hidden behind their backs. This image comes effortlessly to mind when reflecting upon the work of Aleks Bartosik, for she does imaginative violence to Darger's demented, misogynistic phantasia as a gifted feminist artist unafraid of exploring her own dark side. She reclaims something of his territory as being ineluctably her own.

She shaves his work of what has been called its obsessively phallogocentric taxonomy and turns it on its head. No erect penises grafted onto young girls here. You might say she harrows up his soul from the nether regions where it has languished these last many years, draws and quarters it -- and makes it unapologetically her own, Kali-like. I do not mean to suggest that there is anything like stylistic affiliation at work here aside from a similarly put-upon, at-high-risk repertoire of painting subjects, but only that Bartosik shares with Darger in a welter of fever-dream-like imagery what has been called a “near hallucinatory intensity”. (1)

In any case, her visionary work has an inflammatory aura, an unsettling,

potentially wound-like resonance. The mercury here often rises to near-boiling point. Once she gets the hooks in, you're hers. She particularizes with weird acumen those extreme fugue states of identity and desire that vex us in the life-world and puts paint to them – and with beguiling virtuosity for an artist



(detail) from drawing performance at Headbones , 2009

with only a bare decade of work behind her. In fact, all her work to date has been rife with telling psychological as well as oft-demonic, almost inassimilable sociological tropes. Like those of fellow painters Eliza Griffiths (mutable gender/identities) and Marion Wagschal (potent duende generators), her figures are triumphant painting events as well as psychic integers of chiasm and darkkarma. Bartosik now joins their ranks as a feminist figurative painter exploring issues of gender and identity and psychological adversity in topical, intrepid and unforeseen ways.

Here is a visual artist capable of inordinately deft mark-making routines – and a breathtaking delicacy in her rendering of the figure even when associated imagery is at its most dramatically wayward and extreme. However fraught with figures in extremis her work is, she knows what she is about. And it

shows. She renders flesh jackets as angst-ridden playgrounds, and auratic red watercolor wash less as pancake makeup than spilled amniotic fluid or lifeblood -- and she does so with a casual authority few others have or can.

She works her drawn figures into a state of uncanny, even vibratory self-presence, grafting animal parts onto human parts and vice versa with radiant vestigial crossovers until just the right threshold of psychic density has been reached. One might suggest that she is a creature of perfect control – or one all too willing to put herself in harm's way with no safety net in sight for the sake of her art. Hers' is a no-holds-barred exploration of a twilight psychological space as harrowing as it is authentic.

The truth is that Bartosik the artist and presumably the person is entirely unafraid. She recognizes fear as being the true mindfucker and resists it at every turn. Her works are at once subversive and provocative, celebrating rupture over continuity and continuity over rupture, as a means of ownership, avowal and perhaps overcoming. Her female figures are rendered with rare skill in open arenas of suffering and transformation – and with a consummately theatrical, take-no-prisoners bravado. But their rendering also possesses an aching, even heartbreaking, subtlety that betrays the sheer sophistication of this artist's understanding of human psychology and the need for excess as a way of working-through the perils of the present tense.

Her corpus represents her own unique take on Eden's nightside and its in!. While she detonates conventional narrative structure with all the delirium of a



Self portrait with horse, Brazil , 2010

single heartfelt image wrested from the mind's eye and sent full-tilt over the edge of every orthodoxy and every expectation, we still infer from her painting content that it is always told in the first person -- I mean, that Aleks Bartosik herself is the subject, the sole agent provocateur of her own wildly adumbrated reality, her Artaud-like cruelty theatre of the Real. With a repertoire that ranges freely from wall-drawings and performances to costume and painting, Bartosik demonstrates that her own personae are strongly inscribed across all these surfaces and spaces with what is frequently a karmic, unstoppable and almost demented Kali-like fury.

But it should be emphasized that her embodied Me always rests on the solid fundament of an empathic We. No mute solipsist, she. Bartosik never

turns away from or denies the world, but embraces it – and its extremities -- at all costs and whatever the consequences. Her work investigates both self and other and their several interactive morphologies at the closest of quarters.

If her pictorial accomplishments apropos this human equation are profoundly multiple, well, it is probably because her painting world intermixes vulnerability and a lucid childlike innocence with disruptions characterized by an extreme violence and portents of a polymorphous perversity. There is also a salutary ambiguity always already at work there, even in the face of such disruptive web-like tremors, a smudging of possible selves across the full gamut of the human. But governing all that is what one concludes is a hard-won self-awareness, a well-nigh omniscient clarity that reads as virtually absolute. In other words, hers is a clarity that triumphs over everything else.

Aleks Bartosik was asked not that long ago what inspired her and she responded with an understatement and honesty that still rings true:

“People. I'm inspired by the particularities, delicacies, sensitivities, beauties and obsessions held within relationships between lovers, siblings/twins, friends, strangers, or themselves. I like to observe the visible (and accessible) interactions between people and the situations they are placed in and re-create my own scenarios and my own environments and narrations.” (2)

She is a gifted critic and surveyor of the Social, or say, better, a wily ethnographer of the inner and outer worlds of her female protagonists and their tangled skein of relationships in the lived world. Aleks agonistes. She is untangling a noose to catch her viewers' heads in, as she lures them into her own oneiric and ontologically fraught domain wherein they may experience pleasure, as she says, or experience a whole world of hurt heretofore only hinted at in the annals of their own lives or richly embedded there. She has said:

“I want the viewers to have experienced some sort of a visual pleasure. Entered some sort of an imaginary land or situation. I am not particularly sure what I would like them to say, but I know what I would like them to experience. Perhaps they may say something like: “That was strange.” in a delightful sense or a frightened sense. The Horse Heads (a work in progress) are rooted in a larger and deeper narrative, but I



purposefully want them to appear playful and child-like.” (3)

That was strange. Yes, and surreal, too. But also emotionally true. Pleasurable? Often. Seductive? Yes. Painful, maybe, if truth be told. I have termed the characterizing ethos of her work “dark karma”. But this is limiting, even misleading, especially where it dovetails with Buddhist teaching, because it only tells one side of the story, offers only half the truth, if you will. The whole truth is this: if there is dark karma in her work, there are also textures of light karma strewn out across its full array that invigorate and might well redeem the present tense of painting.

Perhaps Bartosik is reminding us – reminding herself as well, of course -- that this fragile life we live, is, well, fragile, and overwhelmingly a consequence and not a mere souvenir or portent of how we have lived. A life lived in and through angst and psychic suffering (i.e. dark karma) is a consequence of having lived controlled by desire-nature. If a life lived meretriciously (i.e. light karma) is a result of ?having lived in control of desire-nature, well, Bartosik demonstrates that too, and in the very execution of these works, with their fearless mien, and transparent process-esthetic, and, above all, her will to move forwards restlessly from one medium to the next, all the while embroidering her signature cosmogony with myriad scars and cries of ecstatic joy and agony across the face of the life-world.

Arguably, her whole body of work, in its very ethic of execution and

resolute “isness” in the world, can be fruitfully understood in terms of the concept of dark-and-bright action as the presence of wholesome and unwholesome features in the self-same action in Buddhist thought. (4) One might suggest that she is a savant of the lower worlds and perhaps intends that her work itself is an adamantine bridge towards overcoming desire-nature, making dark karma light, and triumphing over the specters of adversity by walking on air, seraph or sylph-like.



If you have the strength, if you possess the emotional wherewithal, the psychological stamina, and above all, if you are not afraid of the dark, Aleks Bartosik will take you by the hand and lead you over the threshold into the night side of Eden where she will proceed to take you places you've never been, show you things that you have never seen, and perhaps see the life run out of you. (5) Her invitation to the dark side of dreamland, writ in letters awash in blood, bruises and a tremulous beauty, is one hard to resist. Yes, this work stakes that kind of claim, possesses both a fiercely visceral and fiendishly auratic life, is not easily dismissed, and seldom forgotten.

In effect, Aleks Bartosik's art seesaws in arresting and exhilarating fashion between the purely abject and the authentically human; between a psychological hard place and a perilous beauty, as it were. Perilous because it trembles ghost-like on the threshold of disappearance as quickly as it is glimpsed, and morphs from dream into nightmare and back again in a bare nanosecond.

Not since Betty Goodwin left us (she died last autumn at the age of 85) has a Canadian artist measured and plumbed so fearlessly and with such remarkable acuity and devil-may-care abandon the hungry tides and restless shadows of the human heart.

James D. Campbell

Notes: Dark Karma

?1. See John M. MacGregor? Henry Darger In *The Realms of The Unreal* (New York: Delano Greenidge Editions, 2002).

2. Aleks Bartosik, cited in post submitted by Jen 11/28/2007 on *She Does the City.com*, online text.

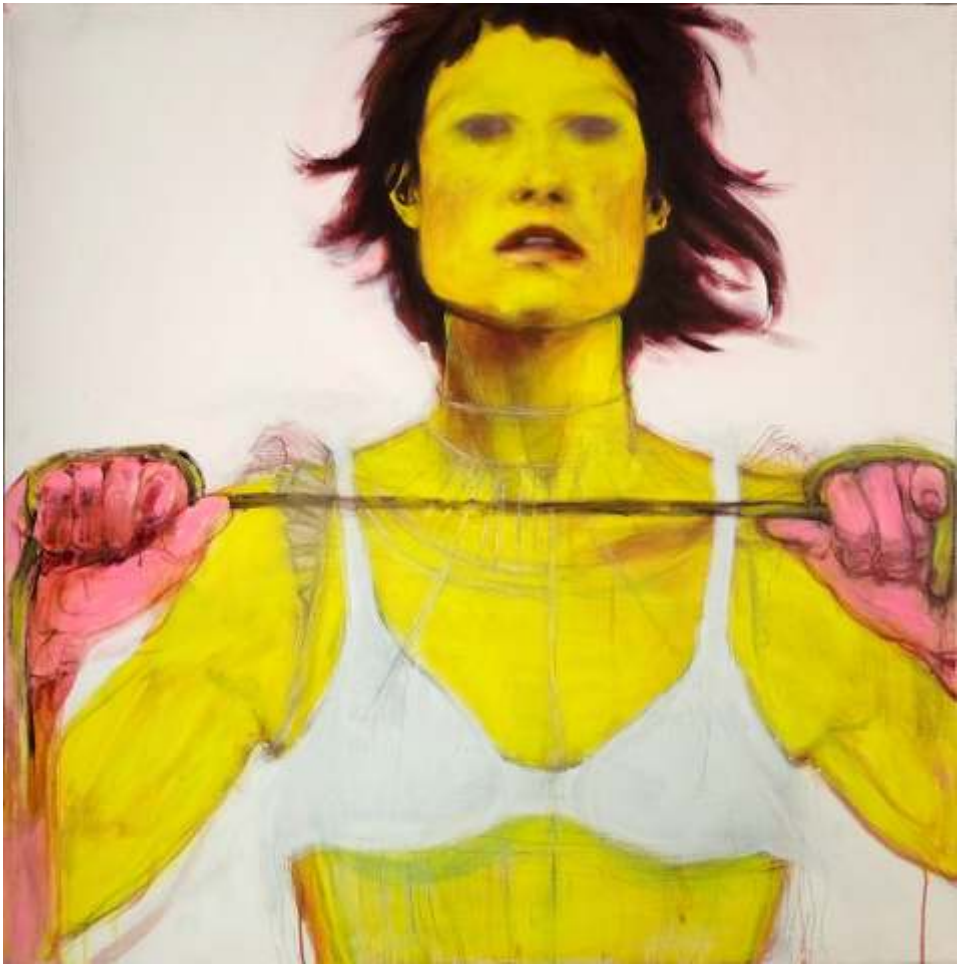
3. Ibid.

4. See “Dark and Bright Karma: a New Reading” by Dr. Abraham Vález de Cea of the Georgetown University Theology Department at <http://www.buddhistethics.org/karma12/velez01.pdf>. As the author notes, this concept “has an enormous potential to explain the ethical behavior of many Buddhists. In this sense, the concept of dark-and- bright action bridges the gap between theory and practice in Buddhist ethics, that is, between the elitist and idealistic view of Buddhist ethics characteristic of Abhidharma literature, and the more common ethical practice of ordinary Buddhists.”

5. As the malevolent spirit and splendidly righteous anti-heroine -- played by the inimitable Alice Krige -- said with relish in the film version of Peter Straub's *Ghost Story*.



self portrait with almond eyes - 2005
conte, pencil, oil on canvas, 47,5 x 47,5 inches



she was not his venus in furs - 2007
acrylic, conte, pencil, oil on canvas, 48 x 48 inches



face 1 - 2005
acrylic, conte, pencil, oil on canvas, 47.5 x 47.5 inches



this venus stole an artichoke heart - 2007
acrylic, conte, pencil on canvas, 48 x 48 inches



chasing stampedes of thoughts in her head - 2011
oil on canvas, 23 x 18 inches



and she was his venus in furs - 2007
acrylic, conte, pencil on canvas, 47.5 x 46.5 inches



ramona - 2005
oil, charcoal on canvas, 30x 24 inches



she was a beautiful apple - 2007
acrylic, conte, pencil, oil on canvas, 48 x 48 inches



at her worst - 2011
oil on canvas, 23 x 18 inches



she does not want to ride the pain anymore - 2011
acrylic, conte, pencil, oil on canvas, 48 x 48 inches



face # 10 - 2005
charcoal, conte, acrylic, oilstickon paper, 35 x 29,5 inches



to be titled - 2011
acrylic, pencil, oil on canvas, 48 x 48 inches



face # 8 - 2005
charcoal, conte, acrylic, oilstick on paper, 35 x 29,5 inches



with her animal heart, a place in his she wanted - 2010
acrylic, conte, pencil, oil on canvas, 48 x 48 inches



face # 1 - 2005
charcoal, conte, acrylic on paper, 35 x 29.5 inches



her existence only failed to honour her own 'myth' - 2009
acrylic, pencil, oil on canvas, 48 x 48 inches



heavy head - 2011
oil on canvas, 23 x 18 inches



ice maiden - 2009
acrylic, conte, pencil, oilstick, oil on canvas, 50x 48 inches



face # 6 (cat woman) - 2005
charcoal, conte, acrylic, oilstick on paper, 35 x 29,5 inches



she wanted to say everything - 2009
acrylic, pencil, oil on canvas, 48 x 48 inches



face 2 - 2005
acrylic, conte, pencil, oil on canvas, 23 x 21 inches



face # 11 - 2005
charcoal, conte, acrylic, oilstick on paper, 35 x 29,5 inches



guardian beast - 2011
oil on canvas, 23 x 18 inches



Ramona, missing her sister Beezus - 2011
pencil, oil on canvas, 43 x 34 inches



her smiles of darkness - 2011
oil on canvas, 23 x 18 inches



face # 12 - 2005
charcoal, conte, acrylic, oilstick on paper, 35 x 29,5 inches



eat my artichoke-heart out - 2009
acrylic on canvas, 12 x 12 inches



fk you and the knight who rode in on you - 2009**
acrylic, oil on canvas, 12 x 12 inches

aleks bartosik

academic history

2002-2005 concordia university: MFA (montréal, QC, canada)

1997-2001 queen's university: BFA with honours (kingston, ON, canada)

solo & two person exhibitions

2011 **a requiem for passion**, headbones gallery. vernon, BC, canada (catalogue)

2010 **moments in damage**, definitely superior art gallery. thunder bay, ON, canada

2007 **borrowing artichoke-hearts**, usine c. montréal, QC, canada

wallpapers, awol gallery. toronto, ON, canada

2005 **faces**, galerie luz. montréal, QC, canada

marsupial traces, galerie art mûr. montréal, QC, canada

2004 **latex flags**, site-specific installation on bald head island. NC, usa

animals and things, gallery weiß. nürnberg, germany

2003 **drawings**, bourget gallery. montréal, QC, canada

drawings, springbankarts centre. mississauga, ON, canada

sibyllae, gallery 401. toronto, ON, canada

two or three person exhibitions

2011 **stampede of animal-hearts** (with Natasha Doyon), la petite mort gallery. ottawa, ON

2009 **spunky rooms** (with robin tewes), headbones gallery. toronto, ON, canada (catalogue)

2008 **month of photography** (with Facciponte and Murrell) art gallery of peel, brampton, ON

2005 **abstraction** (with Roberts & Schenker) acme art gallery. wilmington, NC, USA
 ylwa's dream (with Daphne Gerou) gallery 401, toronto, ON, Canada

group exhibitions

2011 **rudefe artist residency fund-raiser**, lonsdale gallery, toronto, ON, canada
 last call, project 165, toronto, ON, canada

2010 **the infidels**, la petite mort gallery. ottawa, ON, canada
 forces of nature, glenhyrst art gallery of brant, brantford, ON, canada
 headbones gallery neopriest montreal, gallery art mûr, montreal, QC, canada
 drawing 2010, john b. aird gallery, toronto, ON, canada

2009 **square foot**, awol. gallery. toronto, ON, canada
 we made a deal with the devil, "methinks" art tour, toronto (project 165), montreal
 (centre chat bleu) and brooklyn
 neopriest, definitely superior art gallery, thunder bay, ON, canada
 2nd annual governors island art fair, with galleryELL, governors island, NY, usa
 grassroots arts festival, art gallery of mississauga. mississauga, ON, canada.
 the artist project : toronto, the liberty grand. toronto, ON, canada
 neopriest, headbones gallery. toronto, ON, canada
 pass the buddha, canadian museum of northern history. kirkland lake, ON, canada.

2008 **breaking new ground**, glenhyrst art gallery of brant. brantford, ON, canada
 movement o8, production house. etobicoke, ON, canada
 TIAF (with headbones gallery, TO), toronto, ON, canada

- 2008 **nomadismo cultural**, zarinha centro de cultura. JP, brazil
living arts centre juried art show, LAC gallery. mississauga, ON, canada
the artist project : toronto, the liberty grand. toronto, ON, canada
drawing 2008, john b. aird gallery. toronto, ON, canada
www.women, headbones gallery (with schneeman & chicago, etc). toronto, ON, canada
generations 6, A.I.R gallery. new york, new york, USA
- 2007 **veni, vidi, over**, lennox contemporary. toronto, ON, canada
the mirrors, contemporary art crossing, kyoto int. community house. kyoto, japan
drawing 2007, glenhyrst art gallery of brant. brantford, ON, canada
TIAF, (with headbones gallery, TO), toronto, ON, canada
nuit blanche (horse heads event), headbones gallery. toronto, ON, canada
the best of film fort, art gallery of mississauga. mississauga, ON, canada
square foot, awol. gallery. toronto, ON, canada
TOAE, nathan phillips square. toronto, ON, canada
the drawing show, arthouse. calgary, AB, canada
small works, C1 space. toronto, ON, canada
NAC. núcleo de arte contemporânea, universidade federal da paraíba. PB, brazil
- 2006 **wallpapers**, vermont studio center, open studios. johnson, VT, usa
dancing to the invisible piper canadian contemporary figurative art, mississauga Art gallery, mississauga, ON
beauty & obsession, headbones gallery, the drawers. toronto, ON, canada
square foot, a.w.o.l. gallery. toronto, ON, canada

- 2006 **in your face**, art gallery of ontario. toronto, ON, canada
n.b.i. international, bottega art gallery. wilmington, NC, usa
persephone's palace, hang man gallery. toronto, ON, canada
- 2005 **the fifth international biennial of contemporary art**, fortezza da basso. florence, italy
square foot, project spaceman williamsburg. brooklyn, NY, usa
no boundaries, university of north carolina. wilmington, NC, usa
no boundaries, fayetteville museum of art. fayetteville, NC, usa
- 2004 **no boundaries international art colony**, acme art gallery. wilmington, NC, usa
salon rouge, vav gallery. montréal, QC, canada
look ma, no hands (a performance symposium), vav gallery. montréal, QC, canada
- 2003 **eye and hand juried drawing exhibition**, etobicoke civic centre art gallery. etobicoke, ON
international künstlerkolonie, schloss almshof. nürnberg, germany
salon dollop, rad'a gallery. montréal, QC, canada
- 2002 **form**, circa gallery. toronto, ON, canada
body as (ready to be re-) made, propeller centre for the visual arts. toronto, ON, canada
29th annual juried show, art gallery of peel. brampton, ON, canada
rash, agnes etherington art centre. kingston, ON, canada
ambrosia (with hall-patch & munro), union gallery. kingston, ON, canada
shaken, not stirred, union gallery. kingston, ON, canada
TOAE, nathan phillips square. toronto, ON, canada
- 1998 **scumbling**, union gallery. kingston, ON, canada

grants and awards

- 2011 the ontario arts council, project grant, ON, canada
honourable mention, marty's award (visual art). mississauga, ON
- 2010 the ontario arts council, visual art grant, ON, canada
- 2009 1st prize, chocolate competition: toronto artist project, toronto, ON, canada
- 2008 featured toronto artist of the month (october): toronto visual artists web-site
canada council for the arts: travel grant. canada
partial fellowship for vermont studio center artists' residency. johnson, VT, usa
- 2007 jurors' choice award, drawing show . glenhyrst art gallery of brant, brantford, ON
drawing conclusions '07 drawing award: artSEEN journal, florence, italy
the ontario arts council, visual art grant. ON, canada
the elizabeth greenshields foundation grant. montréal, QC, canada
- 2006 canada council travel grant. canada
full fellowship for vermont studio center artists' residency. johnson, VT, usa
- 2004 the elizabeth greenshields foundation grant. montréal, QC, canada
the imperial tobacco visual arts grant. montréal, QC, canada
the william blair bruce european fine art travel scholarship. sweden & canada
- 2003 mississauga arts council grant: visual arts for emerging artist. mississauga, ON
- 2001 the andre bieler prize: queen's university. kingston, ON, canada
- 2000 the margaret craig scholarship in fine art: queen's university. kingston, ON, canada

reviews

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jordan, betty ann. "how to buy art." national post, mar.7, 2008, pp. PM6, PM7.

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urban, regina. "animalische 'weibchen.'" kultur regional, jul.29, 2004, p.25.

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arthouse. the drawing show (april 20 may 4). kitchener: pandora press, 2007.

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headbones gallery. www.women (feb.16 mar.20, 2008). toronto: rich fog micro publishing, 2008.

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roberts, toll, & tustin. no boundaries: fourth international art colony. wilmington printing company, 2005.

schels, pistner & wahl. 22.6.-6.7.2003. erste internationale kunstler kolonie schloss almshof.

nürnberg: kulturlanden schloss almshof, g. pistner, 2005.

residencies

- 2009 vermont studio center. johnson, VT, usa
- 2006 vermont studio center. johnson, VT, usa
- 2005 acme art studios: one invited international artist in residence. wilmington, NC, usa
- 2004 no boundaries international art colony. bald head island, NC, usa
- 2003 international künstlerkolonie in schloss almoshof. nürnberg, germany

collections

- acme art studios residency program, NC, usa
- arthouse, calgary, AB, canada
- jetz kunst web-site: contemporary art collection: germany: www.jetztkunst.de
- national museum der stadt nürnberg, germany
- no boundaries international art colony, NC, usa
- schloss almoshof, nürnberg, germany
- private collections

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