



**GAY & LESBIAN CITY LIVING**

## In the summer heat

by Sholem Krishtalka

in [Art Review](#)

**Hellish anxiety stalks both ends of the country**



Hauntings Scream, curated by Nancy Campbell, features disturbing work by Ed Pien and Samonie Toonoo.

Most galleries use the summer as an excuse for lighter exhibitions. University of Toronto's Justina M Barnicke gallery, on the other hand, lunged into the season with *Scream*, sharply curated by Nancy Campbell, pairing drawings by Toronto's Ed Pien with the soapstone sculptures of Cape Dorset-based Inuit artist Samonie Toonoo. This is the second time Campbell has arranged this kind of matching — she did the same thing with last year's brilliant Shary Boyle/Shuvinai Asoona show — and the outcome is no less rigorous and no less dazzling. The two artists each hold a firmly staked-out territory: Pien covers the walls with drawings; Toonoo populates the rooms with an assemblage of figurines. Despite the disparity of medium, the two artists' work achieves a powerful and haunting harmony.

Pien's drawings are a mass of perverse anxiety. In the smaller, individuated works, figures enact lurid forms of self-harm. The titles — *Drawing on Hell*, *Cannibals and Other Beings* — only give the merest hint of the psychological devastation that Pien's ink line portrays. People eat their own limbs, weep anxiously over their disemboweled viscera, contort their misshapen bodies into strange and cruel shapes. Genitalia is a recurring motif, but never teasing or erotic; it is always there as an object of shame, anxiety or torment.

The larger wall pieces further this anxiety. From far away, an abstract shape seems to conglomerate in one corner of the picture plane, and spreads out in looping tentacles towards another. That shape is, in fact, a mass of myriad tiny figures, repeated over and over, each stamped atop another, jostling in packed proximity. The effect is hellishly claustrophobic, made all the more unnerving by the unerring grace of Pien's drawing methods.

Toonoo's soapstone figurines are likewise haunt-ed, sometimes literally. Numerous sculptures depict the souls of dead bodies rising out of their mouths. They ascend like antlers or vast forked tongues, writhing, spiky and knife-edged. There is no comfort in Toonoo's world: the priests are blockish and intimidating, wielding their crucifixes like clubs, with garish yellow hair that underscores their invasive otherness. One of the most disturbing images in the show is Toonoo's sculpture of the grim reaper, not as a hushed figure of awe, but as a dolt: a vacant grinning skull with googly eyes and a dunce cap.



The show takes its title from Edvard Munch's ubiquitous image of anguished interiority. Pien and Toonoo ably carry that torch, delivering a show of staggering depth and resonance. Moreover, with her pairings, Campbell continues to unite the northern and southern edges of this country's art practice in a deeply meaningful way, creating seemingly new relationships and unearthing rich veins of artistic continuity. Not too shabby for a summer show.

*Scream continues at Justina M Barnicke (7 Hart House Circle) until Sat, Aug 21. (416) 978-8398.*

<http://www.intorontomag.com/art-design/art-review/in-the-summer-heat>