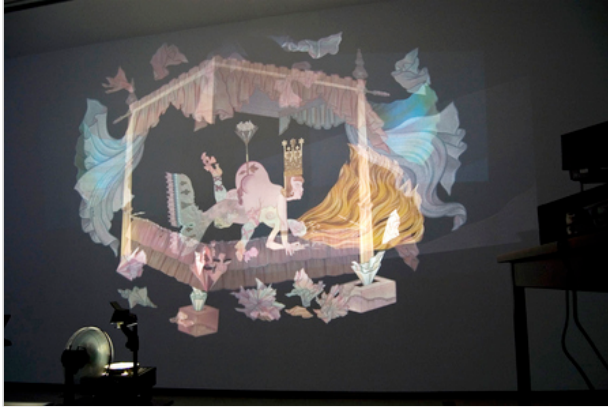


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David Balzer's Top 3: Haunted Heroes

VARIOUS LOCATIONS JAN TO DEC 2010

by DAVID BALZER



Daniel Barrow "Emotional Feelings" 2010 Installation view Courtesy Art Gallery of York University / photo Cheryl O'Brien

Daniel Barrow "Emotional Feelings" 2010 Installation view Courtesy Art Gallery of York University / photo Cheryl O'Brien

1. [Daniel Barrow: Emotional Feelings](#) at the Art Gallery of York University

[Winnipeg native Daniel Barrow's 2010 Sobey win](#), a thoroughly pleasant surprise, heralded his acceptance by a contemporary art establishment which typically places bets on more hardened, entrepreneurial visions. Yet Barrow's work is far from unafraid or unassuming, despite its delicate, insular qualities. Barrow goes back to the essence of romantic expression, examining the horrors and glories of consciousness through the veils of taste, myth, pretense and, above all, beauty. His exhibit earlier this year at Toronto's [Art Gallery of York University](#), "Emotional Feelings," incorporated overhead projection, his trademark—with which he has, in the past, performed astonishing manual animation, and with which, this time, he allowed viewers to interact. The experience mixed perversion, humour and empathy. Viewers moved a fat king up and down on a four-poster bed as he raped a mermaid, and they changed motifs on a Kleenex box. For all its archaisms, Barrow's work is strikingly relevant. Among other things, it is about the cultivated universes—repulsive, mawkish, erotic, aestheticist or whatever—possible in a society that, through so many means, encourages compulsive, delirious seclusion.



Guy Maddin *Hauntings* / 2010 Film still / photo by Jody Shapiro

2. Guy Maddin: *Hauntings I and II* at the TIFF Bell Lightbox

Film director Guy Maddin's remarkable commission for [the opening of the TIFF Bell Lightbox](#) in Toronto this September, *Hauntings I and II*, is a major work—a grand statement on film history, memory and the power of the moving image. (Disclosure: I worked a brief TIFF contract during this year's festival.) Offering to furnish ghosts for the festival's brand-new complex (because every good movie-house needs them), Maddin put an installation in an upper-floor window (*Hauntings II*) and a complex of screens in the new, ground-floor exhibition space (*Hauntings I*). This latter work provided endless enthrallment. Each of the screens—11 in total, arranged like a constellation, with space to weave around them—housed Maddin's short, silent remakes of unfinished works by [Murnau](#), [von Sternberg](#), [Mizoguchi](#) and others. One could appreciate *Hauntings I* first as a sublime hallucination: taken together, the screens flickered with images of voluptuousness and sorrow, of life and death (or, in the words of the exhortatory intertitles in one of the films, "EROS!" and "THANATOS!"). Taken singly, the works were intimate, witty, poignant, lewd and utterly brilliant. One felt, indeed, like Dante: at first privy to a spectacular array of lost souls and then, wonderfully, given the chance to converse with each one.



"Scream: Ed Pien and Samonie Toonoo" Installation view Courtesy Justina M. Barnicke Gallery

3. *Scream*: Ed Pien and Samonie Toonoo at the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery

Curator Nancy Campbell followed [her triumphant 2009 pairing of Shary Boyle and Shuinai Ashoona](#) at Toronto's [Justina M. Barnicke Gallery](#) with "Scream," which united Toronto artist [Ed Pien](#) with Cape Dorset sculptor [Samonie Toonoo](#). The title came from Munch—and the exhibit, accordingly, straight from the darkest and strangest regions of its artists' imaginations. Pien was represented by his messy, disturbing, guttural drawings (an extreme counterpart to his pretty cut-paper works). Pien collects Toonoo's work, and Campbell showed affinities between the two, as well as differences, with verve and impact. Both Pien and Toonoo inhabit, to varying degrees, underworlds. Toonoo's representation of this may, to Southern eyes, seem peculiar, yet his melding of Inuit spiritualism and popular culture is unproblematic, done with confidence, buoyancy and intellect. His stonework provided a striking complement to the tentativeness of Pien's terror-scrawks. And yet both artists testified to the legibility and resonance of the contemporary creative id, regardless of its geographic, ethnic or even historical origins.

David Balzer is assistant editor of *Canadian Art* and an art critic for *EYE WEEKLY*.

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