



## Catching some Zs: Figures of Sleep

*What does sleep mean to you? Figures of Sleep conveys messages about sleep through artistry*

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*The exhibit explores the act of sleeping and the reasons for doing so.*

The opening reception of the Art Museum at U of T's newest exhibit, *Figures of Sleep*, took place on January 25 at University College. The exhibit aimed to explore concepts of what we do when we fall asleep, how we do it, and why. It did, in fact, leave me in the dark for a little bit—literally and figuratively.

The exhibition's statement describes the collection works in "consider[ing] the cultural anxieties manifest in the popular and critical imagination around the collapsing biological function of sleep under economic, social, and technological transformation."

*Figures of Sleep* explores the ways in which sleep is altered under a social and political standpoint. It directs our attention to how sleep offers remedies to our problems, and how sleep in itself can often just be a temporary solution to these notions.

My peers and I enter the exhibit with little knowledge of how this idea works—however, we are excited to find out. One work that helped us grasp it was **Rebecca Belmore's** "Dream Catcher"—a site for indigenous struggle. The work depicts a woman with a long blanket draped over her. She sleeps on a faded grey sidewalk lined with crusted leaves and a loose white feather hovering above the image. A vibrant, fur-coat-wearing Italian woman stands next to us and revels within the image. It's a carpet of some sort, a hanging piece of material with the image sown right onto it.

"I wonder," an art-goer, whose name I did not catch, asked, "Why the artist chose to depict a lion and an elephant on her blanket. Why not other animals?"

Jason Han, a fourth-year music student, replied, “Elephants are known for their memories. Maybe she wants to depict that indigenous people will always remember what they’ve been subjected to.”

Staring longer at the piece, I have to agree. In contrast, the image of the lioness portrays what the woman needs to be in a society that forces her to react like the elephant—strong-willed and ready to defend herself when needed.

We got some more information from an attendant working at the exhibit. She answered all of my questions with one question of her own: “What is sleeping, to you?” I wasn’t sure what to make of it because it’s nothing that I’ve taken time to explore. “That’s basically what this is. An exploration of sleep,” she said.

Sitting there in the middle of the gallery, I spot a thick, bold stump with a sleeping bag on its side. Perhaps symbolizing homeless culture, it’s a giant statement to that idea in itself.

Besides the works of art, I had to take into consideration the kind of lighting that was overhead. The entire exhibit, I realized before leaving, was dimly lit, but there was enough light to see what we needed to see.

The lighting of the gallery was important to how each work was supposed to be manifested. In the dark, we don’t see very much, so we might not understand sleep on its own. When given a little light, perhaps there’s a leeway into noticing what sleep does to us on a regular basis.

The other part of the *Figures of Sleep* exhibit was held in Hart House, where the works were limited, but had the same exhilarating affect as the former. The gallery was dark this time, with two works on display.

The first room we approached was pitch black, with phrases, words, and sentences projected onto the four white walls. They were in different languages—some in German, some in English, and some in Spanish. The work was by two artists named **Peter Fischli** and **David Weiss**, called “Question Projections.” They had been collecting various sources for their work since the 80s.

It seemed that these writings on the walls were thoughts that came to people consciously and unconsciously when they are asleep. Some phrases, in English, included: “How much is 43 x 87?” or “Does a secret tunnel lead directly to the kitchen?” Another in German read: “Soll ich mich selest befriedigen?”

*Figures of Sleep* left me with a different acceptance of sleeping, in a sense. The exhibit was keen on showing the direct visualization of it, and how sleep delves outside of the idea of just closing one’s eyes and resting.

The idea here is that sleep must act as a way to notice societal issues and how sleep ultimately helps us understand life’s burdens.

*Figures of Sleep* runs until March 3 at the Art Museum.



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