

# STRANGE MAGIC

The moratorium on Ossington Avenue bars was lifted recently, but good art in the area has always been legal. Here's what to view between pints.

BY LEAH SANDALS

## 1. David Hoffos at the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art

952 Queen St. W., to Dec. 31

For the past few weeks, David Hoffos' *Scenes from the House Dream* has been generating lineups at MOCCA. And for good reason — Hoffos, who's toiled in Lethbridge, Alta., for the past 20 years, has an output that's distinctive in both its sense and its sensibility. His material technique precisely arranges analogue TVs, picture frames, mirrors and dioramas to create a unique, physically immersive virtual reality. And his moods are steadfastly eerie, with a touch that's more Poe than po-mo. The result at MOCCA is several small, magical scenes: a man throwing rocks off a cliff at night; a strange light landing at a town's edge; a ghostly trailer-side apparition and more. Shadowy life-sized figures lurk in the dark as well. Though frightful at times, it's all good — one of the most compelling tensions in Hoffos' work is the way his melancholy, noir content contrasts with his seeming delight at its elaborate staging. Interestingly, the exhibition itself also has a chimerical, now-you-see-it quality — though Hoffos has shown extensively to acclaim in other parts of Canada for years, this is pretty much the first time Hogtowners have gotten a good look at him. Lesson learned: The "hinterland" has an artistic who's who, too.

## 2. Bill Burns at MKG127

127 Ossington Ave., to Dec. 18

Toronto's Bill Burns is known for witty, unexpected approaches to seriously discomfiting matters. In the past, he's created safety gear for endangered animals and compiled guidebooks to Guantanamo Bay. Here, Burns returns to one of his perennial interests: ecologies and tyrannies in the art world. The most prominent work is a pile of logs engraved

with the names of famed art-world players, including critic Jerry Saltz, dealer Barbara Gladstone, and collectors Mera and Don Rubell. Nearby are lists of the 100 most-named art-world power brokers and the top 23 shrubs in Ontario. Alone, that's absurdly amusing, but the real fun comes in learning that the price of each log is indexed to the rank of the name inscribed. Logs labelled with the names of players ranked 1 to 3 (like übercurator Hans Ulrich Obrist) are \$1,000 each, while names ranked 76 to 100 are just \$150 each. Riffs on nature vs. culture also weave through Burns' series of watercolours — rural scenes accompanied by diaristic notes. A sketch of a moose, for example, is underscored by "I had often heard that curators are fond of ungulates. This held true." What does it all mean? It's hard to say. There's certainly a critique of art-world insularity here — but the rub is you need to be fairly insular to the art world yourself to get it.

## 3. Tristram Lansdowne at Le Gallery

1183 Dundas St. W., to Dec. 19

Emerging artist Tristram Lansdowne's large watercolours often instance a strange mix of the idealized and the decrepit. In the past, they've focused on run-down, graffitied houses rendered with incredible care and floated against pristine white backgrounds. In this new show, Lansdowne ups the ante further, placing his decayed buildings in ever more fantastical settings. In one, a tower of cloud rises out of a deteriorating observatory, while in another, an iceberg spills pink meltwater on to a ramshackle ruin. It can be quite spectacular, the way that Lansdowne folds different dimensions of possibility into and out of each other. What'll happen when he actually matures?

National Post