

**VISUAL ARTS » REVIEW**



**GARY MICHAEL DAULT  
GALLERY GOING**

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**MICHAEL DUMONTIER  
AT MKG127**

\$500-\$5,000. Until Nov. 14,  
127 Ossington Ave., Toronto;  
647-435-7682

**M**ichael Dumontier makes art that partakes inventively of two apparently opposing impulses: the childlike and the inordinately sophisticated.

As co-founder of the now internationally renowned artist group Royal Art Lodge (1996-2008) in Winnipeg, he has clearly mastered some ostensibly irreconcilable modes of discourse. In this show called *this way/that way*, his art – most of which here is as blankly white as a refrigerator door – brings together a cartoon-like innocence and whimsicality with often disturbing insinuations of the inexplicability of the simplest things. His charming *Tree*, for example, is only six thin lines – a long trunk and five short branches. It seems almost too thin. But his mysterious *Two Envelopes*, equally “thin,” with only a few black lines scored into a white acrylic ground, comes on with a built-in reverence like a votive object. Similarly, his *Envelope*, a “manila” envelope made from a few more black lines scored into a rectangle of yellowish paint, has the dumb, moving force of an icon for our bureaucratic times.

Dumontier’s work, paradoxically, is spare and reductive, but ends up almost hectically engaging. Everything seems to speak volumes, even when there’s scarcely anything to look at. Obviously given to the fecundities of children’s art (there are books stacked in the gallery with titles such as *Children’s Drawings as Diagnostic Aids* and *Interpreting Children’s Drawings*), Dumontier here plays some sort of mystic middleman between our basic impulses to reproduce what we see and feel, and then to submit those impulses to the rational and perhaps unforgiving scrutiny of the “real” world.

His work is so graphically forceful and startlingly simplified it can make other kinds of art look fussy. But, at the same time, his work is so privately ruminative that its apparent simplicity reveals itself, in the end, to be highly demanding.