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Giving life to the spring art season

Michael Dumontier was recently at the Plug-In Institute of Contemporary Art in his hometown of Winnipeg to talk about his good-sized career survey showing there. To the surprise of few, Dumontier's visual aides included page after page of illustrations from children's books, and more than a few drawings by kids themselves in all their spindly, disproportionate, naturalistic glory.

Equally unsurprising, then, is Dumontier's work now on display at MKG127 on Ossington Avenue here. In a corner, a delicate arrangement of dark thread is pinned to the walls, mimicking the form of a crudely line-drawn pine tree. A red sock is tucked in the wedge where the floor meets the wall. An oblong disc with an impossibly thin, carefully hand-sawn crack perches on a plywood shelf (it's called "Untitled: Cracked Egg"). A sheet of paper, meticulously-crafted from MDF, has a



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careful rip in its midsection.

Dumontier started his career with a bang as a 20-something member of Winnipeg's Royal Art Lodge, which gained a significant international following through the 1990s for its shared aesthetic of the homespun fantastical. While the Lodge, in its dissolution, has spawned one bonafide international art superstar with New York-based Marcel Dzama, other members have quietly gone about the business of honing their own identities, and Dumontier's is among the most distinct.

Since those days, Dumontier has drifted from the fantastical into a kind of homespun, warm-fuzzy version of minimalism, and his material enthusiasm in that context is voiced in a delicate whisper.

His love of prosaic materials is mirrored in the objects he creates from them, and the simple gestures he makes transform the commonplace into quietly beguiling, lovingly-made representations of the same. Dumontier's eye is drawn to the things most of us look past, and his focused attentions give us the chance to see them anew.

Michael Dumontier, "the middle of the air," continues at MKG127, 127 Ossington Ave., to April 14.