

## VISUAL ARTS

## Exploring our caves of forgotten dreams



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**Another Victory Over the Sun at Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery**  
Until March 11, 101 Queen St. N., Kitchener, Ont.; kwag.ca

The Dynasty-esque corporate melodrama that is *Research in Motion* (oh, if only it was *Dynasty* – Joan Collins could fix that company in an eyelash curl), dominates media coverage of all things Kitchener-Waterloo. Except for here.

Another Victory Over the Sun, an impressive survey of mid-career artists at the Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery, feels more like a leisurely walk through a sun-dappled, botanical garden, or a spelunking jaunt down a jewel-encrusted cave, than an art exhibition.

A series of darkened rooms showcasing works that manipulate light and/or available light from filmic projections, the exhibition is both sensual and smart.

First off is Spencer Finch's Home-Depot-rough recreation of a Japanese reflecting pond, complete with a (paper) moon. Taking up the main entry hall of the gallery, Finch's installation is comprised of a chain of low wharf-like structures set on top of a turtle-pool-deep enclosure filled with water. The lining beneath the water is charcoal dark – all the better to reflect the buttery yellow light from a massive white paper sphere above it.

Simultaneously soothing and anxiety-making – the wharfs are narrow and laid out in a winding trail, a challenge for the balance-impaired (i.e. me) – Finch's installation is nicely matched by Miguel Calderon's full-on panic-prompting video of a very cranky panther prowling around a dark cage.

Filmed in total darkness and projected in a room enclosed by light obscuring blackout curtains, Calderon's work reveals only the panther's brilliant, enormous white teeth and demonic, glowing eyes. The cat's body and movements are invisible, dark matter. When the panther's mouth or eyes shut, you have only your other four senses to guide you. And then you hear the panther breathing, a low growl ... a roar. If you have a bladder accident, nobody at KWAG will judge you.

The most entrancing work in Another Victory is Melanie Smith's experimental documentary *Xilitla: Incidents of Misalignment*. Projected as a long floor-to-ceiling rectangle, the film wanders around Las Pozas, an abandoned "lost city" that is all that remains of the incomplete, wacky dreams of one Edward James. An English architect and Surrealism enthusiast, James spent four decades, starting in 1949, building a wobbly Utopia in a Mexican jungle.

In the world of Las Pozas, top-sy-turvy is the norm. Thorny, sticky vines and pointy shrubs creep over the space, attempting to enfold James's vision of post-urbanity; a vision comprised of asymmetrical concrete pillars (that hold up nothing), curvy stairways (that lead nowhere), and bulbous, melting wax-like decorative adornments (that have no admirers).

Smith films each of these failed spaces as lovingly as Woody Allen films ingénues, but provides no localizing or explanatory information. The viewer jumps in without any directorial guidance, which makes the film both wonderfully mysterious and, counter intuitively, highly informative.

But the information is of a different type than is typical of a documentary – it is closer to the associative, tangential information received in dreams.

These three works are only the highlights. Another Victory is packed with brain teasers, works that reward the patient, post-logical viewer.

**Laurie, Moores, Vickard and Hall at the University of Waterloo Art Gallery**  
Until March 3, 200 University Ave., Waterloo, Ont.; uwag.uwaterloo.ca

Meanwhile, down the road at University of Waterloo Art Gallery, two no less investigative (but more laugh-out-loud fun-

ny) exhibitions pit everyday materials against the overstimulated imaginations of four very playful artists.

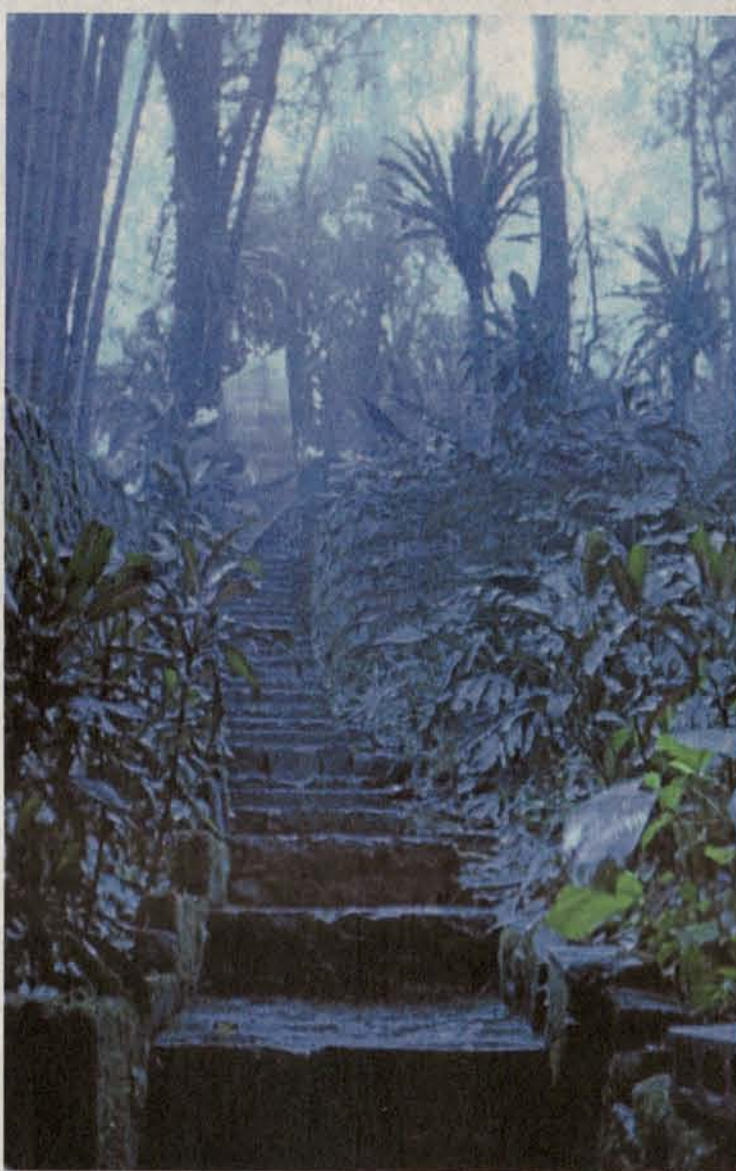
In the first gallery, Steven Laurie, Zeke Moores, and Brandon Vickard make some noise with machine culture, gear-head sculptures any 12-year-old will be hard pressed to keep his or her fidgety little mitts off of.

Laurie's post-industrial contraptions look like Transformer hybrids of lawnmowers, scooters, and chainsaws. And they do utterly useless things, such as making circular skid marks on pavement. The videos of Laurie playing with his cockeyed devices are hilarious and a little bit abject; miniature monster truck rallies complete with all the metaphors of diminished masculinity.

Vickard's work moves in the opposite direction. Stripping down motorbikes (the long, hyper-phallic kind commonly called choppers) until they are rendered into quite lovely skeletons of their former powerful selves, Vickard resignedly embraces the impotent gesture.

While Laurie's work bellows, Vickard's work sighs. Call it rust belt poetry.

Moores's work, particularly his colossal cut steel replica of an SUV, straddles the same hopeful/foolish divide. When the Great Recession passes and needs a commemorative sculpture, Moores is the man.



Melanie Smith's doc wanders around an abandoned 'lost city.'

## IN OTHER VENUES

**Julie Joyce, intervention in a public telephone booth**  
Until Feb. 29 at Queens Quay East and Freeland, in Toronto

In co-operation with Telephone Booth Gallery, and as part of its year-long Tel-Talk series of artist interactions with the near-extinct booths, multimedia wonder Joyce has decorated one with delicate, butterfly fragile hand-made flowers.

**Half the Sky**  
Until March 26, 334 Dundas St. W., Toronto

Opening on Wednesday, this selection of new works by women artists from Burma, Vietnam and Cambodia promises to be an eye-opening peek into three contemporary art scenes operating under autocratic regimes.

**Magda Wojtyra and Marc Ngui at Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery**  
Until March 4, 101 Queen St. N., Kitchener, Ont.

Wojtyra and Ngui create a particoloured fantasy world inhabited by "Crystal Kings," their half-animal, half-gemstone creatures.

– R.M. Vaughan

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