



Kandis Friesen and Sarah Pupo - DOUBLETAKE

I am watching two blobs — two inky, seahorse-like whorls — slowly approach each other on a wall at the Eastern Edge Gallery, projected there as part of Kandis Friesen and Sarah Pupo's *Doubletake*. I'm expecting the blobs to combine. Instead, one passes smoothly, impossibly, beneath the other.

Immediately, I look over to their desks to see if I can figure out how they made that happen.

Doubletake is as much a residency as an exhibition. Friesen and Pupo have set up an experimental animation workshop in the gallery for a month, making textures, shapes and anti-shapes with paints, inks and paper, and using light, depth and motion to make them come alive. The resulting film is a call and response between the two artists, projected onto a gallery wall in a continuous loop.

Sometimes the response carries the tone of the call, and sometimes it pushes off into a completely different world.

Transformation is a big theme in this exhibition. First, we see the gallery transformed into a work space. Gallery visitors watch the artists experiment, make mistakes, and make a mess. They can talk to the artists and learn about their process.

Within that work space, we see simple found objects transformed into a full-fledged animation studio. Desktops are made of wooden planks with sawed-out centres. Windowpanes propped up on bricks cover the holes, and desk lamps shine up through the glass from the floor. Pupo's station is a mess, covered in coloured acetate and splats of paint. Beside her chair are discarded Q-tips with blackened ends. They look like bones. There's a handwritten note to check out the work of animator Signe Baumane stuck on the wall above wads of crumpled tissue paper. Friesen's spot is ordered and neat, with most of her supplies hung in discrete bundles on the wall around her desk.

No fancy, high-tech equipment in sight.

Most importantly, we see communication transformed. There are no words in this projected conversation between Friesen and Pupo, or in their work's conversation with us. Instead, unfamiliar creatures, like the seahorse smears, activate our tendency to find likenesses in abstract shapes. The likenesses and unlikenesses I find in them provoke an emotional response.

It makes sense when Friesen and Pupo tell me they see animation as a way to explore darker subjects, like colonialism, power imbalances, and turbulence in life. As these images seep and spread across the screen, they take us somewhere where difficult topics can be explored using colour, light, representation and feeling.

Doubletake is also playful and surprising, and the artists make a concerted effort to violate the serious-face protocol of art. They come from a DIY punk ethos, which is clear in their process, their product, and their insistence on turning the gallery space — typically a place of finished, perfect work — into a place for experimentation and imperfect, ongoing creation.

In their film, after the seahorses ride away, an iceberg rocks quickly back and forth with a sped-up tide. The image is fuzzy and granulated, like real, found footage from a mid-century documentary.

But then an unlikely gush of liquid flows over a corner of the image, like the iceberg is sticking its tongue out at you, and I'm reminded that none of this is real, that this is hundreds of still images, strung together — motion rising paradoxically from a series of frozen instances.

Life out of blobs.

- Sarah Smellie, St. John's, 2015

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