

Jennifer Barrett – *Werebears and Only Children*

Why should anybody care about art? Isn't it all really a waste of time? Aren't artists really just acting out, avenging their parents' divorce, dealing with the trauma of being picked on in school? Is our time (the artist's and the art viewer's) more satisfactorily spent watching *Star Wars*, shopping, playing video games?

The two unnamed protagonists of Jennifer Barrett's *Werebears and Only Children* could be said to be struggling with these questions, yet they can't be bothered to really go very deeply into the problem of their own indifference to the paintings. Like characters from *Seinfeld*, any consideration of the work before them is interrupted by the most mundane observations and an inability to concentrate on seemingly anything for longer than five seconds. If Barrett's characters don't seem to have much invested in looking at art, how can the actual audience? Is this, to reference *Seinfeld* again, art about nothing?

I don't think so. However obliquely, Barrett's installation describes the wider world's misgivings about contemporary art, a misgiving Barrett evidently shares with the two characters from her comic strip. The female character particularly indicates a desire to be an artist ("I always wanted to be a painter, but it never seemed realistic."), and, contradictorily, is the speaker of the most unabashedly anti-art sentiment that's usually found in the letters page of *The National Post* ("They should be paying us to look at this junk"). Less an exploration of the art experience, or an investigation into meaning and beauty in contemporary art, Barrett's piece dissects the gallery going experience, and seeks to undermine not only herself as artist, but the conventions of the gallery itself. After all, the best openings are not necessarily the ones with the best art, but have more to do with the food, drink and conversations we find there.

-Craig Francis Power, 2009