

Momus

The Outsider That Invites Us In: Jordan Maclachlan's "Ways of Living"

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The fantastical meets the hackneyed in [Jordan Maclachlan's](#) expansive *Ways of Living*, a detailed menagerie of other-worldly creatures, animals, and humans, too. The clay figures that populate her installation engage in various activities ranging from the banal to the perverse, and we are invited to peer into this universe and, therein, identify ourselves.

Covering several rooms in the [Canadian Clay & Glass Gallery](#), and divided into three "worlds" that remind one of the distinctive realms in video games, there is: *Unexpected Subway Living*, in which a group of people trapped in a subway disaster have become C.H.U.D.-style underground deviants; *Condo Living*, which features figures in their home environment, if disturbed by loneliness and perversion; and *Zoo Living*, a section in which humans interact with animals, animals interact with other animals, and some mythical creatures that either stand alone or get vivisected.

It's a disorientating and overwhelming exhibition (curated by artist/curator [Camilla Singh](#)), comprised of hundreds of component figures, each with its own personality, and engaged in the pursuit of its own desires, vices, etc. The idea of "lifestyle" *a la* [Wallpaper* Magazine](#), is here subverted by showing us a different kind of "living," one grounded in a sort of existential *sturm und drang*, where the characters' anxieties and prejudices are enacted equally, for our witness.

A partial cause for the perceived hermeticism of the installation is due to the fact that there is no discernible system; the figures do not communicate with one another except in a binary sense (i.e. the figures engaged in raunchy sex acts in *Condo Living*). Humans and animals co-habit this world like some primeval Garden of Eden where things screw one another, play out their stupidities, and die. This is not the Judeo-Christian paradise, mind you, nor Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, but what Dinos Chapman refers to as "a black hole of absolute negative energy." The installations are further complicated by the delicate nature of the figures, which have been lovingly crafted with an artisan's care, rendered with an aching beauty. The tension between these two extremes of tender craftsmanship and horrific, "adult situation" tableaux posits the work away from the realm of craft, and smack in the middle of contemporary concerns with boredom, isolation, violence, suicide, sexual repression, entitlement, sexual "deviance," meaninglessness, ... the void.

Maclachlan self-identifies as an outsider artist (she is self-taught), and there is a certain naïve quality to the figures when taken individually, as though they could be sold at a ceramics shop. But taken as a group, these images bear as much in common with outsider art as *Hell* does, by the Chapman Brothers, with its sprawling orgy of death, featuring myriad little Nazi soldiers torturing, dismembering, and feeding each other into tiny furnaces. There is a deliberateness to Maclachlan's installation and an urgency to its themes (in a sociological sense) that anchors it in the realm of contemporary art. But *Ways of Living* (perhaps a riff on *Ways of Seeing* by the Marxist critic John Berger?) is no hell either. It's a sort of limbo, a world tumbling meaninglessly through the darkness of its own decadence, veiled by the familiar and the banal. Imagine a torture chamber furnished by IKEA, just disarming enough to lure in the innocent, but deadly and horrific nonetheless.

The quotidian and the gruesome occupy the same plane in *Ways of Living*: little chickens and penguins hang out with little torture victims. Headless torsos take pigs on a leash for a stroll; a dog with its face seemingly blown off by (one suspects) a shotgun sits placidly as if nothing was wrong; another dog tentatively sniffs at a topless woman's vagina through her panties as she brushes her teeth as per usual; and an elephant chokes a man to death. The colors are earthy and

inviting; some tableaux depict the fun times, chilling in the living room having drinks, stretching on exercise balls; but one quickly comes to the conclusion that these characters will end up like the eviscerated, quartered corpse that sits on a couch in front of the boob tube (*Zoo Living*), in a fashion not dissimilar to the way in which serial killers like BTK or Robert Rodriguez left their brutalized, mutilated victims for cops and loved ones to find.

Ultimately, the key may be that all Maclachlan's figures represent different aspects of ourselves. We are the animals, we are the humans, we are raping and being raped at the same time, and it's a nasty state of affairs, punctuated by quality programming and choice leisure activities. Ways of living, indeed.