

# The Back

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Sure, *Angels and Demons* will ignite religious controversy — just like its predecessor, *The Da Vinci Code*. But will it be any good? **see page 19**

Cynical, sure — but I was speaking to someone recently about the differing art worlds (or genres), and how they can all too often be sadly incongruous, contradictory and vicious (not to mention vacuous) in the assertion of their primacy. The failure of this approach can be seen in the corporate wallpaper of the RBC painting competition, for example, or the manner in which ideology and poor execution, regrettably, has characterized many an Artist-Run Centre (ARC) — to their detriment.

Perhaps, this may simply be a crisis of faith concerning the current world of art on my part — a world where far too many people speak about how their works sell as supposed proof of their value. To that, I can only respond that there's a thriving market for porn and crack, as well.

Happily, an antidote to that type of frustration comes in the most recent work by local artist Yuka Yamaguchi, currently showing at the Stall Gallery. Her career is taking off — and deservedly so, thanks to exhibitions in the past such as *Flatlanders* at the Mendel (where she displayed some of the strongest work in the show), and now with this solo exhibition of newer works.

Yamaguchi's works are often deliberate and sparse, and yet always colourful and engaging. There is a childlike — not at all to be confused with childish — nature to her work: it's playful and exploratory, and full of bright colours. The actors in her scenes are all young, and some seem to be enjoying themselves, while others appear somewhat put upon, or suffering silently.

The facial expression in "Bad Hair Day," for example, is somewhat pained — understandable, in light of the blood from the malevolent pea pod, or the bizarre animal, mixed in with the flora entwined in the hair, that's digging away at the figure with its paw. Sound strange? That's exactly what is continually fascinating about Yamaguchi's work: the meticulous execution is often paired with a very disturbing or provocative image — sometimes masochistic, sometimes sexualized but always engaging.

"Self Sufficiency" has a "babushka" character—which is apparently being orally violated by a very penile carrot (oh dear — did I just say that?). I say apparently being violated because again, Yamaguchi's characters sometimes seem to be enjoying their respective predicaments, while others seem to be baffled at how they got where they are, and at

what is happening to them.

"Milky Frog" is an excellent example of this contradiction: the main character on the empty, white and negatively-spaced background — some sort of frog/human hybrid, tempting me to use the phrase "frogtaur", for some reason — seems happy and pleased as he holds his carton of milk. However, within the frog's mouth we see a bit of a head and face, which may be this amorphous being's third head (three heads are better than two, and definitely better than one), or it may be part of an semi-digested victim. It's these types of uncertainties that make Yamaguchi's works creepy — and interactive, in terms of allowing us to construct what may be unfolding in the scenes she presents for our consumption (okay, bad pun—but impossible to resist when discussing a carnivorous frogman).

Her method is fairly uniform, subordinating composition to content. Yamaguchi's work is always very realistically executed, if fantastic in content: blank backgrounds are left empty so as to allow for the full appreciation of her line work — and her skill at her medium.

These also are reminiscent of illustrations that might be in a children's book of fairy tales — and we all know that fairy tales were most certainly not for the faint of heart before they were sanitized for modern generations. Most of them, in their original form, were as unsettling as some of Yamaguchi's images: don't go in the forest, or you'll get eaten by a wolf — or, perhaps, a monstrous, human/frog hybrid. Even in the title of the exhibition, *Indoor Playground*, the childlike notion appears again, indicating that like fairy tales, these images are playful and fun—and, like the best fairy tales, they're also disturbing and phantasmagorical.

I can't help but joke that some of the best-executed works I've seen have been produced by individuals who have eschewed art schools — whether this is because art schools are less about quality than indoctrination, or that one can define their own schedule and parameters outside of an institution, and choose their own focus. Yamaguchi, self-taught, is a fine example of this — and *Indoor Playground* shows clearly that she's an artist to watch, as her works are easily some of the best in terms of form and feeling that we're currently seeing in Saskatoon. ☺

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## top6

### BUBBLEPOPPERS

Pure pop music should worm its sugary melodies into your brain until you find yourself grinning and bobbing in the checkout line. Even the most serious music fans sometimes need to shake their booties. /Emily Zimmerman

**1 KYLIE MINOGUE**  
In the decades since "Locomotion", Kylie Minogue has slowly risen to the top of the pure-pop-food chain. She sings dance pop that has no (blond) ambition other than fun, exemplified by the 2003 single "Red Blooded Woman".

**2 ANNIE**  
If you're tired of, or too old for, *High School Musical*'s crowd's Grated chirpings but still want pop, check out Norwegian artist Annie. She makes bubblegum for grownups, like her single "I Know UR Girlfriend Hates Me".

**3 GIRLS ALOUD**  
No one remembers most bands formed on television (Sugar Jones, anyone?). But these British Popstars winners have been scoring huge European hits for years. They're at their best when their brainless Euro-pop takes a backseat to old-school glam: check out the singles "Biology" and "Can't Speak French".

**4 GIRLICIOUS**  
Another group built and branded on a reality show, Girlicious were designed to be the junior Pussycat Dolls. But their adorably bleeped, sugary single "Stupid" far surpassed their hardbodied big sisters' recent output.

**5 ROBYN**  
Her first album came out a decade ago and she seemed a bit like a Scandinavian Britney. Her recent work, inspired by electroclash and death disco, retains the melodic lightness of her teen-pop days, adding harder lyrics and a sly sense of humour. Check out the hilarious "Konichiwa Bitches" video on YouTube.

**6 LIGHTS**  
The recent winner of the Juno for best new artist, Lights' sound melds dance-pop production and arrangements with the song structure and lyrical smarts that usually go with jangly-guitar power pop. Her self-titled EP is available all over Canada.



"Milky Frog," by Yuka Yamaguchi.

## Nightmares And Dreamscapes

Rising star contrasts happiness and horror in latest exhibit

by Bart Gazzola

**YUKA YAMAGUCHI — INDOOR PLAYGROUND**  
Runs to May 24  
The Stall Gallery

It has been said that, in terms of human endeavours, 90 per cent fall in the category of failure, while 10 per cent succeeds. In terms of the art world, I'd be comfortable raising the former to 95.

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