



ILLUSTRATION: JUSTIN WARREN

YOU REMEMBER this visibly emotive lass, caught in a high art moment ‘cleaving to her Yodellers’? We suggested that if she truly wanted to preserve each issue of our bi-weekly beacon of wit and truth and gobsmacking beauty, then she needed to stop chucking her Yodellers about and subscribe instead to our electronic edition. Fat lot of good that did. Since passing along that helpful tip, we’ve heard from absolute hordes of would-be Yodeller cleavers saying, ‘Phooey on your pixelated images and scrolling PDF files. Where can we reliably get our itchy mitts on hard copies of London’s most provocative organ?’

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look at this

The Utter Fascination of Watching Paint Dry

VINCE CHERNIAK

WATCHING THE installation videos that form part of Canadian artist Dave Kemp’s *The Things You Know But Cannot Explain* exhibition might leave you speechless. They’re about as interesting as watching paint dry, water boil, or grass grow. And while we’ve all seen a few shows over the years that may have prompted that response, I have Kemp to thank that I can actually finally say that in print.

Except —if you haven’t guessed already — this is exactly what Kemp is up to in his provocative and engaging *Series of Boring Videos*. The surprising revelation in this show also warrants a spoiler alert: trust me, that’s about all the info you need to know. Stop reading now, and get to McIntosh Gallery before July 19 and take in one of the more fascinating and thought-provoking exhibits you’ll see this year. Then come back, and read on.

That warning is justified here, because I wish I knew just a little less about what I was walking into at the gallery ahead of time. We’ve likely all had a film review reveal just a tad too



Photo courtesy: Dave Kemp

Dave Kemp: *The One-Pixel Camera Project*, 2014

much information that can influence our direct response to the film proper, and it would seem that is part of Kemp’s intent, by limiting textual descriptions, in the layout of this show. The three videos, *Watch*, *Watched*, and *Watching* that comprise the *Series of Boring Videos* all play with seemingly mundane scenarios to which we might bring preconceived judgments, and Kemp is interested in that discon-

nect between what we think we know and the perceptions or information of what’s hidden in the banal.

“I am interested in different kinds of knowledge and how they form our perception and understanding of the world,” says Kemp. “It is easy to quickly label something based on one’s pool of knowledge and then simply walk away. With these works, the nature of their presentation encourages the viewer to really experience what is happening with these everyday occurrences.”

Thus for *Watched*, the first video

while the right side of the screen documents the same footage running in reverse, so you see the dried state “returning” to wet. At some point through the video, both sides merge as a uniform image when the paint is at the same stage of drying. It’s a clever way of enhancing and informing just what

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Photo Courtesy: Dave Kemp

Dave Kemp: Video still from *Watched*, part of *Series of Boring Videos*, 2014

in the series, Kemp has the viewer start the video of (spoiler alert!) water boiling, rather than have it play on a loop, as half the fun is the unfolding of the process. The hard to identify black shimmering surface in short order evolves into a wonderland of bubbles and steam. It’s a mesmerizing visual evolution, captured with a macro lens, and hard to believe you’ve never quite seen the evocative beauty of this everyday event before, perhaps because we’ve been errantly advised that a watched pot never boils.

Watching is all about the boredom of watching paint dry. But of course, Kemp reveals that it is anything but. The split screen, 20-minute video shows paint being applied on the left,

the eye can miss in something we presume is uneventful.

Equally, *Watch* puts focus on the process of discovery of subtle change that is not normally under the purview of our perception. By way of an almost 30-day-long video of grass seed emerging from soil, Kemp is drawing attention to the external information beyond the growing lawn: nearby traffic sound, the passing of birds and animals, weather and human intervention. This is a document that anyone who’s planted grass seed and checked on daily can relate to, but any particular segment can reward equally: the section I caught, with the play of dappled light and leaf shadows was fondly meditative, hypnotic. You’d

have to hang in the darkened gallery for the length of the exhibit to see what other wonders you're missing.

Kemp's visual magic doesn't end here. A mechanical engineer before focusing on art, he puts his tech skills to use in an intriguing conceptual piece, the *One Pixel Camera*. With a paradoxical high-quality Zeiss lens, Kemp fabricated an instrument that records the extreme limit of useful information on the low end of the extreme, one pixel of data, so that resulting images are a mere averaging of colour in the field of view, and thus present one colour tone — reducing “photography to its bare essence” he says. Kemp purposefully shot cliché scenes here, a sunset at Grand Bend, Niagara Falls, a kid's birthday party, and a selfie. The images running down one wall of the gallery appear like the best paint chip display you've ever seen.

ON THE OPPOSING wall, a complementary series of detailed photos of arbitrary or ambiguous objects, *Locations*, sets up a contrasting dialogue with the low-info one-pixel series. While the only useful information in the one-pixel series comes from the titles, the *Locations* pics are full of image info, but no title or contextual background. “In neither way do you have a whole picture,” notes Kemp.

Oscar Wilde once said of Wagner's music that “it's better than it sounds”, and though it's a seemingly backhanded compliment, it speaks to something ineffable in the work that can't be reduced to words or descriptors of its reception, or reasons why a work is memorable and provokes further thought. Something like that is afoot here in Kemp's work: watching paint dry, or one-pixel images, truly are better than they look. And further, great art often has humble origins and subjects; all in all, *The Things You Know But Cannot Explain* is a reminder of how powerful an exploration of the everyday, eloquently conceived and delivered, can be. So thank you Mr. Kemp, for boring us to tears — they're tears of joy and wonder.

DAVE KEMP: The Things You Know But Cannot Explain at the McIntosh Gallery until July 19

www.mcintoshgallery.ca/exhibitions/current.html
www.davekemp.ca



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