

Lisa Birke's 'Search Engine' - Googled Art

- Posted by [Jon](#)
- Filed in [Arts](#)
- January 24, 2008



The internet is completely changing the contemporary art world. The way artists both create and distribute their work, and in turn the way the public consumes said art is wholly different in today's digital world. I don't know about you, but I'm much less likely to search out the latest exhibitions with today's proliferation of great art & design blogs, websites, and online portfolios.

One local artist, however, is showing her own brand of net-dependent art the traditional way: in a commercial exhibition. At the [Bau-Xi Gallery](#) on Granville street, prolific Vancouver artist [Lisa Birke](#) presents her latest collection "Search Engine," a series of large-scale paintings based on images culled from [Google](#).

The premise had me interested, so I figured this was one random facebook-event invitation that I may as well follow up on. Prying my web-addicted frame away from the design blogs, I took a wander down Granville yesterday to see what it was all about...

Since graduating from Emily Carr in 1999, Vancouver resident Lisa Birke has been



involved in a number of public and commercial exhibitions in Canada, the US and Europe. She now teaches art at Emily Carr and SFU. The Bau-Xi show is the first commercial exhibition of her latest series, already shown publicly at Medicine Hat's Esplanade Gallery...

Birke's process for 'Search Engine' began with typing modern figures of speech, like "beauty is skin deep" into Google. She then used selections from the barrage of returned images as inspiration for each painting. The works end up feeling a lot like collage; seemingly incompatible images find themselves interwoven in playful, sometimes violent juxtaposition. The vibrant paintings are visually arresting from first glance, and force contemplation as the viewer attempts to "work out" the connection between images.

'Search Engine' presents itself as a reflection and attack of today's plugged-in culture. According to Birke's [manifesto](#), individuals in today's society have been "overfed on a constant stream of uber-information." As we fly through endless photos, texts, and videos, the media becomes jumbled and confused, almost collapsing under its own weight. As the ease of consumption increases, individual images and ideas themselves become meaningless.

The pieces in the series are more than mere paintings; they incorporate multiple canvases, paint, sculpture, and even recycled computer parts. Connected to computer chips and processors, paintings of varying style, size, and detail overlap one another, duplicating the imagistic confusion of computer screen and modern mind. A mess of giant keyboard keys even spills out from one piece onto the gallery floor, the grey keys in stark contrast to the colorful image of an austere figure surrounded by ominous fruit-bats, clouds of lipstick, and stone-eyed frogs. Sitting somewhere between surrealism and collage, the paintings are hard to describe but wholly captivating.



You can check out some of the series as it appeared in Medicine Hat at [Lisa Birke's](#)

[website](#), but pieces like "Flogging a Dead Horse", pictured above, demand to be seen in their full, three-dimensional glory. Whether or not you agree with her that society has become "obese with hyper entertainment," Birke's art is undeniably compelling and will leave all with re-awakened retinas and lots to think about on the trip home.

The Bau-Xi, Vancouver's oldest contemporary art gallery, is conveniently located just a few blocks from Granville & Broadway, only a two minute walk from one of the city's most accessible intersections, and nestled into what some refer to as 'gallery row' -- so why not make an afternoon of it?

Great art -- not just online, but in galleries. One of the perks of calling Vancouver home.

The exhibition runs until Saturday, January 26th at the [Bau-Xi Gallery](#), 3045 Granville Street (Granville & 14th).

Header image from "Seeing Red", right image from "Beauty is Skin Deep", and bottom image from "Flogging a Dead Horse", all on display.

- 