


## Artists fit entire world into the NAC

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It is often said that "it's a small world", and this month at the Niagara Artists' Centre, two artists will be taking that cliché literally. Toronto photographer Toni Hafkensheid and Montreal artist Karine Gibouleau have each shrunk their interpretations of the world down into miniature scenes as part of the gallery's latest exhibit, In the Mind's Eye.

Hafkensheid uses 'tilt-shift' photography to make actual scenes appear as though they are part of model sets. Originally from the Netherlands, he was inspired by the "monumental" landscapes of British Columbia and wanted to recreate his childhood love for model train sets through photographs.

"[The B.C. landscape] always kind of looked fake to me," said Hafkensheid.

"Also in B.C. there's all these trains that go through the mountains, and as a kid I really liked playing with model train sets, so I sort of put two and two together. I take photographs of things that are real, like Niagara Falls, but when you look at the actual photograph, it looks like tiny little figurines are walking along this fake Niagara Falls."



Media Credit: Chao Sun



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Hafkensheid looks for iconic landscapes when he uses this technique, and replicates the scenery in an attempt to make people look at something familiar in a completely different way. He said that the effect is likely recognizable to people in the photographic world, while others assume that they have been somehow manipulated.

"I'm using a camera that you normally use as an architectural photographer. The neat thing about the camera is that it looks sort of like those old cameras, with the bellows that have been around for over 100 years - it's a very basic camera. Because of the bellows, you can actually move the lens compared to the film plate. So in a normal camera, the lens is always parallel to the film, and in this case, it doesn't have to be so I can change that. And I do change that, then you get a very narrow strip of focus and that's exactly the effect that you're getting. And why it suddenly looks like a model train set - that, I don't actually know. It's what they call a very shallow depth of field."

Gibouleau's contribution to the exhibit, an installation she has titled All You Can Eat, acts as a direct contrast to Hafkensheid's work, in that she actually creates miniature scenes - they resemble dollhouses and are inhabited by over 150 toy-like figures that she has hand-sculpted. The display was inspired by her recent visit to China, more specifically by the factory conditions of its workers. "[The title for the exhibit] came about because of my interest in the many thousands of Chinese youth who move to cities in China to work in factory complexes which produce enormous amounts of consumer goods of every type imaginable," said Gibouleau. "In a sense, China has become the factory of the world. Much of what we buy is produced by an army of invisible workers on the other side of the world that we know very little about."

The variety of different scenes within her three interconnected six-foot tall buildings each contain a sense of humour while at the same time are, "a serious comment on our rampant consumerism and an homage to the young Chinese who work and live in factory complexes so that we can have 'all we can eat' at a good price".

In the light blue buildings of the installation, viewers will see dozens of uniformed workers lined up at tables in a food-processing plant, and a sports bar scene shows a pair of obese groundhogs overindulging themselves on an all-you-can-eat wings night. Gibouleau hopes that those who see her work will be able to understand the interconnectedness of the world and understand the processes that are behind their consumer goods that often seemingly appear to us from nowhere.

"I had the opportunity to visit Shenzhen in southern China in December and was able to visit a factory," she said. "To me the factories resemble work camps and even though the young people are not prisoners, their working conditions are often difficult or dangerous and their wages very low. Despite this I saw young workers laughing, holding hands, playing soccer. They are energetic young people with hopes and dreams, just like in Canada. My wish is that people would have a thought for the young Chinese factory workers when they purchase something 'made in China'."

In the Mind's Eye will be on display at the Niagara Artists' Centre until April 19.