



Curiosity Built the Cat
Duke and Battersby

Curated by Evan Tyler

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“In order to talk about big ideas, begin with the personal.”

Someone once told that to a dear friend of mine, and she passed the message onto me. It is in the spirit of these words that I have chosen to curate this show and to create a book entitled, *Curiosity Built the Cat*. Within these pages exists a commentary of my personal relationship to the work of the artists, Duke and Battersby. I have included original stills, some text, and a few original drawings I created that illustrate defining moments and ideas generated by selected videos.

Curiosity Built the Cat is a survey of the works in various media created during the years 1997-2015. A small selection of these works are represented in these pages.

Curiosity Built The Cat

The multi-faceted art works of Emily Vey Duke and Cooper Battersby provide an open forum that touches on feelings of alienation, pain, loss, self-loathing, as well as subject matter around addiction, identity, philosophical degradation, and annihilation. These themes are blended into monologues that provide us with glimmers of perseverance, hope and humour, expressed at times with shocking realism.

Since my first exposure to their diverse art practice comprised of video, sculpture, printed matter, installation, and the written word, the artists have been a beacon of light that guides me, haunts my understanding of art production, and elucidates why it is important to make art. A common thread of our connection stems from a shared struggle with the use of substance and addiction, and this has been an essential component in the way that I have experienced them as artists and cultural thinkers. Duke and Battersby employ their own curiosities and emotions as a means to reach out and share with their audience the humanness of disorder and dysfunction, while never understating the importance of compassion. One can imagine these life collaborators as two overly curious cats exploring their environment, sometimes crouching silently ready to pounce by challenging assumptions, norms and the passive acceptance of “how things should be”. At other times, they are calm and relaxed, lying in a sunny spot, purring happily.

Beyond the layers of emotion and cynicism, an over-arching question lingers for Duke and Battersby, and that is: “How does an individual transform and grow after addiction without losing a sense of radicalism – as an essential and underlying sense of vitality?” In other words, how does one evade the threat of becoming ordinary? This is a conundrum that plagues many of us who struggle with an innate need to celebrate the spoils of curiosity, or who struggle with existential questions about the meaning of life and the inescapability of suffering and death. It is a reality that substance abuse provides a gratifying lie, a road around facing these difficult questions. Perhaps we can arrive at a juncture where shedding the nightmare of addiction becomes a form of radical vitality in and of itself – because eventually substance abuse transforms into its own predictable world. The artists continue to express new forms of radicalism with great honesty, humanness, grace and potency as their journey continues.

Curiosity Built the Cat presents a retrospective of the works of Emily Vey Duke and Cooper Battersby, providing the viewer with an opportunity to contemplate some of their most provocative art works. The exhibition surveys a timeline from 1997 to 2015, and documents a true lifelong collaboration and partnership. The works explore many ideas powered by a strong sense of curiosity, and ultimately transport one to a place where art can invoke, at the core of existence, a sense of empathy.

Evan Tyler

2015



Being Fucked Up
Duke and Battersby
2001
Running time: 10 min.



When I watched **Being Fucked Up** on my second day in art school, something shifted in my heart. Emily's haunting vocal melodies in the opening episode unraveled my own self-image. Cooper's monologue about yoga class gave me a new kind of radical optimism. I once thought video art was boring...now all of that had changed.

"Worthy Citizens"
Evan Tyler
Ink and pencil on paper
2015



Bad Ideas for Paradise

Duke and Battersby

2001

Running time: 18:25 min.



“If I was a teenage boy I would insist on brand name clothes. My laundry would be done frequently and come back fleecy, golden, folded. Heavy hooded sweatshirts and boxer shorts and socks would always bore their mates. My garments would hang just so on my snotty, lanky frame – uncontrived, brand new, tumbled dry. If my mother does the wash while I am in the shower, I yell then shout until she turns it off. Even if she’s watching television she eventually gets up, sighing, and stops the load. She thinks...*He’s still my baby boy*. I think, *Fuck you, Fuck you, Fuck you, but only call out Mom, turn off the water.*”

Duke and Battersby from the episode “Teenage Boy” in **Bad Ideas for Paradise.**

“What’s Reserve?”

Evan Tyler

Ink and pencil on paper

2015



Rapt and Happy

Duke and Battersby

1998

Running time: 16:58



I've stopped trying to be happy all of
the time. That would be awful.

"Emily"
Evan Tyler
Ink and pencil on paper
2015



Beauty Plus Pity

Duke and Battersby

2009

Running time: 14:26



When I was a child I remember my greatest visceral desire was to one day physically touch a gorilla. Are all children like this?

“Gorilla”
Evan Tyler
Ink and pencil on paper
2015



Here is Everything
Duke and Battersby
2012
Running time: 13:55



It's important to demonstrate grace. I've started folding my laundry neatly and making my bed more often. It helps. Sometimes I even draw a sweeping line across paper gracefully.

"Sweeping Line"
Evan Tyler
Ink and pencil on paper
2015



Dear Lorde
Duke and Battersby
2015
Running time: 27:08



I've written a few letters to people I respect and admire. I think the art of letter writing isn't to be thrown away like a dirty Kleenex. My favourite letter, and quite possibly the hardest and most honest one I've ever written, was to Duke and Battersby. Next year I'm going to write a letter to Sade and tell her about my plan to become a worthwhile person. Maxine Rose, the character portrayed in **Dear Lorde** is an inspiration to me. Maybe I will write her a letter too.

"Maxine"
Evan Tyler
Ink and pencil on paper
2015

About the artists...

Cooper Battersby and Emily Vey Duke have been working collaboratively since June 1994. Their work has been broadcast and exhibited around the world.

Duke and Battersby are currently teaching at Syracuse University in Central New York. In 2010 they were shortlisted for the prestigious Sobey Art Award, and their work is distributed by Video Data Bank in Chicago, Argos in Brussels, V-Tape in Toronto and Video Out in Vancouver. In 2012, a book was published about their work. It is titled *The Beauty is Relentless*. In 2015 they received the overall award for the European Media Arts Festival for their video, *Dear Lorde*.

dukeandbattersby.com

About the curator...

Evan Tyler is an artist, curator and writer based out of Toronto, Canada. He has exhibited and curated both nationally and internationally. Tyler was curator and owner of the contemporary art project space, **gallerywest** from 2010-2014. The gallery was awarded with “Best Gallery in Toronto” 2012, 2013 and 2014 (*Liberty Villager*).

Tyler earned his BFA (2008) in Visual Arts from the University of Regina, majoring in Intermedia.

He is currently pursuing a Masters degree in the MVS Studio Program, University of Toronto.

Tyler’s video works are distributed by V-Tape in Toronto.

evantylers.ca

About the gallery...

Founded in 1974 and incorporated in 1977, the White Water Gallery (WWG) was originally created to facilitate opportunities for local artists in need of professional development and who were unable to find accommodating venues for their research and dissemination projects. This need, combined with the dedication of many local artists, founded an institution devoted to the support of artistic development prioritizing research, risk-taking, and experimentation in the arts. Today many of Canada's most established and successful artists acknowledge the role WWG has played in advancing their careers.

whitewatergallery.com



Duke and Battersby
2015

