

Sock monkeys swing their way into fine art

Thomas Anfield has found a perfect mix of tragicomedy and playfulness in a subject he's painted for 20 years

> BY ALEXANDER VARTY

groups, posing alone in their ists on a busy street. Some spin els. "I prop them up a little bit, of through the air as if caught up in course, but only just enough that a Kansas twister; others slump, exhausted, like children at the end them, because I think that's when of a hot summer afternoon. Some they read the most honest. seem oddly noble, as if thinking they are.

But sock monkeys have never looked as good as they do in the paintings of Thomas Anfield, on

an odd topic for a visual artist, but, as Anfield tells the Straight in a subjects often stand in for human ces on-stage have definitely spilled figures. "You just can't get away over into his work in the studio. from their human quality, and "Butoh was quite a logical exten-their anthropomorphism," he says, sion of working as a figure artist, reached at his Vancouver home.

In his Monkeyland show, however, the inherently ludicrous qualities of porary figure painter. Were the creahowever. Enacting a weird parody awkward, and oddly moving.

"There's this lovely, tragicomic quality to them-but they're celebratory, too," says Anfield.

medium-size acrylics are almost big part of their appeal. giddily physical. Wave, for instance, finds four monkeys dancing an ele-

ocean roller, but it looks more like they're being lifted by forces unhey come singly and in seen, as if in fin-du-monde rapture.

Anfield explains that he spends a best dress-up clothes or clus-tered together like tour-collection of sock-monkey modthe natural pull of gravity is on

I like when they have this sort Great Thoughts. Others are frank- of natural weight, the natural pull ly cartoonish, with the garish red of gravity," he continues. "That's lips and beady black eyes of sock something we respond to as people, monkeys—for that, in fact, is what because our lives are like that; we get pulled around by the ebbs and flows and the forces that surround us."

Anfield's own artistic path pays tribute to going with the flow. Sock view at the Petley Jones Gallery until monkeys are a rare constant in his next Thursday (November 12).

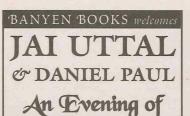
Homemade toys might seem like

oeuvre: he's been painting them for 20 years. But during that period he's also ventured into improvised music as a guitarist and explored telephone conversation, his floppy butoh as a dancer, and his experien-

you know, working with your body in a theatre," says Anfield, who has performed with Kokoro Dance and these stuffed, simian sock puppets his own Butoh-A-GO-GO com-allow Anfield to tackle topics that pany. "And then from that experiare almost off-limits to the contem- ence, I feel that with the monkeys I can get a lot of figurative qualities tures in Couple Holding Hands or in the way they're arranged, but also Kissing Monkeys human, the effect a theatrical quality in the way they would be excruciatingly sentiment- take up space, and in the way they're al. These monkeys aren't mawkish, lit. Without wanting to sound too corny, having had that experience of human romance, they're absurd, of being on a stage and inside those lights does inform this work."

This suggests that there's more to Anfield's monkeys than might immediately meet the eye. Even so, Indeed, some of these small to he stresses, play and pleasure are a

The number one thing for me is how full of life they are," he says. gant arabesque; it's possible that "It's a good time to be alive in the they're being carried along by an world, so let's get on with it." �





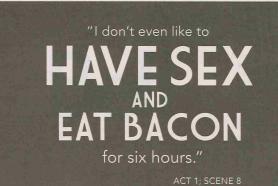
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