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WOMAN TO WATCH: JILLIAN MCDONALD



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POSTED BY: Barry Chong
June 18, 2013 | [Comments](#)
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When the word "artist" appears in profiles, it usually serves as a blanket term meant to bolster a person's otherwise narrow portfolio or activity. Happily, artist **Jillian McDonald** needs no such help from our end. Trained in drawing and painting, McDonald's exploits in performance art, video and other digital media have garnered international praise and Internet celebrity. Her work, which inhabits the worlds of humour and horror, can be effusive and cerebral. But the art is always informed by McDonald's attraction to sincerity.

Born in Edmonton and raised in Winnipeg, McDonald developed her sense of artistic purpose a bit late. "As a teenager, I was ill, and spent a lot of time drawing as a way to escape that," she says. A high school art teacher saw McDonald's potential and encouraged her to attend art school — something she did not know even existed.

Today, McDonald's waist deep in academia, serving at **Pace University** as an associate professor of art. It's an intellectually engaging gig that mirrors her roots as a performer, but McDonald's principal focus remains her art.

"If I didn't have to teach, I wouldn't, but it gives me a tremendous amount of freedom," McDonald says.

"Teaching gives me an income so I can make the projects

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Projects like 2003's *Me and Billy Bob*, an early viral hit wherein McDonald digitally inserts herself into scenes from Billy Bob Thornton's filmography. It's an exploration of celebrity crushes — by "flirting," "caressing" and eventually "kissing" her object of desire, McDonald creates a powerful expression of wish fulfillment.

The artist's tender tribute to romantic fantasy speaks to her larger fascination with sincerity. The short honours the sentimentality of, say, *Annie Hall*, not the sugar of the *The Notebook*.

"I'm paying homage to fantasy, because it can be funny and beautiful," she says. There is an overabundance of self-referential comedy these days; cheeky writing that is in the business of self-congratulations. McDonald's sense of humour is refreshing because it pushes an honest emotional connection.

That quality drives McDonald's love of horror, too, an obsession that started in 2006 when she decided to make her first scary movie.

"I was interested in the idea of people enjoying being fearful," says McDonald. Seven years on, "it's not ending anytime soon."

Within the love of horror, McDonald finds universality, citing Toronto's *Zombie Walk* as a particularly terrific display of affection.

"Even though there's a lot of bad horror out there, the basic storytelling strategies are really rich and fascinating," she says. "It really gets to morality tales and primal fear; things we all have a relationship with."

McDonald's latest go at the genre is *Valley of the Deer*, a 48-minute video shot in Dufftown, Scotland as part of her Glenfiddich *Artist-In-Residence Prize*. The feature is an uncanny look into the myths and legends that seemingly haunt the Scottish landscape. Tonally, it's a cross between *Christina's World* and *The Wicker Man* (the good one, not the Nic Cage one). Again, we see in McDonald's work a more classic approach, not a trendy one.

"Scotland is a really mystical and creepy place dripping with beauty," says McDonald. "I stayed much longer than my residency because I couldn't get enough the place."

Now McDonald's back in Brooklyn, a hipster counterbalance to her decidedly less pretentious thinking. ("Like all New Yorkers, I have a conflicted relationship with the city.") So, like her work, McDonald's exists in a stream of authenticity, unaffected by the current of contemporary gimmick.

Valley of the Deer is featured in the exhibit, *No Dull Affairs*, beginning June 19 in Toronto, [Onsite \[at\] OCAD U.](#)



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POSTED BY: Lissa Desbarats
June 24, 2013

TORO WOMAN



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One of Jillian McDonald's most delightful works was when she was putting make-up on in a New York subway (as only the very deft can do, esp. eye mascara), slowly and nonchalantly transforming herself into a vampire creature, and walking off the subway as if on her way to an office temp job...sweet!

POSTED BY: michelle bush
June 21, 2013

Can't wait to see the results! Yay you!

POSTED BY: Neil and Pat
June 19, 2013

Great work. Looking forward to the show in Toronto and meeting your associate installer.

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