

art reviews



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DONIGAN CUMMING at the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art (952 Queen West), to May 22. 416-395-7430. Rating: **NNNN**

Our youth-obsessed world banishes the old and dismisses the drunks. In this series of videos and photographs, Montreal-based **Donigan Cumming** snaps our wrinkle-free faces around to see what we've been trying to avoid.

You may not last more than a moment here before quietly ducking out to make a quick Botox appointment. You might even despise Cumming for his seemingly questionable behaviour.

A visual overture is provided by two large, stunning works of encaustic paint and photographs, and four enormous prints on canvas of naked old men, broken and lost in apparent disgrace. Most enthralling, however, are the videos, a medium the photographer discovered a decade ago. Three televisions play hours of Cumming's many documentaries, engulfing you in the struggles of lonely alcoholics as they rise to face their condition and then give in.

Three huge, visually arresting simultaneous projections show six more videos, a cross-pollination of miseries including a heartbreaking moment when a middle-aged Frenchman who drinks lying down imparts his solitude through a stream of tears.

But incredibly, as curator **Peggy Gale** explains, **not** all of the subjects are real. In some cases Cumming uses actors to portray real people, and in others the details seem to conflict, calling into question the reality of the entire project. Beyond such considerations, however, lies a truth about shame and love among the helpless that will floor you.

Stay and work through the difficult scenes and you will be rewarded. Beautiful, yes, but as Gale notes, it ain't pretty.