

TOM DEAN

Peaceable Kingdom



PUBLIC
ART
vancouver



About the Work

the wolf shall dwell with the lamb,... the leopard will lie down with the young goat...and a little child will lead them. Isaiah 11:6

The word *paradise* has its origins in ancient Persian, literally meaning a walled enclosure, garden, or park. And the concept of a place of paradise is cross-cultural—a sheltered kingdom of eternal peace, in which creatures dwell together in a state of harmony and contentment, as opposed to the realities of a contemporary world.

Behind such an Eden there always looms the question of a fall from grace. Will there be an expulsion from the garden? Can what lies beyond these sheltered walls intrude upon it? And if so, what will happen?

Canadian artist Tom Dean explores these questions in his ongoing examination of the concept of paradise—its presence and absence, the mirage of it, how we may yearn for it yet only gain it for transient moments, while also hoping for mercy. Dean's art plays upon tensions between the ordinary and mythological. While his subjects can allude to dreams, psyche, or the soul, they are portrayed in forms from the material world of desire and the body. This can imbue his created objects with a contained and mysterious energy.

Above Installation detail of *Peaceable Kingdom*, 2008. Photo: Ann Pollock

Peaceable Kingdom, 2008, consists of twenty-two, beautifully cast, bronze sculptures, ranging from small in scale to monumental, strategically placed throughout the large, inner courtyard of King Edward Village, a triangular configuration of buildings in east Vancouver. It includes the Kensington Branch of the Vancouver Public Library that opens onto the site.

Within this inner courtyard, sculptures of strange and magical pairings exist in apparent harmony. A young goat lies intimately on the back of a powerful leopard and kisses its ear. A family of giant sloths dangles from a wisteria trellis. A beaver peers around the edge of a building. He could be a Canadian version of a "pied piper," checking to see if the way is clear so that he can lead away the pack of rats gathered around him. There is a serpent that resides in this "garden" also. It is happily intertwined with a big, fecund sow, while her farrow of piglets lies scattered nearby.

At the base of a tall waterfall otters play, while a bear and a naked male child sit together watching them. The bear wraps a comforting arm-like paw around the child, who raises a hand in the ancient gesture of benediction.

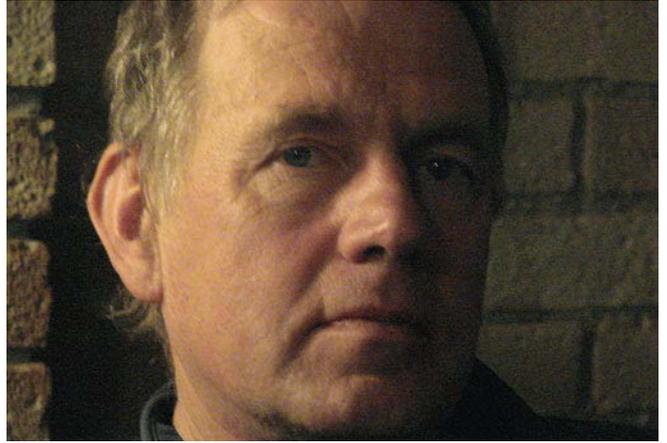
It might be that a pairing for the viewers who move through this space is with a large vulture. Perched on a ledge above, the bird surveys the scene below. The strength and detail of its exquisitely rendered wings are clearly visible as it sits, poised to take flight at the first opportunity.

Sheltered from the busy streets that surround it, the courtyard has the feeling of a moment suspended in time. But beneath this surface of apparent harmony and calm, powerful energies and emotions can be sensed in the creatures that co-exist within it. For the present everything is balanced in a place of enchanted equilibrium. But can it hold? Will this peaceable kingdom remain in its state of charmed perpetuity? Or could some unexpected event trigger a descent into chaos, with the vulture sweeping in to scavenge on the remains?

— Ann Pollock

Ann Pollock is a Vancouver-based art curator, writer and maker of sound features.

Opposite Installation detail of *Peaceable Kingdom*, 2008. Photo: SITE Photography



About the Artist

Tom Dean received the Governor General's Award for Visual and Media Arts (2001), was selected to represent Canada at the 1999 Venice Biennale, and was honoured with the Toronto Arts Award for Visual Arts in 1996. His work can be found in major collections including the National Gallery of Canada, Art Gallery of Ontario, Musée d'Art Contemporain, and Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Other commissions include *Fire & Sausage* (2009) for Scotiabank Nuit Blanche, Toronto and *Desire* (2003) for the National Ballet School of Canada, Toronto. Born in Markdale, Ontario (1947), Dean moved to Montreal in the late 60s where he studied visual art at Sir George Williams University (now Concordia) and was active in the avant-garde art scene. A founding member of the respected Véhicule Art Inc. and Véhicule Press, he published *Beaux Arts* magazine with Stephen Lack from 1972 to 1974. He has resided in Toronto since 1976, with the exception of New York from 1986 to 1989, after his solo exhibition there at the 49th Parallel Centre for Contemporary Canadian Art (1985). Dean produces work in a range of categories including writing, painting, video, performance art and editions, but perhaps, is best known for his sculpture.

The City of Vancouver Public Art Program commissions artworks and supports critical artistic explorations that reflect on the complexities of place, publics, and culture. The program prioritizes artist-centred approaches and respectful relations in pursuit of the vision of a city where the work of artists is integrated into daily life. Artworks are commissioned by the program for public sites and through private development rezoning requirements. Vancouver's public art collection includes over 300 artworks created since the program began in 1991. Learn more about the program and other public artworks at vancouver.ca/publicart. Sign up for Arts and Culture information at vancouver.ca/culture.



Peaceable Kingdom, 2008, was commissioned by Aquilini Investment Group as part of their participation in the City of Vancouver's Public Art Program.

Cover image Installation detail of *Peaceable Kingdom*, 2008, King Edward Village, King Edward Avenue at Kingsway and Knight Street, Vancouver, British Columbia. Photo: SITE Photography



TOM DEAN
Peaceable Kingdom



© Photos: SITE Photography, except Upper left and lower left Ann Pollock