

# Art gets candy-coated in collaborative installation

By Nancy Tousley, Calgary Herald, September 6, 2009

*Through Thick & Thin:* Eric Cameron And Deborah Margo, On View At Truck Gallery, Through Oct. 1.

Surprisingly enough, the floor of Truck Gallery is right now a field of candy, the essential and unlikely bond between the work of Eric Cameron and Deborah Margo in their collaborative installation, *Thick&Thin*.

Between them, the show contains such sweets as licorice allsorts, tootsie rolls and 166 okeydoke jawbreakers, and is a treat itself. Margo's four-inch-diameter okeydokes in a lush palette of confectionary pastels fill the visual field. Impossible to eat at this huge size, the jawbreakers make an unorthodox, ephemeral and beautiful material for art. An okeydoke in its pristine state is a hard, shiny, colourspeckled white ball, manufactured by coating a candy core with successive layers of different coloured sugar and binder. A cross-section reveals concentric circles of colour emanating from the centre of the jawbreaker.

However, Margo has not left this sugary ready-made alone. She presents the okeydokes, a series of manufactured units, in altered states that proceed from nearly original to eroded and partially dissolved, or sliced and polished like geodes, cut into wedges and crushed into granular debris. The smashed balls were damaged by chance in transit, which Margo accepts. She has performed the other transformations of this malleable material by using water and a variety of methods to distress the candy balls.

There appears to be an okeydoke on every intersection of the invisible laid grid on the gallery floor. But look closely. Placed among Margo's pastel confections are six of Eric Cameron's small *Thin Paintings*, each of which contains a piece of candy or a candy wrapper encased within 996 alternating layers of white and grey gesso. These candies --Matilda's Tootsie Roll, Gregory's Wine Gum, Margaret's Licorice Allsort and the others--are completely concealed from view.

And the *Thin Paintings* themselves blend into the field at first, overwhelmed by the greater number of okeydokes.

Once spotted, Cameron's paintings stand out as objects that are made, and bear the evidence of touch in brush strokes visible on their surfaces. Where the Camerons have the strange symmetries of nature, the symmetries of the Margos are those of the machine. The okeydokes retain the stamp of manufacture in the traces of their underlying spherical uniformity. The shapes of the Thin Paintings appear to be the baroque results of acts of nature that have occurred beyond the artist's control.

Margo, who lives in Ottawa, and Cameron, who lives in Calgary, were brought together by Truck's director, Renato Vitic. Margo had already noticed some similarities with Cameron's work before she met him. They developed the collaboration by mail and completed it when they met at the gallery.

The way they start is not really so different. Each artist chooses an object from the everyday world and lifts it out of the ordinary, by subjecting it to processes that transform it.

The artists have in common the fact that they set up pre-determined procedures by which to make their work and then follow them to conclusion, knowing that they can only partly control the result. Neither artist can predict the outcome.

Still, it is a paradox that Margo begins with a manufactured object, made by applying layers from the centre out, and reveals the inside, while Cameron begins with a manufactured object and covers it, by hand, with layers from the centre out, only to conceal its core. The resulting forms might have some surface similarities, but it is the differences that are the most interesting.

While Cameron's ready-made functions as a seed for a marvellous unique object that is its metaphysical antithesis, Margo's multiple objects become beautiful, mortality-invoking ruins. One process is additive, the other subtractive. Margo's work speaks of the body, Cameron's of the soul.

*Through Thick & Thin* turns on dualities set up by the two bodies of work. In addition to those already mentioned are repetition and singularity, similarity and difference, artificial and natural, colour and the monochrome, permanent and impermanent, and others besides. It seems like such a simple thing to put the work of two artists together in the same room, but the implications in this exemplary case reach deep into the nature of art.