

Capturing the dreams of David Hoffos

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Ghostly Carolina appears in David Hoffos' Scenes From A House Dream at the Illingworth Kerr Gallery. Photo courtesy of David Hoffos.

Take a solitary walk through the TV-lit darkness that is the David Hoffos: Scenes From the House Dream exhibition at the Illingworth Kerr Gallery and you'll soon see you're not alone.

There's an attractive young woman off in the distance.

An Alberta College of Art & Design student, perhaps?

She's lingering in one spot so you wonder if she's studying the installation.

You get closer to her as you work your way through the first half of the exhibit, among the televisions facing the walls, screens oddly duct taped, and past the peep-show-style windows which reveal weird nocturnal scenes rendered in 3-D, some suburban and others fantastic in nature.

Then, suddenly, you realize you're sharing space with an apparition. The young lady is an illusion, projected upon a life sized cut-out.

Don't feel foolish if you're a tad chilled at this moment, a slight shiver running up your spine.

David Hoffos created Scenes From A House Dream and he's still unnerved by it at times.

"When I saw you moving around in here, that spooked me as well," says the 45-year-old Lethbridge-based artist as he walks me through the exhibit, which he created in stages over a five-year period, from 2003 to 2008.

During that time, Hoffos debuted a new phase of the work every spring at TrepanierBaer Gallery. When the House Dream was completed, Hoffos took it on a Canadian tour which has included stops at major museums and galleries from Lethbridge and Toronto to Ottawa and Halifax.

Now, for the first time in Calgary — the final stop on the tour — visitors can experience Scenes From The House Dream in its entirety, through to Dec. 17 at Illingworth Kerr.

“For now, it’s over,” Hoffos says. “I have a good sense of closure and satisfaction with it.”

Hoffos describes Scenes From A House Dream — which was initially inspired by a recurring dream he’s had since childhood about his “difficult, middle-class suburban upbringing” — as “a journey through the subconscious.”

But the exhibition is by no means confined to the suburban setting. Peering through the series of windows in this multimedia installation — where the visuals incorporate tiny, meticulously detailed models and trippy illusions created with mirrors and projections — you’ll find haunting, dimly lit living rooms next to the ancient kingdom of Atlantis.

One scene depicts an apparent colony on the moon, while, in another, a camper sits in the middle of a black forest, the man inside unaware of the ghostly shape outside. At another station, pop-culture buffs might recognize the living room from TV’s *The Brady Bunch*, but you’ll soon notice something askew and, dare we say, freaky in this view of Brady bliss.

In one spot you’ll find yourself peeping into someone’s home. Who’s that figure in the window off in the distance, peering back at you? Brace yourself for another creepy tingle when you figure that one out.

“I’m creating an experience that is both strange and familiar at the same time,” explains Hoffos.

“I’m using cues and archetypes and icons that the viewer will recognize, but putting them in a slightly off kilter environment. . . . You have ordinary things happening in this extraordinary situation and it produces a third sensation.

“Something uncanny.”

Spurred on as he was by his own dreams when developing the exhibition, Hoffos says his goal was to capture “the texture of a dream.”

“Things here are not fully tangible or physical,” he says. “They do sometimes appear to be real . . . But as you become a little more savvy in the space, as your eyes adjust to the light and you make your way past the illusions, they reveal themselves as illusions.

“Much as our dreams do when we wake up in the morning.”

David Hoffos: Scenes From The House Dream is at ACAD’s Illingworth Kerr Gallery through to Dec. 17. Admission is free.

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