

Manufactured Landscapes and Dark Transparency: Alex McLeod and Michael De Feo at Angell Gallery

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[Toronto artist Alex McLeod](#) seems to be everywhere these days, from a recent show at [Switch Contemporary](#) in the spring to not one, but two concurrent shows on in the city as we speak (one opens tonight at the [Lonsdale Gallery](#); the other, which I'm talking about here, is at [Jamie Angell's on Queen](#).)

Moreover, he's getting a lot of love in the blogosphere, most significantly -- for his viable commercial career aspirations -- at least, on [Kanye West's blog](#), where the super-stylin' R+B producer calls his work "pretty romantic," which I guess we have to take as tacit fandom.

"Pretty romantic" isn't really a fleshed-out analysis of McLeod's computer engineered, candy-coated landscapes, though, and I hesitate to offer too much of one myself. The technique is arresting: McLeod, who studied drawing at OCAD, switched over to full digital renderings after graduation; his images have a perplexing sense of hyper-reality that are part glossy, psychedelic dreamscape, part Tim Burton-esque film set (which, I guess, is kind of redundant, but bear with me).



In any case, the odd incongruity provoked by McLeod's particular skills with his medium -- they seem to be photographs of wacked-out dioramas that, on closer inspection, flatten and surrender to their digital origins -- is provocative, indeed. My initial urge, to brush them off as hipster eye candy, was quelled on seeing them in person; there's something both seductive and

compelling about the virtuality of McLeod's worlds; at the same time as their candy-coloured sheen attracts, it's also somewhat chilling, and the tension inherent works for me.

On the wall opposite from McLeod's work are a series of self-portraits from New York-based street artist [Michael De Feo](#). They're an odd pairing; aside from the obvious incongruity in method -- De Fao's work is highly material, often lacquered in layers, with paint roughly applied over top -- there's a huge rift in conceptual conceit. Which is to say, De Feo gropes for one, but doesn't come close to reaching it; his self-portraits, rough and obscure, paint slathered over maps of New York City in generously thick dollops, smacks of trendy, undergraduate false angst.

This time, my initial impulse seems served: This is no more than hipster decor, its faux-authenticity writ large. In fact, McLeod's work, with its deliberate sheen of glossy unreality, seems more genuine than De Feo's maddeningly earnest, angsty attempt at the same. Funny how that can work, isn't it?