

» TORONTO STAR «

One thing: Douglas Coupland's urgent, dreadful 'The Golden Fleece' is the best work he's ever done

Call it a recovery effort, but the sometimes glib artist shows hidden depth with a new body of work about our plastic-choked world.



Douglas Coupland, The Golden Fleece, 2018 (COURTESY DANIEL FARIA GALLERY)

By **MURRAY WHYTE** Visual Arts Critic
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I have a checkered history with Douglas Coupland, which is something like having a complicated relationship with maple syrup or stubby beer bottles. The oozing Canadiana-kitsch of perhaps our most loved contemporary cultural figure has, for me, always served as an excuse for artworks that score points on nationalist name-checks that forgive a maddening lack of depth.

There's no there there, I've often said, as beguilingly slick as his sweetly superficial works have often been. They're crowd pleasers, to be sure — a giant bust of his own head, covered with expended chewing gum? — but deep ruminations on critical issues, generally, they're not.

Not this time. At the Daniel Faria Gallery here in Toronto, Coupland has turned one of his many obsessive pursuits — and there are many — into urgent fare. Here, a collection of plastic jetsam — things Coupland himself has collected on beaches all over the world, a gesture of anxious futility that itself prefigures the work's calamitous implications — sits in tight Plexiglas boxes, specimens of an unnatural infestation.

Coupland gilds the lily a tad, smearing them with paint; but if you take the gesture to convey fretful helplessness, it works. But at the back of the gallery, an altar-like space — a shrine, maybe, to gross consumerism run amok — holds Coupland's effort, and thinking, at its very best.

There, a gross tangle of rope and flotsam — gas cans, foam buoys, fishing net — is plated in gleaming gold. It simultaneously provokes notions of infamous art world excess — Jeff Koons' gleefully decadent balloon dogs, the throwaway made priceless — and violent dread: a set of twisted entrails, guts turned inside out.

Coupland knowingly name-checks Koons, I think, a habit he can't help, but obliterates the artist's cheeky glibness in the same gesture. There is nothing funny here, in Coupland's urgent, gilded monument to a dying, plastic-choked world; instead, there is only a shimmering idol and false god — remember better living through chemistry? — to which we're left to pray in vain. It's the best thing he's ever done.

Douglas Coupland: Tsunami is at the [Daniel Faria Gallery](#), 188 St. Helens Ave., until April 28.

-Whyte, Murray. "One Thing: Douglas Coupland's urgent, dreadful, 'Golden Fleece' is the best work he's ever done", *Toronto Star*, April 18, 2018 7, 2018.