



'Life is a circus': Humour meets anxiety at Pumphouse artist's surrealist exhibition

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Artist Victoria Wallace stands with her surrealist animal paintings, where she explores daily pressure through metaphor and says she hopes to expand her teaching practice in Niagara-on-the-Lake. [DAVE VAN DE LAAR](#)



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Artist Victoria Wallace represents daily life as a precarious tightrope walk through surreal animal imagery in a new exhibition at the Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre.

“Logic: Lost in Translation,” which opened May 3 in the Joyner Gallery, centres on her use of animals navigating aerial wires over open space to depict how people manage strain in daily life.

The show positions humour and play as a response to that pressure, with Wallace arguing that people maintain composure despite instability and uncertainty.

Wallace, a Toronto-trained muralist who spent more than two decades in commercial and film work, shifted to studio painting to gain control over subject and process.

That move allowed her to develop a body of work rooted in metaphor and personal experience, with recurring imagery drawn from both childhood exposure to spectacle near Toronto's Exhibition grounds and her ongoing observation of animals.

The paintings present dogs, elephants and other animals suspended above water or sky, each engaged in a solitary act of balance. Wallace described the scenes as a direct reflection of how people navigate daily demands without clear outcomes.

"There's no certainty," Wallace said. "We're just balancing the challenges in our lives and putting on the top hat and making it look good and presentable, trying to put on the brave face and go out there and face the world, but we're doing it on an aerial wire over water."

The work draws on surrealist traditions associated with artists such as René Magritte, Salvador Dalí and Frida Kahlo, with Wallace adapting dream logic to depict familiar emotional states.

She translates common idioms into literal images, including works that reference phrases such as "when pigs fly," using visual absurdity to expose underlying tension.

"I was expressing human behaviour through the animals, using them to make it humorous and to demonstrate what we're going through," she said.

Wallace said she aims to extend her work locally beyond the exhibition through teaching and expanded online sales. She currently teaches at Haliburton School of Art and Design and indicated interest in developing courses in NOTL, dependant on the Pumphouse' ability to facilitate her.

The show's central message rests on reframing pressure as something that can be managed through interpretation and perspective. Wallace said the intention is to present difficulty without removing it, and to give viewers a way to engage with it.

"I wanted to make light of it," she said. "I wanted to show a lighter side where we do make the best of it and face these challenges with a smile on our faces."

The exhibition remains on view until May 31 at the Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre on Ricardo Street.

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