

## Capturing the nature of art

Grayduck and Big Medium exhibits' artists look at mankind and the world around us

By [Jeanne Claire van Ryzin](#) | Wednesday, August 11, 2012, 12:49 PM



Casey Polacheck's oil paintings at Grayduck Gallery offer a wry and layered parody of the natural world.



In his Big Medium exhibit, Kevin McNamee-Tweed uses rocks as his canvas.

But it's Polacheck's oil paintings of natural history museum dioramas that offer the most wry and layered parody of our conflicting history with and behavior toward the animal kingdom. After all, what are dioramas but imagined — and idealized — stage settings for wildlife? They purportedly portray realistic scenarios, but are girded by romantic fantasies.

Polacheck calls attention to this subversively, knowing we're not always used to reading museum dioramas so critically.

Why, in one painting, is that polar bear poised with its feet on the surface water as if it's walking on the surface? And, in another, doesn't that giant chimpanzee have a paintbrush in its hand, ready to complete the idealistic painted vista that stands in as a background to its natural habitat?

Polacheck's depictions of dioramas subvert our expectations.

Everything is endearing about Kevin McNamee-Tweed's "Rocks," his solo show at Big Medium.

McNamee-Tweed uses rocks as his canvases, painting and drawing in black sumi ink rocks that range from small to platter-sized. And the artist coyly suggests that his cartoonish images (many of which are augmented with text) offer "a comprehensive history of humanity."

Actually, what the rocks offer is McNamee-Tweed's charming, sardonic and often sexually charged musings on the origins of human life rendered in own quirky hieroglyphics. These are the alternative archaeological finds — the evidence of our goofy fallibility.

On one rock McNamee-Tweed catalogs a prehistoric to-do list: "Make rain with sacrifice," "hunt," and "gather" top the roster.

On others, Simpsons-esque characters act out fledgling developments in human knowledge: A man pushes a child riding a bike with square wheels.

And on another, McNamee-Tweed offers the remnant of a drawing depicting what surely must have been a major revelation of early history: "Man walks on sunny side of road."

Ah, human progress.

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"Tamed Territory"

When: Through Aug. 20

Where: Grayduck Gallery, 608 W. Monroe St.

Cost: Free

Info: [www.grayduckgallery.com](http://www.grayduckgallery.com)

"Rocks"

When: Noon to 4 p.m. and 7 to 9 p.m. Friday

Where: Big Medium, 5305 Bolm Road

Cost: Free

Info: [www.bigmedium.org](http://www.bigmedium.org)