



**TURTLE BOY, WHY SO EMO? *BEASTS OF BURDEN* INVITES INTERPRETATION** PHOTO BY JAMIE CAMPBELL

# BEAUTY IN THE BEAST

CONCORDIA STUDENT TURNS MASCOTS INTO ART SUBJECTS

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In a gallery downtown, pictures of the beast you've become and the burden you embody hang colorfully on a wall for all to see.

In *Beasts of Burden* Concordia student Jamie Campbell has taken the human condition's dark side and given it a vibrant look, a fitting environment and a coy guise. Mascot heads of plush animals sit heavily atop slouched shoulders, depicting the burden we feel with regards to the beast we most resemble.

"The project started with an interest in the questioning of who motivates a motivator. Or who performs to the performer," Campbell

the moment's stillness; *turtle boy* seems stuck with a shell, *donkey girl* stuck with her ears, *lion boy* stuck with his mane.

"This project dealt with solidarity and melodrama, and the absurdity of how the two interact with each other," said Campbell. "Or how seemingly small, or miniscule misunderstandings turn into often overwhelming problems."

Perhaps the pictures' beauty lies in the balance between the heavy burden and the composition's full-out vibrancy. The photos are like a well-placed flippant remark; at first they make light of the moment in a satirical manner, but once further analyzed, they show a playfully jaded acceptance of the mendacious fronts we sometimes present to maintain a sense of dignity.

questioning of who motivates a motivator. Or who performs to the performer," Campbell said about the choice of mascot-headed individuals. "I felt there was quite a bit of responsibility placed on people we either take for granted, or expect to be entertained by [ . . . ] Not necessarily people on top, but more importantly to me, average folk."

With Campbell's exhibition we get to know these people under the mask.

*turtle boy* ponders his existence, out of his shell, on a listless basement couch. He hugs himself meekly through a skin he finds uncomfortable. *lion boy* sits head down in a drab but overbearing room. He is the jock with the jersey number stitched over his heart. *donkey girl* knows her place as somebody's trusty companion, but seems ignorant of anything beyond her little world. All of these characters represent the wrong foot forward of the people we love to know, but sometimes loathe to be.

All the pieces carry generic names in lowercase: *mouse girl*, *boar boy*, *shark boy*.

"Everyone carries an intangible weight, everyone is burdened by bits of daily life," said Campbell. "It is very much part of the human condition."

Despite the gravity of the exposition's theme, it's enjoyable. The ironic twist on character honesty is true to our flaws. The tragedy is in

fronts we sometimes present to maintain a sense of dignity.

"Some people laugh at the photos," said Push Gallery owner Meghan Bradley. "One great reaction was when an older lady turned to me after walking around and said 'it's so sad.'"

Push Gallery is a nice little space that opened this September. Also on display is Kotama Bouabane's *Melting Words* series, in which words made of ice melt before us. In one piece, 'do you love me?' show the cold and calculating nature of this needling question.

Next to Bouabane's pieces stands a couple of photos from Campbell's *Untitled* series, which takes undefined people and places them in overemphasized spaces. This highlights the subject's shy but agonizing search for meaning in the frame.

All the work on display is definitely worth checking out. It will either move you philosophically, or in a head-nodding 'you dig?' kind of way, with its tangible and meaningful displays.

***Beasts of Burden, Untitled and Melting Words* are on display at the Push Gallery (5264 St. Laurent) until Nov. 23. Admission is free. For more information, call (514) 544-9079 or visit [www.galeriepush.com](http://www.galeriepush.com).**