

IT'S ALL RELATIVE

Painter Sarah Refvem uses large-scale paintings to examine family dynamics

There's no better time to reflect on family dynamics than after the holidays, for many a time of family harmony and family madness, and that's exactly what artist Sarah Refvem is doing with her First Friday ArtWalk solo exhibit *Familiar Dynamics* at the Woodpecker's Muse on Jan. 4. Refvem's last show explored group dynamics through painting photographs of school classes or swim meets — her impressionist and expressionist style rendering the subjects just vague enough to be relatable to a wider audience. Now she is diving further into her subject matter and narrowing her scope to the family.

Since graduating with a BFA in painting last spring from the UO, Refvem has been ruminating on group dynamics within a family structure and how these roles stick with us well into adulthood e.g. once the baby always the baby. "I'm figuring out how to exist as an adult," she says. "I'm re-evaluating relationships with people in my family — which parts I want to hold on to and which parts aren't as healthy to hold on to."

For the past several months, Refvem has been asking anyone who is willing to donate pictures of his or her childhood. It did not take long for a theme to emerge — people kept offering snapshots of their families with Disney

characters. "A childhood trip to Disneyland is such a classic childhood memory a lot of people can relate to," she says. "I look for where you catch a little glimpse of something accidental — someone looking away. It wasn't what the photographer intended but it was accidentally captured." And perhaps what will be this exhibit's most arresting piece is Refvem's personal version of this; "Disney Vacation, 1996" is a 7-foot-tall impressionistic acrylic painting based on an image of Refvem, her brother and sister posing with Winnie the Pooh. The painting, done on printmaking paper, is so tall that its bottom edge will curl upon the gallery floor, and that's exactly what Refvem wants.

"I love working large," she says. The paintings, on both stretched canvas and paper, place the figures against white backgrounds, "making it so the white background and the wall blend together. The only things that come forward are the figures themselves ... It pushes them forward into your space." The effect is to not only to have the painting cross the threshold into the viewer's personal space (rather than say, a viewer "losing herself" in a painting), but for these figures to be life size, as if they were standing right there returning the viewer's gaze.

"I'm not trying to preach anything," she says. "All I'm trying to do is pose a question, spark some sort of thought



'DISNEY VACATION, 1996' BY SARAH REFVEM

process that may lead someone to their own understandings." Maybe that understanding is "Wow, my family is great," or "Wow, my family is crazy" or maybe it's just "Wow, those Disney characters are creepier than I remember." ■

Familiar Dynamics opening reception 5:30 to 9 pm Friday, Jan. 4, at The Woodpecker's Muse Art Gallery, 372 W. Broadway, 310-909-3518.

MOVIES BY MOLLY TEMPLETON



A MAN AMONG (MANY) MEN

French Director Léos Carax sends viewers on a superb, surreal jaunt

HOLY MOTORS: Written and directed by Léos Carax. Cinematography, Caroline Champetier. Editing, Nelly Quettier. Starring Denis Lavant, Edith Scob, Kylie Minogue and Eva Mendes. Indomina Group, 2012. Not rated. 115 minutes. ★ ★ ★ ★ ☆

Léos Carax's baffling, magical Rorschach blot of a film, *Holy Motors*, is a magic mirror: It gives you what you want from it. If you think it's funny, you'll be amused; if you think it's serious, you'll be somber. If you want to figure out what it all means, your options are plentiful: It's a mosaic of modern life, and the roles we play for each other; it's a vision of personal reinvention, a filmmaker stepping back into feature films after more than a decade; it's an exploration of the glory and wear of performance of all kinds: the little part played by a woman you pass on the street, or the larger roles played by parents and children. If you're familiar with Carax's previous work (*The Lovers on the Bridge*, *Pola X*), something more intimate and self-

referential emerges from these vignettes: one features Carax's daughter, and another revisits a character from one of his shorts. Carax himself appears in an opening sequence, walking into a theater after opening a door with a key that's grown from his hand.

But *Holy Motors* mostly follows one man, Oscar (Denis Lavant), as he becomes many men (and one woman) over the course of a day and night. Ferried about in a white limo by Céline (Edith Scob), Oscar goes to appointments, appearing as a different person each time: a villain in a tracksuit, a tired father, a beggar. Who makes the appointments is irrelevant; a file appears in the back of the limo, and Oscar transforms himself as required. Riding with him is like being backstage as dreams are formed. You need no context, only a willingness to go along with each new character.

Watching the transformations does little to explain them — or what Carax means to accomplish with his

strange film, which feels esoteric, true, absurd and personal all at once. It's too beautifully pieced together to be dismissed as a goof, a surreal jaunt over the rainbow and through someone else's psyche, but it's also playful and brisk, a constantly morphing tale of change and connection. A photographer mutters "Beauty! Beauty!" as he shoots photos of stone-faced model Kay M (Eva Mendes), changing his chant to "Weird! Weird!" when he sees Oscar as the green-suited, flower-eating Merde. (In the strangest sequence, Merde absconds with Kay M, who barely bats an elaborate false eyelash as she is transformed.)

Holy Motors springs from the head of Léos Carax, but sits in the palm of Denis Lavant. It couldn't exist without both of them, without the perfect pairing of Carax's vision and Lavant's presence. His shifts in gait and posture, malleable face and deep sense of tiredness (all in contrast with Céline's white-suited consistency) lead us deftly into each new scenario. Somehow, Lavant simultaneously makes it look easy, and like a wearing, exhausting lifetime of work. Oscar is an artist unlike any I've previously seen on film. Watch *Holy Motors* for Lavant's performance, at the very least — there's no telling what else you'll take away from it. ■