



Donovan and Siegel's *Boy with Hatchet*, part of a recent series of sculptures based on the Pinocchio story and similar tales of creation.

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Discover some of Toronto's most interesting contemporary artists and the ideas that give life to their unique works. **BY CRAIG MOY**

ARTS PARTNERSHIP

As of this article's publication, **Hallie Siegel** and **Matt Donovan** have exhibited their artworks precisely twice. Their first "solo" showing at Toronto's Olga Korper Gallery was in 2007. Their second show occurred this past spring. It's not for lack of public interest, nor for lack of inspiration. Instead, it reflects the extreme craftsmanship and high concept inherent in their pieces, and

the time necessary to successfully achieve such a combination.

"We're conceptual artists," says Donovan. "Our working process is one where we discuss things a lot. We iron out all the aspects of a work well ahead of time. When it comes to execution, there's very little 'free association' that happens."

This free association of ideas began in earnest more than a decade ago. Now husband and wife,

their methods are truly collaborative (in our interview, they even finished each other's sentences); one gets the sense that the extensive passing back and forth of notions, hypotheses and plans between these two artists is almost more fulfilling than the physical act of creation.

What does, ultimately, emerge are intricate sculptural works that Donovan and Siegel call "history machines," both for the pieces' incorporation of mechanical elements and the way they draw on historical narratives to engage contemporary issues. Their recent series of Pinocchio-like wooden sculptures is a perfect example: inspired not only by that fable, but also the Pygmalion myth, the Hebrew golem, the biblical story of Adam's creation, and even the Japanese anime figure Astro Boy, the pieces evoke the epoch-old belief that humans can somehow replicate ourselves through artifice. An earlier work, the *Self-Printing Book*, offers a similar perspective. According to Siegel, this brass tome, which contains the text of a 1945 essay that prophesied the emergence of computers and the Internet, is concerned with "how the past connects to the present and what that means for the future." A follow-up question: "How do our ideas about the future shape what we're up to in the here-and-now?"

Even at a superficial level, these works make a statement. They're extremely well crafted, their production clearly resource- and time-intensive. Their materials—mainly woods and metals—lend them weight. They appear as though they could be relics from another era. They look like they've been made to endure.

Siegel refers to the pair's desire to create cultural productions rather than artist productions—pieces that, when examined in the distant future, will offer no distinction between art and artifact. Expanding on this, the pair refer to grand-scale artworks like Takashi Murakami's 6,613-pound steel, aluminum and platinum *Oval Buddha*, which represent a brand of art-making intended to last for millennia. One gets the sense that Donovan and Siegel have similar aspirations.

Matt Donovan and Hallie Siegel can be found online at historymachines.com, and are represented in Toronto by [Olga Korper Gallery](http://OlgaKorperGallery.com) (17 Morrow Ave., 416-538-8220; olgakorpergallery.com).