

Gareth Long's perfect show for our stupid Trump moment

By Murray Whyte

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From Gareth Long's Square Peg Round Hole, at Susan Hobbs Gallery

Gareth Long, Square Peg Round Hole: "(H)ow is stupidity taught" and "how can it be learned" form the core concerns of this show, which arrives, not coincidentally, at the apex of such matters. A Toronto artist, Long watched agape – like most of us – as absurd falsehoods began to shoulder out factual reporting in the run-up to last fall's U.S. presidential election. Now, "fake news" is a mantra for a president when he sees real things in the fact-based media he doesn't like; and facts be damned, he's been alarmingly successful at merging the perception of the wild and maliciously deceptive, openly bigoted alt-right (Pizzagate! Emails!) with that of the real world. In the realm of "how stupidity is taught," Donald Trump is conducting a master class.

But wait: In Long's view, stupidity can actually be a productive tool. Wilful ignorance, he reasons, can liberate the mind from conventional thinking and force a kind of re-education, new pathways to facts and comprehension. In this show, Long recruits a handful of his former students (Jaimie Aitken, Grace Esford, Nora Downer, and Claudia Rick) to produce various works meant to embody that workaround – fumbling in the dark, against knowing, to a new set of resolutions. He calls it a kind of "rational stupidity," the destructive phase that begets creation. If only a certain commander-in-chief's technique was so rational. At Susan Hobbs Gallery, 137 Tecumseth St., until April 29.