

**Climbing the Walls Thinking it  
Might be a Way Out at the  
Robert Birch Gallery**

This show tries so stridently to be hip, it feels annoying. Guest-curated by Eileen Sommerman, this "exhibition about ambivalence, naiveté and thoughtfulness" features works by two artists from Toronto (James Carl, Karma Clarke-Davis) and two from New York (Tony Matelli and former Torontonian Carl Skelton). Matelli, a bright young thing currently on the almost conventional meteoric rise up through the ennui-tinctured New York art scene, is showing a large sleepwalking chimpanzee figure he showed there recently at PS1. It wears a T-shirt that says GONE and I guess it's some kind of isn't-life-like-that? comment on the botch we've all made of evolution or something (there are Matelli T-shirts on the walls with heavy-handed symbols like nooses and hands clinking martini glasses). Carl Skelton's sometimes funny, mostly irritating video *Prisoners of Information* is, like the show itself, less smart than its title. Karma Clarke-Davis's Styrofoam boulder trailing tubes of fibre-optic light (is the rock leaking light or being fed light?) is pretty but slight. James Carl's *Thinking Fish*, a 24-carat gold-leaf cartoon fish affixed to the gallery's storefront window (which it thus turns into a sort of temporary pop-cult aquarium) and his mural-sized *International Briefs*, a big cleanly stencilled wall painting of underwear in white lines on the blue wall, demonstrate yet again the degree to which wit increasingly passes for art nowadays. It's getting pretty clear that the visual one-liner is emphatically not the "way out" — though it can cause you climb the walls. \$100-\$12,000. Until Aug. 12. 241 King St. E. 416-955-9410.

**GALLERY GOING**

**GARY MICHAEL DAULT**

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

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