

ArtPic: Lee Henderson's Palliative Care at Latitude 53



FISH GRIWKOWSKY

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A moment with Betty White from Lee Henderson's Palliative Care, running through Saturday at Latitude 53.

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ArtPic artist: Lee Henderson (<http://www.noattainment.com/>)

Artwork: Palliative Care, video with deck chairs

Show: Runs through Saturday at Latitude 53
(<http://latitude53.org/archive/2016/henderson/>), 10242 106 St.

The concept is a triple threat of intelligence, humour and pathos: Scouring seven seasons of The Golden Girls sitcom, Toronto artist Lee Henderson isolated every reference to death, dying, funerals, cemeteries ... even beheading! He then mashed these in order into one mega mix, which runs in the gallery in a sitcom-length work of art that's comically musical in its cadence ("death" "death" "dying") but also sometimes sharply heartbreaking.

Ultimately, though, thanks to its deck chairs that feel a little like hospital beds, Palliative Care serves as a dimly-lit shrine where one's own questions of mortality pop up — most certainly at the video's final scene.

Henderson explains, "When I was a kid I used to watch The Golden Girls at my grandma's house. I attribute a lot of my equanimity toward death to my grandma — for as long as I can remember, over 30 years, she would regularly say that she was 'ready to go any day now,' and would then fail to do so — until she didn't.

"There are two scenes I remember most vividly from that time. In one, Rose tells a curmudgeonly neighbour to 'drop dead,' and the rest of the episode is about the Girls having to administer her funeral because she had no remaining family and no friends. In the other, the Girls make a pact that when one of them dies the others will all take care of each other. The episode ends soberly when Rose asks, 'But what about when there's only one of us left?' So upon reflection, my memories of the show are more morose than they are comedic. I guess mining it for death references felt

obvious. And I've always thought of death and humour as intertwined.

"As for the Girls being 75 per cent gone, yeah, people point that out frequently. Though I don't really telegraph the show onto its performers; maybe it's because it exists as a separate text for me, or maybe it's because of Bea Arthur's famous rejection of the nostalgia of strangers — Google 'Bea Arthur Rufus Wainwright.'" (Wainwright says she told him, "I'm not your f—ing grandmother.")

"That said," says Henderson, "I'd really love to know what Betty White thinks of it."

As to whether the artist believes he'll return to this brilliant video collage at the point of his own death: "I don't know if I'll see it flashing before my eyes.

"But I'm ready to go any day now."

fgriwkowsky@edmontonjournal.com

(mailto:fgriwkowsky@edmontonjournal.com)

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