

VISUAL ARTS REVIEW

**Joan Kaufman
at Red Head Gallery**

Until Nov. 27, 401 Richmond St. W.,
Suite 115, Toronto;
www.redheadgallery.org/

Down the hall at Red Head Gallery, another heightened reality awaits. Joan Kaufman's *News from Nowhere* is a collection of dreamy photographs and an eerie video installation, all focusing on the theme of flight – as both a simile for escape and, for some species, a daily activity.

Kaufman's large format photographs are awash with a yellowing, partialized light, as if her subjects – tattooed ladies, hands bound in fetishy leather gear, a supine young man – were photographed while submerged in a tank of briny water. A bright red ball hovers over several subjects, defying gravity, and the tattooed lady's exposed shoulders reveal a pair of inked-in wings.

A related video installation portrays massive flocks of birds swirling over fields, their collectively alerted bodies forming pointy, but balletically fluid and ever-changing, clouds.

Culling footage from various nature documentaries, Kaufman reduces the birds to solid black silhouettes and then removes all the surrounding colours, replacing them with a hot, blood red. The effect is both jarring and beautiful, as it causes the viewer to contemplate the birds as watch-precise wonders of communal movement and communication, not as sentient, individual beings. Ornithophobes beware.

Cao Fei and Joan Kaufman revivify, with new technologies, the primordial human dreams of shape shifting and flight – two forms of ultimate personal autonomy. Meanwhile, Amanda Reeves and Mike Bayne, using ancient technologies, go to great lengths to cloak the "artist's voice," another sacred autonomy.

How does that old curse/blessing go: May you live in interesting times?