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Double visions and scary dolls

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Fausta Facciponte at Stephen Bulger Gallery

Until Oct. 29, 1026 Queen St. W., Toronto; bulgergallery.com

If you think you're too grown-up (or just too boring) to indulge in the frights of Halloween, award-winning photographer Fausta Facciponte's exhibition, *Sleepy Eyes*, will give you the autumnal creep-out you know you still crave.

Facciponte's subjects are vintage dolls, the kind with oversized eyes enhanced with mechanical lids that shut when the doll is horizontal. Dolls are curious toys to begin with – replicas of babies given to babies. But Facciponte turns the little nasties into full-blown monsters by photographing them in an unsentimental, head and shoulders, hot light style, as if they were convicts, and then printing the images in large formats, so that every tuft of plugged-in hair, every scraped off bit of flesh paint, and every insect leg-like eyelash is as big as your thumb.

Eek! These photographs ought to come with a warning: Do not look directly into the dolls' eyes, lest your soul be stolen.

As the accompanying essay explains, children invest dolls with extra-natural powers, especially the power to come alive, and then to listen. Facciponte's glaring ghouls carry all that original power (the dolls do seem to watch as one wanders the gallery) as well as a new, equally necromantic skill.

Namely, the power to reawaken childhood's awful wonder.