

Amy Jean Porter
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Amy Jean Porter,
Douc, 2008.

★★★★★
"Freaked-Out Monkeys in the Trees," Lisa Boyle Gallery, through Jun 21 (see West Side).

Amy Jean Porter's playful ink-and-gouache depictions of monkeys take our fellow primates doubly out of context: Porter sets their portraits in the suburbs and inserts passages from St. Paul's Epistles into some of the works. As in previous installments of her series of animal

drawings, *All Species All the Time*, Porter renders her subjects in bright, discordant colors and enhances the resulting quirkiness with mysterious snippets of text.

The artist never explains why she chose her biblical quotations, but they strengthen the impression that she has put the monkeys in an artificial environment. Porter inserts all-American symbols such as a flag, house and station wagon into *Gelada (Female)*, in which a neon-blue baboon perches on a spindly red tree as the words "Too much learning is driving you insane" float between the branches. The assemblage highlights the oddity of the baboon's relocation from the grasslands of Ethiopia to America's suburban lawns. *Douc* suggests a similar displacement: A silvered langur (colored green by Porter), native to Southeast Asia, sits in a tree, accompanied by giant yellow flowers. The tree's branches cross at the bottom of the image, creating a triangular frame for a glimpsed colonial-style home.

Yet Porter's drawings do more than suggest her "freaked-out monkeys" don't belong in the suburbs. The monkeys seem to utter the Bible's words themselves, confusing the boundaries between animals and people. Perhaps our tendency to project our own thoughts onto our mammalian friends is what's misplaced.—AE

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