

Penelope Stewart's beeswax art is worth the buzz

There's still a week to see (and smell) Penelope Stewart's stunning installation *Vanitas* at Koffler Gallery.-



Inside Penelope Stewart's "*Vanitas*," a giant installation made entirely of beeswax at the Koffler Gallery until the end of August.

Penelope Stewart calls her [Koffler Gallery](#) installation *Vanitas*, and it's a suitably baroque nudge and wink to the artist's typically Modernist, utopian worlds. Stewart's work in recent years has been trained on the intersection — and disconnect — between idealized notions of cities and the organic, organizational perfection of beehives, making an oeuvre of building ever more elaborate environments of 4-inch-square tiles made of beeswax.

At the Koffler Gallery until the end of the month, you can smell it as you walk through the door, a sweet, sickly odour that underscores Stewart's deft toggle between order and decay: The exterior of a freestanding, smoothly tiled cube gives way to chaotic overgrowth within, as the interior walls sprouts intricate floral forms and squat, baluster-like growths from its rococo hide.

Just outside, wax forms dangle from ropes or sit in piles on the floor, like a construction site hastily abandoned during a sudden disaster. Which, when you think about the [sorry state of the honeybee](#) — threatened, diminishing — and our own woeful failure to stop it, seems about right. Order here hangs on by a thread, tilting towards chaos — an unfortunately apt metaphor, and not just for the bees.

Penelope Stewart: *Vanitas* closes Aug. 31 at the Koffler Gallery, Artscape Youngplace, 180 Shaw St. Opening hours noon to 6, Tuesday to Friday; 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Closed Monday. www.kofflerarts.org