



ETCH A SKETCH: Moira Clark (right) and Julie Voyce, confessed "dedicated etchers", have staged *Scrap Plate Project*, modest in scope and rich in results.

An invitation to come up and see some etchings

PRINTMAKERS have made an impression on Canadian art over the years, but lately they seem to be dropping out of sight.

There are signs the situation may be changing. Open Studio (520 King St. W.), one of Toronto's oldest printmaking ateliers in Toronto, recently unveiled a small but wonderful exhibition of etchings made by a wide range of local artists.

Organized by Moira Clark and Julie Voyce, a confessed pair of "dedicated etchers", the show reminds us that there's plenty of life left yet in a medium that has been around for a long, long time. The *Scrap Plate Project*, as it's officially called, may be modest in scope but it's rich in results.

Approached artists

Essentially, Clark and Voyce approached 24 Toronto-based artists, mostly painters, and offered each one an opportunity to make a print using the Open Studio facilities.

"The idea," Clark explains, "was to introduce artists to a medium they don't usually work in. We wanted to draw them into another form and see what they would do."

Each participant was given a small zinc plate covered in a layer of brown wax ground. He or she was asked to sketch an image directly into the wax and return the plate to Open Studio, where the printmaking process was completed.

"Very few of the artists involved had ever done etching before," Voyce says. "But we ended up getting wonderful examples of everybody's art. We just told them all to have some fun. Only a couple were unhappy enough with their works to ask to do them over again."

With such artists as Andy Fabo, Oliver Girling, Michael



Art

Christopher Hume

Merrill, Sybil Goldstein, Harold Klunder, Fast Wurms, Rae Johnson and Runt joining in, one might expect the etchings would be wild and crazy. Curiously, they're not.

In fact, most of the 24 have clearly kept their contributions simple and to the point. The works tend more to the lyrical than the impassioned. Given the nature of some of the participants' previous art, this calmness represents a somewhat different — and welcome — aspect of their work.

Take Runt's print, for example. He's known for dozens of huge cartoon-like murals throughout the city, but this little piece is a model of restraint. It's even poetic in its delicacy.

Another interesting work is Goldstein's. Although she's best known for her dramatic, swirling canvases, she has changed directions here and created a classically-inspired image of few elements. The work shows a woman leading a horse. The surface has been left uncluttered and the effect is pleasing. Some might complain about the awkwardness with which Goldstein has handled certain parts of equine anatomy but this also gives the piece an edge it would otherwise lack.

But not everyone involved is a novice. Recognized printmakers such as Jan Winton, Carl Skelton and Harold Klunder are also included.

This kind of exhibition seems to have vanished almost entirely from the scene in Toronto. As much a celebration of the art

community as of the etching process, Clark's and Voyce's project is a happy event.

"It all went so smoothly," Voyce says. "Every time one of the artists made a print, it was like getting a present."

For Open Studio, which marks its 20th anniversary next year, the show should help remind us of its existence. One of nine or 10 such studios in Canada, it has played a major role in making artists familiar with various printmaking techniques.

The exhibition continues until Feb. 18.

Curiouser And Curiouser: Several years ago, the Art Gallery of Ontario found itself embroiled in a minor controversy when members of the public complained it wasn't exhibiting *The Lady With The Lilacs*, a canvas by Pre-Raphaelite painter Arthur Hughes.

What makes the painting remarkable is that it was owned by Lewis Carroll, who is said to have used it as a model for his illustrations of Alice in *Alice In Wonderland*. Carroll's drawings were never used, of course, but there is a resemblance between the two females.

Carroll bought the painting from Hughes in 1863 and it hung on the wall of his Oxford study until his death in 1898. The AGO acquired it in 1966.

Despite similarities between Hughes' lady and Carroll's Alice, neither resembled the Alice Liddell, who inspired *Alice In Wonderland*. Instead, Hughes' picture sums up the Pre-Raphaelite's unrealistic attitude to women. This young woman, more ideal than real, is shown gazing off into the distance. She's as pure as she is feminine.

The painting, and related documentary material, will be on display at the AGO's Trier Gallery from Feb. 11 to April 2.