

Unique Joyce prints a clear view of her soul

Julie Joyce speaks a language all her own. In a city that boasts any number of fine artists, the 33-year-old Toronto painter-turned-printmaker is one of very few true originals.

Her work is totally unlike anything else that passes for contemporary art in these parts. Since she began exhibiting her work in the early '80s, it has progressed and developed, but there's never any mistaking a Julie Joyce. New or old, they're instantly recognizable. They couldn't have sprung from any other brain.

Even at the start of her career, the enthusiastically eccentric Joyce seems to have known exactly what approach to take to art and art-making. Her uniqueness isn't the result of years spent trying to be different. She is different.

In her current exhibition, at Mercer Union (333 Adelaide St. W.) until June 23, she has taken her bizarre abstractions, which were never quite abstract, and added figurative imagery. The pictures are still extraordinary but now the content is more related to the real world.

The show consists solely of prints, a medium which has occupied Joyce for the last three years. One thing's for sure, she has become a master of her chosen forms; lithography and etching.

The works now are full of references to plants and animals. In some pieces there are depictions of creatures such as bats, walruses, and elaborate insects. In others, there are pomegranates, flowers and strange vegetal shapes.

It is a universe portrayed in a state of becoming, of evolving. The elements have been taken from Joyce's private vocabulary.

Art

Christopher Hume



of images and symbols. The results are unabashedly intimate. It's as if she has the ability to express her subconscious directly, without running it through the filters of the upper mind.

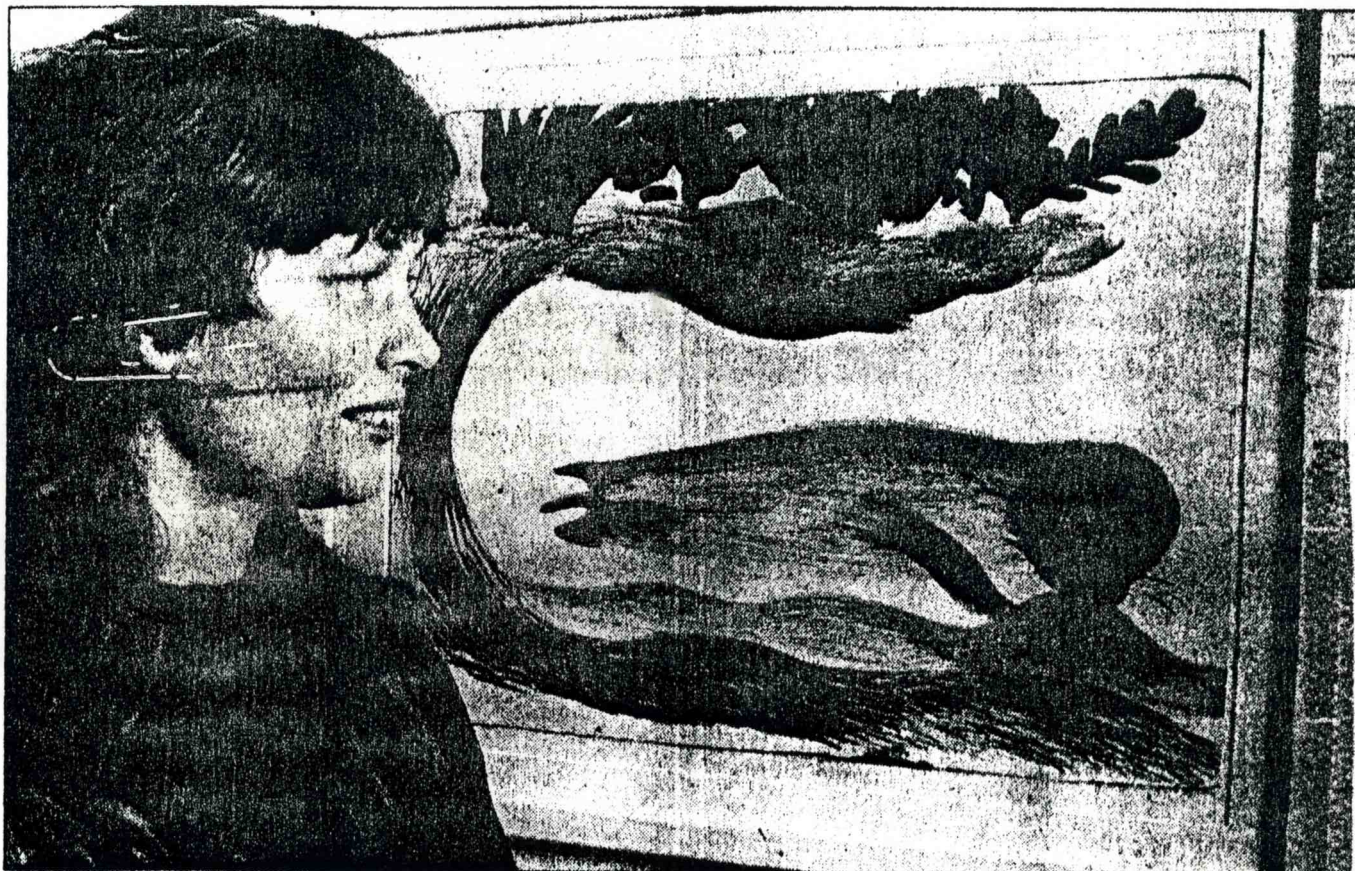
Joyce's habit of working small enhances the precious, jewel-like feel of the work. Even the black-and-white lithographs, each filled with an odd assortment of disparate objects, have this sparkling quality.

The three distinct series that make up the exhibition cover a lot of ground. They range from the finely-rendered to the exquisite and impressionistic. One group of tiny prints all verge on looking like something, though one can never be sure what exactly. Made in a number of techniques, they are crammed with color, shape and imagery.

Joyce might be the Jorge Luis Borges of contemporary art; she never wastes times making epics when a short story will do.

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Garden Party: Also on display at Mercer Union is a memorable installation by Calgary artist, Tim Watkins. Titled *The Dreaming*, it's made up of eight structures that resemble massive plant-like machines. Arranged around a blue plastic "pond" and a crescent-shaped bench, they move up and down as if breathing.

Amusing but also scary, Watkins' work turns a mundane gallery room into a marvellously contemplative space in which we



ENTHUSIASTICALLY ECCENTRIC: There's no mistaking the art of Julie Joyce, currently exhibited at Mercer Union.

RON BULL/TORONTO STAR

become the studied not the students. His ability to operate within the narrow space between the mechanical and the organic gives the piece a real edge.

The Dreaming needs a better setting. I think it would be perfect in an outdoor space such as a garden. Outdoors, its eerie moving parts would appear more life-like, or at least part of the post-

industrial landscape.

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Boyle-ing Point: Canadian nationalism is alive and well. Just ask John Boyle. The London-based artist has devoted his career to exploring and creating the myths that define this reluctant nation.

Boyle's exhibition, at Nancy Poole's Studio (16 Hazelton Ave.)

until June 7, is an exuberant continuation of the themes that have preoccupied him for some years. Here are lacrosse players, portraits of Glenn Gould, Oscar Peterson, Milton Acorn and the like. Here, too, is the ill-fated Avro Arrow, pictures of moose, caribou and kayaks.

Rendered in Boyle's inimitable lumpy manner, these paintings

are more interesting to contemplate than look at. If anything, his style is so visually off-putting that it gets in the way of our desire to decipher the contents.

Nonetheless, Boyle is as committed to Canada and its culture as anyone. If that doesn't make his art compelling, it at least makes it relevant.