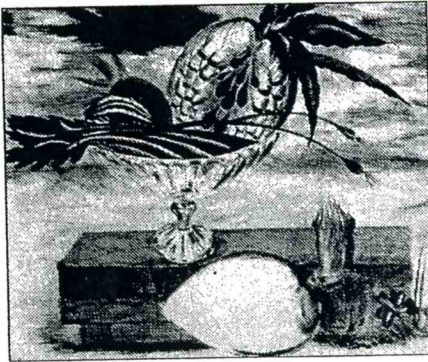


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Brilliant kitsch rocks Julie Voyce's retro Still Life lithograph.

Voyce steps up

JULIE VOYCE at Paul Petro Contemporary Art (265A Queen West) to October 20. 416-979-7874. Rating: NNNN

IF YOU WANT TO SEE AN ARTIST ON the brink of superstardom, check out Julie Voyce's Worker Foot.

Sure, the work that Paul Petro Contemporary Art is presenting as its swan song at the Queen-near-University site (the gallery moves west next month) is almost a dozen years old, but if Voyce's slyly brilliant lithographs were good in '89 (when — disclaimer time — this critic bought one), they're even better now

that the world has caught up with her.

Back in the 80s, Voyce was perfectly capable of charming her way into a week at the Playboy Mansion as Hugh Hefner's guest (it really happened), the kind of audacious gesture she's never held back on when making her art. But at the time, that kind of in-your-face kitsch didn't read particularly well. Serious fun didn't read as serious.

So when Voyce looked to bad antique engravings as inspiration for technically brilliant, wacky nature prints full of sneaky art in-jokes, she didn't exactly shake the earth.

But works like Bawling Child — a fetish-lovely stiletto shoe with a Pop-eye-esque baby's head springing out of the toe — are unforgettable. Like twisted icons.

Voyce has tons of local fans, people who jealously hoard the Red Hot Productions multiples that this Open Studio regular and Red Head co-founder sends out as Christmas cards. When San Francisco cult queen Georganne Deen had a big blowout solo show of her loopy, cartoony, femme-powered works at the Power Plant, a lot of Toronto scenesters were wondering why Voyce — a local act, after all — wasn't being shown in parallel.

DEIRDRE HANNA