

TV Influenza, an exhibition of sculptures, paintings and mixed-media works at Galerie Art Mûr, takes a critical and fascinating look at the impact that television is having on modern society

# A threat to innocence

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SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

Perhaps more than any other invention aside from fire and the wheel, TV has changed the way we live. Now Galerie Art Mûr is featuring an exhibit wittily titled TV Influenza, which includes sculpture, painting and mixed-media installations having to do with TV. The real theme is how we relate to TV, or how TV relates to us.

This is depicted in almost cartoon fashion in the oil titled *Series: Home sweet homeless Show: Star for a day Scene #14*. It is by the Toronto group calling itself *Cartoon Logic* and shows a skid-row scene, oozing slime and littered with bottles. Pointed at a cardboard box, obviously the too-snug abode of a homeless person, is a TV camera. Here, TV exploits the homeless.

That TV creates a reality of its own, superceding all other realities, is asserted by Robert Duchesnay's black-and-white photographs: three images lined up to suggest a narrative. In one picture, we see a TV, its screen filled with obvious pornography. In another picture, there's a man in an easy-chair set out on a lawn; he is riveted to the TV. Meanwhile, in the final picture, there's a forlorn woman facing the bleak wall of a house. What we get is an updated version of the standard, adulterous triad, except that here the interloper is a machine.

Meanwhile, the voyeuristic aspect of TV is the focus of Claude Ferland's video installation *Les Ombres englouties du jardin de la maison H*. The long-winded title could be that of a mystery novel; and, indeed, the darkened setting of the installation, a special room in the gallery, sets the right tone. Along the wall are small, blinking apertures, keyhole-size "windows" in which there are video monitors. But when we look in, it seems as though we are approaching a strange house or, when looking into another such window, crossing a garden. There's also a pool-like video projection on the gallery floor suggesting we just might step unknowingly into the void.

On the other hand, the future is the ostensible subject of General Idea's two short videos done in the early 1980s. It should be noted that General Idea, an artist trio consisting of Jorge Zontzo, Felix Parz and H.A. Bronson - he's the only one of the three still alive - was, in the 1970s and through part of the 1980s, Canada's leading maker of satirical art.

Certainly, their tart video in the current show, titled *Shut the F— Up*, has as much bite today as it did 20 years ago. Included in this work is an old film clip of artist Yves Klein orchestrating



A detail from *It's a Beautiful Day*, a large installation by Sean Mellyn on display at Galerie Art Mûr.

the creation of one of his paintings. Rather than brushes, he uses the live bodies of beautiful female models to get the paint on the paper or canvas. The scene is oddly hilarious, all the more so because General Idea's video also includes the group's trademark: a poodle. Here, however, the poodle is a pathetic stuffed object dipped partly in blue. All this is accompanied by the kind of ponderous voice-over explanation associated with newsreels of the 1950s.

While GI ventures into satirical surrealism, both Mario Côté and the internationally famous Nam June Paik, a kind of Marshall McLuhan of art, transform TV into sculpture, a form of materialization that, paradoxically, results in a deconstruction of virtual reality. Côté's painting is, in fact, strips of film glued onto

wood that suggests materialization of image. In Paik's work, TV has become a frame and a drawing, a minimal face done with a few intentionally slapdash brush marks on a silvery background. Paik's works seem at once incredibly profound and simple as child's play.

There's also a naive insouciance about David Acheson's dogs relative dog, consisting of a humidifier nosing dog-like up against a TV screen filled with static.

A giant child is the centrepiece of the large, extravagant installation of Sean Mellyn titled - apparently with no sarcasm intended - *It's a Beautiful Day*. The child, his mouth stretched to the limit with a joyful smile, ponders, as only a child can, the vastness of life. His innocent imaginings burst almost literally from

his head, in the three-dimensional form of such things as a baseball bat complete with arms and a lime-green milk cartoon, its pale contents indicated by cut-out shapes on the gallery floor. There's no TV in the picture, though we can't help but get the foreboding feeling that the joyful curiosity will ultimately be dulled by hours in front of the idiot box.

For his installation, titled *It's a Gir(d)le*, the artist, serving as his own model, does the mechanical dance of those already brainwashed by TV. In fact, this work includes a small TV improbably built into the upper part of a real weighing scale. The "program" features a plump man exercising - or flailing - to the tune of upbeat pop music, itself emanating from speakers built into an actual attaché case.

As we watch, the man puts on a girdle, thus assuming quasi-female identity. It should be recalled that the work was done in 1992, when exercise gyms were still mainly the province of women and not, as now, packed with men.

All in all, this fascinating, funny, unusual show raises a number of major issues, the main one being simply whether we can survive TV intact as rational human beings.

Also on view at Art Mûr are Montreal artist Jinny M. J. Yu's works collectively titled *Modules*. These consist primarily of vast grids drawn and painted and recalling the impersonal facades of modern skyscrapers. However, as in the especially lovely module (3. 8.G), they are subtly embellished with texture and colour, so that form is not just function but also sensual delight.

TV Influenza and Jinny M. J. Yu remain on view at Art Mûr, 5826 St. Hubert St., until March 1. Call (514) 933-0711.

The focus is on childhood development at the Galerie Clark in a show titled *Stretchmarks*. In Cynthia Eddor's series of three colour photographs, we see the same little girl - same pose, facial expression and dress - with the child in each case held aloft by three different people in three different settings. It seems setting has no influence on nature - or, at least, on the nature of this child.

Changing places is also an aspect of Cynthia Tarr's five colour photos titled *Georgia*, focusing on a little girl with cerebral palsy. We see her, variously, strolling moodily in the country, holding a tawny cat on her lap, at therapy and rapturously splashing in spray. In all of the images, we're aware of the slightly tense - or limp - contours of the little girl's body. Yet, while she is in some ways marked by her disability, she is also remarkable for something else we see in each picture: her humanity and the emotions, common to all of us, written on her face and in her hands reaching out to possess all that life has to offer.

Finally, in Marlene Charles's three colour-photo series titled *Angels*, anything that might have seemed angelic has been buried; the metallic skin surfaces are all that's left in the sexy models, fitted in chic boots, mean shades and groovy hats, all astride big motor cycles. Indeed, the women are just extensions of their bikes, splendid chrome-studded jewelry with which anyone might fall in love.

*Stretchmarks* remains on view at Galerie Clark, 5455 Gaspé St., Room 114, through today. Call (514) 288-4972.

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