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 exhibition with a witty title: TV Influenza, which includes sculpture, painting and mixed-media installations having to do with TV. The real threat is how we relate to TV — or how TV relates to us.

This is depicted in almost cartoon fashion in the oil titled Self-Portrait. Home Sweet Homeless Show. Star for a Day Scene #4. It is by the Toront group calling itself Cartoon Logic and shows a skid row scene, one man sitting and another drinking. Painted on a cardboard box, obviously the too-smug abode of a homeless person, is a TV antenna. Here, TV exploits the homeless.

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

Meanwhile, the voyeuristic aspect of TV is the focus of Claude Parent's video installation Umbrellas at an Exhibition of the Garden de la maison H. The long-winded title could be reduced: Parent is making a machine; and, indeed, the darkness setting of the installation, a special room in the gallery, is a metal frame. Along the walls are small, blinking apparatus, keyhole-size "windows" in which there are video monitors. But when we look in, it seems as though we are approaching a strange house; when looking into another such window, crossing a garden. There's also a pool, a reflection 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 1980 video, titled The Beauty of it All. It was first shown in the 1980s. It should be noted that General Idea, an artist trio consisting of Jorge Zonta, Felix Partz and H.C. Branson — he's the only one of the three still alive — is in the 1970s and through part of the 1980s. Canada's leading maker of satirical art. Concerning their video in the current show, titled Shut the F- Up, there is as much hope today as it did 30 years ago. Included in this work is an old film clip of artist Voss Kleinert orchestrating 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 hideously hilarious, all the more so because General Idea's video also includes the group's trademark: a pole. Here, however, the pole is a pathetic stuffed object dipped partly in blue. All this is accompanied by the kind of pungent voice-over explanation associated with newscasts of the 1960s.

While Of-ventures into satirical surrealism, both Mario Côté and internationally famous Nam June Paik, a kind of Marcel Duchamp 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 insufficiency about David Aichinson's dogs relative dog, consisting of a hum drumning nois dog like up against a TV screen filled with static. A giant child is the centerpiece of the large, extravagant installation of Sean Meylin titled — apparently with no sarcasm intended — It's a Beautiful Day. The child's mouth stretched to the limit with a joyful smile, sets the tone for the rest of the exhibition. His innocent imaginings burst almost literally from his head, in the three-dimensional form of such things as a base ball complete with arms and a lime green milk cartoon, its pale contents indicated by cutout shapes on the gallery floor. There's no TV in the picture, though we can't help but get the feeling that the joyful surliness will ultimately be dulled by hours in front of the idiot box.

For his installation, titled It's a Girdle, the artist, serving as his own model, does the mechanical dance of his brain washed by TV. In fact, this work includes a small TV improbably built into the upper part of a real, weighty scale. The program features a dump man exercising — or flailing — to the tune of upbeat pop music, it self emanating from speakers built into an actual attack 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 1962, 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 Jimmy M. J. Yu's works collectively titled Modules. These consist primarily of vast grids drawn and painted and recalling the impersonal façades of modern skyscrapers. However, as in the especially lovely module 1.8.0, they are subtly embedded with text and colour, so that form is not just function but also sensual light.

TV Influenza and Jimmy 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 is a show titled Sketchmarks. In Cynthia Edorff'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 Clark's five colour photos titled Georgia, focusing on a little girl with cerebral palsy. We see her variously straddling moodily in the country, holding a toy car on her lap, at therapy and repeatedly splashing in sprays. In all of the images, we're aware of the slightly sense — 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 picture cutout 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 Clark's three colour photo series titled Angels, anything that might have been possible is burned to the metallic skin surfaces are all that's left in the series, filled with light, bisected by their bikes, splendid chrome-studied jewelry with which anyone one might fall in love.

Sketchmarks remains on view at Galerie Clark, 5453 Côte St. Luc, Room 114, through today. Call (514) 288-4972.