

ART

1993: Calm before the storm

Someone still gets nervous when they look at paintings

BY OLIVER GIRLING

This was an emotional year in art, in which nothing much seemed to happen. But within that calm, there were a lot of individually striking shows.

It all came crashing down at the end, with criminal charges being laid against an artist under child pornography laws. If anything positive can be taken from this goofy situation, it's that someone still gets nervous, or thinks other people will, when they look at paintings. (Though, come to think of it, why is it always art that gets charged; never, say, the mainstream cinema? What about *Chaplin*, which shows Charlie being serviced by girls well under the age of 18, or a recent European release, with its explicit sex between two adolescents — in French *Vogue*, the producers assured the public that the sex was real, not simulated. The answer is that this province would be laughed out of film distribution).

▶ THE COUP: No contest: Lisa Neighbour's show at the Red Head Gallery. Though she's been working in the vein for years, this time it all came together in a way that was literally dazzling. She illuminates her organically shaped, sometimes flower-like wall sculptures with contained lights that create an aureole around the work. The effect of a roomful of these objects was wonderful, and proof that contemporary art doesn't have to be cynical, smarty-pants or even self-referential to be moving.

▶ THE DEBUT: Eli Langer at Mercer Union Gallery. The only real taboo he transgressed was the one established by modernism and post-modernism against content in art. His paintings explore the distance between childhood and old age through the medium of the body, juxtaposing old and young people in ways that evoke sexuality at some times, games and riddles at others.

▶ UNDER A BUSH: A01's (a.k.a. Andrew Owen) exhibition of wallpaper collages was buried in a small space in the basement of U of T's architecture faculty. Combining Chinese brush-painting techniques and spatial sense with rowdy, raggedy-edged collage in which the paper

a parallelogram, or by making a hole so dark that only its contour defines it. James, by contrast, opens an extra, ideal space into a space that already exists, using the camera to re-establish the random topography of the landscape as platonic garden.

▶ NUTBAR-OMETER: David Sandlin's first Toronto show happened at Lake Galleries. A Sandlin show is a total experience of corny, highway frazzled U.S.A. as the gateway to eternity. Kudos for introducing him here.

▶ RETROSPECTIVE: It was a pleasure to see David Buchan's sensual and witty large-format photos, light-boxes and photo-texts gathered together at the Power Plant; he deftly combines visual historical references with a sure ear for ad-lingo.

▶ MULTIPLES: A large selection of General Idea's multiples at S.L. Simpson Gallery was an object lesson for younger artists like Julie Joyce, who are working in the format.

▶ THE FACETS: Kim Adams' show at Grunwald Genereux was a tour de force, continuing his work on massive, whimsical vehicles with a basis in Canadian Tire parts, but now also introducing the miniature.

Through different facets of the external body, the viewer could see a whole minute landscape within the truck, complete with lights, roads, vehicles, etc.

▶ SMART COOKS: Curated and collective shows lit up the fall. At Garnet Press, Robert Flack's *Smash Megalitis Explosion* brought a quirky, disparate group together, and Natalie Olanick's selection explored the poetics of the machine. At Mercer Union, in

Jennifer

McMackon's two-part *Heliotropic*, participants accepted an invitation to elaborate on an ancient device. Sharon Brooks brought Michel Decter and Michel Dupuis together with Eric Cameron at S.L. Simpson in a show that, in spite of its ultra-whiteness, was very tactile. And Nethermind and Spontaneous Combustion collectively elaborated the ideas that they've been working out in previous shows.

▶ THE GALLERY: Birganart on Danforth beats the competition for most fun openings, as well as consistently interesting shows and artists in its stable who you can't always predict.

▶ REMEMBERED: The art community lost two important people this fall to AIDS: Rob Flack and Alex Wilson. Their friends, as well as people who never knew them but knew their work, mourn the great loss to our community and to art as a whole. ☹



Fresh look at still-life: A01's (a.k.a. Andrew Owen) exhibition of wallpaper collages was buried in a small space in the basement of U of T's architecture faculty. Owen's Autumn (chrysanthemum), top, and Winter (pine branch).

layers are progressively stripped away resulted in the freshest still-life show of the year. Now he's just got to show it to the crowds.

▶ THE ODD COUPLE: The inspired pairing at the Power Plant of Anish Kapoor's sculptures with Jeffrey James's photographs of asbestos slag in Northern Quebec. Both do the opposite of what you'd expect: Kapoor makes 3D go flat, either by covering the rocks with brilliant, powder pigment, by carving shapes into them that we associate with flattening, like

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