

Trio stirring up excitement with tributes to sick planet

Just when you're about to give up on Toronto art galleries, local artists are showing signs of returning to life.

The first evidence of this stirring are the current exhibitions of works by Adly Gawad and Andrew O1 (shortened from Owen) at Garnet Press (580 Richmond St. W.) and by Regan Morris at Mercer Union (333 Adelaide St. W.).

This trio is part of a loosely knit group of young Toronto artists who, if nothing else, have created a renewed sense of excitement in a city whose art community has become more irrelevant than ever.

Unlike the Chromazone kids who emerged in 1980/81 and disbanded three or four years later, this group has no name and is not quite so easily identifiable. Most of its members are friends but they certainly don't hold regular meetings or anything so organized. In addition to the threesome named above, other artists associated with this gang include Warren Quigley, John Abrams and the ubiquitous Runt.

The group is united more by a sensibility than a common approach to art-making. Perhaps it isn't surprising that its main preoccupation is to show how sick and unhealthy planet Earth has become. Using junky, discarded and broken materials — many of them industrial and technological — they create monuments to a world that has been fatally polluted. These young men are the self-appointed poets of disaster, carefully crafting paeans to ugliness.

The best examples of this are the works of Quigley, Morris and Andrew O1. Morris, whose exhibition, *Pompeii Now: Living In The Shadow Of The Big Meat*, is outstanding, has an extraordinary ability to turn trash into sculpture. He sees the world as dirty, diseased and full of nasty mutant creatures.

His show consists of three large sculptural pieces and a series of drawings. The latter are forgettable but the big works are overwhelming. Two in particular, *Black Comet* and an untitled piece that resembles a fountain, are gruesome evocations of a world covered in black slime and oozing poisonous goo.

Assembled from high-tech discards, rubber tubing, TV screens and the like, these works are — in this reviewer's experience — the most graphic depictions of what humanity has done to the planet.

Meanwhile Garnet Press is filled with AO1's constructions and Gawad's wonderfully executed paintings. Despite all efforts to turn the works of these two artists into a coherent whole, they remain separate and distinct. Where AO1 sees the world as one large ruin, Gawad celebrates beauty and order.

AO1, the self-styled wild man of Toronto art, is given to ranting and raving. But like the works he



Paeans to ugliness: Adly Gawad, left, with one of his paintings, and Andrew O1 with his constructions from their show at Garnet Press. The show continues until Aug. 23.



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Art

makes, there is more thought and effort behind his lunacy than one might realize at first. His biggest piece, *Architorture Deconstruction #3*, is made of construction materials such as bricks, blocks and bits of marble. Yet as he points out, "(It's) a precarious-looking, but balanced, organization of building elements held together by the universal glue, gravity." This is, he explains, "my literal version of the 'concrete jungle.'"

AO1's other contributions, *Reconstruction Arcs*, consist of the same "building elements" arranged in semi-circles that hang from the gallery walls. This time, the bricks have been made of Styrofoam. Again, they are intended to remind us of "the tyranny of structure and the influence of the urban rectangle

on the quality of life in the city."

However, on the basis of what has been exhibited so far, the most interesting of the group is Gawad. Paintings seem to flow out of the Egyptian-born painter with breathtaking ease. Where so many of his contemporaries opt for flash and bombast, Gawad, 27, takes a more considered and thoughtful approach. This doesn't mean, however, his work always looks so terribly serious.

What separates Gawad from the others is his desire to become an artist, not a celebrity. He is represented in this show with a number of small 3-dimensional constructions and paintings. The most spectacular piece, titled *Ego Alter*, is a gorgeous depiction of the Queen St. life. Sensuous and swirling, this semi-abstract painting on paper announces the arrival of major talent.

Even in his smaller works, which tend to be more tossed-off, Gawad manages a sense of dynamism and completeness. He is definitely an artist to be watched.

The show at Garnet Press goes to Aug. 23. Morris' continues until Aug. 9.