

WHAT'S

ON

SNOW FOOLIN'

Snow or no, we've got two seasonal celebrations starting up this week: Frostfest and Winterfest. Brrrr! See E10

THE STAR'S
GUIDE TO
ENTERTAINMENT
IN TORONTO
THIS WEEKEND
AND NEXT WEEK

THE TORONTO STAR
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SECTION E
PAGES E1-E22



PHOTO BY RICK EGLINTON/TORONTO STAR

Club Art

THE HOTTEST ART IN TOWN CAN BE FOUND, NOT ONLY IN GALLERIES, BUT IN RESTAURANTS AND CLUBS, SOME OF WHICH ARE ALMOST WORKS OF ART THEMSELVES.

BY CHRISTOPHER HUME
TORONTO STAR

Once, when artists wanted to exhibit their work, they went to an art gallery. Now, they're just as likely to go to a neighborhood restaurant.

Throughout downtown Toronto, eateries are turning to art in a big way. Usually, this means paintings hanging on walls that would otherwise look cheap and bare.

But increasingly, art is becoming much more than mere decoration. In the Queen St. W. area in particular, it has acquired an importance secondary only to the menu. There are clubs/bars/restaurants around now that are works of art in their own right. Well, almost.

The places that come to mind — StillLife, RPM, the Squeeze Club, the Blue Room, the Cameron, Lee's Palace, Nut's 'N' Bolts — are showcases of contemporary Toronto art to a degree that most local galleries could never hope to equal.

More than any other factor, the fledgling Toronto outfit known as DecorAction is responsible for the rash of art that has appeared at so many Hogtown hotspots. The firm was started several years ago by Andrew Ol, a Toronto multi-media artist whose name at birth was Andrew Owen (get it?). In 1986, he joined forces with another local artist, Jamie Osborne. The two haven't stopped since.

"If you're an artist in this society you have to go out

Continued on E3

Andrew Ol and Jamie Osborne, artists and "environmental repair men," have pooled their talents in an effort to "integrate art into the club scene."

COVER

Off-the-wall art goes on the wall at clubs

Continued from E1
 and hustle," observes Osborne, 28. And that — hustling — is something they're both very good at. Between them, they have managed to convince an amazing number of the city's notoriously cheap bar/restaurant/club owners to spend a little — usually very little — and let them go crazy in their establishments.

"We're environmental repairmen," says O1, at 25, a mile-a-minute veteran of Toronto street culture who began his career as a graffiti artist. "We encounter break boxes all the time. Usually we're given a carefully designed sign that we have to humanize. We want to integrate art into the club scene."

Osborne and O1 met in the summer of '86 at RPM, the cavernous dance club on Queen's Quay. By coincidence, both were installing artwork there. Osborne, a part-time RPM employee, had talked the boss into letting him put up a series of giant painted Styrofoam rockets. Before that, he contributed 10 enormous cartoon-like paintings, all based on the theme, *Dick Tracy Meets Miss Trudone*.

O1, of course, had shown up one



CHRISTOPHER HUME

Art

day, a sketchbook filled with proposals and a head full of ideas. He ended up constructing a herd of dinosaurs, actually dinosaur skeletons. To top it off, a flock of pterodactyls, with 9-foot wingspans, hovered overhead.

In keeping with DecorAction's official policy of spreading the wealth, O1 engaged talented Toronto artist Matt Harley to complete a set of six massive (8-foot by 12-foot) wraparound murals depicting prehistoric themes such as cavemen battling woolly mammoths, a volcano erupting....

After that — their installations are never permanent, lasting anywhere from one night to five or six months — they built the *Leitaiting Living Room*. This one consisted of an entire suite of living-room furniture spray-painted white. "Flying pell mell through the air"

Then there were the "funky Egyptian hieroglyphs" and the "top art psychedelic spiral," which, incidentally, is still there.

Each installation gets more elaborate than the next. Operating out of two downtown studios — one for spray painting, the other for sculpting — the pair has developed a formidable range of technical skills. They paint — sometimes even with brushes, more often with cans — they sculpt, they fabricate objects, they do lighting. They also make the arrangements when other artists are involved.

These are not artists in the traditional sense of the word, but culture guerrillas-turned-entrepreneurs. They'll do anything — and want to.

Though they are constantly searching for new ways to apply their manic talents, and pay no rent, they always do their homework. For example, the months of January and February are slow months for the club scene in general. Owners don't feel like spending money, especially on a "frill" like art. Osborne and O1 are putting the time to good use with an exhibition at Garnet Press (380 Rich-

mond St. W.) until Feb. 14 that is, in effect, a showcase for DecorAction.

Right now, the boys are into "clarification of some of the 'primary principles of the universe.'" Sounds heavy. But not to worry. The clarification comes in the form of two pieces, *R.G.B. — 1.2.3.* and *Birch Barkitecture*. Both are instant meditations on the "five Platonic polyhedra" (multi-sided three-dimensional shapes).

In *R.G.B.*, the shapes are suspended from a wooden circle and bathed in colored lights of green, blue and yellow. The play of light on the white wall of the gallery only hints at what DecorAction could do in a club setting.

Birch Barkitecture, which consists of the five shapes constructed in birch bark, is more obviously a gallery piece. But again, it suggests greater possibilities. Imagine, a whole room where everything is made of birch bark.... Why, even now, the pair is hard at work on a birch bark Macintosh computer. And let's not forget their birch bark baseball caps. They, along with Astroruf pillow hats, are available at the gallery, each one beautifully lined in "hoose plaid."

On a (slightly) more serious note, Osborne and O1 have started "processpainting," in which they have applied the techniques of printing to art-making. The term is an amalgam of process spray-painting. This means working with dots and screens and using three colors — magenta, blue and yellow — in combinations to make other colors.

A typical example is *Mond Trout*, in which the image is actually made up of colored dots. From up close, it's an abstract painting; the trout doesn't reveal itself until we stand back.

But, as productive as Osborne and O1 may be, there's more than enough room for others. Fiona Smyth, an occasional collaborator with DecorAction, is another local artist who likes to work in clubs. The 23-year-old painter has decorated windows at StillLife, Toronto's totally designed nightclub, but is probably best known for the Dance Cave she did (with Kurt Swinghammer) at Lee's Palace. Smyth's handiwork can also be seen at Sneaky Dee's.

Then there's Melaney Melody, who specializes in wearable art such as splatter-painted kids' clothing, jackets with doll heads sewn in and other forms of outrageous kitsch. Melody's current offering, at the Squeeze Club on Queen St. W., consists of six framed aquaria (filled with more than 1,500 "squeeze toys," mostly little plastic dolls, from the club's private collection) and a series of photographic portraits with frames that must be seen to be believed for their sheer rococo madness. Made of dozens of tiny toys, they are much more interesting than what they enclose.

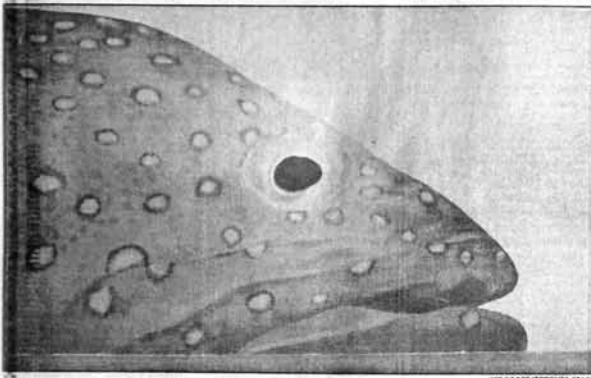
"We're part bar, pool hall, restaurant and gallery," explains Marcus O'Hara, co-owner of the Squeeze Club (and the squeeze-toy collection). "We want it to be a real gallery, with a mailing list and everything. Once we get organized, we're even going to hire a curator."

Hire a curator! A restaurant owner is going to hire a curator to keep his walls up to date. There are galleries in this city that could use a curator. But I want to know when they're going to start hiring chefs.

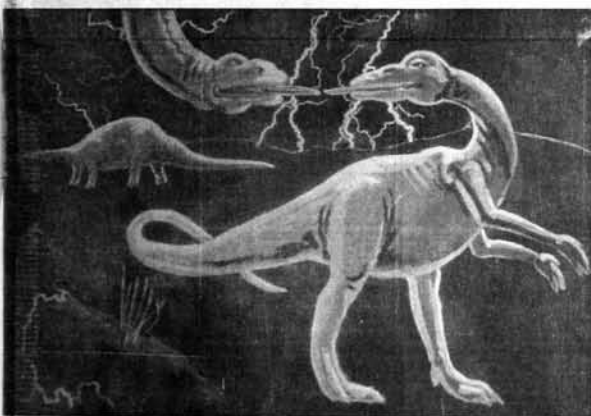
Dance-hall girl: Part of the first club decoration — RPM's giant 10-part *Dick Tracy Meets Miss Trudone* series — created by then-employee Jamie Osborne.



Melaney Melody: Outrageous artist Melaney Melody models wearable kitsch she has on display at the Squeeze Club.



Deep Blue scenery: Wall-sized fishface is part of thematic decor of the Blue Room on King St. W., which is almost a work of art in its own right.



The club that time forgot: Battling dinosaurs by Matt Harley were commissioned by DecorAction to help fill the cavernous RPM dance club.

Fig. 5: Archie Fisher/Lorena McKenney at Harbordcourt, 973-4000

Fig. 6: 5 March 6: The Effect Of Gamma Rays On Man-In-The-Moon Marjorika at Young People's Theatre, 964-9732

Fig. 8: Robert Munsch at Gimonco Hall, 872-2277

Fig. 6: Bulside at Silver Dollar, 961-4957

Fig. 7: Robert Munsch at Mpler Auditorium, 872-2277

Fig. 8: Zappocosta at Diamond, 872-2262

Fig. 8-13: Big Daddy Kinsey & The Kinsey Report at Albert's Hall, 964-2242

Fig. 8-13: Ben E. King at Imperial Room, 369-2511

Fig. 9: John Mayall at Diamond, 872-2262

Fig. 9: Camerata Musica at Roy Thomson Hall, 872-2633

Fig. 10-14: National Ballet program of short ballets at O'Keefe Centre, 872-2262

Fig. 10: Supertramp at Maple Leaf Gardens, 872-2277

Fig. 12: Hearts Against Hate concert with Brass Band/Coconut Grove and Bad at Harbordcourt Hall, 872-2277

Fig. 12: Alice Cooper/Blackhead at Maple Leaf Gardens, 872-2277

Fig. 12: Jim Carroll/Jerry Jerry & The Sons of Rhythm Orchestra at Silver Dollar, 961-4957

COMING ATTRACTIONS

Feb. 13: Toronto Pops Orchestra Classic Romances at Massey Hall, 593-4828

Feb. 13: The Northern Symphonica at Roy Thomson Hall, 593-4828

Feb. 14: Kim & Jerry Broday at Jewish Community Centre, 924-8211

Feb. 14: Valentine's Day Sweetheart Serenade with The Satisfines at Barn Boo 593-5771

Feb. 15: Sting at Maple Leaf Gardens, 872-2277

Feb. 16: SHUB features Richard Hall at Silver Dollar, 924-2144

Feb. 16-20: Ballet British Columbia at Promera Dance Theatre, 869-8444

Feb. 16-March 12: Observe The Sons Of Ulster Marching Toward The Somme at Bluma Appel Theatre, 366-7723

Feb. 17: Egriit Orchestra Olympic Concert at Jane Mallett Theatre, 366-7723

March 17-18: Eddie Shaw at Albert's Hall, 964-2242

Feb. 17-18: Saverus Whitfield & The Barones at Horseshoe Tavern, 598-4763

Feb. 17-21: National Ballet Don Quixote at O'Keefe Centre, 872-2262

Feb. 17-27: Lola Falana at Imperial Room, 369-2511

Feb. 18: Village People at Komrads, 1 Isabella St., 872-2277

Feb. 18: Jay Leno at Roy Thomson Hall, 593-4828

Feb. 20: Katie Webster/Sam McClain at Harbordcourt, 973-4000

Feb. 20: Shadow Men On A Shadow Planet/Dundred/Heimlich Manoeuvre/Dix Van Dyke at Silver Dollar, 924-2144

Feb. 23-27: Montreal Danse at Premiere Dance Theatre, 869-8444

Feb. 24: Don Pullen/Dewey Redman at Barn Boo 593-5771

Feb. 24-28: National Ballet program of short ballets at O'Keefe Centre, 872-2262

Feb. 24-April 3: L'Homme Gris at Toronto Free Theatre 368-2656

Feb. 27: Kate & Anna McGarriglen at Harbordcourt, 973-4000

Feb. 29: Buckwheat Zydeco at Barn Boo 593-5771

Feb. 29-March 5: Luther Allison Band at Albert's Hall, 964-2242

Feb. 29-March 5: Phyllis Diller at Imperial Room, 368-2511

Feb. 29-April 9: One Way Pendulum at Royal Alexandra Theatre, 593-4211

March 1: The Normal Heart opens at Balford Street Theatre, 533-1161

March 4: Merle Haggard at Massey Hall, tickets on sale Monday, 593-4828

March 5: O'Verbo Dance at Premiere Dance Theatre, 869-8444

March 2-6: Big Bird Goes Hollywood at O'Keefe Centre, 872-2262

March 7-12: Cliff Eberhardt Band at Albert's Hall, 964-2242

March 8: Squeeze/The dB's at Massey Hall, 593-4828

March 12: Toronto Pops Orchestra Saturday Night In Old Vienna at Massey Hall, 593-4828

March 12: Michael Hodges/Leo Kottke at Concorco Hall, 872-2277

March 12: Niagara Symphony H.M.S. Poushore at Chaw Festival Theatre, 361-1544

March 13: Mal Waldron Illia Holiday's piano player at Barn Boo 593-4269

March 14: Gil Scott Heron/Richie Havens at Copas, 872-2262

March 15-16: Tom Russell at Horseshoe, 964-4957

March 16: Jacques Bral in *Alive And Well And Living In Paris* opens at Massey Hall 593-4828

March 17: Marlian Awareness Ball at Barn Boo 593-5771

March 18: Eddie Shaw Band at Albert's Hall, 964-2242



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Gene Loves Jezabel

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Listings are published free of charge. Information must be received by 1 p.m. the Friday before date of publication. Write What's On, The Toronto Star, One Yonge St., Toronto M5E 1E6. We regret that we cannot take listings over the telephone, but late changes can be phoned in between 10 a.m. and noon Mondays at 869-4485.

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