

Artichoke

A woman is shown from the waist up, wearing a large, voluminous dress made of many layers of translucent, yellowish paper. The dress is suspended by numerous thin, dark strings that crisscross the dark background. She is holding a long, thin rod horizontally across the middle of the dress. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the texture and folds of the paper.

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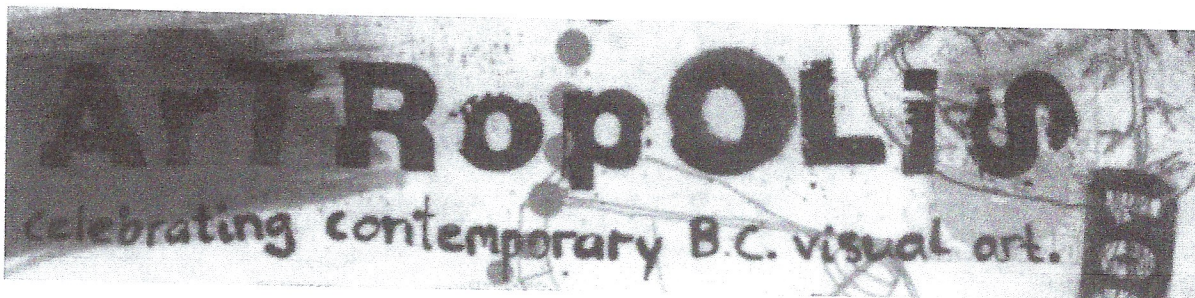
WRITINGS ABOUT THE VISUAL ARTS

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THE ALBERTA FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS ART COLLECTION

ARTROPOLIS 2001

RIELISMS



As anticipated, *Artropolis 2001* was a gloriously successful extravaganza lasting 21 non-stop days between April 7 and 28 and showcasing some 700 works of art—and some that weren't quite art. Some weren't even near art. Several were parodies on art. And more than a few were just paradoxical. In truth, *Artropolis 2001*'s fare resembled a Chinese smorgasbord. But the nature of Vancouver's mega-exhibitions is anarchical and—with the exception of the sanitized *Browser* exhibition in 1997—the seven *Artropolis* shows have always been more pot luck than fine dining.

Similar in scope to the fabled 1993 *Artropolis*, which spread out over two floors of the former Woodward's department store and featured work by 245 artists, this year's *Artropolis* occupied slightly more than 10,000 square feet of television studio space at CBC Vancouver. The juried and curated sections were separated by a corridor display of 502 self-portraits on letter-size archival paper. The *Self-Portrait Project*, coordinated by Ed Varney and Famous Empty Sky, was the *Artropolis 2001*'s most democratic component. Mounted cheek-by-jowl on

plywood panels, every entrant's submission was exhibited.

The other visual feast offerings were spread throughout two cavernous studios which 197 artists filled (in some instances, high into the rafters) with an overwhelming array of images and objects. Elizabeth Kidd, Ruth Scheuing and Henry Tsang juried the open-invitation section, which drew over 600 entries—and more than 2,400 slides to be viewed. Over three long December days and nights the three jurors narrowed down their choices to less than 100 artists. Unconvinced they had made all the right decisions, their *apologia* in the exhibition catalogue makes reference to Marcel Duchamp's ready-made *Fountain* being rejected from the 1917 New York Armory Show and notes "we did not make selections based on what the medium was or whether someone had a Masters of Fine Arts degree or where they lived or how famous or not they were. We simply selected what we felt was compelling or intriguing."

To call Ann McLaren's perpetually weeping sculpture of Tammy Faye Bakker "intriguing" perhaps overstates the impact of at

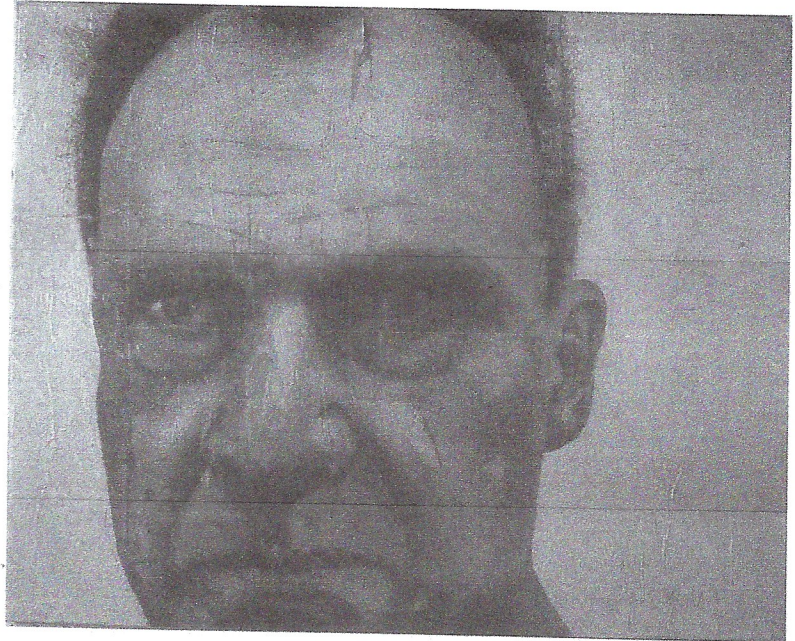
least one of the items displayed in the juried section. On the other hand, learning that the artist had constructed *Tammy Faye Bakker—Endless Tears* from rubber, silicon, yak hair, and various toxic materials gave a certain tabloid authenticity to the three-foot high water fountain.

A similar kind of tongue-in-cheek humor was apparent in Henry Robideau's *Jericho Beach Cucumber Facial*, a composition of four overlapping black-and-white photographs and handwritten text. The pictures, which flowed across the top and then wandered down the right-hand side of the frame, depicted casually clad participants at one of Vancouver's summer events. Robideau's calligraphy provided the context: "Just outside the back gate of the Vancouver Folk Music Festival, a gathering of tribes assembles along Jericho Beach, selling their multi-cultured wares and mixing musics of the planet. Vancouver is the New Age capital of Canada and every year people come from across the country to have their faces cucumbered while a restful chorus of bongos, flutes and digeridus wafts past their ears. Cucumber, though shunned by

Opposite page: *Butcher, Baker, Candlestick Maker*, oil, gold leaf and silver coin on canvas, 70 x 48 inches, Gayle Ryon



2nd March 2001, painting, sculpture,
24 x 32 x 3 inches, David Dorrington



Untitled Self-Portrait, paper, acrylic, pastel, tar on galvanized iron, 46 x 58 inches,
(Ben) Dennis Nielsen

many among the younger generation as being too closely linked to zucchini, has been proven beneficial for the reduction of stress, cleansing of the skin and prevention of warts.”

Predictably, landscapes accounted for a large percentage of the imagery in this section. Among them, Michael Atkinson’s meticulously-rendered ink painting *Can You Find the Fish Suitcase and my Dad’s Spotted Tie?*, which combined the tropical lushness of the West Coast rainforest with Richard Scary-type flora and fauna. Also notable was a mechanized installation by Haruko Okano, aptly titled *Drawing Breath*, which quietly mimicked coastal wind patterns by scratch-scratching signatures of twigs onto a rotating sand-covered disk.

Like Okano’s sculpture, Diana Lynn Thompson’s installation employed materials collected from nature. Reprising her recent Surrey Art Gallery project, *Hundreds and Thousands*, where she inscribed leaves with poetic words and phrases, the Salt Spring Island artist’s *The Word and The Leaf* featured hundreds, perhaps thousands of small fluttering leaves strung on vertically suspended threads.

Another installation that relied on a quantifiable inventory was J. Femke van Delft’s *Ten Thousand Pencils*, a room setting where walls, carpet, and upholstered furniture were randomly stabbed with yellow HBs. Taking a leaf from Thompson [sorry, we couldn’t resist the pun], van Delft’s installation also featured fluttery

items suspended overhead; in this case they were pencil shavings. Despite van Delft’s labour-intensive endeavor, her ad hoc designation of a brutally pruned hedge along one side of the CBC Vancouver parking lot—as an outdoor art project titled *CBC Cutbacks*—had stronger appeal.

The curated section of *Artropolis 2001* was sub-divided into three categories: *Erosion*, *Super Natural*, and an exhibition especially for rural artists called *Consolidation, Contact and Conflict* (appropriately subtitled *The Artist in Bucolic Paradise and Poverty*). Regrettably, the exhibition site’s cramped quarters prevented viewers from distinguishing between the three themes curated by the team of Barbara Heller, Jean Kares and Bettina Matzkuhn



Cowheeler Supreme, acrylic on linen, 48 x 78 inches, Doug Robinson



Tammy Faye Bakker – Endless Tears, rubber, silicon, yak hair and various toxic materials, 3 x 2.5 feet, Ann McLaren

(*Erosion*), Maija Martin (*Super Natural*), and Tony Martin (*Consolidated, Contact and Conflict*).

The most compelling work amongst all three categories was Emily Mattson's *Hangin' out the wash* installation of a life-size female figure pegging a clothesline of washed garments. Such feminist narratives are not unique, but in this instance the material used for both the washing and the skin of the realistically sculpted figure was cow placenta. Mattson, who lives on a cattle ranch near Dawson Creek, explained that her decision to use the life-nourishing membrane was inspired by seeing "how beautiful it was draped over a fence, especially with light behind it."

Compelling was also the word to describe Ben Nielsen's untitled self-portrait, a larger-than-life mixed-media painting which drew viewers into the artist's stare. Equally transfixing, but for less obvious reasons, was David N. Dorrington's two-part presentation of a formally painted portrait of a young girl holding a stuffed toy and the toy itself—a blue duck in a dress. In their comments about Dorrington's ambiguous painting/sculpture, the curators note that "the girl in the image seems human, but subtly altered. The disparity of scale between painting and doll is at first intriguing, but soon becomes ominous."

Video games, kinetic contraptions, and other types of interactive exhibits gave viewers lots of opportunity for hands on

participation in *Artropolis 2001*, but Cherie Markiewicz took a more direct approach. She gave away matchbooks inscribed with the question, "Do You want to be an Artist?" Printed on the back of the matchbooks were other questions: "Do you have the form but no content...the message but not the medium...the venue but not the work...the talent but no motivation?"

Summarizing *Artropolis 2001* is impossible. As organizer Chris Tyrell said, "If this were a CD, it would be a compilation." Representing artmaking in 46 British Columbia communities, *Artropolis 2001* was an unforgettable locus of collective creative expression. ♦

Paula Gustafson