

No dirty laundry, just hanging out the wash

Peace River artist Emily Mattson / *Draws good reviews at Artropolis 2001*

by WENDY HOLM

Peace River rancher-cum-visual-artist Emily Mattson laughs when asked what she was trying to express in her exhibit "Hanging out the wash," on display as part of Artropolis 2001, an annual Vancouver-based exhibition of B.C. art that this year is mounted in the cavernous basement studios of the CBC building.

Hanging out the wash depicts a woman bending over before lines of washing strung above her head. She is reaching down to hang another piece on the line – cow placentas all. The wash. The woman. Beautifully iridescent cow placentas in hues of yellow, amber, brown and red. Cow placentas "freeze dried" over fences in Emily's cold Peace River winter pastures.

Transparent cow placentas lovingly turned into art. Art that wowed the spectators and earned Emily praise by the CBC, the *Vancouver Sun* and both *E-Space* and *Artichoke* magazines.

"I wanted to make a statement that is universal. Universal and mundane."

It's an angst ridden statement on humanity. Women have this timeless drive to nurture. It is biological; we are Earth Mothers. Yet we see all this stuff happening

around us. To our resources. To our communities. Very physical stuff. We try to take care of it all. And at the same time, we keep on doing the laundry. It's a real and universal image. We keep drawing on our resources and "hanging it all out there on the line."

Watching Artropolis visitors "discover" Emily's medium on opening night was equally fascinating. Unless you're very clever or very rural (or probably both), you don't know these beautiful transparent "things" are dried cow placentas. Until you bend over to read the card on the floor, that is.

There is the odd gasp. People crowd around. Bring their friends back to see it. Stand for long minutes in quiet contemplation. Reactions range from delight to awe to obvious discomfort. But of course discomfort is part of art. "Women who live in the country have a raw sensuality," Emily observes. "We understand the earth and what it's all about. We are the ones that touch the soil. City folks are removed from the earth. Their reactions are different ..."

This piece – and this artist – are also clearly different. And that's a good thing.

Emily Mattson has been ranching and doing art in Rolla, B.C. for over 30 years. She ranches with her husband Larry, and sons Karl and Dean.

