

at Optica, we see a twofold articulation of referentiality: the house as a personal memory and the landscape as a cultural reference.

The originality of Saulnier's approach obviously places him within the realm of post-modernity, both because of his use of materials and quotations.

Pascale Beaudet

Translated from the french by Francine Dagenais

Jane Buyers

Art Gallery of Hamilton

Hamilton

November 25 to December 8

I first remember seeing Jane Buyers' art three years ago when a friend of mine sublet her studio while Buyers sojourned in Italy. It quite perplexed me. What is the intention of these etchings with images of pliers or hammers? Or the drawings that simulate construction blueprints? But seeing them in the studio emphasized the recursiveness and sparked the thought that "this is work about work about work", and my penchant for hedonism caused my interest to fade, put off by the cerebral coolness of the work.

Now she has mounted *Mixing Memory and Desire* at the Hamilton Art Gallery, and her work has developed considerably. She has left printmaking behind to make an ambitious series of complex multi-media assemblages.

Once again she strikes the note of self-referencing, placing six miniature rooms within the larger room of the gallery, but this isn't the bald-faced and, perhaps, slightly tiresome statement of recursion that John Massey gave us when he put four miniatures of the very room that he was showing in at the Art Gallery of Ontario in each corner and accompanied them by an audiotape that seemed to be a soundtrack to a porno film. Buyer's rooms, rather, transports the viewer outside of the gallery into her own interior life and the exterior world.

Miniatures have such an immediate popular appeal, that one anticipates the danger of the audience marveling at the curiosity of a tiny perfect world and thinking no further about the art. While these pieces are meticulously crafted, they pale beside the distracting feats of professional miniaturists and the relative simplicity of the tableaux make it apparent that she hopes our attention won't linger exclusively on the craftsmanship.

Each room is a pine box mounted on a sometimes decorated, tubular pillar. Each scene, except one, is fronted with plexi-glass. Under each packaged environment is a drawer with an incisive but brief typeset text, sometimes a fragrance to jolt the memory, and a set of headphones with which one can hear a longer expository tape. The tapes are well mixed with carefully chosen music, and two skilled readers, Fred Gaysek and Frances Leeming, read the selected bits. The texts, in keeping with the assemblage format of these works, are not written by the artist herself, but are fragments collected from various sources.

The first environment is an Italian



Jane Buyers, *The Life of the Mind* (detail) (1983), mixed media assemblage, 45 7 x 55 9 x 25.4 cm, courtesy Art Gallery of Hamilton

garden as seen from an arched Baroque portico. The colours are sensually Mediterranean and the park is replete with sculpted trees that take on the surreal appearance of a Tanguy rock garden in shades of verdure. The piece is predicated on Robert Smithson's idea that gardens are pictorial in origin, that they are landscapes in flora rather than paint, attempting to recreate the lost Eden. The fairly didactic audiotape has the ring of a CBC radio documentary, making one wonder if it's intentionally being used as a counterpoint. The music and the sound effects from the wilds may have been sufficient.

Anais Nin is quoted for the second piece: "The cyclical domestic, ritual household chores women have traditionally done are means of expressing love and care and protection." If the task, here, is not to recreate Paradise it is at least to create a warm, safe refuge. The room is protected from too much scrutiny by the gallery goers because of the facade of a quaint brick Victorian townhouse, typical of downtown Toronto. It brings two associations: the masterful late paintings by Christiane Pflug, and the play, *A Doll's House* by Ibsen. Both are about containment, and the infliction it brings to women better suited to more demanding roles.

The Life of the Mind is a library jammed with books; 'upstairs' is a deserted child's playroom. It is a discourse on the transformative power of ideas contained in print. The library is as much a laboratory as the studio workshop in the twin box, *Che Fare*. The audiotapes of *The Life of the Mind* consists of the opening lines of a variety of esteemed books.

The most compelling work in the show, *Che Fare*, uses alchemy as a metaphor for artistic creation. The excellent soundtrack collages short extracts from Beuys' tape prepared for his Guggenheim show (discussing art as a transformation of materials as opposed to a striving for beautiful appearances), with a fragment of "The Witch's Lament" from T. S. Eliot's *The Family Reunion* ("... We do not like the maze in the garden/ Because it too closely resembles the maze in the mind"). All this is punc-

tuated by the persistent sound of a hammer chipping stone and striking metal. In this metaphysical drama, the artist takes on a near-heroic role in the face of the pessimism expressed by Eliot's lost coven.

The last two boxes contain stark white rooms. In contrast to the faith in creativity of *Che Fare*, these two are the testament of a non-believer who once invested a great deal in the transformative powers of love. Both have a somewhat cynical typeset text by Barthes from *A Lover's Discourse*.

La Vie En Rose consists of a room with French doors and a dishevelled bed. The tape plays music only: Sam Cooke's *You Send Me*, a Gato Barbieri solo from *Last Tango in Paris*, and Edith Piaf singing the immortal lovers' melody that titles the room. This romantic fare totally contradicts the Barthes quote: "The amorous scene consists of after-the-fact manipulations, recovering only insignificant features in no way dramatic, a fragrance without support, a texture of memory." As if to underline these disillusioned words, the smell of rose petals sweetly teases the nostrils.

The second of this pair is even more disenchanted. Titled *Absent/ Presence*, it presents an empty room, atmospherically lit. The epigram by Barthes, "The discourse of absence is carried on by Woman: Woman is faithful (she waits), Man is fickle (he sails away)" floats like a malevolent spirit in this space, and the bitter refrains of pop songs mourning loss added further testimony for this witnessing against love.

Sometimes *Mixing Memory and Desire* seemed too much the work of a diligent archivist, the artist speechless or camouflaged behind the words of others. However the concerted intelligence was disarming at a time when too many artists are scornful of reason, and insist that the artist's role is to be merely an inspired intuitive creature.

In each of these six works, Jane Buyers posits her intended aim, and then, using whatever materials or tools she needs, logically goes about building the construct. The degree of success varies with each assemblage.

photo: Peter MacCallum

The most frustrating aspect of *Mixing Memory and Desire* is that all the vital, promising elements are there, but the alchemical transformation is not always complete. With the exception of *Che Fare*, one gets the sense of being just one step away from a truly magical synthesis.

Andy Fabo

R. Holland Murray

Optica

Montreal

November 8 to 26, 1983

Ecto-Endo is R. Holland Murray's first solo exhibition in Montréal. Although trained as a printmaker and later working as a painter, Murray has in the last few years made free-standing assemblages in painted wood.

Tired of painting because he found it too codified and culture-bound, assemblage provided him with a mechanism for expressing globality. Assemblage could be potentially the most free-wheeling and by extension, the most appropriate reflection of world art which, regardless of time or place, has concerned itself with the manipulation of images. Because Murray is a black artist, he sees North American art as too much the activity of a collective. Yet at the same time, he considers African-American art too strongly incorporated into a system of expectations. For Murray, assemblage, with its grab-bag use of materials, could defy the assumed references inherent in the original objects and by manipulation of the formal means, could dispel the belief in a Jungian-universality of images. What Murray wants is a vehicle to deny the absolute, believing that culture, African or North American, never holds all the answers.

The exhibition's three white structures, produced in 1983, suggest the dialogue of duality inherent in the show's title *Ecto-Endo*. Each work questions the dichotomy between the traditional expectations of painting and of sculpture; between African and American visual vocabularies; and most importantly, the dialectic created by the seductive power of established cultural values and the need to hold back for the sake of personal integrity and freedom.

The largest piece, *Ecto-Endo*, is a series of three tall grouped solid uprights suggesting taut, totemic insignia standing on a long horizontal base sliced by a cropped wheel. The work ends or starts at an unpainted wooden door loaded up with deadlocks, keys and a peep-hole, barricading the viewer or the artist from entering or escaping. The unpredictable linking of shapes and sensations gives the work an eccentric compositional flow. The three uprights, in the forms, respectively, of a cross, a filled-in wishbone and a warlike ceremonial spear are magical emblems which confront the all too concrete reality of the barricaded door. The contrast of open/closed, painted/natural, motion/stillness reiterates the dialectical position of

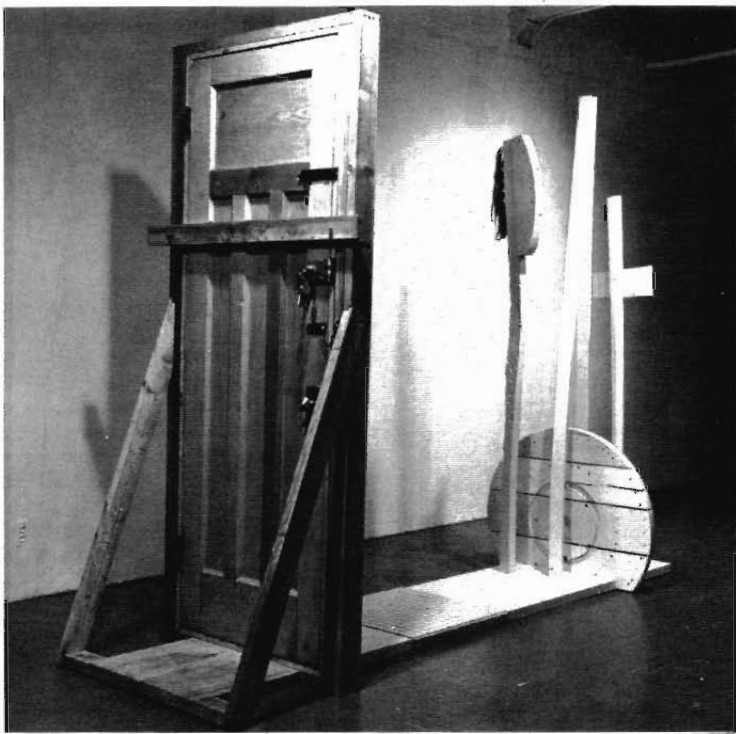


photo Cyril Ryan/Susuma

R Holland Murray, *Ecto-Endo* (1983), mixed-media, 300 x 92 x 220 cm, courtesy the artist

the artist (and the viewer) within the boundaries of artmaking and within society. Murray has commented that while we lock out danger, we are also in the position of locking out potential so that it is up to each individual to determine within one's self on which side of the door the locks are placed.

The new stark whiteness of this and the other pieces in the show evokes the traditional iconographic meanings of purity and mourning. Yet the white unifying skin gives the work an airiness and ethereal quality. The pieces seem less narrative than Murray's earlier assemblages of thin, black verticals with brightly coloured decorative motifs. The works here are engaging and approachable because of the humanness of their scale, external and internal.

Threesome, a more simplified, structure with three interlocking "wheels" at one end of an oblong base and a three-part arch at the other, is less hieratic. The configuration has a greater lyricism and wistfulness that is much more "optimistic", Murray's definition of on-going thinking. The image derives from the pattern made by women walking along a city street and despite its overall size, it retains an easy intimacy. The various tones of white, the elegant drawing and the careful positioning of the forms suggest a concern for formal clarity where the priority of either reason or emotion is constantly shifting position. The everyday objects and recycled materials are not intended as *objets trouvés*, nor in their new disguise is there any suggestion of nostalgia. Although the work is skillfully constructed and the problems of physics successfully solved, there is a strong sense of the handmade without any suggestion of the casual for its own sake.

The smallest and sparest assemblage is *Gemini* with a single curving vertical post, splayed at the top and

resting on a base formed by a toilet seat. This work is the most reminiscent of Murray's earlier assemblages. Those dark thin polychromed structures, exhibited in group shows in Montréal and Toronto had a much stronger reference to tribal art in terms both of process and decoration. Unlike the current work, they tended to be more associative and referential. *Gemini* has a particular gentleness and even jocularity, enhanced by green and yellow stripes painted along the interior of the top split. Like the earlier assemblages, it is the one piece here that is most closely linked to the human body in terms of scale and the simple axial joining and splitting. Its self-containment and modesty evokes the sensation of interrupted privacy.

With a different sort of notion in each work, the exhibition suggests a new sense of adventure in Murray's thinking. The show seems to have been conceived of as a kind of installation. The white structures are closely aligned to the white walls of the gallery and the ghostliness and shimmer of the pieces are enhanced by their sparse environment. Despite this careful placement of the works in the room, Murray adamantly rejects the individual works as sculpture. Indeed the work is not positioned to ensure a three-dimensional configuration and the structures seem to make no spatial demands. There is no interest in sculptural gravity or the illusion of gravity. The pieces do have a sense of frontality because of the way the verticals are spread along a narrow horizontal base resting on the floor and there is the feeling of a dominant plane rather than four coalesced views. But this effect may derive more from Murray's experience as a painter than from the influence of modernist planar-directed sculpture. Murray has called sculpture something which "exists when you turn off the lights but

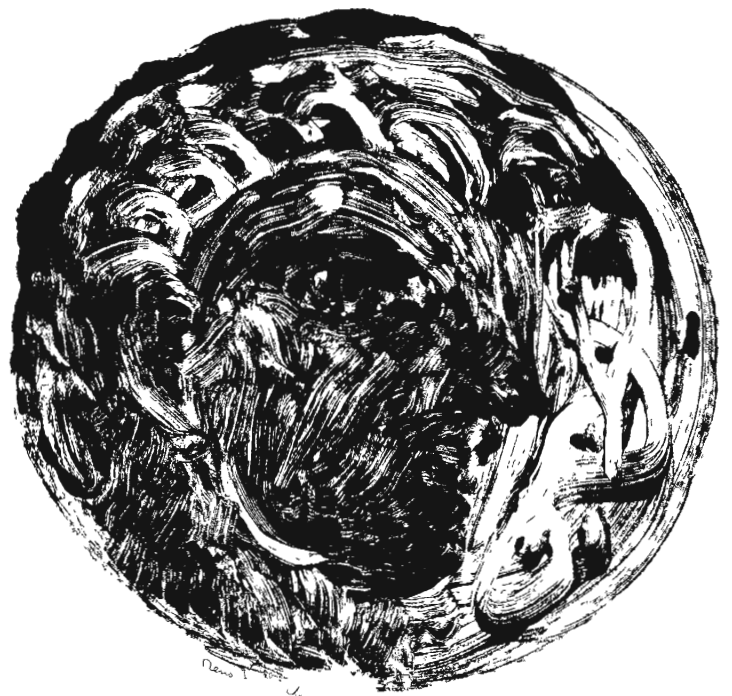


photo Randy Eriksen

Joe Reno, *The Greek God* (1982), monotype, 56 cm diameter, courtesy the artist

painting doesn't; and these are my best paintings".

Sandra Paikowsky

Joe Reno
Arthead Gallery
Seattle

December 8 to January 12

This was roughly a ten-year survey of the Seattle-born artist's graphic works. (Part I was earlier this year; this was Part II, the final exhibition). Joe Reno is one of those artists who has delved deeply into himself to create a wealth of figurative images that vary among straightforward heads, torsos, and portraits, and multiple figure groupings in Poussin-like compositions and landscape settings. Trained at the Art Students League in New York under his idol, Edwin Dickinson, Reno likewise has included himself in the pantheon of his own private mythology.

Still, it was necessary to separate out a lot of wheat from the chaff. Highly prolific, the 40-year-old painter and sculptor uses graphics as a quick sketching pad and rarely attains as high a level of technical excellence or penetration of subject matter as do his paintings. He began working with Alfred Gay, the gallery owner and a fine master printer, in 1982 and the finest of the many intaglios, reliefs, collographs, dry points, etchings, lithographs and monotypes, appear to have been printed by Gay.

Given that, this was an exhibition of rich rewards and enigmatic splendour. *My Fantasy* (1982) shows nude men and women in a sylvan glade, some like Icarus are wearing man-

made wings and are flying (or falling); others are praying beneath trees. In the background, a temple with a curved dome and a large open eye symbol presides over all. In a zincplate etching from the long *Mystique* series, there's a Venus emerging from flames instead of waves, surrounded by an enchained male figure and a dog-like animal.

Like Jacques Moireret, Joe Reno is a Seattle artist whose reputation has grown steadily underground. Both have been more admired and recognized by rock musicians and fellow artists than by curators or critics. To be fair, Reno's work was the subject of frequent critical scrutiny throughout the early 1970s but interest slacked off mid-decade. Now, many would agree that Reno antedated the Neo-Expressionist movement by ten years and the steady achievement of his prints, pastels, drawings, sculptures, oil paintings, and poetry confirm this claim eloquently.

This harkening back to Renaissance artist-polymath models for a variety of media and artistic endeavour is conscious on Reno's part; his early models were Raphael and Leonardo and he saw their works first hand, along with Durer's, as a G.I. in Germany during the early 1960s. Twenty years later, those experiences have shaped the artist's subject matter and unwavering dedication to his talent. It has also created the major paradox or crisis in his art until very recently. The transformations of Raphaels into Renos, for example, were followed by a variation and re-interpretation of certain early modern artists such as Pablo Picasso and Joan Miro, as well as, later, the prominent senior Northwest artists of Reno's youth, Kenneth Callahan and Mark Tobey. All the same, such satires or emulations still bore the remarkable stamp of the artist's own technical hallmarks: a flowing, spon-