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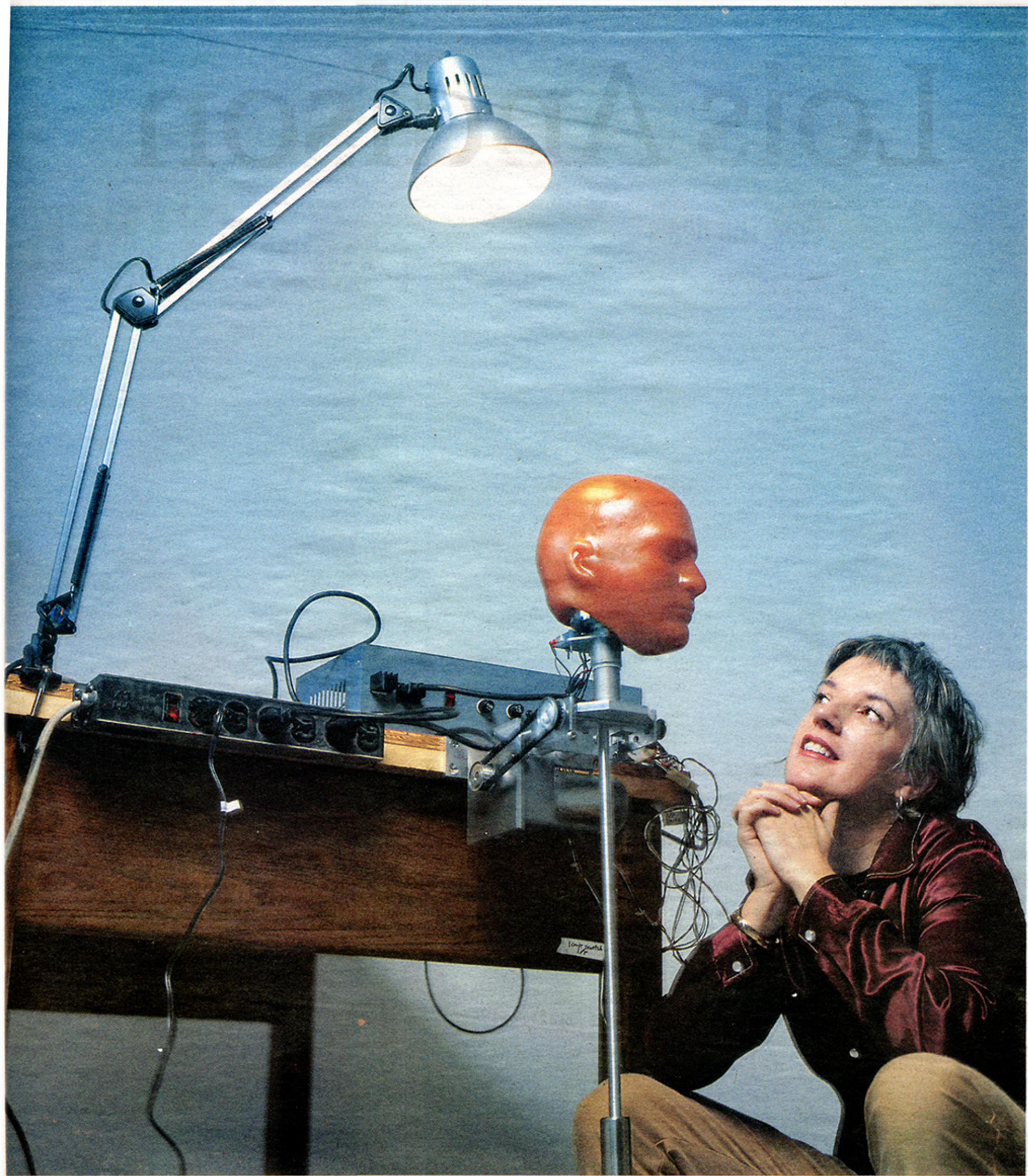
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**LOIS ANDISON SCULPTS**

# ART THAT MOVES



# Lois Andison

**LOIS ANDISON: AUTOBODY** on view today (Thursday, November 8) through December 16 at the Koffler Gallery (Bathurst Jewish Community Centre, 4588 Bathurst); the artist speaks tonight at 6 pm, followed by an opening reception from 7 to 9 pm. Free. 416-636-1880 ext 380.

**TV DINNER WITH LANDSCAPE: LOIS ANDISON, JILL BALLARD, DECO DAWSON, DAVID KRIPPENDORFF, JENNIFER McMACKON, TANYA READ, ALTHEA THAUERBERGER and JUSTIN WADDELL** on view at YYZ Artists' Outlet (401 Richmond West, suite 140) until November 24. Free. 416-598-4546. Rating: NNNN

LOIS ANDISON IS SUCKING BACK PEP-permint tea at the 401 Richmond gallery complex's Loftus Lloyd Cafe, waiting for YYZ director Lisa Deanne Smith to finish turning on all the works that are part of the show next door, TV Dinner With Landscape.

The one non-video/film piece in the show – quite literally, the centrepiece – is Andison's Camouflage 2, a mechanized field of tall grass that sways in a non-existent wind.

It's been the scene-stealer everywhere Andison has shown it since creating the piece for 1998's landmark collective group show Canadian Shield, and it's doing it again here – even keeping company with deco dawson's brilliant FILM(dzama), the best Canadian short film winner at this year's Toronto International Film Festival.

But right now the kinetic sculptor is too busy tweaking the four new works she's making for her Koffler Gallery solo show – opening tonight, with an artist's talk – to notice the buzz around her latest group effort. She didn't get much sleep before we met, she needs to make a parts run to Jacobs Hardware and she's exhausted to the point where she's not sure she can speak.

Until she walks into YYZ, where the installation is so crowded that David Krippendorff's projected video of a swamp full of reeds provides the only

illumination for Camouflage 2. Andison lights up, electrified by the parallels between the pieces as well as the process of letting go of a work that's clearly taken on a life of its own.

"I did the grass piece when I was just getting into technology and the virtual world," explains Andison, who was earning a good living as a Web designer with Extend Media until she was laid off in the dot-com meltdown this April. "The effort to produce something that looks natural on the Web – the mediation through the computer – has had a large impact on the way I make my work."

Andison's intimate understanding of new media is helping her forge a fine art practice that feels absolutely right for this moment. Her sculptural works move in more ways than one, striking a powerful and precarious balance between emotional vulnerability and aesthetic strength, and are simultaneously elegant, politically barbed and extremely funny.

Right now she's totally on. The Toronto-based native of Smiths Falls, Ontario, picked up the Ontario Arts Council's prestigious K.M. Hunter Award for visual arts for 2001. Last year her goofy feathered audio helmets, Birdscapes In Red And Blue, were the hit of the Textile Museum of Canada's Wildlife: A Field Guide To The Post-Natural; and Tidal Pool: Ode To Tom Thomson – a self-propelling rowing device made in collaboration with Simone Jones, who teaches robotics and fine art at Pittsburgh's Carnegie Mellon University – just lapped up kudos in the Tree Museum's annual site-specific show near Gravenhurst.

Recent solo gigs, including 2000's Camouflage at the Southern Alberta Art Gallery, and Camouflage 3 – a life-sized female torso (the artist's own) shrouded in a flesh-coloured evening gown, with a phallic piston apparatus that ejaculates puffs of smoke replacing the head – are earning raves.

Anyone who missed Camouflage 3

at the Red Head can catch it at the Koffler, where it's joined by new works that again mark a creative departure for this ever-innovative artist.

"It isn't always easy to get to the point where the humour comes," Andison says, explaining the direction her new work is taking.

"I'm letting the mechanics, which I used to conceal, show. I'm replacing the organic with humour."

It's a direction she's been encouraged to take by Koffler senior curator Carolyn Bell Farrell, who sees Andison's Autobody as the highlight of a season featuring provocative content rooted in the human form.

Less than two weeks before Autobody opens, all the new work is very much in progress in her workshop, a light-filled unit in the brand new Felim Court studio complex on Dupont near Lansdowne. Andison, a vegetarian whose first-ever kinetic project was an indictment of the meat industry presented in a dining room in the heart of U of T's student ghetto for 1994's House Project, laughingly says the sole problem with the new studio is that the only nearby places to eat are Portuguese chicken joints.

She's a little tense, because that morning she'd had to evacuate her space when the hair salon next to her unit filled with fumes coming from another artist's studio.

"It's all fine now," she says a little too perkily. Hours later, she's still got the studio doors wide open; there's no way Andison can take the fume problem lightly. Just last year her boyfriend, neon artist Orest Tataryn, was off work for months from his day job as a captain with the Toronto fire department after exposure to toxic fumes.

This morning's fume scare has left her feeling a little vulnerable, which comes through even as she shows off some of the strongest works she's ever made – like Iris, a larger-than-life female torso glistening with blue metallic automotive paint and breasts that

are triggered by a motion detector to open and close like a pair of eyes returning the viewer's gaze.

"Beautiful women are not given voice," she says. "They're placed in magazines and looked at. With Iris, I try to turn that gaze back on itself. Women's breasts are objects of such attention, but these look back at who ever looks at them."

Andison is smart enough to know her technical limitations, and has worked long enough in software to know how creative projects can benefit from team effort.

She's quick to credit those who provide technical help – Colin Henry and good friend Paul Cahill, who did work on Iris; J. Jamb, who adapted some vapourizing gizmos from Lee Valley Hardware into a device that sprays steam from the pearl-white car-paint-covered cast-bronze bust of Maid Of The Mist; Cahill again for machining parts of Sugar Daddy, a nodding and shaking head that uses a circuit panel built by Andison but programmed in machine code by Jim Rutton.

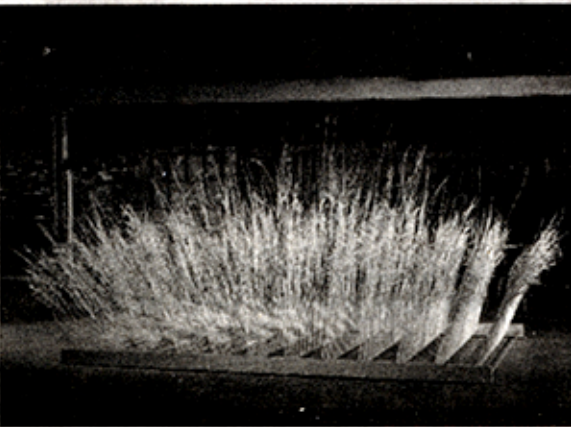
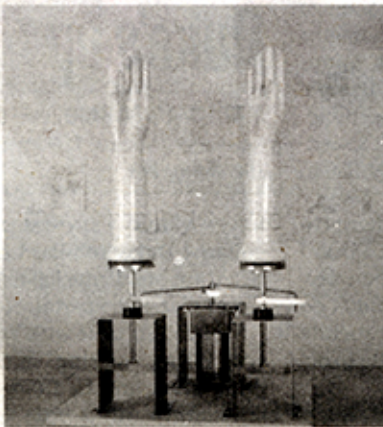
"I always say my boyfriend is my sugar daddy," she quips. "Orest is always chauffeuring me places, and it's become a big issue because he's starting to feel like he's an art slave. I'm acknowledging that with this piece – and finally am learning to drive."

Andison's move toward revealing the mechanical guts of her pieces started with The Wave, a pair of antique porcelain glove forms mounted upright, with a visible, cob-type articulated gear that makes them move in a hilariously accurate simulation of the queen's famous ceremonial greeting.

It's a subtle stylistic shift, but one that shows Andison's commitment to the medium.

"The process is really addictive," she marvels. "Once you start making mechanical, kinetic, electronic work, it's hard to turn back." ☉

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Humour and motion animate Lois Andison's Sugar Daddy (shown in process, far left, with Andison), Birdscape In Red, The Wave, Camouflage 2 and Camouflage 3.