



## OLIVER GIRLING

*Naked State* slams into Harbourfront like a ton of bricks. The current exhibition at The Power Plant, skilfully assembled by chief curator

Louise Dompierre with the assistance of Arthur Renwick, brings together in one place a number of new artists and works, some of whom have been seen in other exhibitions around town, especially in the context of the Spontaneous Combustion and Nether Mind shows.

It has an effervescence, energy and lucidity that has been missing recently at The Power Plant. It's not ideal: there are emerging artists it would have been nice to see included who didn't get so much as a studio visit; and the lack of painting

# Wired up from degree zero

## REVIEW

## NAKED STATE

A selected view of Toronto art. To Nov. 6.  
The Power Plant, Harbourfront Centre,  
231 Queens Quay W. 973-4949.

is lamentable (if not unexpected). But what's here is very good — finally, a sense of a new generation of artists poised to take the stage.

Though the overt subject is, in general terms, "the body" (all this unnamed, essential body — whose body? — smacks too much of the abstract body of Christ, the fact that it's often a woman's body notwithstanding), I read the show's title as referring to technology. Reduced to degree zero, denuded, what are mass media but extensions of modest tools and mechanisms, which are in turn extensions of our 10 fingers (digits), five senses and central nervous

system? What these artists have in common is that each one first invents the necessary technology for the production of their own piece.

Lois Anderson's *crown of thorns* is a stunner. A dangerous-looking object, produced with Kent Dale, it is interlaced blown-glass branches filled with iodine that come to lethal points; it resonates simultaneously medically and horticultural-

ly, and sits on a Pyrex stand mounted on a rusty iron wheel on welded aluminum legs. Her other piece is a Christian metaphor, too: *walking on water*, a pair of cast-glass men's shoes mounted over fishing net. Anderson also works with the bandit neon artists Skunkworks — apparently, the medium of glass focuses much of her work.

Max Streicher's *Boiler* is fabricated out of parachute cotton (called olefin) — three sculptural presences stay floppy 'til you pump air into them via foot-pumps connected to ducts in their interiors. Then they turn into ram-homunculi, oversized, fragile figures who seem to be flexing their curlicued extremities. They feel like a herd of big, goofy Canadians.

Teresa Marshall and Michael Belmore address First Nations' issues in ways that are refreshingly oblique and funny, the former through the medium of The Indian Act silkscreened on men's clothes, the latter using cast acrylic as a kind of aspic in which toy cowboys and Indians are suspended. Janet Morton creates monumental clothing using the mediums of knitting, printing and sewing in an update of Oldenburg's oversized sculptures.

Catherine Heard and Millie Chen both employ human hair in their sculptures, Heard in anatomical embroideries of penises from 16th-century medical texts, Chen to make the proverbial hair shirt. Chen has also gouged petroglyphs into those pristine museum walls and filled them with aromatic herbs and spices, forcing viewers to literally smell the wall to find out if the art stinks.

## PICTORIAL HISTORY

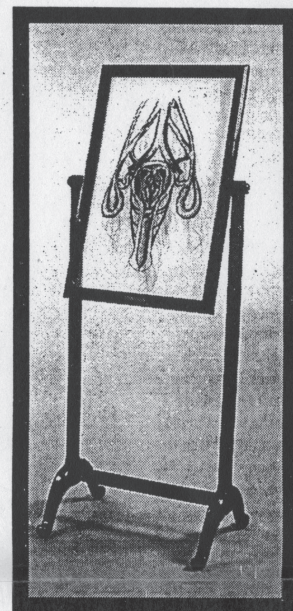
The pictorialists have been grouped in a room: Corneil Van der Spek the lone(y) painter, Francis le Bouthillier the videographer and John Dickson the water sculptor. Dickson creates funnels, movements and circulations of water

inside tanks that are mysterious and evocative. Le Bouthillier uses an industrial scale and mock barbershop to recreate slightly ridiculous rituals (his haircut is called *Templates For Male Pattern Baldness*). Van der Spek deals with Jackson Pollock, body-building and painting as martyrdom.

Carl Skelton's sculpture *Diorama* and Michael Buchanan's digitized photograph *Untitled* have both been used extensively as promotion for the exhibition, with good reason: they're powerfully memorable images. Buchanan has substituted tiny carpenters' levels for the pupils in a man's eyeballs; Skelton has embedded glass eyes in fake tree branches made of acrylic resin. These made me think of the wonderful/creepy sculptures of the Berlin artist Ben Wargin, which consist of industrial

debris and hundreds of eyeglasses.

Karen Henderson uses ink on plastic (mural scale) and photographs mounted on plastic (picture scale) as micro-cosmic/macro-cosmic reflections of one another, to force a physical experience of the piece. Robert Windrum's embroidered tattoo imagery of a clown with the logo "AIDS schmaids" and doctor's staff surmounted with a flaming heart throw defiance at the gloom and doom merchants



Catherine Heard's *Untitled* (detail), 1993.

in the AIDS crisis.

Greg Hefford's illuminated male and female washroom glyphs cryptically circuit the room. Marla Hlady's spinning girls in her installation *Beauty* are less beautiful than the regular wiring of the installation itself, which turns the whole room into an abstract painting. Michelle Gay's damask panels with surgical instruments sewn into them, as well as her very inventive and comic pencil drawings, open the show.

In the upstairs gallery there is a sound/installation piece by Janet Cardiff. It consists of a well-used wood worktable wired for sound, speakers and taped voices; rubbing the table activates the piece. It's one that shows clearly the truth of McLuhan's adage: We live in an audile-tactile world. ☘