

## Letter from Toronto

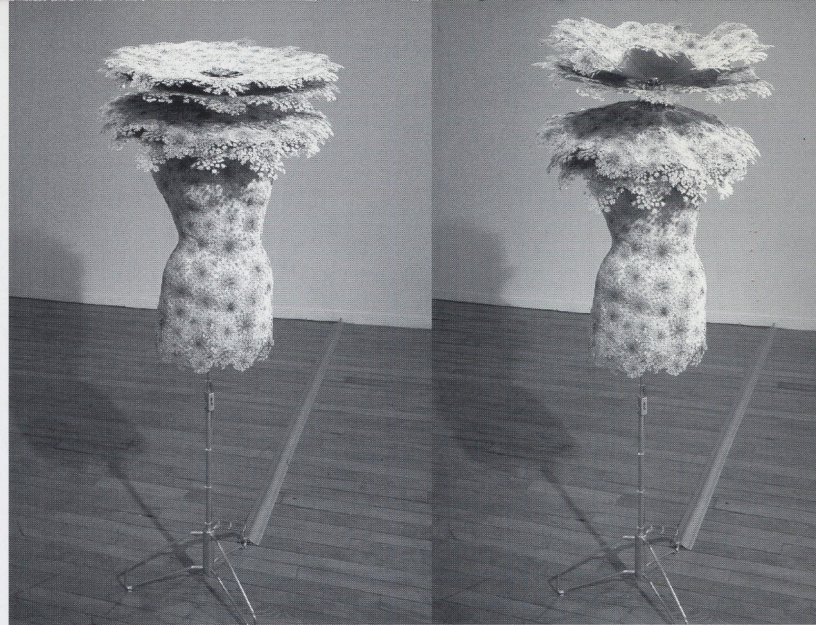
November 1998

Philip Monk's latest exhibition for the Power Plant takes a historicizing look at the Toronto art scene during the 1970s and 80s, and has longtime members of the local community either reminiscing or cringing (perhaps depending on one's haircut at the time) – while the rest of us might well feel like we missed a great party. "Picturing the Toronto Art Community" (to Dec. 20) includes artworks and archival material that flaunt a playful nostalgia while preserving the ephemeral. Looking at the documentation of the Miss General Idea Pageants and the fabulous, over-the-top teleperformances of the Clichettes and Lamonte del Monte (a.k.a. the late David Buchan), I was struck by the artists' energy and effulgence – the likes of which I'm hard-pressed to find in the community's current incarnation – as well as by the huge loss the community has since suffered to AIDS. This show is paired with "American Playhouse: The Theatre of Self-Presentation," which features photographs and films from the 60s New York art scene of Andy Warhol and Jack Smith, along with those by their myth-making successors Richard Prince, Cindy Sherman, Mike Kelly and Paul McCarthy (to Dec. 20). With all its self-conscious image-crafting, New York in the 60s doesn't seem to possess the light-hearted fun of Toronto in the 70s. I guess you had to be there.

A few gems to be had this season include Lois Andison's installation made of Queen Anne's lace at the Red Head Gallery (closed Oct. 3). For the work, titled *Camouflage 1*, Andison fashioned strands of the delicate blossoms and hung them, like a beaded curtain, from the gallery ceiling. As well, she affixed blossoms to a dressmaker's dummy (over top of skin-like pink latex) and to a mechanized Queen Elizabeth I collar encircling the dummy's neck. The tiers of the collar, which mimic the blossoms' radial configuration, flapped haughtily as I moved in front of a motion sensor. Though Queen Anne's lace grows wild, its association with the vestments of a pure bloodline suggested a certain hot-house variety. At Art Metropole, curators Roger Bywater and Luis Jacob gave us "Work for the Ideal Home," featuring functional and non-functional objects one might find in that perfect dwelling (closed Nov. 4). Though it was not placed at the door, John Marriott's *spell-bound* offered an apt, if ominous, introduction: a black rubber welcome mat in which the "wel" was voided out and the word "come" was left. Not quite the perky greeting Martha Stewart would recommend. Other artists, including Odette LeBlanc, Myfanwy Ashmore, Myfanwy MacLeod, Daniel Olson, Jorge Pardo and Fraser Stables were similarly sceptical about the notion of domestic bliss.

Farther afield, the Ottawa Art Gallery is mounting an ambitious show addressing sexuality and outer space. "Close Encounters" (to Nov. 22) will cruise the Final Frontier through a series of video and multi-media installations by Canadian and international artists such as Colin Campbell, Thirza Cuthand, Lynne Marsh, Mariko Mori, John Scott, Sheila Urbanoski and Laurel Woodcock, curated by Sylvie Fortin.

Lisa Gabrielle Mark



Above: Lois Andison, two views of *Camouflage 1* (1998), mixed-media installation, photos by Peter McCallum

Below: John Scott, *Parallel Vision* (1997), black polyresin fibrecloth, oil, acrylic and oil stick on paper, 244 x 305 cm, photo by Tim Wickens, courtesy Ottawa Art Gallery

Left: Myfanwy Ashmore, *Enarmoured Euphoria* (1997), wall socket, digital voice recordings, appropriated sound, portable tape player, speakers, photo courtesy Art Metropole

