

Season of Sex, the City, and Worlds in Between

Fall's banquet of visual arts explores consumerism, ancestral origins, the urban environment, and sensuality

BY ROBIN LAURENCE

Assigning an overarching theme to the coming visual-arts season is a bit like fishing in deep, dark waters. In your attempts to make millennial generalizations, you might reel in a flashing, leaping, gorgeous silver creature. It might



be tender and tasty, too. But you also might drag up a rusted piece of garbage from the muddy bottom. And whether that muddy bottom constitutes the Zeitgeist or your own unconscious, well, it's difficult to say.

Since I've been fishing with a net rather than a line, I've hauled in a half-dozen wriggling themes, the biggest and most wriggly of them being Sex and the City. At least, that's how I've identified it. Whether they're working through photography, performance, painting, video, or mixed-media installation, whether their careers are local, national, or international in scope, the artists exhibiting or performing in the Lower Mainland this coming fall and winter seem to be compelled by the nature of our urban environment and the conditions of our sexual existence. Not surprising, really, in the last year of this most urbanized and sexualized of centuries—and millennia. Other themes emerging—or re-emerging—from the murky deep include consumerism, voyeurism, ancestral origins, teen bedrooms, and the contested space of the art gallery.

The season is already under way at the Charles H. Scott Gallery, with Toronto artist Kim Adams's Street Works. On until October 10, the exhibition consists of three mixed-media, interactive sculptures, which are stored in the gallery at night and sited in different spots on Granville Island during the day. "Kim is using the gallery as a garage," says curator and director Greg Bellerby. "The pieces are on trailers or wheels and are portable...like Gypsy art." Also on display in the gallery are models and drawings related to these projects.

Bellerby says that Adams uses humour and everyday objects to address issues of "consumerism, desire, and commodity capitalism." Adams's positioning of the sculptures—on the streets of urban centres—is in keeping with a recent spate of exhibitions at the Scott Gallery, all dealing with our contemporary urban condition. As for our contemporary sexual condition, a group show titled *Sexy Girl* (at the Scott Gallery October 20 to November 28) threatens to blow the lid off representations of women by women (and one cross-dressing guy). The show's curator, Cate Rimmer, says she was interested in the ways in which younger artists are challenging the proscriptions of older feminists in their examination of sexuality and gender. "There's a certain amount of bravado, a pushing [of] the envelope in terms of political correctness," she says. Rimmer talks about the "girlie" images in the show, a species of representation that would have been anathema to feminist critics a decade ago. "The thing about these women [artists] is that they're very much informed



The eclectic photographs of Man Ray muse Lee Miller (above in *Self Portrait*, 1932), will be at Presentation House Gallery in early 2000.

by earlier feminism," says Rimmer. Sounds like Madonna wrestles Griselda Pollock to the ground—and makes her wear a bustier. Eight local artists ranging across nearly as many mediums will participate.

At the Contemporary Art Gallery, an exhibition of works by the controversial Japanese photographer Nobuyoshi Araki opens at 8 p.m. on Friday (September 10) and runs through October 16. CAG curator Keith Wallace has chosen to show some 1,200 images from four separate series of Araki's work: his confrontational photos of erotic subjects and the urban environment are contrasted, Wallace says, with his luscious close-ups of flowers and his cheery portraits of the residents

of his Tokyo neighbourhood. Something of a cult figure in Japan, Araki has been likened to American photographer Nan Goldin. "He plays with the dividing line between art and obscenity, fact and fiction," says Wallace. The viewer often cannot tell if Araki's images are "constructed images or actual documents".

Following Araki, Vancouver artist Judy Radul will create a stage-set installation at the CAG (October 23 to November 6), in which she, her viewers, and other collaborators may improvise periodic performances. Next on the lineup, Daniel Congdon will exhibit metal sculptures whose shapes are based on projected and refracted beams of light (November 13 to Decem-

ber 18). The urban environment will be featured again in the new year, in an exhibition of paintings by Winnipeg artist Eleanor Bond (January 8 to February 20). Wallace says that Bond's new works specifically address Vancouver as a site and follow her practice of "looking at areas of the city and creating new, imaginative, Utopian possibilities for their redevelopment".

In another manifestation of urbanism and utopian redevelopment, the Or Gallery recently moved from its besieged location in the 100 block West Hastings to spiffy new quarters at 400 Smithe. Inaugurating its fall-winter season is Getting the Corners, a group show of some dozen, up-and-coming British artists (September 15 to October 23). Guest curated by London-based Matthew Higgs and making use of a "stealthy" aspect of the gallery space (yes, its corners), Getting is the first in what Or director Reid Shier hopes will be a series of shows of international origin. (He's been working with curators in Caracas, Los Angeles, and Tokyo.) Seems like an ambitious program for an artist-run centre, but Shier says it's possible to put together an internationally based exhibition on a modest budget. "All you had to do was ask," he says, alluding to the granting process. "And lo and behold, it's happened."

Lo and behold, another international project is happening out of an artist-run centre. Live at the End of the Century is an expansive performance festival, organized by Brice Canyon at the **grunt gallery** and taking place at the **grunt** and 10 other galleries and venues throughout the city. It runs from October 1 to November 6 and fea-

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tures dozens of artists from around the world and down the block. Some galleries will sponsor exhibitions associated with performance art or artists; some will present video documentation and some will host lectures on the subject. (The essays from the lecture series will be collected in book form following the festival.)

Artist-curator Canyon says that grant staff were searching for a way to mark the millennium when he came up with the idea of the festival. Given the city and the gallery's long association with performance, a project celebrating this underground phenomenon "seemed like the right thing to do". It's been 20 years since the last such festival in Vancouver and, Canyon observes, interest in the art form is growing. A new generation of performance artists is emerging from our local art schools, he says, and books are more widely available on the subject. A new audience is emerging, too, "looking for something more stimulating than a movie".

That stimulation could take place in your mind or in some other sensitive part of your body. From nudity to cross-dressing, and from fetishism to censorship, sexuality will be well-explored through the festival. Among the more daring sexplorers is New Zealand punk artist Satina Saturina, who will take viewers on an "autoerotic journey through orgasm"—or so the festival brochure promises—in *Sector X*, at the ANZA Club on October 7. Also on the performance program are works dealing with First Nations spirituality, public versus private space, cults and psychoanalysis, and the nature of performance art itself. The series kicks off with a Performance Art Cabaret at the Vogue Theatre on October 1. Information brochures will be available at participating

galleries and elsewhere throughout the city by mid-September.

In association with *Live at the End of the Century*, the **Vancouver Art Gallery** will present an exhibition of works by internationally acclaimed American artist Ann Hamilton (October 16 to January 23, 2000). Hamilton's subtle, sensuous, and cerebral practice weaves together many media and disciplines, including installation and performance. Her exhibition at the VAG, says senior curator Bruce Grenville, will include book projects, photographs, and "residues" of earlier artworks. "These are objects that are produced 'in process'," he explains, "because so much of her work is process-based and performative in nature".

The VAG will also be developing exhibitions from its permanent collection through the coming season. "We looked at all kinds of end-of-the-millennium possibilities," says Grenville, "and one of the things we decided to do was to focus on the collection." This old focus is realized by new lenses, however, in *Out of This Century* (October 23 to February 27, 2000). Six local celebrities, none from the visual arts, have been invited to choose and interpret artworks from the VAG's collection. "So often, the collection is interpreted solely through the eyes of the curators," Grenville says. "This way, we're able to bring [the process] back to the community, to bring out a whole different set of works and, in some instances, to show them in very different ways." Novelist Doug Coupland, playwright Tom Cone, landscape architect Cornelia Oberlander, radio host David Wisdom, and filmmakers Mina Shum and Loretta Todd are the guest curators.

Some of the most potentially exciting exhibitions this season are the historical ones, which promise to bring overlooked or forgotten artists to light, or to revise, reinterpret, or re-evaluate the careers and contributions of those already



The work of Barkerville photographer C.D. Hoy, including the untitled photo above, is showing at Presentation House Gallery until October 17.

established and acclaimed. Among such historical recoveries is *First Son: Portraits* by C. D. Hoy at **Presentation House Gallery** until October 17. Hoy, who immigrated to Canada from China in 1902, worked variously as a gold miner, fur trader, and railroad surveyor before establishing a successful photography studio in Barkerville in the B.C. Interior. "He produced a huge body of photographs—portraits of people living in the Ques-

nel area," says Presentation House director Karen Love.

Self-taught, Hoy undoubtedly had a great eye; he also had a feel for his era and the peoples of his adopted homeland. His clientele was drawn from three distinct cultural groups, Love explains: Chinese, European, and First Nations. Hoy's negatives, in the collection of the Barkerville Historic Town, have been painstakingly researched by guest curator Faith Moosang, who has also writ-

ten a book on the subject, copublished by Presentation House and Arsenal Pulp Press. (A book launch and curator's talk will take place at Presentation House at 2 p.m. this Saturday [September 11].)

Ancestral histories, religious and economic persecutions, the migrations of peoples, and the shaping of nature by culture, all are enfolded into Marion Penner Bancroft's new body of landscape photographs, *By Land and Sea: Prospect and Refuge*, at Presentation House Gallery November 6 to December 19. Politics and family, sex and the city, war and wealth and deprivation, all figure in the travelling exhibition, *The Legendary Lee Miller*. As beautiful as she was talented, Miller (1907-1977) was artist and muse, image maker and model, sexual rebel and partner of American surrealist Man Ray and, later, British surrealist Roland Penrose. Her beauty and sexuality, however, fade in juxtaposition with her eclectic photographic career, beginning with her invention (along with Man Ray) of the solarization process and her spirited explorations of surrealism, and running through her stints as a fashion photographer and celebrity portraitist and her service as a combat photojournalist in Europe during the Second World War. Organized by the Lee Miller Archive in the United Kingdom and spanning the years 1929 to 1964, this exhibition is, Love believes, the first solo show of Miller's work in Canada. It runs from January 8 to February 20, 2000.

It's curious looking at Lee Miller's *Nude Bent Forward*, taken in Paris circa 1931, and then looking at a similarly posed nude from Nobuyushi Araki's recent series, *Tokyo: A City Heading for Death*. Half a world and more than half a century separate these two works, and yet they bear many formal likenesses. Cities fall and sensibilities shift, but the artist's fascination with sex and the human body? It's older than the millennium. ■