



PHOTO: WENDY WARD

Megan Wong's *My Palette*, showing at IDA gallery.

Impressions of impressions

By PAULETTE PEIROL

Imagine 13 x 21 square units of unadulterated McDonald's cartons. Alternate rows of Filet-o-Fish and Big Mac containers and squeeze in 56 Quarter Pounder cubicles. Project upon this cellulose tapestry a shadow of the Russian sickle and hammer insignia and the result is called *The State of the State* by artist Iain Robertson. It can be seen at the IDA Gallery (Fine Arts Building) until tomorrow. The work is part of an exhibit by four first- and second-year MFA graduate students. Robertson's piece sounds prosaic and pretentious (if not downright mundane) on paper. Its impact is felt only when you face the actual work. A suspended projector casts your shadow over 273 units of styrofoam propaganda—power and fear become synonymous.

The material composition of the work itself begs the question: Pop Art or Political Statement? However, the subtlety of the hammer and sickle shadow proposes no blatant answer. Robertson himself—from politically-fueled England—admits that the piece could be called "disposable art."

The temptation to crush the McDonald's containers ("They were made to be destroyed," laughs Robertson), is an undeniable effect of the work. Indeed, one Big Mac package has already been mutilated by an anonymous thrill seeker.

Contrasted against Robertson's work are four pastel and water-color line drawings by graduate student Megan Wong. *Get Serial!* speaks in guttural tones of maroon, orange, and violet with strains of green and yellow. Textural variations lead the eye along the flow of kinetic lines.

My Palette is an imaginative display of obtuse color, set upon an intriguing melange of shapes and figures. It is appealing from a distance but an eye-sore close up—it's not for those with a taste for subtle flavors. The painting would be appropriate for a bank or playroom but seems too violently bright for this exhibit.

Structuring another wall are Vaughn Perusse's picture window sculptures. Of these, *Golden Animal* and *Flaming Heart* speak the loudest. They seem haphazard and simplistic at first but then strike the viewer with their true roughness.

The *Golden Animal* droops out of a hammered metal backdrop, captured in animation, yet still somehow static. The effect is disconcerting. *Flaming Heart* is both subtle and violent, passive, yet disarming with its amalgamation of crimson, deep purple, and orange-yellow. Perusse seems to relish these oblique dichotomies as he plays on them in his work.

Dominique Ambrose's sculpture is the focal point of the exhibit. A black cloak of mixed media hangs from the ceiling, headless. It's a decoration of fur pelts, dried fish, Its decoration of fur pelts, dried fish, pearls, and blood tell an awesome historical tale for the viewer with a violent imagination. Look, but do not dream the image.

Facing the cloak is a translucent child's jacket with a painted doll lying next to it. It seems to speak of an empty virgin death. The two apparitions stand (or rather hang) face to face, juxtaposed in emotional space. "The doll and jacket are an insult to the artist's brilliance," said one observer.

At any rate, the IDA gallery exhibit leaves plenty of room for controversy. No one I saw left with a blank stare.

Holy trinity of TV

Media Speak by Donna Woolfolk Cross. General Publishing, 1983. 254 pp. \$19.95.

Most of us would agree that television plays an important role in today's society; most of us would admit that the quality of television is deplorable at best. And yet, when evening comes around, most of us find ourselves in front of this communal shrine of shared images.

With the average person watching about six hours of television every day, it is hard to imagine that some sort of indelible impression is not being made on the unsuspecting viewer. In her new book, *Media Speak*, Donna Woolfolk Cross gives an illuminating account of just how television shapes our perception of the world.

Although the book doesn't go to radical extremes, the crux of Cross's book is political: television is a product of big business. The TV is a permanent fixture and preaching pulpit for the establishment, whose sole aim is to maintain the status quo. Television keeps the masses complaisant and entertained while preaching the holy trinity of the American way—see, want, buy.

Cross stops the flow of images for us, turns off the hypnotic glare, and wittily scrutinizes the gamut of television programming: sitcoms, advertisements, game shows, soap operas, news "shows," political messages. Behind each one she uncovers the true message being portrayed and the true propaganda being delivered.

In one chapter, titled "All the News that Fits," Cross examines the network and local news shows. These shows, which are supposedly objective (and for most people are their only source of information) stop far short of presenting an

happens. News programs are primarily ruled by the necessity of competing in the rating game. The emphasis is on making the news presentable in a nice safe package. The story must be exciting and palatable for the average viewer. As Cross says, "People are getting more news than before but they are actually less well-informed."

The last section of *Media Speak*, "The Politicians" shows the hype and propaganda behind political elections and the near absolute control over the media an elected official has. When one chairman of the Republican party was asked what the difference was between selling soap and selling a President, he replied: "Frankly, the disciplines are basically the same." The only difference is if you don't like the soap you can throw it away; it takes a few years to get rid of a President.

Cross believes that the reason television gives us such a distorted view of the world is not because of what it says as much as what is left unsaid. Since the sole purpose of commercial television is to sell ads, the big businesses wield omnipotent power when it comes to what is said and shown on the shows they advertise. For the writers of news and prime-time programming this means a lot of their ideas are censored, sometimes beyond recognition. The most dangerous kind of censorship is when writers give up trying to write about ideas.

Media Speak is a welcome addition to the all-too-few informative books about the television industry. Cross has managed a brilliant follow-up to her last book, *Work Abuse*. Like that book, *Media Speak* maintains a humorous and intelligent mixture, which makes for thought-provoking and enjoyable reading. —JOHN NICKLAS

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