

ARTS

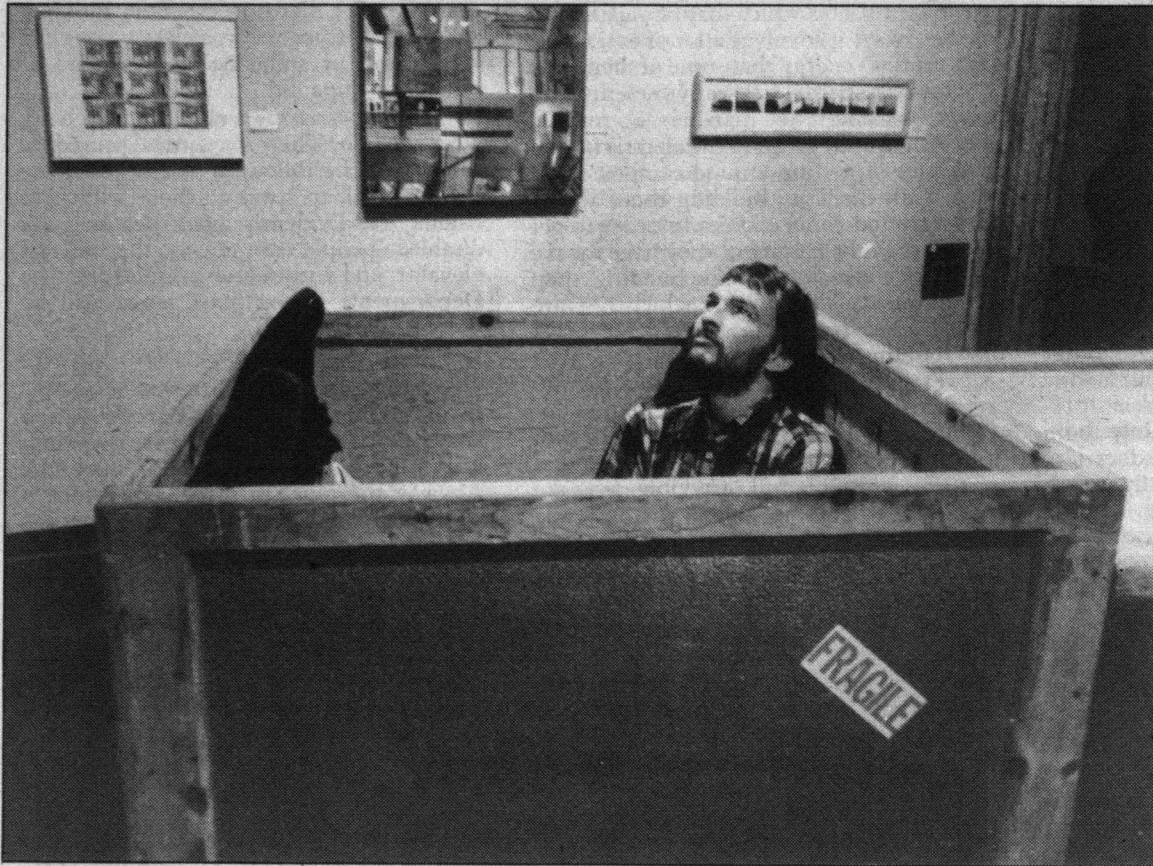


photo Peter Jarvis

Is the Arts Editor about to be shipped to Outer Mongolia by Parcel Post? No, he is just wallowing in a recent sculpture by Dean Eilertson.

Ethanol and aesthetics

Recent Sculptures
Amy Jones and Dean Eilertson
SUB Art Gallery until Jan 31.

review by Jens Andersen

"Graham Hicks hit the nail right on the head," Ray told me when the Thursday afternoon staff meeting was over, "Your reviews are illogical, badly written and vindictive."

Ray's comment, I should hasten to add, was in no way hostile, for Ray is never hostile, only unswervingly forthright in speaking his mind. In fact, so great was Ray's concern and solicitude for my wrong-headed attitude towards modern art, that he had volunteered to escort me to the SUB Art Gallery for my first-ever opening night. There he would introduce me to the artists, who through their explanations of their works, would overcome my prejudices and facilitate my appreciation of the works on display.

But first we were to go up to RATT where he and some fellow staffers would soften me up with some preliminary consciousness-raising about colour theory, composition, etc. The consciousness-raising, alas, failed, as did my counter-educational offensive, in which I tried to convince them that humans are more emotionally suggestible through the auditory nerves than the optic nerves, and that as a result, one is inevitably less moved by painting than by a good piece of music. Which is the reason lovers always say, "They're playing our song," and not "they're exhibiting our picture," and why a dirge is more depressing than mourners' dress.

But after a few beers our differences seemed to sort of melt away, and we turned our attentions to Hot Cottage, who were beginning to play a competent set of old blues-rock favourites like "Just a Little Bit" and "All Your Lovin' ". I dropped back downstairs for a few minutes to see how many suckers the Inner Peace Movement had managed to recruit for their self-development seminar but when I saw they had only roped in two people I decided I would just as soon avoid it.

So I rejoined the others in RATT for another beer, and then we headed down to the gallery. We purchased a round of wine at the bar at the door, then went into the gallery, where a fair crowd of first-nighters was milling about.

The first sculpture we experienced was "Ascent and Spiral Descent" by Dean Eilertson. The sculpture consists of a box or packing crate about four feet square with a cantilevered ramp leading up to it. The idea is to mount the ramp in stages and then descend into the box on the spiral steps inside it, whereupon one experiences an aesthetic orgasm.

So the Gateway staffers began to file slowly up the ramp, myself at the tail end of the line. This was a big mistake, for by the time I reached the platform just before the box I could feel my aesthetic sensibility "coming" and before the person ahead could step out of the box and let me in I was yelling, "I am master of

all I survey!"

Talk about premature ejaculation!

But the post-coital rest in the box was very soothing and relaxing and I took advantage of it to drain my wineglass. I purchased another, talked briefly to Eilertson (who said his life's ambition was to become Gateway Arts Editor), and went over to Amy Jones' "Separation Contained" - a roomy sculpture with a Women's and Men's entrance - and entered by the latter. What a surprise! The sculpture was just one long high passage between the two entrances, with a set of steps in the centre.

I walked out the Women's entrance and met Ray who introduced me to Ms. Jones and another lady. Ms. Jones looked timid and nervous, and I wondered if she had been told to expect a slaving, homicidal ogre. I assured her cheerfully that I thought "Separation Contained" was just wonderful, and she seemed to relax.

She took us to her other sculpture, "The Space Between Black and Blue," a sort of giant cubist pyrogy that you can walk into. On the inside of the pyrogy one is subjected to the stereophonic whooshing of traffic sounds travelling from one end of the pyrogy to the other. Jones began telling us how the pyrogy was designed to alter one's perceptions, and I suddenly thought, "Yes, my perception is being altered!"

I felt suffused with a feeling of warmth, and I relaxed with such ease that I wondered how I could possibly have dreaded coming here. I noticed there was no wine in my glass. The others' glasses were empty too, so we headed back to the bar for more. Then back to "Separation Contained" where we sat on the inside steps and I listened blissfully as Jones explained how the sculpture forced on to rethink one's ideas about the relationships between men and women.

The rest of the evening passed rather hazily. I remember wandering through Eilertson's "Glass House" made of 42 broken auto windshields mounted on a 4 by 1/2 inch lumber framework, and thinking uproariously, "I shouldn't throw stones," and marvelling at this stupendous, scintillating, and profoundly cosmic witticism, and the deep wells of humor that the whole exhibit gathered its power from, I seemed to hear a vast, rich, intergalactic laughter reverberating through the gallery.

"Ray is right," I thought, "there is something to this modern art."

Anyway, to make a long story short, I went back to the gallery two days later to augment the sketchy and somewhat illegible notes I had taken on the exhibit, and give it a second look-over. Somehow, though, the exhilarating feeling of opening night wasn't there, no matter how hard I tried to recreate it. The broken windshields, the box with the ramp, the joint Men's-Women's room and the giant pyrogy just sort of sat there.

I guess my re-education is going to take a little longer than I thought.

THE CHOPPING BLOCK

by Jens Andersen

The January issue of *Edmonton Magazine* contains a fine little essay by John Duffie about that obscure humorist, the late Will Cuppy. Readers with sharp eyes and memories will recall that the Arts page did a bit to promote the worthy Cuppy last fall, when it featured an extract from his essay on Catherine the Great, an excellent buffoonery which unfortunately was upstaged by a lesser buffoonery, the Art Fraud survey.

Well then, let us praise Cuppy again, for his whimsical deadpan cynicism is a treasure that deserves wider recognition. Take, for instance, this tidbit about Aristotle (a pet hate of Cuppy) which Duffie served up in his article:

Aristotle thought more in actual footage during his life than any other person....Any prize he deserves for doing so should be for quantity, not quality. He would think like one possessed, then announce that swallows spend the winter under water, or that eels are the product of spontaneous generation, or that women have more teeth than men. Then it would be published and taught in schools, because it sounded like the sort of thing that is taught in schools.

Also relevant to you students, who probably labor under the heavily-advertised delusion that art inspires and uplifts people, is this passage from *The Decline and Fall of Practically Everybody*:

Pericles was able to make Athens the City Beautiful by building the Parthenon and other things on the Acropolis and adorning them with a great deal of art. The average Athenian citizen, if he so desired, could daily contemplate the most magnificent specimens of architecture, painting and sculpture the world has ever seen. The effect of this upon the citizens was the same as the effect of art upon citizens today.

The Parthenon cost 700 talents, or about \$875,000. Inside it was a statue of Athena Parthenos, by Phidias, worth around \$1,250,000. It was forty feet in height and was overlaid with ivory and gold. The Athenians accused Phidias of stealing some of the gold while he was making it. He had not stolen any of it, but the Athenians thought he had because that is what they would have done. After a while there was not nearly so much gold on Athena's draperies as there was at first, and pretty soon the statue itself disappeared. It was not nailed down.

Duffie reports that, "Will Cuppy...sad to say, is virtually unknown today even among librarians."

I checked out Rutherford and, sure enough, the only book listed by him is his moderate bestseller *The Decline and Fall of Practically Everybody*. A crying shame, it is, as is the fact that the library has no copy of Sheila Ballantyne's excellent *Norma Jean the Termite Queen*.

Just a few more reasons to give Jim Horsman a good kick in the seat of learning next time you see him.

Amidst the deluge of bilge and press releases that swamped into the Gateway office the other day was an Alberta Government bulletin "Disaster Services News and Notes." It contained a news item about new legislation on transporting dangerous goods in the province, which in turn contained this sentence:

The Alberta Bill deals with the handling for transport, offering for transport and transporting dangerous goods by the road mode.

The night after I read this sentence I had a nightmare in which I was surrounded by a ring of sales booths manned by grinning Peter Lougheed clones hawking T-shirts, posters, buttons, and bumperstickers marked, "Keep on Vehicling (in the truck mode)."

Yours truly is going to Hollywood this weekend on a Twentieth Century Fox press junket. Next week I will be bringing back news about the weather in California, the price and quality of cocaine being offered there, the pulchritude and amiability of the starlets, and, time permitting, critical comments about several upcoming films.

The largesse of the film companies, incidentally, is legendary. Last year, for instance, Warner Bros. phoned us long distance to ask it we would like to get a press release sent to us. This year when the press kit for *Modern Problems* came, with the customary five or six glossy photos and 60-100 pages of information and flak, they also threw in a T-shirt with "Modern Problems" emblazoned across it.

The movie is still waiting to be reviewed, and if the reviewer is size-S the little perk is all theirs.

Hey, I'm not just sick of modern art, I'm sick of kicking it around. From now on no more modern art reviews till I get done with all the book reviews that I have been putting off. Honest Injun!

