

Carol Fraser exhibit immense and original

by S.L. Bowes

There has been a great deal of honest bemusement, uneasy shuffling, and obvious absorption in the Dalhousie Art Gallery these days. The cause of this has been, and will be, until March 27, the 71 paintings, drawings and ink washes which comprise the Carol Fraser Exhibition.

Many of the works, because of their complexity of theme and execution, their juxtaposition of danger and repose — and because one must bring more than a pair of eyes to them — seem, initially, unapproachable. It is impossible to be indifferent. There is something wrenching, something rapturous, something pending in them which demands that one approach them.

That the paintings and drawings, however swarming with detail and symbol, are never cluttered is an indication of Fraser's toughness of thought and line. Indeed, they have an immense power — a kind of dynamic formality — because she never lets them get away from themselves. The symbols, whether personal, social, sexual, or elemental, operate alone, and in association. They are often ambiguous, but never tentative. And truth, however simple or entangled, is in them — unmistakably. Even the most gruesome of symbols — the scalpel in *Major Surgery*, for

example — is striking, but not foreign.

It is important to note the sense of belonging in Fraser's work. Her depiction of the luscious, surging network of fibre and protoplasm, whether human or vegetative, is certainly not catchpenny sensationalism. (The paint is not heaped up; the focus is not sprayed around; the colour, while often luminous, is never strident or splashy.) Rather, there is a glorification of the inside of things in order to demonstrate the fundamental interpenetration and interdependence of the organic world. Humanity — necessarily, and not unhappily — participates in, and contributes to, the general fecundity. Thus, there is integration, coherence, and the aforementioned sense of belonging.

Many of the works, however, suggest that a confrontation between industrial and natural universes, or artificial and natural impulses, can lead to ruinous surroundings and circumstances. The weaponry in *The Couple II* is a sinister reminder of what can happen to any relationship if the forces of disintegration and incoherence are allowed to flourish. It must be noted, however, that there is no facile didacticism in all of this. Fraser's work recognizes the torturous ambiguities of the modern world.

As a whole, Fraser's work gives an overwhelming demonstration of different insights — intellectual, emotional, and sentient. But it is difficult to talk about overall outlook. Each of the works contributes to a vision which is necessarily complicated, and yet generally hopeful. It seems, despite



Lamentation - Carol H. Fraser 1976-77 - oil on linen - 34-5/8" x 26-5/8".

its recognition of the world's nastier influences, to be dominated by the spirit of embrace.

In order to appreciate the nature and effect of this remarkable exhibition one is not obliged to be familiar with aesthetic principles and formulae. Indeed, because it is unlikely that we have seen anything

like it before, these conventions might prove cumbersome or inadequate. And because it is impossible to translate its power, I shall end this review with a "go one, go all" exhortation. The Carol Fraser Exhibition is immense and original, and deserves, not to be heard about, but to be seen.

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Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf?

by Jeff Round

"No more honest or unsparing autobiographical play exists in dramatic literature. What grips us... is the need, the vital, driving plaint, of a human being." When drama critic Kenneth Tynan wrote that in the 1950's he was referring to Eugene O'Neill's last play, *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. If one were to strike out "autobiographical" that phrase might work equally well for Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Albee's play belongs in the same dramatic category with other works such as *Long Day's Journey* and *The Country Girl*. The influence of Strindberg's *The Dance of Death* (an adap-

tation of which was well-presented by members of the Dal Theatre Dept. recently) is clearly seen.

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? is the stabbing psychological portrait of two aging, unfulfilled people who married one another to prolong their mutual martyrdom. But while they publicly destroy one another, and anyone else who comes too close, they have one great secret happiness: an imaginary son, upon whom they bestow all the care and devotion that they are unable to show for each other.

We meet George and Martha as they return home from a campus party. George is an associate professor at a New England university and Martha is the daughter of the president there. We soon realize that there is great dissatisfaction and frustration between them. Elizabeth Taylor gives an excellent performance as Martha, the tough, vulgar "earth mother", her hair graying and her face lined, the features fading into a middle-aged puffiness. Inside, though, Martha really wants to acquiesce - to give in to George's strong, quiet authority. She wants to, but doesn't know how.

Burton's classical skills are given a challenge worthy of the undertaking in this film. As the seemingly meek, restrained professor married to an unmanageable shrew, Burton never goes wrong. In one

scene, on the swings, his great Welsh voice sounding amazingly like Dylan Thomas reciting "Fern Hill", he delivers a mesmerizing speech with a wonderful tenderness and urgency. Their response to one another in these roles being so great, not surprisingly the next film that the Burtons made together was *The Taming of the Shrew* - the flip side of the coin from *Virginia Woolf*.

The movie has been shortened somewhat from the play, and the action is not confined to a single set. This has the effect of lessening the tension built up so intensely in the first half of the movie, but in a sense it serves much the same purpose as the play's intermissions. For this is not simply a play made into a movie, but rather, it is a movie transferred successfully and skillfully from another medium - the theatre - onto the screen. What it has lost in the unity of a single set it has gained from the intimacy of the camera. Shot in a richly textured black and white, the camera moves penetratingly, providing a claustrophobic effect as it lurks about the disordered living room where most of the story unfolds. An extremely effective score by Alex North frames the film, adding the finishing touch to an otherwise already-perfect film.

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did serve its purpose. It showed the loopholes which exist in the Constitution, and this will hopefully result in a study of it and the making of necessary changes. The defeat of the motion could be construed as a condoning of election irregularities, but I feel that this is clearly not what it shows. It succeeded in two respects. 1) It showed that election irregularities will not slip quietly under the table. 2) A committee will

be set up to make definite recommendations to prevent the same thing from happening again.

One other thing deserves note. All the members of the new Council present at the old Council meeting who spoke (excluding the President and Vice-President elect) favoured the new election. And, they spoke very well. This is certainly encouraging for the future.

Keith Evans

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