

Art Gallery Features

House of Horrors

by Beth Cumming

Rita McKeough's *Blind Spot* enters into the familiar territory of a family bungalow; the living room with a sofa set and giant TV, the parents' room with a double bed, dresser and night table, the kitchen with stove, table, and chairs, the bathroom, the kids' room with toys and books on the beds, and behind a screen door the backyard with real grass and a newly dug

garden. Then you notice that the membrane-like walls have bruises; recent purplish-blue ones and older greenish-yellow ones. There are also painful-looking slashes and cuts that have been sewn up.

McKeough says the house is taking on the slaps and punches that would otherwise mark women and children in a domestically violent situation. These are wounds that are usually hidden by makeup and sunglasses.

The soundtrack makes audible some of the psychological tension of living in a place where violence is an immediate threat as well as a recent memory. A steady drum beat with occasional coughs and footsteps walking on pavement back up the repeating monologue.

In the master bedroom the script takes on an intimate tone, like a diary or a thought.

"We are face to face — we are looking through the eye of a needle.

"Sometimes I walk and walk with my eyes closed all night long." The voice suggest how women can continue for years to live in a life-threatening situation.

The kids' bedroom is dimly lit; the translucent walls let in light as well as sounds from other rooms. It's easy to imagine the kids lying awake listening to a

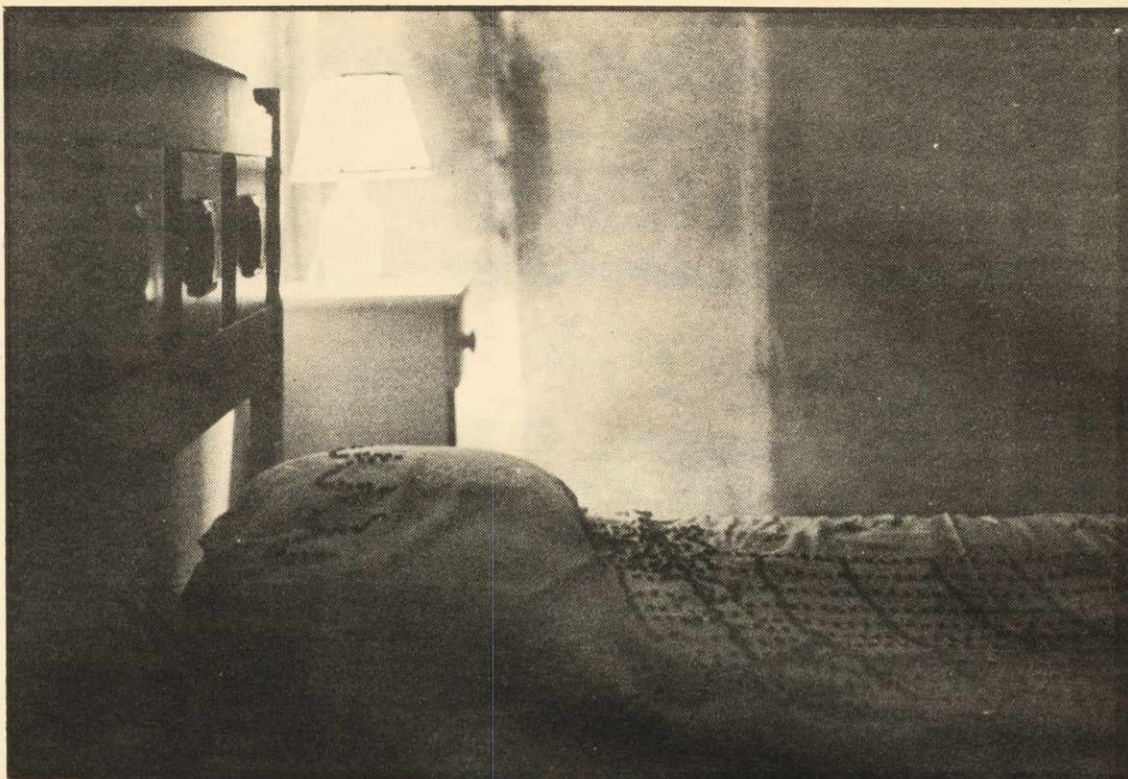


PHOTO: ROCHELLE OWEN

The master bedroom is an eerie experience

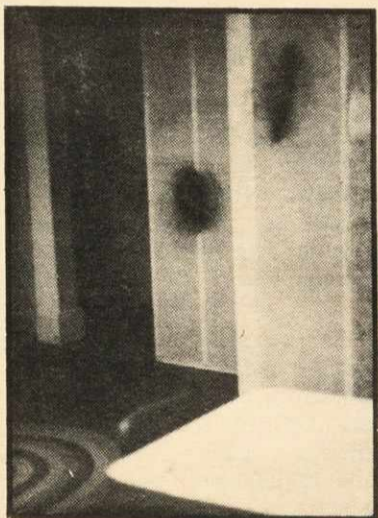


PHOTO: ROCHELLE OWEN

Bruises on the walls

garden.

The people who must live there have gone out but there are voices which seem to be coming from the walls.

"I can't keep this a secret any more . . . something's cracking."

family fight.

Outside in the backyard, things are a little less claustrophobic. The peat moss smells nice and you can hear kids playing or fighting in the corner of garden. Closer listening reveals some things that may suggest sexual abuse:

"Your fingerprints are all over me . . . you think I'm lying . . . what more do you want? . . . shut up." Or maybe they are doing to someone else what was done to them.

McKeough's work has long been concerned with the effects that physical structures, and by analogy social structures, have on people's lives. *Blind Spot* is the third and final work in her

series about domestic shelter.

The first installation in the series, *Retaining Wall*, like *Blind Spot*, comes from McKeough's own experiences of growing up in a traditional working-class white family. Sound tapes were used as well as text on the furniture, rugs, and walls.

"Let me go . . . all the twists and ties of a happy home . . . I recall the tears."

There was also a concern with how much privacy the occupants had from each other and from the rest of the world. Public rooms like the living room and the kitchen were treated differently from 'private' rooms like the bedrooms and the bathroom. *Exchange Within* was an

attempt to make positive suggestions of how a single family home could be made more human to better meet the emotional needs of the occupants. McKeough created a set of family members in a certain point in time. The house was to take an active part in the life of the family, giving protection and encouragement.

These earlier installations include the point that privacy is a fundamental requirement for social interplay. *Blind Spot* identifies privacy and isolation as one of the conditions that allow for woman and child battering. *Blind Spot* is at the Eye Level Gallery, 2182 Gottingen Street, until October 24.

Interior and exterior views

Love vs technology

by Beth Cumming

In the modern age, privacy is out the window," says Valerie LeBlanc in reference to her recent installation, *Love vs. Technology*.

The gallery is divided into interior and exterior views with a speaker in each. A soundtrack bombards the viewer with alternately soothing and jarring sounds.

The interior "space of the mind" contains a comfy chair, a record player, records, and a lamp. The walls are made of reject videocassettes painted black and other Halifax junk. To LeBlanc, this is a reference to apocalypse — people would have to make use of the leftovers of the techno-age, perhaps, as repair and building materials.

Part of the dividing wall is a painting of a huge broken teacup and saucer on the interior side. Telephone poles and wires are on the exterior side of the painting. There is a black bench and a stunted street lamp that glows eerie blue. The sound track is 16 minutes long and meant to be

listened to from start to finish. It includes sounds of children playing, airplanes and helicopters passing overhead, pouring rain, and waves. Popular music is edited to pick out certain lyrics. Also, speaking parts break in from time to time. An old woman tells about how the elevator in her building doesn't work. An authoritative voice states, "Technology should be used to develop the brain instead

of inundating the private space."

One of the concerns of *Love vs. Technology* is how the media sensationalize life, while at the same time changes are taking place against our will and common good. These changes become integral and we get used to it, says LeBlanc.

Love vs. Technology is at the Centre for Art Tapes, 2156 Brunswick St., until Oct. 24.

After learning more about the respective musical backgrounds of this duo, I was no longer surprised to see the undeniable talent and, above all, versatility manifested in every piece they performed, such as "I've Got a Crush On You" by Linda Ronstadt and "All of Me" (the title song to the movie by Steve Martin). When asked just how this versatility came about, the duo explained that they "liked to adapt according to the setting they were in," and that they "were open to all kinds of music", for, after all, "any good music is

inclined towards jazz. Kurt's interests range from jazz to classical and all the way to new wave or pop, Pet Shop Boys and U2 being two of his favourites.

So how did this multi-talented duo stumble upon each other, then? "Well, through a pop band called The Screaming Trees," explained Kurt, after which they worked together on a few jingle recordings and decided they made a good team. Sure enough, they were right, for with both their talents combined, they make for a promising future in

A duo with no name

by Mariam Pirbhai

Last Thanksgiving weekend I was lucky enough to be able to watch the Christine Glen and Kurt Hahn Duo at Pepe's Cafe and Grill. Lucky, because it made for an extremely enjoyable Friday night, with Christine's powerful yet dulcet voice, and Kurt's obvious rapport with the keyboards. Later, I was also fortunate enough to get the chance to speak to this multi-talented duo between sessions. This was

the duo's first public appearance together, which was surprising because they harmonized with and complemented each other so effortlessly.

Previously, Christine had been singing in Toronto in various Broadway musicals and Charlottetown Festivals (where she is also better known), whereas Kurt had been building up his reputation as "The Synthesizer Wizard", spending much of his time playing for local dance companies and the like.

worth doing!" And what exactly is their definition of good music? Well, while Christine is more

the music scene, and one I'm sure we'll all be hearing a lot more about.

