

## ARTS

# Using laughter as a weapon

BY JENNIFER BECK

HERE IS SOMETHING exceedingly familiar about the exhibition *No Laughing Matter*. This collection of pieces by thirteen internationally-known artists is presented with a solidarity that blurs the distinct anti-ism of the individual works, and leaves the viewer with an impression of union that belies the disparate commentaries.

## EXHIBITION *No Laughing Matter* Dalhousie Art Gallery

This unity is achieved through the cement of humour that lends the show its balance and coherence. Some artists have combined text with visuals, and the effect of this is direct and striking. The textual pieces take some of the ambiguity out of the message of the art, but replace it with an undercurrent of tension that gives the humour its edge: be it ironic, sarcastic, or cynical.

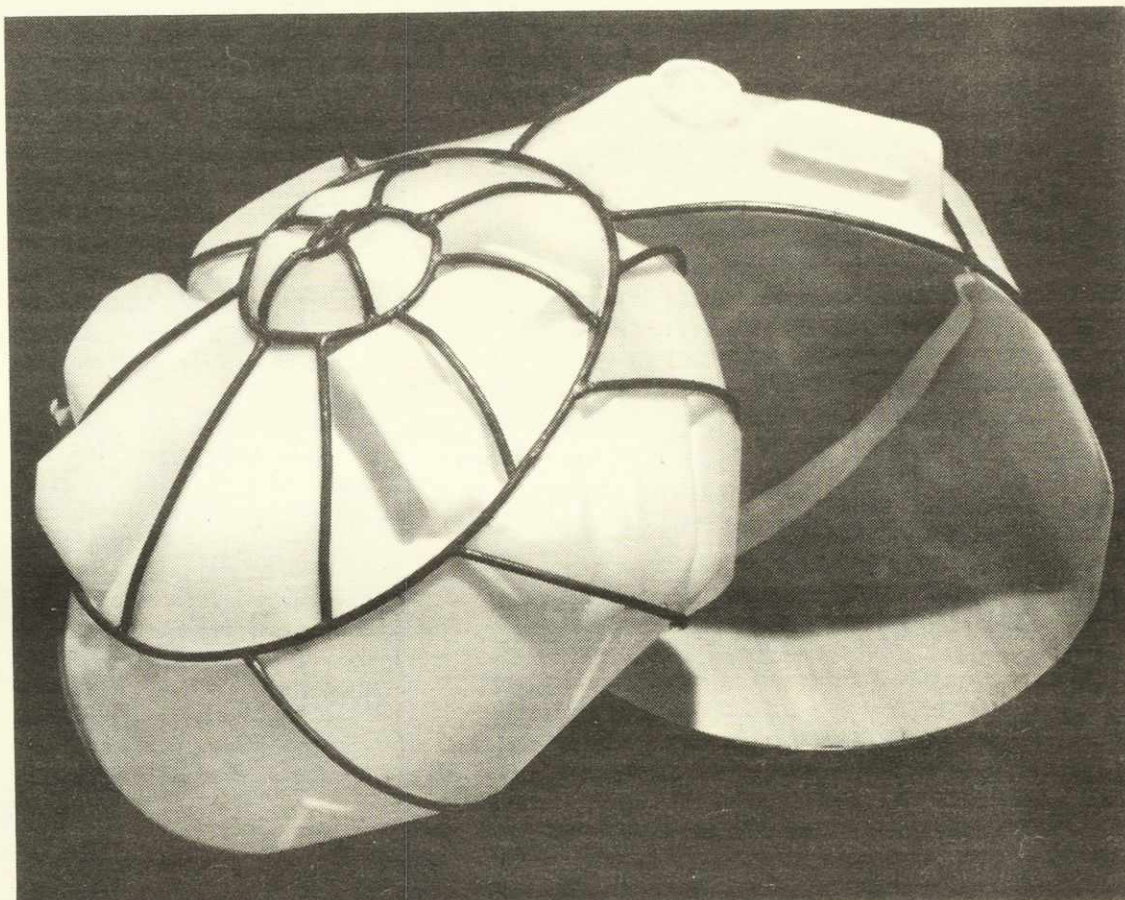
The humour provides an open invitation for the works to be at least superficially understood, and it would be possible to see the exhibition and leave the gallery sensing nothing incongruous. But this is a show dedicated to social commentary and criticism, and the point is to assess why these humorous portrayals have the power to frustrate us, exasperate us, and in some cases make us thoroughly uncomfortable.

One series of particularly vivid photographs is by Cindy Sherman. Sherman was commissioned to create full-page ads for a New York boutique's designer lines, but she took the haute couture and modelled it herself in the various guises of beaten, manic, and gleefully satanic women. The series has nothing like the typical fashion pose that objectifies the female form (lessness), and only four of the six shots were actually cleared by the boutique to run as ads. This folio of sexual stereotyping is a blatant, bold slap in the face of the commercial powers that be.

Those same powers are also well taken to task by the Guerrilla Girls, a group of women who hide their identities with gorilla masks and gloves and picket scenes of art-world discrimination. The group bills itself as the "conscience of the art world," and it uses its posters full of incriminating statistics to point out the folly of idealizing one's reality instead of realizing one's ideal.

Ilona Granet highlights the problem of sexual harassment on the street by using street-style signs. These bright, "punny" pieces use the imperative tone of street signs to command men to "curb your animal instinct." The humour is obvious, but the frustration comes from the very real necessity for the signs to be taken seriously.

No Laughing Matter also shows pieces by different sculptors, Christy Rupp and Tom Otterness among



Christy Rupp, *Technobabble*, 1990.

them. Christy Rupp has three pieces in the show, and to see them is an exhibit in itself. The delicacy of her shell forms totally belies the materials used to create them, and the message of environmental responsibility is clear.

Each artist in the exhibit deserves some kind of mention, but the best possible scenario would be to see them for yourself. The exhibit will be on display in the Dalhousie Art Gallery until April 19, handing out free Gran Fury stickers while supplies last.

Nina Felshin, curator of *No Laughing Matter*, will present an illustrated talk on the show on Thursday, 19 March, at 8:00 pm in the Gallery. This is free and all are welcome, so go find out what is so familiar about this exhibit for yourself.

## HEY! FREE STUFF! HEY!

Mid-March. You can't wait for school to end but there's no way you'll get everything done before it does. How's this for a deal: **NIRVANA, TEENAGE FAN CLUB, NITZER EBB**

Pick your favourite single by each of the above artists and write them down with your name and telephone number. Then run it up to the Gazette on the third floor of the SUB. You could win a CD single of each courtesy of the Dalhousie Gazette and MCA records. Sound simple? It is!

Winners will be chosen in a random draw on March 23. Chances of winning depend on the sheer volume of the response. Names of the lucky five will be published in the March 26 issue of the Gazette, or come ask us. Watch these pages!

The Dalhousie Theatre Student Society and the Dalhousie Arts Society are proud to present the **Three Stages Theatre Festival**. This exciting three day event will feature a series of one act plays written, directed, and performed by Dalhousie students. At 8:00 pm on **March 12, 13, and 14** three non-traditional theatre spaces in the Life Sciences Building will play host to this theatre extravaganza. Tickets are \$2 for an evening or \$5 for three nights. Theatre passes and tickets are available at the door. For further information, please contact the Arts Hot Line, 494-2146.