

## Evan Penny's art exposed in exhibit

Evan Penny & Figurative Works  
Fine Arts Building Gallery  
to January 31

review by June Chua

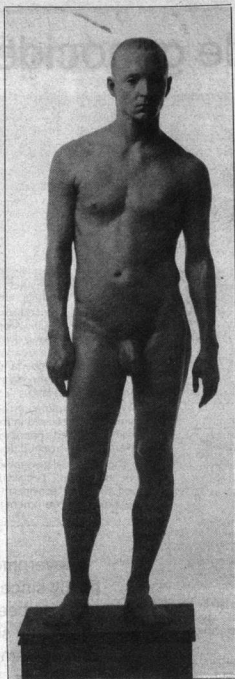
The stark realism of nude sculptures discomforts the viewer. Yet is drawn to these life-like models with their realistic, sometimes repulsive, details. These startling depictions of the human body are displayed at the Evan Penny exhibition. Penny's 4/5 life-size sculptures are mounted on block pedestals, bringing them up to eye-level. Thus, the viewer comes face-to-face with these human-like forms. In this way, one gets the feeling that the figures can, at any time, walk away or even talk to you.

Details make Evan Penny's works alarmingly close to the real thing: veins and muscles at the temples, arms, legs and feet protrude slightly, giving human physical qualities. One particularly grotesque model featured cellulite sags around the thigh area; offensive, but true to physical decay. Some sculptures are twinned with another figure, supposedly ancient and of Greek origin — having the green, aged-bronze casting. This provides a counterbalance to the "modern," more realistic figures.

Curiously, in this exhibit, Penny has chosen to feature men as lithe, lean-muscled figures while women are shown to have rounder, "earth-mother" shapes.

"Figurative Works From Local Collections" are also on display at the gallery. These paintings and prints deal with nude bodies and individual perceptions of the human body. One example of distorted perspective was a depiction of physical agony and suffering: An army-green bolt of color cut through the middle of a dark, somber background. Inside the arrow-shaped bolt were discernable hands, lower limbs, and, barely visible, a solemn Christ-like face. These characteristics gave the impression of inner torment.

One especially intriguing painting showed a woman in a black swimming suit, against an oppressive dark green-and-purple background. One is struck by the masculine aspects of this woman: the face and figure, except for the presence of breasts and make-up, were man-like: powerfully built. This illustrates the male view of women that seems to dominate this display. Other works, however, are concerned with certain aspects



Nude sculpture by Penny

of the human figure. One picture featured an obese woman sitting in a chair. Certain parts of her body were grossly exaggerated and therefore, individualized. The rest of her body and face was exceedingly fleshy, taking on a contorted effect.

Overall, the observer is made to feel almost like an intruder in the private world of the naked being — stripped of all superficial decorations. This strange but fascinating collection is definitely worth a look. The works here are as diverse and interesting as the human body.

W.O. Mitchell's play at Waterdale

## Jake and the Kid on stage

Jake and the Kid  
Walterdale Theatre  
run ends Jan. 23

review by Randal Smathers

Walterdale Theatre is updating a summer tradition in the winter-time. The tradition is the annual Klondike melodrama in August; the twist is that this one is written by W.O. Mitchell.

While *Jake and the Kid* is not officially a Klondike melodrama, it certainly has the air of one. For those unfamiliar with the series, the characters originated in Maclean's magazine in 1942, then were put on CBC Radio and into Mitchell's books and plays. The stories revolve around the lives of the Kid, his Ma, their hired hand Jake, and the upright citizenry of Crocus, Saskatchewan. In the *Walterdale* show, the most important citizen is Old Man Gatenby, who tangles with Jake regularly and humorously.

This conflict is the special emphasis of the first play of the two-part production at the *Walterdale*. Titled "Cabin Fever", the play deals with Ma, Jake, the Kid and Gatenby stuck in one small cabin during the worst prairie blizzard since "the blue snow of oh-six and oh-seven."

Director Thomas Usher, currently working on his MFA in directing at the U of A, has tried to recapture the original flavor of the radio drama in this play. To this end, he has brought Kate Plaskin on stage with a whole variety of sound effects materials, including a nutcracker to simulate knuckle-and-spine-cracking. This is an interesting idea, but after the first try or two, it gets in the way. Also, her modern mike stood out as anachronistic in a production where even the stagehands wore costumes.

It is that type of small problem that prevents this production from being completely enjoyable. The pacing is not quite right, which means that by the time that Jake and Gatenby have finally had enough of each other in "Cabin Fever", I had too.

The second half of the show, "The Day Jake Made Her Rain", was much shorter and faster paced, perhaps because it is a script that has been used before, while "Cabin Fever" is a new adaptation by Mitchell. The second play also works with the relationship between the title characters more, whereas "Cabin Fever" excludes the Kid in favor of Gatenby as Jake's main foil.

"The Day Jake Made Her Rain" involves

Jake telling a too-tall tale, namely that he can bring rain in the middle of a massive drought. Gatenby calls his bluff, and so Jake produces a remarkable machine, which may produce rain but definitely produces laughs. This is the part of the play where Hank Perry does his best work as Jake, trying to convince the good folk of Crocus to believe in his remarkable contraption.

Elsewhere, Perry was not this good as Jake, as his bluster should have been toned down a little in spots. Part of the problem may have stemmed from trying the impossible task of matching the Jake I had created in my mind

The stories give a  
fascinating  
glimpse into what  
entertained  
Canadians before  
TV

from a recent reading of Mitchell's wonderful book. I especially enjoyed Chuck Shobe as Gatenby and Damien Atkins as the Kid. Shobe showed good variety of expression in his battles with Jake. As the Kid, Atkins gave a good sense of wide-eyed innocence, although his worship of Jake, the driving force in the books, was largely absent here.

Usher worked closely with Mitchell in producing this play, and credits the playwright for bringing his characters to life on stage. In turn, Mitchell called Usher — in the best sense — "The most persistent young man I have ever met" for his doggedness in tracking down old radio scripts with which to work.

Much of the audience seemed to be of the age that they probably heard these shows first on radio, and that is a pity. The stories, and Jake's tall tales within the stories, give a fascinating glimpse into what entertained Canadians before TV. As such, they not only entertain, but enlighten, and the current *Walterdale* production does a good job of both.

The run is on currently and continues until January 23. Shows start at 8 p.m., with Sunday matinees at 2. For six bucks and two hours of your time, you can enter an enjoyable time machine which is as unusual and efficient as Jake's rain machine.

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