

Contemporary art show held every five years

Nine Canadian artists invited by Documenta IX

Nine Canadian artists, a record number, will be represented at **Documenta IX**, one of the world's most prestigious contemporary art shows.

The exhibition takes place in Kassel, Germany, June 13 to September 26.

"I think that most people in the art world would agree that *Documenta*, of a number of large contemporary art shows that are held periodically, is the most important," says Diana Nemiroff, curator of contemporary art, National Gallery of Canada.

Nemiroff says that there are several reasons why *Documenta* is regarded as highly as it is, one being its use of a curatorial committee.

"In shows like the Venice Biennale where there is national participation which is not controlled by any central curatorial committee, *Documenta* is seen as being capable of expressing a curatorial vision, a curatorial take on the actual moment in contemporary art. It is an exhibition that has been able to use its structure very well in terms of defining a theme."

The director of *Documenta* and head of the curatorial committee this time around is Jan Hoet, director of the *Museum of Contemporary Art of Gent*, Belgium. Hoet defined the role of *Documenta IX* in a statement from the curatorial committee last October:

"*Documenta* cannot be a majority election, neither an anthology, nor a collection. It is not an encyclopedia, neither a festival or a museum. It has not to be a laboratory for experiments, neither a stage for celebration, nor a piece of ideological machinery. The real challenge for *Documenta* is to be able to receive with as much care and respect what art has to offer to the present. Then only is it possible to believe that *Documenta* as an institution has achieved its role."

Nemiroff says that the inclusion of so many Canadians is a reflection of both the artists and the curator.

"It speaks highly of the Canadian contemporary art scene but it also says



Two Machines for Feeling by Tony Brown
Photo courtesy of National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

something about the curator. He is known as someone who is independent and somewhat of a maverick. He takes an intuitive rather than an academic approach and this gives him a certain amount of freedom."

Mr. Hoet is no stranger to Canada. In 1984, through the offices of the Department of External Affairs' International Cultural Relations Division, he made an exploratory tour of Canada. He later organized two shows by Canadian artists, Betty Goodwin and Roland Poulin.

"It is true," says Nemiroff, "he had some background knowledge of Canada and he had established contacts with General Idea and many West Coast artists in particular. Canada was not a big, vast unknown to him."

In the end, Mr. Hoet chose three artists from British Columbia, three from Ontario and three from Quebec.

Quebec is represented by Angela Grauerholz, a photographer known for cityscapes, portraits and deserted interiors; Geoffrey James, a journalist, whose photographs of Italian ruins and gardens were published in two books last year; and Rober Racine, who is known

for his large installation pieces often based on the French language and *Le Petit Robert* dictionary.

Tony Brown, a sculptor who teaches at the University of Ottawa, is one of the artists from Ontario. He has worked with engineers and computer programmers to produce pieces that reveal the tensions inherent in contemporary life.

Vera Frenkel, a Toronto-based multimedia and video artist, and Royden Rabinovitch, a sculptor whose one-man show (curated by Rudi Fuchs, who also curated *Documenta* in the past) opened in The Hague this February, round out the Ontario contingent.

The only painter among the Canadians is Attila Richard Lukacs. The West Coast artist now makes his home in Berlin. Conceptual artist Rodney Graham and video artist Stan Douglas, whose parodies of the television commercial format were featured at the Sydney Biennial, are the other two British Columbia artists picked by Hoet to represent Canada.

Documenta is held every five years. **Documenta VII** featured six Canadian artists.

