

Faces without eyes

The Greeks had huge ones. Greek theatrical masks were up to three feet high and had built in megaphones.

King Tut's burial mask was made of solid gold.

African masks are valued around the world as art objects.

In New Orleans, they don masks and let loose in a virtual frenzy every year the day before Lent.

Every society, be it Mexican, American, Indian or Japanese, has masks somewhere in its culture. Ceremonial, theatrical or just plain entertaining masks are a part of everyone's life.

Because of its universality, the mask is perhaps the easiest of all art forms to relate to.

And if you want to rediscover a bit of the mystery of the mask, Latitude 53 is the place to visit.

Latitude 53 is currently hosting an exhibition entitled *A Thousand Eyes*, which consists of about 100 masks. Most of the masks are made by two local mask makers, the rest are from all over Canada.

The two local artists are Linda Ould, and Michelle Garneau.

Both women started making masks last year at Halloween. They met later on, and discovered that they had this fascinating art form in common.

"I wanted to do something totally different," said Garneau. "I wanted to work with a new medium. The year before that I had made masks with my students and decided that this is the medium I wanted to use next. It seemed like there was a lot of potential."

"I've always been interested in drawing faces," said Garneau. "I'm interested in faces and people."

"There's so much potential with masks. We all have so many masks inside ourselves," said Garneau. "They are such an escape. They offer so much freedom."

Garneau was also interested in the performance aspect. "People become so totally different because they wear a mask. It frees them and they can become who they want to be for that time."

Ould, on the other hand, started by making masks for her daughters, but after showing them the technique she continued doing them herself.

Ould began by designing masks, and then putting art on them. Ould's masks have ducks, snakes, and flowers painted on them. Her masks are mixed media, art works, rather than simple masks.

"I put a lot of inner feeling on my masks," said Ould. "I like masks because they relate to the face. Each one of my masks has one emotion, one inner feeling that I purposely put on it. I believe in decorating the form."

When asked if she took any inspiration from primitive masks, Garneau replied that neither she nor Ould did. "These masks are

from another culture, another society," said Garneau.

Both artists use mass produced materials. "These materials say more about our society than if we were to work with mud and twigs," said Garneau.

Garneau believes that mask makers today are making masks as art objects because masks have lost most of their function (religious or ceremonious), "Both Linda and I started making masks for the wall then evolved to making masks to wear."

Garneau makes most of her masks from moulds with the plaster that body casts are made of.

"I have several moulds," she said, "and some of my masks are actually made on people's faces (for example she has one mask that she moulded from her brother's face) and several of my masks are made off the same mould."

Some of her masks are glazed; others are just painted with acrylic paint. Lately Garneau has been experimenting with wire mesh and draping material - making partial and half masks.

Ould's masks, on the other hand, are paper relief with painted designs. Some are decorated with leather, some with fur. "Whatever is on hand, I use on my masks." One of her masks even has dried flowers on it.

Both enjoy wall mask and think that masks that can't be worn and are only for decorative purposes are vital to the art of mask making.

"Wall masks are very suitable to our society. A mask on the wall is always there, and always living, always staring at you," is Garneau's philosophy. "But a mask in the theatre is momentary; it's here, then it's gone."

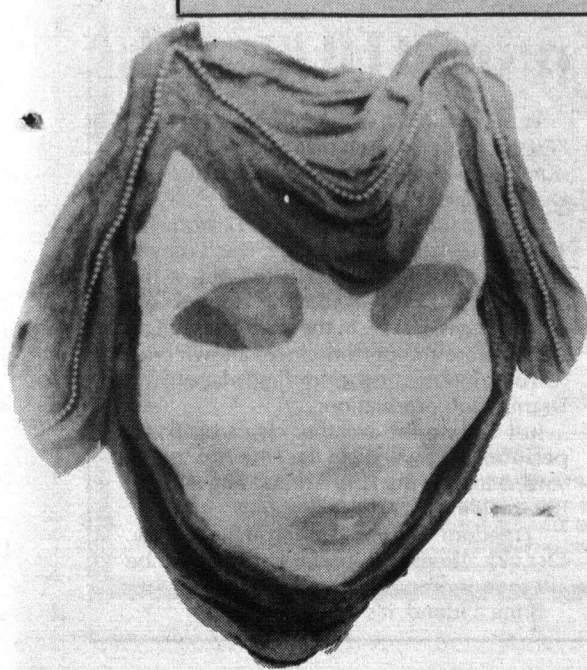
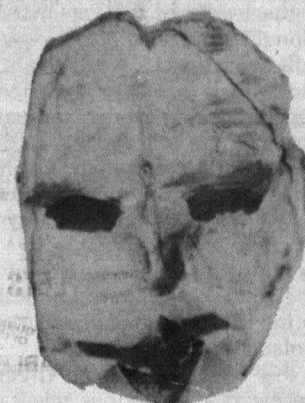
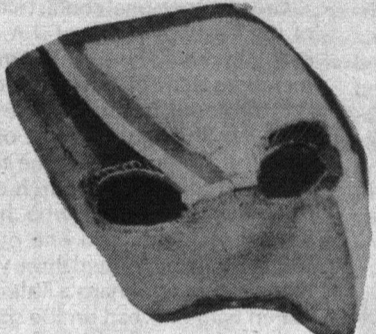
Ould thinks that wall masks are more imaginative. "A face mask has structural limitations (it can only be a certain size - not all that much larger than the human face, and not all that much smaller). A wall mask is freer. While the face mask is limited to the character that the person wearing the mask wants to be, the wall mask can free your imagination more."

Neither artist custom makes masks, and both enjoy painting. Garneau likes painting on silk and textured painting, while Ould likes watercolors, acrylic and still lifes.

Both stress the freedom that masks offer to artists. Masks in the exhibition at Latitude 53 are made out of such diverse materials as bark, wax, wire, plaster, and one mask is even made out of the hip bone of a deer. There are even some knitted and quilted masks.

Garneau sees a resurgence of masks: "You even see masks in rock videos these days." Its a long way from Greece to MTV.

Heck, I didn't even see one megaphone in the whole show.



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