

American, eh?—Art from south of the border

American Accents
—Art Gallery of Nova Scotia until
Feb. 6

Review by Michael Hymers

Since January 5th, the **Art Gallery of Nova Scotia** (at the corner of Coburg and LeMarchant) has been displaying a fascinating exhibit entitled *American Accents*, consisting of over forty different works by twenty-one different American artists.

Included are three whose artistic careers extend as far back as the 1930's: Ilya Bolotowsky, Montreal-born Philip Guston, and Raoul Hague.

The three very geometric works by Bolotowsky, "Tondo in

Blues, Red and White" (1976), "Red Diamond" (1980), and "Horizontal Ellipse" (1979), feature comparisons of different shades of one or two colours, contrasted with a single shade of a third colour.

Guston's "City" (1969) and "Ominous Land" (1972) are characterized by understatement, and at least in the latter case, irony—in addition to which they are arguably rather unattractive.

Raoul Hague's sculptures in walnut, "Chataugua" (1966) and "Onandaga" (1977) offer accentuations of the natural forms of the wood.

These works are not American so much due to a distinctive

"Americanness"; rather, they are American insofar as they are not European.

As Henry Geldzahler, organizer of the exhibition, points out in the accompanying literature, prior to World War II and the Great Depression there existed the commonly held view that in order to be an "artist" one needed to go to Paris. But a sense of artistic community developed during the 1930's and 1940's whose effect was to make New York "a kind of latter-day Paris."

Throughout the exhibit there is a great variety of styles—accents. Some of the featured works

depend upon elegant simplicity and even minimalism.

Christopher Wilmarth's sculptures in steel and glass, "Slip" (1972) and "Gnomon's Parade (Standard)" (1980) seem to suggest bare reductions of the traditional landscape and the human form respectively.

Ellsworth Kelly carries things one step further with his experiments in ground and subject. His "Light Green Panel" (1982) succeeds in driving the ground right out of the painting and leaving a sort of generic subject. He "creates" space by annexing the wall and causing its metamorphosis to ground. One may even extrapolate that the entire room, the observer, is made part of the ground.

Perhaps the highlight of the display consists of four large prints by Frank Stella, and here again, ground and subject play important roles. Stella achieves extremely subtle mixings of colours, shapes and indeed, ground and subject, in "Pergusa Three" (1983) to the extent that the subject seems to "grow" out of the ground.

Similar effects are found in his other works, especially "Swan Engraving III" (1982), though here distinct colour is superceded in importance by intricate texture and simple shadings. Some of Stella's latest works are three-dimensional and his rivet-

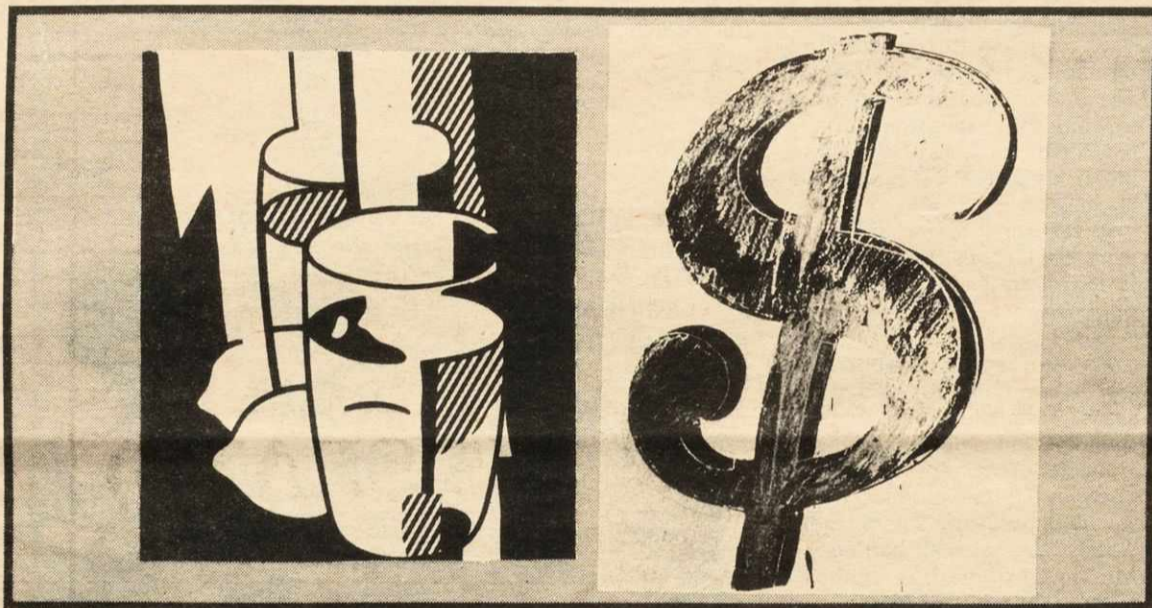
ing patterns literally extend from the wall.

Having moved from simplicity, I should mention Joan Mitchell, whose work "Quiet Please" (1979) offers a much more restless approach than Frank Stella's creations. Curiously, it is reminiscent on a grand scale of the more referential works of the French Impressionists, particularly Renoir. It is a reduction to the abstract of this school, while also being a busy conflict far removed from Ellsworth Kelly. It is simplicity and intricacy at once.

Greatly divergent from anything yet mentioned are the paintings of Wayne Thiebaud, whose passion for close, tight, powerful vertical distortions provides us with "Ripley Ridge" (1977) and the amazing "City, Hill and Freeway" (1980).

Probably the two most familiar artists exhibiting are the pop artists, Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein. Lichtenstein's "Glass and Lemon Before a Mirror" (1974) is characteristically sharp and vibrant.

There are many other works and styles which could be mentioned, from the organic metal sculptures of Nancy Graves to the striking realism of Maxwell Hendler's paintings. Additionally, there is a video tape featuring interviews with several of the artists. Let me conclude by saying that you have until February 6th to see an intriguing and immensely satisfying exhibit.



The Pretenders : Survival of the fittest



Learning to Crawl
by The Pretenders

Review by David Lutes

The Pretenders are back! Two and a half years after their last release and a year and a half since death and dissent nearly toppled the group, Chrissie Hynde and the boys set about making up for lost time with *Learning to Crawl*.

The title reflects the new beginning that this release marks for the band. The death of lead guitarist James Honeyman-Scott and the subsequent quitting of the group by bassist Pete Farnon left the two remaining members in a difficult situation. The two, drummer Martin Chambers and the Pretenders' heart, Chrissie Hynde, were faced with the difficult task of replacing these two. When replacements were finally found, in the persons of Robbie McIntosh on guitar and Malcolm Foster on bass, the band was ready to start again.

While the search went on, Hynde and Chambers did some work with a transitory Pretenders. Three of the songs that resulted from those sessions appear on *Crawl*: "Back On The

Chain Gang" and "My City Was Gone" released early last year and "Thin Line Between Love and Hate" previously unreleased. The first two feature Rockpile alumnus Billy Bremner on guitar and Big Country's Tony Butler on bass.

"Back On The Chain Gang" is a thoughtful reflection on past happiness and the passing of this feeling with the disappearance of a friend. Is this a hymn for Honeyman-Scott? The image is definitely there.

"My City Was Gone" is Hynde's requiem for her now corrupted town of Akron, Ohio. The dark mood is set by Butler's dominating bass line and Hynde's angry vocals.

"Thin Line Between Love And Hate" also features Paul Carrack, ex of Squeeze, on piano. It is a passionate tale of the destructive relationship between an uncaring man and an unknowing woman. Though it fails to approach the power of an early cut like "Lovers of Today", it still is an emotionally charged tune.

A change that has greatly affected the new group's sound is Hynde's new marital bliss. Love and motherhood have had a calming influence on her life and Hynde reflects this in her music.

Gone is the taunting anti-romantic sounds of tunes like "Precious" and "Bad Boys Get Spanked". The closest we come to this is "Watching the Clothes". The all out rock sound is there, but instead of confronting her antagonists Hynde seems more willing to please, even if it means subverting her own personality. A line from "Watching" reflects this new attitude . . . "I've been kissing ass. Trying to keep clean."

The entire album is still typical Pretenders—headlong bass and drums underneath the twin guitar payoff and Hynde's tough-tender vocals. *Learning to Crawl* should set those people straight who have been touting the 'positive punk' of U2 and Big Country as a great new thing. This group has been at it for 5 years and they are still as strong as ever.

The most unique cut on the album is "I Hurt You". With the odd vocal dubbing over the tension created by the guitar lines, the threshold of violence approached in the lyrics is also felt in the music.

"I Hurt You" also spotlights the drumming of Chambers. His contribution to the band's sound is a surprising discovery on the

album. His drums remain a constant punch from the underside, keeping the sound moving but under control.

Learning to Crawl is a strong comeback and an important release. Though not quite living

up to the group's self-titled debut of late 1979, *Learning* shows a promise of a turnaround and displays to the world Chrissie Hynde's survival instincts.

For an indepth review of this album, join me Monday, February 6 at 8 p.m. on CKDU.

