

Designer crafts innovate at Avatar 85

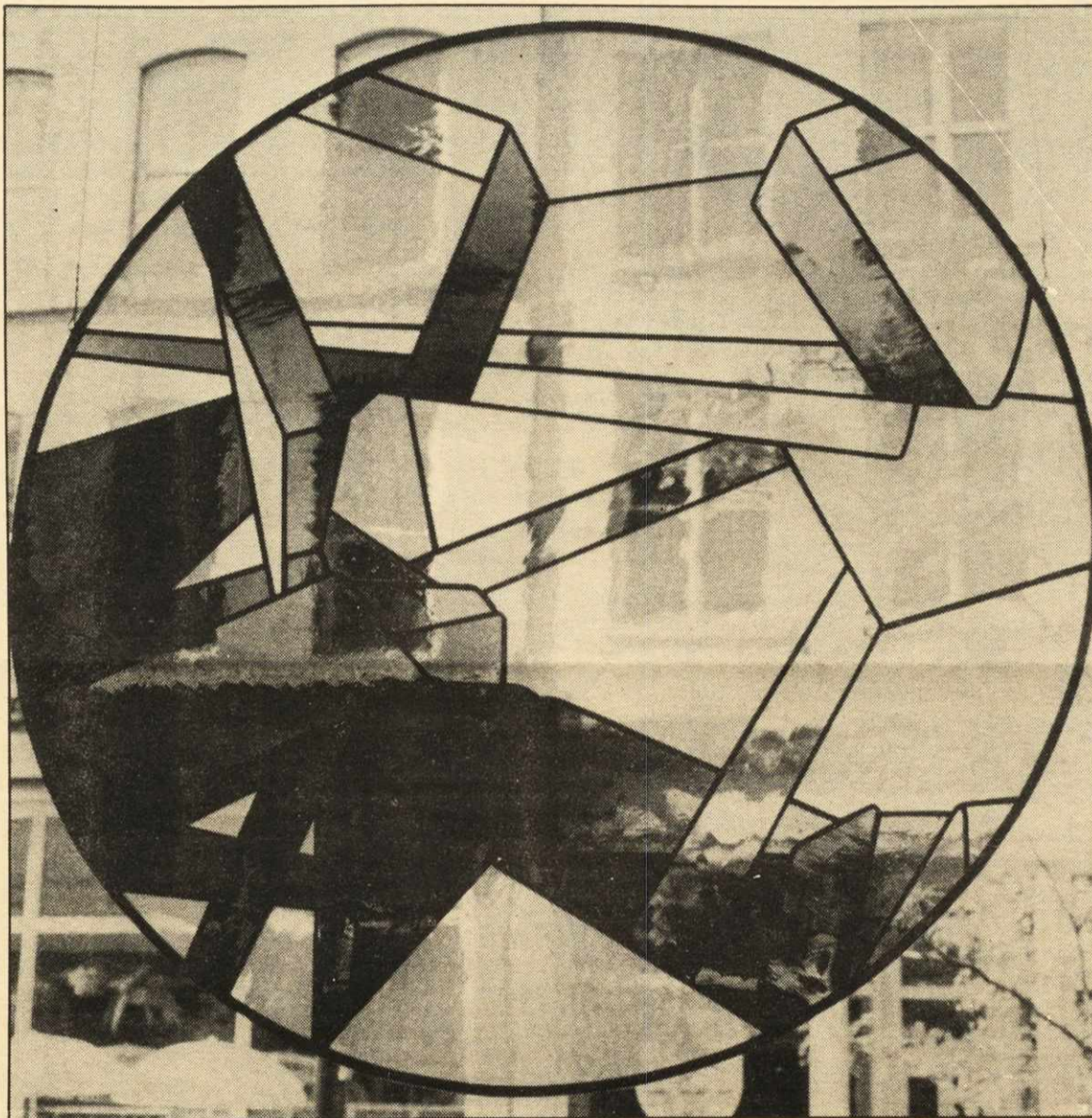
by Phil Doucette

Innovation was the theme of Avatar 85. For the show, a juried exhibition of Nova Scotia Designer Crafts Council from September 10-28, artists were asked to consider the traditional applications of their craft media, and then apply the restrictions of the materials to a new and exciting display of diversity, or, as one of the jurors put it, the show exhibited "Ordinary material made precious."

Certainly the show was colourful. The combination of bright pottery glazes, sparklink stained glass and lustrous jewelry contrasted with the rich textures of wood and fibre to create an overall feeling of opulence and tranquility. The cool and airy space of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design's Anna Leonowens Gallery was ideal for a show of this kind, and the exhibition's success was facilitated by the peaceful viewing environment orchestrated by the installers of the show.

However, this description of the atmosphere of Avatar 85 leads to my only criticism of the exhibition. While craft can be successfully represented as visual art, if careful consideration is not given to the context of the display, the objects lose their individuality, becoming *pictures at an exhibition*, stripped of the essential humanness that is such a vital component of craftwork. The selected works of Avatar 85 are each of tremendous merit, but hanging together in the gallery they seemed almost disembodied. The sense of separation from any emotional interaction on the part of the viewer was very tangible, making the tranquility of the show cold, and the opulence rather impersonal.

The development of the exhibition concept, "the embodiment of concrete manifestation of an abstract concept", was probably the main contributing factor to the specific inaccessibility of the craft component of Avatar 85. The majority of the works in the show were abstract, and the reasons for that abstraction were often ill-defined, or purposeless. The visual statement of each piece was supplemented by a small information sheet on which the artist placed their comments about the inspiration and aspirations of the work. This idea was amusing, because it allowed the viewer to glimpse at the character behind the craftsman, but it seriously undercut the necessity for each artist to ensure that their work was a complete statement of self-contained message and intent. Nonetheless, Avatar 85 was enjoyable. The mediums of stained glass and textiles were very well represented. Of particular interest were the three



Regene Stowe's "Untitled Circle" was one of the more impressive stained glass works at Avatar 85, a juried exhibition by the Nova Scotia Designer Crafts Council - Photo - Phillip R. Doucette.

dimensional glass constructions of Andrew Terris, of which *Labrynth* was selected as one of the jurors' choices, and the fibre garment *Herring Bone* by Ruth Scheuing, also a jurors' choice. Each of these pieces successfully fuses the abstract with a high level of craft work, and delightfully adds a playful dash of self-criticism. The jewellery displayed was elegant, but the larger pieces suffered from a lack of connection with the traditions of the medium.

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Three-day Disasters

by Kathy O'Brien

Some people will go to any length to get a novel published.

In 1984 over 400 people spent their Labour Day weekend steadily writing in an attempt to get what they wrote published. Vancouver's Pulp Press, a small publisher, sponsored the 3-day novel-writing contest, which has been an annual event since 1978.

The idea for the contest originated in a barroom when one of Pulp's editors challenged a bookseller to write a novel in three days. Both failed to write a novel, but Pulp Press went public with the writing contest a year later.

Jim Curry won the International 3-Day Novel-Writing contest last year with *Nothing So Natural*. The 78-page novel tells the story of Timmy, a 12-year-old, who lives with an eccentric family, but longs for a "normal existence."

"The purpose of the contest is to encourage writers to write," said Frances Eger, distributor and sales director for Pulp, in an interview with the *New York Times* last fall. That is a noble statement, but by imposing such extreme time limits Pulp does not exactly encourage aspiring authors to write well.

In fact, past winners and other supporters compare the contest more to a sporting event than to a literary endeavor.

"You almost have to be a trained athlete," said Sig Laser, a bookseller who sponsored the contest. Les Leyne, of the *Victoria Times Colonist*, calls the contest "a triathlon for the brain." "I think book reviews of the 3-Day Novel should be put in the Sports section," said the 1983 contest winner, Jeff Doran.

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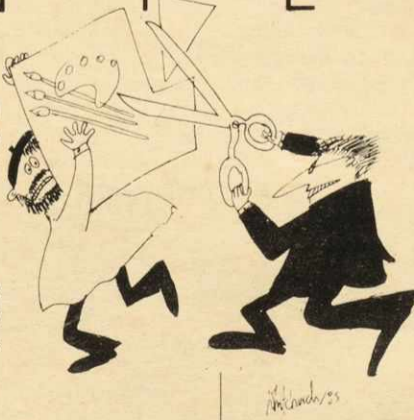
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