York galleries span far and dig deep

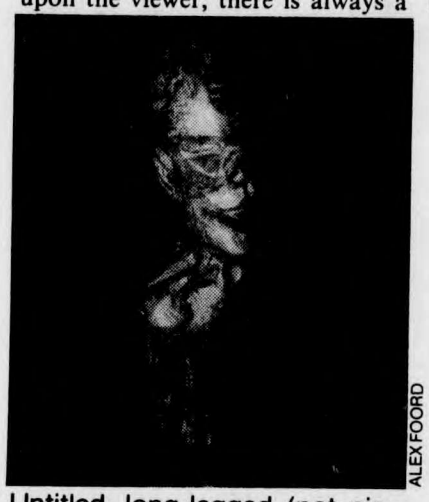
ARTS SECTION

Founders Art Gallery

By PAULETTE PEIROL

Through our Window, an exhibit of sculpture, painting and photography at the Founder's Art Gallery, reveals a fascinating range of perspectives in the work of student artists Gail Esau and Mario Scattoloni. Esau's portrayal of angst-ridden, often solipsistic or fantasizing figures contrasts sharply with the relentless social shutter of Scattoloni's lense. Yet the exhibit as a whole draws attention to character studies, to both the inner and outer subtleties of personalities.

Esau's figures, although often seeming to stare vacuously into space, project themselves forcefully upon the viewer; there is always a physical attempt to communicate, whether by a clenched hand or an extended limb. At the same time, her figures are very much trapped in emotional moments of self-reflection. Often the sheer bulk and substance of a figure, or the way it is framed, fixes it emphatically in space and time.



ALEX FOORD

Untitled, long-legged (not pictured) work by Esau.

In "Winter," for instance, an aged man sits solidly (so solidly that he seems rooted) sculpted in "cast cement fondu." His body appears to be stacked out of boulders, or perhaps he is a living vertabrae without cartilage. Only his hands, proportionately large, seem to be alive; clenched in self-preservation, a final testament to his will power. His hollow eyes make the figure haunting, as if he were dead but buried alive.

"Figures in Space" on the other hand seems to reflect fetal struggles of pre-birth. Painted in aqua and mauve acrylic hues on thin wooden slats, the four figures are necessarily distorted and contorted to fit into the frames. It is as if the figures are trapped within their frames while the bodies of the figures are trapped at the mercy of their long limbs. Arms and legs jut toward the viewer, forelengthened rather than foreshortened. Their heads are skeletal and featureless. What is disarming about this work is there seems to be no chance of escape for the figures; the effect is powerful and painful.

Scattoloni's black and white photographs are primarily action shots, a form he seems most comfortable and adept at. His subjects range from elderly women (presumably in a hospital or old-age home) to children interacting with each other both in play, anger, and boredom. Scattoloni's work often reveals a sense of psychological impoverishment, not necessarily rooted in physical poverty (although this too is sometimes the case). Environment is important to his work; subjects are framed in social circumstances and react to their surroundings.

Yet in this particular exhibit, Scattoloni has opted to provide large scrawled captions beneath photographs. Unfortunately, the effect is more often distracting than inspirational or helpful. Scattoloni is not a poet; in many cases, the captions undermine the spontaneity of the photographs and seem to try too hard to sway the viewer's thinking.

ALEX FOORD

Esau's *He Always Envied the Birds Their Flight.*

Scattoloni has also included some collages in the exhibit, which are for the most part provocative. "Answer" consists of cut-out cliché statements such as "No pain, no gain" and "You don't have to be a genius to . . . ." Scattoloni plays on the clichés with a sharp questioning sense of humor, using photographs to counterbalance and defy the statements. Another work uses the well-known Virginia Slims advertisements (you've come a long way . . .) in a similar way, juxtaposing the assumptions contained in the phrases with challenging photos. Scattoloni is most effective when he uses language as a contrast rather than a complement to his work.

"Through our Window" also contains the work of six other artists on a single wall. It is refreshing to see two diversified artists collaborating for an exhibit, since each of their styles challenges the other. *Through our Window* will be showing until February 3.

IDA Gallery

By JANICE GOLDBERG

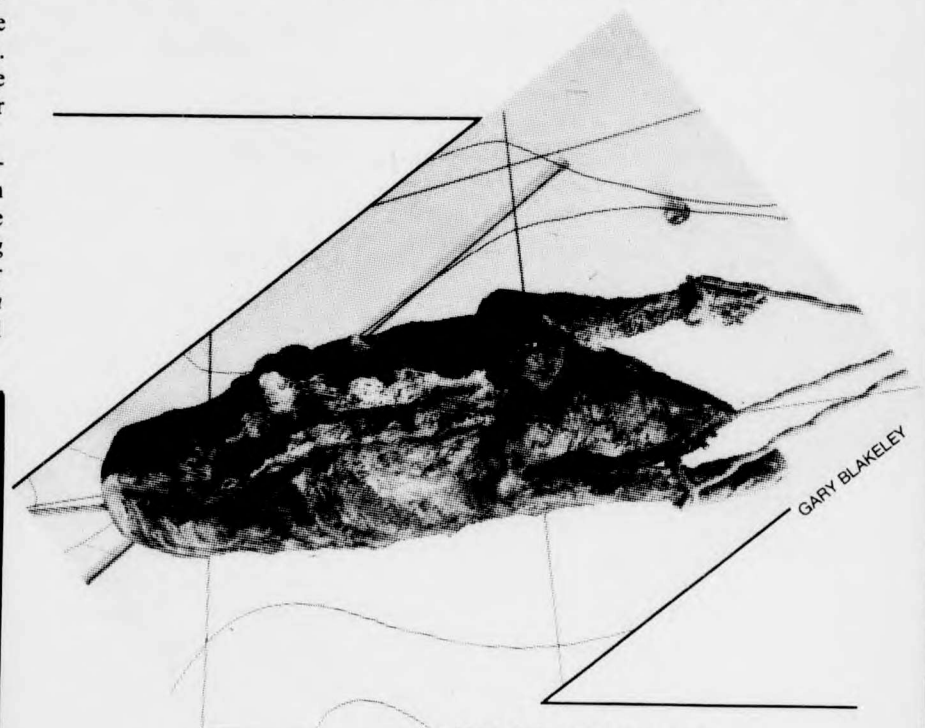
Those with romantic longing to do a guest spot on *The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau*, or those simply hankering to transport themselves back in time for a quick dip in that primordial soup, had their desires at least somewhat satiated by the sculptural installation *Submarine*, at the IDA gallery last week. The show, a collaboration between fourth year sculpture students Karen Ross and John Knotton, transformed a section of the usually stark gallery into a bizarre, dense vision of an undersea environment.

Knotton and Ross, who prepared for the exhibit during the past five months, worked together on the conceptual formulations but executed the pieces individually The artists explained that their intent was to explore ideas of life, birth, water, evolution, death and the inherent interrelationships among these concepts. The show demonstrated the artists' ability to deal with their subject matter with imagination and an appreciable sense of humour—they created an environment that challenged and surprised the viewer with its unexpected variations.

The pieces, constructed of a wide range of materials—wood, wire, sheet metal, wax, paper, sand and sea shells—were arranged so that the viewer's attention moved from floor to wall to ceiling to mid air. Elements were combined to form dualistic entities; for example, fish turned into boats; or was that a boat transforming into a fish?

Grotesque shrunken human heads sprouted fins and scales. A fish, structurally suggestive of a boat's hull, was frozen in the sand, and it was impossible to tell if it was emerging or submerging itself. What was that strange creature suspended from the ceiling—a gruesome, yet lovely combination: part fish, part woman, part boat, part scary sea monster?

The warm amber lighting was set up to create the requisite eerie shadows. A primitively constructed dock of weathered unmilled wood, along with plenty of real sand helped to complete the primeval, aquatic mood. Knotton and Ross created an environment that allowed the viewer to gain both meaning and delight.



GARY BLAKELEY

Part fish, part woman, part boat, part of sculpture students' installation *Submarine*.

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TIME: 10:00-12 noon

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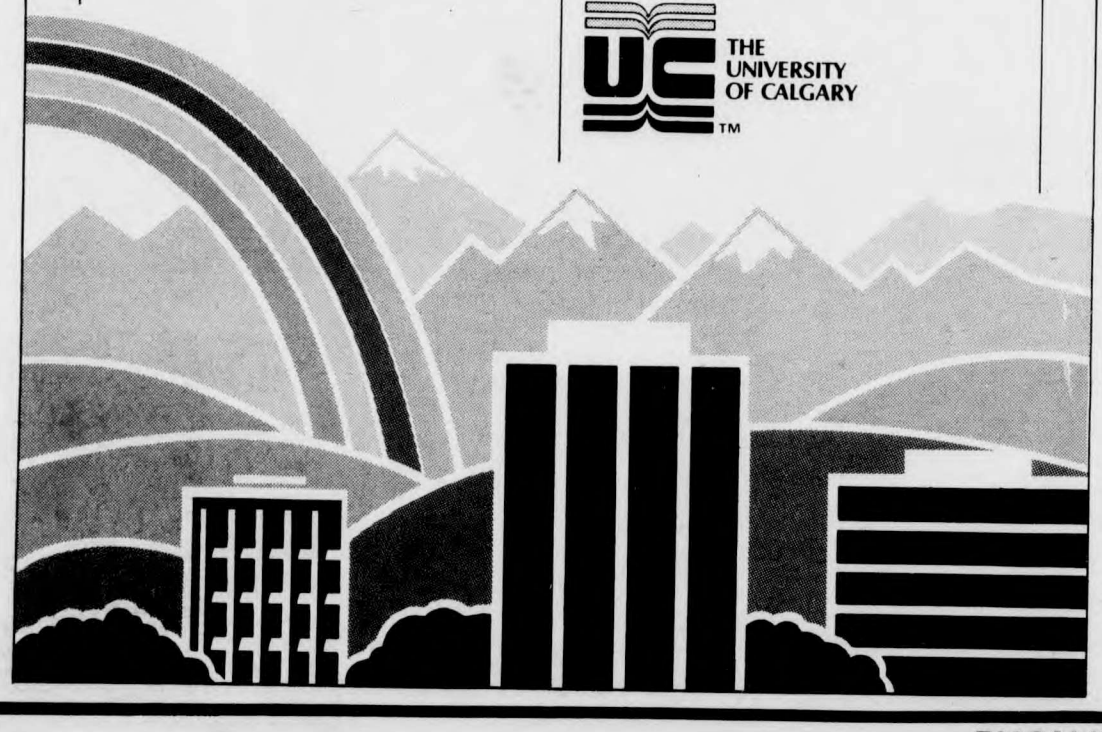

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