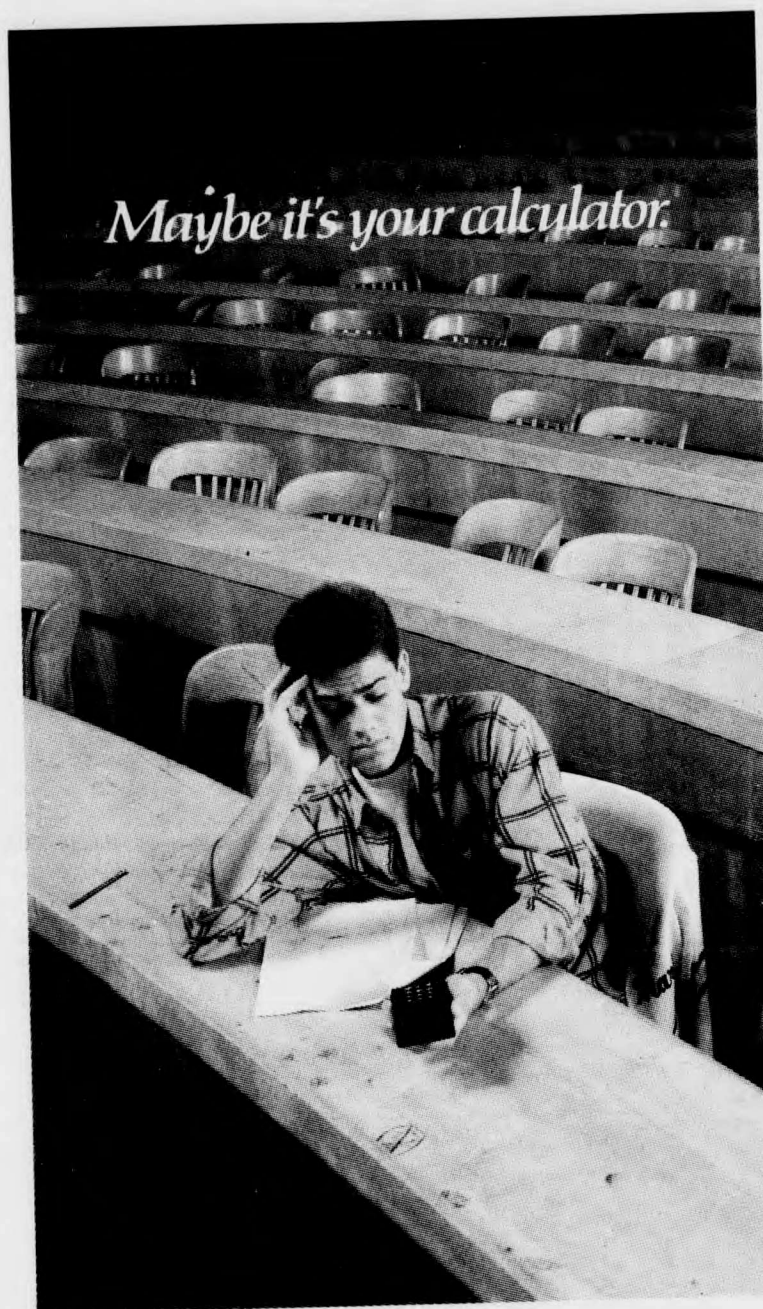


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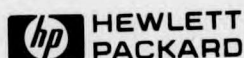
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# Ross Bldg bugged

By LEN CUNNINGHAM

York campus is "... low, drab, and featureless—except where it is tall, drab and featureless," according to a 1984 *Saturday Night* article written by David Frum. Frum cites in particular the Murray G. Ross Humanities and Social Sciences Building: "It is oppressive, inhumane, and inefficient, and it is hated by nearly everyone who sets foot in it, including Murray G. Ross himself."

An obvious contender for the Albert Speer Architectural Award, the Ross Building is a visual embarrassment and sad reminder of failed '60s idealism. The style is best characterized as functionalism taken to a vengeful extreme. Yet, the Ross Building fails even in this endeavour, being centred upon an essentially 'functionless' ramp.

The Ross Building and its accompanying 'ramp from hell' figure largely in the oral history of York University. It has been a long-standing (and erroneous) student joke that York's campus was destined for Southern California but because of a filing error ended up in North York. The second rumour, which is too embarrassing to believe, holds that the ramp, and the lack of any main entrance to the Ross Building, was a response to '60s fears of student rioting, effectively denying a main focal point for aggression and, unfortunately, also denying any hope of being 'user friendly.' The only apparent fortunate effects of these twin structural hangovers from the '60s has been the students' humorous reactions and York MFA graduate Alex de Cosson's equally playful sculpture, "Siting the Super Nova," currently on display outside the Ross Building.

At one time an aspiring antique dealer, de Cosson's West Coast background (at the University of Victoria), coupled with his teaching and technician's work at Banff, helps to explain his preference for interactive outdoor works.

De Cosson's "Siting the Super Nova" is composed of three separate pieces—"Home Base," "KP33," and "KP44." "Home Base" consists of a lime green '65 Volkswagen with birdcage-like pink bars atop a wooden structure, situated on what is reputedly a former refuse heap facing the Ross ramp. "KP33" and "KP44" are the white painted wooden structures located on the boulevard between "Home Base" and the ramp. No further description is necessary since the piece cannot be missed by students arriving by bus. Furthermore, it *should* not be missed.

So what does it have to do with the Ross Building and ramp? "The piece was built for York so it had to deal with the Ross Building," says de Cosson. "It's about York, for them [the students]."

A central part of the sculpture is the chair inside the Volkswagen which can be reached by using a metal ladder bolted to the side of the wooden structure. Once inside, the viewer/participant's attention is directed towards the ramp. In fact, attention is *forced* towards the ramp by two factors. First, the obvious reaction to the Volkswagen, being a vehicle, is forward motion. Second, both the car and the chair are situ-



**THAT SINKING FEELING:** Detail of cab of Alex de Cosson's 'Homebase,' a green volkswagen which is part of his interactive sculpture *Siting The Super Nova*. "Great," says Ed Nossoc.

ated so that they face the ramp.

To have the participant stare at the Ross Building is not the only idea of this piece, however. The Volkswagen and its colours belong to the same period as the Ross Building, and just as the building was liberating in intent, so are the materials employed by de Cosson. Yet both have a similar paradoxical result—restriction. Whether it is concrete or pink bars, the final statement is the same. Once seated upon the chair, de Cosson forces the viewer to visually confront the militaristic visage of the Ross Building and ramp. The juxtaposition of the materials used—a lime green '55 Volkswagen, and a pink cage—and their effect when combined, is a succinctly satiric comment on York's architectural failings.

"Humour is inherent in my work," acknowledges de Casson, "and the majority of it is interactive." Instead of "sitting down to look at a painting," you are sitting down *in* a painting. "You are part of the piece."

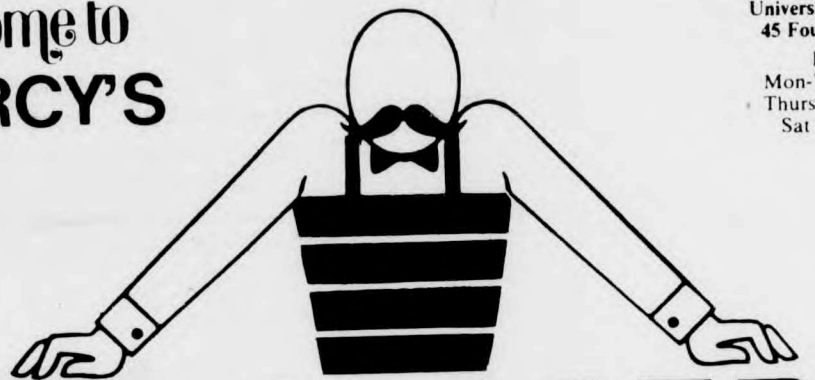
Sadly enough, a misinformed minority have misconstrued 'interactive' as an invitation to remodel certain aspects of the work. This artistic Luddism is the continuation of a York tradition which we could well do without, and the situation is made sadder still, by the appalling lack of an adequate maintenance fund for York's art collection. "It's almost like guerrilla warfare, having to come up with ways in which to counteract acts of vandalism," says Elizabeth McLuhan, director of the AGYU.

In the face of vandalism, student ignorance, neglect, and underfunding, McLuhan is to be highly commended for her continued support of non-commercial outdoor works. The overt success of de Cosson's talented and capable use of humour and paradox in "Siting the Super Nova" stands in stark contrast to our campus' aesthetic bankruptcy.

At 4:30 p.m., Sept. 22, de Cosson will give a lecture in the Fine Arts Building, Room 312, followed by a reception in the Purple Room at 5:30. All are welcome.

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