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wide range of themes and styles in the show.

Lohnes' series of photos evoked a rich, emotional character. A wall of foreboding sadness is absorbing in her portrait of an elderly man surrounded by the tall autumn grass — a seasonal metaphor played out in human terms.

A textured photo of water droplets clinging to glistening vegetation delivers a sense of spiritual reverence to her subject matter.

Michael Lawlor's portraits show an incredible understanding of his subjects. He uses the elements of composition well together with an evident rapport with his subjects — the people in the photos. His portrait of band leader John Alphonse sizzles with energy, the light and selective framing giving the picture a dynamic, yet enigmatic feel.

While Lohnes and Lawlor create an intimate bond between the subject and the viewer, Catherine Hatt is calculatingly distant by contrast. Deliciously morbid, she arranges her corpse-like model in a series of bizarre, macabre situations. Her subject has a strange mannequin quality to it — the model

robbed of any human characteristics beyond its basic physical form.

Of Mark Simkins' travel photos, his grainy print of Cherryhill Beach has a trance-like vision as the figures proceed towards the water in an orderly fashion. It is a quiet, graceful doomsday march.

Other stand-outs in the show included Rob Palanica's colour photographs and Paul O'Keefe's hand-coloured prints.

Like any group show the exhibition did have its flaws. Jeff MacFawn's collection of concert photos were unimaginative and technically flawed. Mario Petite's architectural photographs lacked a sense of presence.

The co-op could have also been a little more adventurous in its exploration of the art — most of the photos fall within conventional standards.

But flaws aside, the collection provided an interesting portrait of the tiny co-op. □

A smaller portraiture show by the co-op is running at Cafe Prague (in the Brewery complex) until October.

—Rick Janson

Coming up for air...

Ecphore Exhibit, City Club Aug. 13-17

HALIFAX'S "UNDERGROUND" art community came up for viewing one week this August.

From August 3-17, The City Club on downtown Barrington Street housed over 250 works by 75 local artists in the biggest alternative art exhibit ever held in Halifax. Cryptically titled the Ecphore Exhibition — from the Greek word meaning, "to revive through stimulus" — the show was impressive in its size and the range of artists' expression.

All three floors of the large abandoned building were filled with works of varied forms. Even bathrooms and closet space were pressed into display area service to give the wide range of works room for peaceful co-existence. Painting, sculpture, pottery, crafts, photography, video, and installation were all represented in those rooms. While painting may have been the predominant form, at least in sheer amount of space utilized, the show above all reflected the diversity of Halifax's alternative art scene.

One of the more striking paintings was Gary Evans' huge renderings of codfish. Placing his subjects all upright in a row, Evans painted the fish in sombre greens and blues, transforming them with a foreboding, eerie atmosphere you don't expect in a painting of fish. If it was typical of anything, it was the alternate approach to form and subject matter of works in the show.

The large number of paintings exhibited in Ecphore was probably representative of the strength of The Nova

Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD) studio department. In fact, the entire exhibition could be seen as representative of the Art College. Most of the artists were NSCAD students, staff, or alumni, and the Alternative Art Society, which organized the show, also consists of Art College denizens.

Response to the show was swift as more than 1,000 people attended opening night alone. The downtown location of the City Club — provided rent-free for the exhibition — was evidently a strong drawing card, as was the opportunity for Halifaxians to see art they wouldn't ordinarily be exposed to. Ecphore was definitely a success in placing Halifax residents together with a large quantity of art, most of which couldn't have been seen at any commercial gallery in town.

If the strengths of Halifax's alternative art scene were out in the exhibition, so too were its weaknesses. The areas of photography and video were less well represented in the show, perhaps arising from their lower profile at NSCAD. The small number of video works also reflects the weakness of the local video art scene.

Even with these faults in the Halifax arts community, the Ecphore Exhibition served to spark anticipation of a possible follow-up next year. At the very least, it'll be interesting to see what the Alternative Art Society comes up with next.

—Ken Burke and Bonnie Bobryk



42nd Street cafe wins our sexist sign of the month contest. Once a fave of Gazette types, it wins our boycott. Congratulations piggies.

Masked Media

The politics of colourists

By Ken Burke

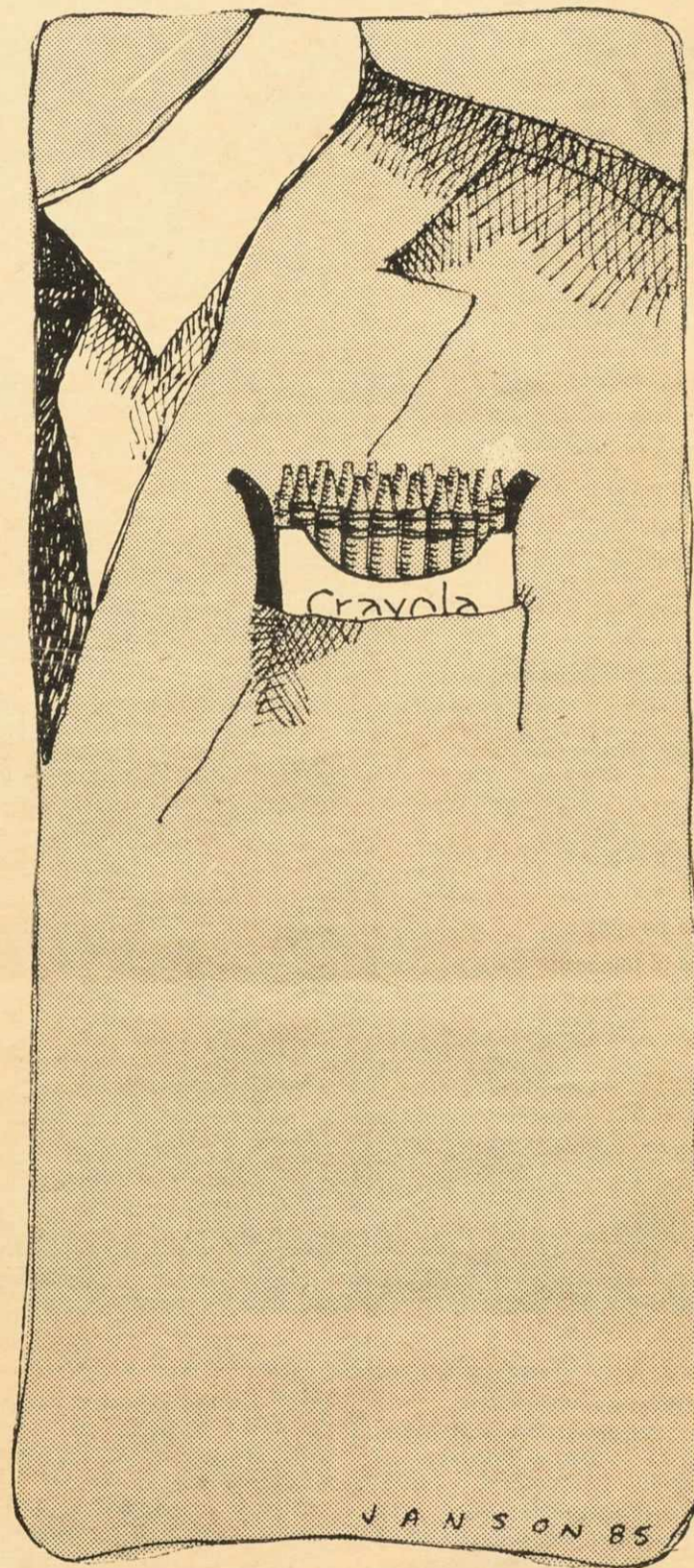
The costliest cultural event in Canada this past year came and went with nary a word from the Media's cultural gurus. It may not have been high art, but its only purpose was to create an aesthetic impression in viewers and bring back familiar emotions. It was fashion, but didn't end up on the fashion pages of any coffee-table magazine. How to explain the poor cultural coverage of the Tories' decision to dress the Armed Forces up in traditional-colour uniforms?

If that last sentence sounded ridiculous, consider for a moment how important that change was to the Forces' personnel and their boosters. Ever since the "much-lamented" unification of the forces in the mid 60's, nothing brought anger up in a DND employee like the dark green colour of their official clothes. They were onto something politicians knew long before modern science measured it — the importance of colour to groups and movements.

The basic idea behind political colour is a simple one — us versus them. It may have originated in battle as one bunch of men chose to wear an identifying mark to keep from hacking off bits of their side. When kings started defining nations with uniforms and flags, soon identifiable groups within countries began defining themselves by colour, such as political parties and different branches of national armies. Tory Blue and Liberal Red got their start in England long before Sir John A. or Wilfred Laurier were born, let alone living in Canada. One hue of blue was set aside as Navy Blue, and now Canadians are going to pay \$55 million for new uniforms to make sure the Navy has their proper colours.

It can't be argued that the uniform change is not a cultural decision. The clothes haven't been designed for more flexibility, comfort, or battle-readiness; like a trendy new outfit by a name designer, they're only meant to give a psychological boost for the wearer. It's an easy way to build a sense of belonging into members of a group, and for the Tories, it's a way of doing something about the perceived morale problem in the Forces. It's not the first time colour has been a political issue in Canada, as our national flag demonstrates.

Beside the whole fuss over keeping or not keeping the old colonial flag, the maple leaf design that eventually was accepted went through political changes on its way to the top of the Peace Tower. The original design, coming from Tory-solid Ontario, had a red maple leaf grouping in the centre, flanked by blue borders. When Pearson's Liberals were through with the flag, it was Liberal-red through and through. The Federal Tories are now making up for this hefty snub by redesigning official stationery for all departments to: a) de-emphasise the Canadian flag, which the liberals had played up in size, and b) use blue for as much of the writing and design as humanly possible. Please remember that hundreds of thousands of dollars are spent on these crucial matters every year — by adults.



In such an atmosphere, where the big political parties have long exploited the advertising power of colours, it was a matter of time before the NDP woke up and joined the arts race. There is a move by a significant number of the rank-and-file to change the party's colours. The longstanding orange & brown standard is under assault by those who want to climb aboard the "Green" movement bandwagon. Already the colour has popped up boldly in party banners during the August national convention. The green forces may have a struggle on their hands, though — it may be easier to oust a leader than alter a colour scheme in Canadian politics.

Somehow, all this missed the gaze of the country's cultural mandarins while they were sizing up Tory cultural cutbacks. That's too bad, because the irony of allocating money for new uniforms while cutting back on cultu-

ral funding demonstrates an important fact about the new federal regime. Mulroney and Co. aren't "against" the arts at all; they just want to control it for their ends.

In the Tory view — also typified by provincial erosion of independent funding councils — arts funded by the state should be state-serving, not bite the hand that funds them. We may see more funding go into official spectacles such as the Reagan Gala and Nova Scotia Tattoo and less into independent, community-centred culture which might mention social problems. Culture funding may also be increasingly channeled through government departments such as Tourism to increase its political cost-efficiency.

One thing can be said with real certainty, though. If you're a Canadian painter in search of official work or large grants, it'd be wise to stock up on blue pigment — for at least the next three years. □