

Bourgeois' "Shredder" at the AGYU

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Don't let this artist's name fool you. Louise Bourgeois' sculptures are certainly not conventional, ordinary or to the norm. The 24 piece exhibition at the AGYU by the 78-year old sculptor is bold, provocative, funny and sad. Most of all, it stimulates one to think — to think about what the pieces are saying and to think about the feelings that are provoked by the sculpture.

Bourgeois' most impressive masterpieces are of marble. "Blind Man's Bluff" is a polished marble female torso with breasts bursting out all over. This is the predominant fetish within this exhibition, although when queried about it once, Bourgeois replied, "I wouldn't know if they are breasts." In other words, let your imagination run wild in this eclectic collection that articulates both the life force and the death wish within us all.

The epitome of the latter theme would have to be "Henriette." Cast and polished bronze, it is a decapitated hanging figure. The smooth, heavy drooping shoulders — headless with a small, round hole in the neck conveys a silent, sinister death. The polished black colour, the one hanging, long, skinny leg — all instill a deep fearful questioning: "What crime could one commit so as to suffer such cruel punishment? Or worse, what innocent person suffered such torture?"

More enjoyable but just as sizzling are her "Nature Studies." Two large golden orbs, fixated to a tall,

thin, black metal pole, quickly expressed to me the ideal female figure for many a male in this day and age. However, I was surprised to read a female critic's response in the Boston Globe that the study quite possibly conveys the circular parts of the male anatomy. It is up for interpretation.

One can learn much about one's psychology from this exhibit. Two pieces blatantly titled "Tits" are perfect in their living, curvacious, flowing lines. The shiny, reflective smoothness and rounded points simply invite caressing but, without the title, are certainly innocent and respectable enough to put in one's living room.

"The Rocking Figure", a very nicely chipped and carved marble piece invites much interpretation. It depends on how "dirty" your imagination is — you might not have to stand there staring and thinking about it for too long.

Bourgeois comments that although she is afraid in life, "I am completely independent and fearless in my art." Fear and an outrageous, bizarre sense of humour seems to be exactly what she enjoys working with.

Five worn, wooden spools, spanning eight feet in diameter (the type plastic cabling comes on), are connected together in the center by a metal pipe. Glossed over the pockmarked, thick boards is a thin coat of lacquer. The pieces of broken bronze in front of the wheels adds to the threatening cold, lifeless feeling — perhaps the sense that you are about to be

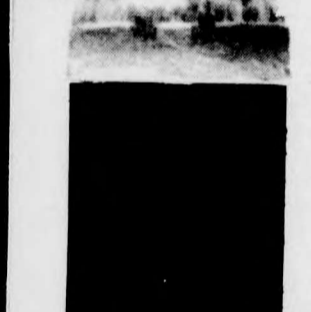
run over by the gargantuan wheels and learn why the piece is called "Shredder."

Feelings of discomfort are as easily conveyed by another "Nature Study." It's the same hideous mammal as before with six breasts, four clawed feet and some sort of phallus half hidden.

Another piece, "Fingers", is small round heads of black and gold polished bronze, sprouting out of the ground. "Hearts," which was specifically produced for this exhibition at the AGYU, is made of ugly, sticky rubber and metal, the deep red colour giving the tow pieces a look of having recently been removed from their proper place and function. If you let your imagination go far enough, you can believe that you're in *Hellraiser*.

But, there are more peaceful, "happier," "presentable" works. For example, a half-tonne marble "Nature Study" would look beautiful in any water-fountain. Likewise for the "Labyrinthine Tower", an amazingly meticulously carved showpiece that would flatter anyone's living room.

Bourgeois' artwork does provoke the realization that to be radical and political is ultimately to risk being extremely personal. This first Canadian solo exhibition by the preeminent American sculptor is something worth seeing for the bold and imaginative art enthusiast and thinker. The exhibit continues at the AGYU until August 20. For gallery hours call 736-5169.



Louise Bourgeois

York fine arts at city hall

visions of Africa

A York Fine Arts graduate is among the nine winners in the Toronto Garden's third annual student competition.

Susan Schantz, MFA, received an Odette Scholarship for her African-inspired proposal. Her maquette, as well as the other submissions that were chosen, were displayed in the Toronto City Hall Rotunda from July 4 to 14.

Students were to come up with a plan for a work intended for display in the Garden. The natural conditions of the ground, which is located at 115 King St. East, were to be a major consideration. Each project had to be documented in a written and design format.

Schantz's exposure to the African way of life evidently influenced the design of her installation. Her visit to the Northern region of Ghana in 1987 allowed her to realize labour as a harsh existence of the African lifestyle. According to her statement of theme, her piece portrays "an image of 'Third World' vernacular architecture."

Her proposal includes two larger-than-life photographs on either side of an adobe wall. The photos, taken by Schantz, show two African women completing the outside surfaces of their homes. A second free-standing wall would also be part of the scheme. Both walls are patterned with thumbprints, an apparent tribe tradition that serves as both a "decorative and anti-erosion" finish.

Schantz aims to establish a recognition and association between the viewer and the women and what they are doing. She does this by keeping "Not only the scale of the African domestic architecture but also the scale of the human body within the garden." Some of the area on the walls is purposely left unmarked with thumb-prints to tempt the viewer into adding his or her own.

It is interesting to imagine these African tribal women in the midst of our contemporary technological society. The differences in our culture would make it impossible for them to survive here. Then

again, we would never make it in their country as labour is the focus of their lives.

Schantz wants us to think of the diverse qualities of the two societies, and ultimately, their consequences. As she put it, the "images of non-Western buildings and non-Western women building placed within the shadow of Toronto's steel and glass skyscrapers, throw into contrast our own beliefs and practices around these same activities."

In recognition of her fine work,

Schantz will be able to compete with the other eight winners, who were also selected from their individual schools, for a solo show in the Toronto Sculpture Garden in 1990. If chosen, Schantz will get an opportunity to compete with the 1987 finalist, Doug Buis, also from York, and the 1988 finalist, Peter Wallace from the Dundas Valley School of Art.

Should Schantz's work ever be built in the Sculpture Garden, Torontonians will be forced to open their eyes to a diverse way of

life and perhaps reflect on their own, more "self-centred" lives.

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