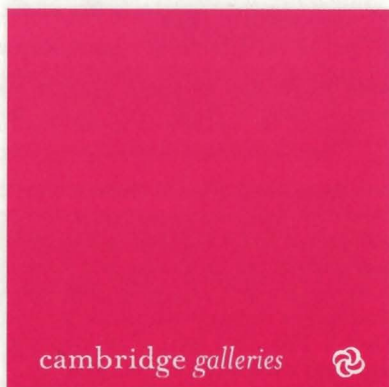
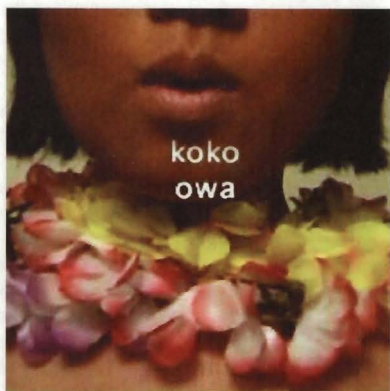




CASE



SHOW



cambridge galleries



SHOWCASE.05

a survey of emerging artists from across central, southern and southwestern Ontario
selected by David Liss and Ivan Jurakic

David Liss: What was your inspiration for organizing a survey exhibition with a regional focus?

Ivan Jurakic: The notion of capturing a 'snapshot' of emerging artists operating in central, southern and southwestern Ontario occurred to me as an avenue that was under served by most public galleries. It's not that emerging artists aren't getting shows, but there hasn't been any kind of recent attempt to define a group of younger artists making interesting work in the here and now. Back in the mid to late 90s the Southwestern Triennials at the Art Gallery of Hamilton, Art Gallery of Windsor and Museum London highlighted a diverse group of up-and-coming artists, most of whom are still exhibiting. It seems to me that there is a real need for this kind of show. Cambridge is situated near the crossroads of Highway 8 and the 401, it is a natural geographic locus between Hamilton, Kitchener, Waterloo, Guelph, London, Windsor and obviously Toronto. This nailed it for me.

David: Your curatorial approach was generally focused on the art colleges in the region. How do you feel about the work being turned out by academia these days?

Ivan: Well, art programs, particularly graduate programs, are a natural place to gravitate towards. It wasn't until the early 90s that a lot of the MFA programs in Ontario were launched, including Guelph, Western and Waterloo, so there is obviously a growing density of post-grads operating in the region. I think this is a sea change; it is more common for artists to complete their degree and develop a solid body of work before entering the murky waters of the art world. What do I think of the work? I tend to believe that you can't really substitute an arts education for life experience. That being said all of the artists in this exhibition have a degree or MFA, so make of that what you will. The most compelling and consistent submissions tended to be from artists coming out of universities or OCAD, and the show reflects that.

David: Did you apply any specific criteria for selecting the work? Were your selections based on specific pieces or more general aspects of the artists practice?

Ivan: Overall, I tend towards an intuitive response to the artwork itself, tempered by the artists' subsequent support material; what they have to say about their own work and their level of engagement with contemporary art. If I see a compelling body of artwork that has a unique point of view that speaks to me, I'm drawn to the work first and I ask questions later. There were some proposals where I understood the conceptual underpinnings but wasn't as taken by the work itself. I tend to select artists based on how compelling I find their artwork and the consistency of their body of work as a whole.

David: Of the 147 artist dossiers we looked at, did you notice any specific trends or any commonality amongst them?

Ivan: I've been thinking about this quite a bit, trying to find some commonality between the artists we selected. I can't say there is any one thing that makes it easy to quantify them as a group, which I think is a good thing. I'm glad I can't easily pin a common theme down. Overall, there is a definite sense of self-awareness and an identity to the selected works; a knowledge of the art world and a clear engagement with contemporary culture, yet not in a cynical manner. I like the fact that there's no easy category to slot these artists into. Are they post-modern? Certainly, but more as an inevitable fact of our times than as any kind of calculated strategy. Most of the artists are using visual metaphors to express an overlapping set of themes and ideas. Many of the artworks certainly touch on current trends relating to the appropriation of media, the critique of consumerism, and the investigation of cultural identity but overall it's a diverse mix of people and a representative sampling of what a lot of contemporary artists are exploring.

David: Do artists in this region speak of the region through their work or does their work have a more global perspective?

Ivan: Frankly, I don't see a distinct regional voice at work, such as the scene in London, Ontario during the late 60s and early 70s, for example. I think artists tend to be well informed, have broad interests and are by nature nomadic and difficult to pin down, particularly when they're moving from city to city or country to country, as many of the artists in the show have done since our selection meeting. The group is nicely representative of the growing cultural diversity in the area, so the regional character of the show has inevitably become much more dispersed. As a result, my intention to capture a snapshot of emerging artists in the here and now has already expanded well beyond the geographic limits I initially set for the show, which is nice. It's reflective of the times we live in.

David: Interestingly there were a large number of painters that responded to your call for submissions, which seems to contradict any notion of painting being played out as a medium. And there were not that many videos that were sent in, again contradicting trends in the big biennials that we're seeing all over the world, where video/DVD projection seems to dominate.

Ivan: The sheer amount of painting submitted was quite a surprise really. It was unexpectedly refreshing. I may regret saying this, but this may be part of a nascent rear-guard action in response to the ubiquity of computers, digital cameras and iPods. Artists tend to be contrarian, so perhaps the novelty of interactive art and large-format projection, which has defined the international art scene of the past

decade, may be waning somewhat. Painting and chemical photography start to seem pretty radical when you're inundated with ready access to digital toys. I won't say that this is a trend, but it might be an interesting footnote to the show. The hand-made quality of much of this work might be something to keep an eye out for over the next few years.

David: The date in the title of the exhibition implies that there will be other *Showcase* exhibitions in the future. Is that the case? If so, why do you think this approach is worthwhile?

Ivan: It was always my intention that *Showcase.05* would be a prototype for an ongoing emerging micro-biennial. I'd certainly like to revisit this process again in two years time to see which artists have come along in the interim. It's a very useful means for me as a curator to get a sense of what emerging artists are up to.

David: Your approach of a directed call for submissions followed by consultation with an outside curator is somewhat unique. How did you decide upon this method and how do you feel about the approach? Is this a direction you may take with future versions of *Showcase*?

Ivan: Absolutely! Working side-by-side to select the artists was a very rewarding experience and a reasonably objective means to review a broad spectrum of work by younger artists. It came down to two curators sitting in a room looking at artist submissions and having a long, highly subjective, often goofy, and yet very substantial discussion about the artwork, a conversation that in a very real way continued for weeks after we made the shortlist. *Showcase* intentionally retains certain egalitarian principles associated with open juried exhibitions but is designed to be more conceptually grounded and curatorially effective, which ultimately benefits the artists in the long run. This show is a real commitment and I have no doubt we will be seeing a lot more from this group of artists. I don't think you can ask for much more than that.

David Liss is the Director and Curator of the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art (MOCCA), Toronto.

Ivan Jurakic is the Curator for Cambridge Galleries.

POSTSCRIPT

I tried to construct an aesthetic breakdown of the works in the exhibition. Typically, many of the artworks overlap into multiple categories but ideally this will provide some sense of the discussions that David and I had during the selection process.

Appropriated Images

Jaclyn Conley makes oil paintings based upon paparazzi photos of celebrities featured in trashy magazines, including "Britney" and "Mary-Kate and Ashley", as a comment on our fixation with fame and beauty. **Alexander Wlasenko** references obscure Italian and Russian cinema as subject matter to create his large format drawings, like "Art Club, 1971", which has a very rich and cinematic quality.

Critique of Consumerism

Phil Delisle creates variations of his "How to" paintings, a series of visual instruction manuals that show artists how to make a painting or how to apply for an exhibition. **Zeke Moores** uses casting and metal plating to transform ready-made objects, such as his "Trashcans", into consumer status symbols. **Steven Laurie** fabricates customized hand-held motorized items like the "Rubber Burner", which both celebrates and critiques the fetishization of masculinity. **Dado Segota** (at Preston) paints enamel on Lexan in "Pipedream Series" to make formalist ramp-paintings that riff on both skateboarding and auto culture.

Cultural Identity

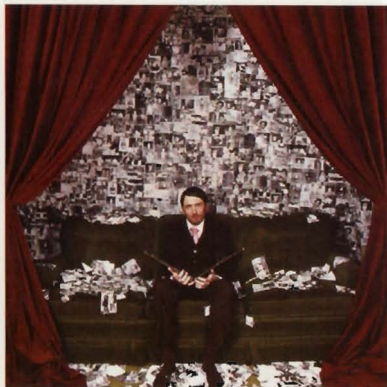
Soheila Estahani integrates Persian script into her abstract "Poetic Compositions" as an elegant and aesthetic means of crafting line and form. **Ayako Kurakawa** performs karaoke to an old Japanese war song in "Sen You", a single channel video that creates a curious juxtaposition between past and present. **Insoon Ha** examines the fluidity of gender in "Breeding Season" recasting the human figure as a hybrid form.

Architectonic Abstraction

Kristine Moran paints muscular graphic images of racing cars and fiery crashes in works like "Smokescreen", which elicits notions of speed and chaos to reflect urban culture. **Jinny M.J. Yu** juxtaposes expressive mark-making within linear structures painted on aluminum, her "Me(n)tal Perspectives" series suggests a complex psycho-physical equilibrium.

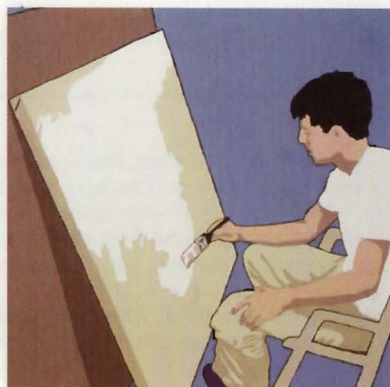
Personal Cosmology

Jason Hallows has created a pseudo-biographical narrative in his ongoing series of "Ore" installations and drawings, which blend imagery of the near North with fact and fiction. **Robyn Cumming** expresses a very dark vision of the world in her "In Place" series of C-prints depicting individuals in awkward and often disturbing obsessive compulsive tableaux. She is represented by XEXE Gallery, Toronto.



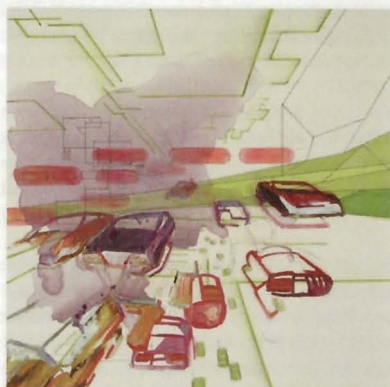
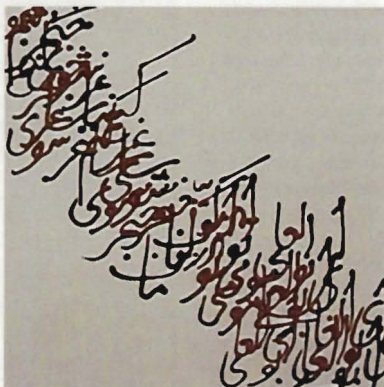
front: clockwise from top right

Jaclyn Conley
 Alexander Wlasenko
 Zeke Moores
 Steven Laurie
 Ayako Kurakawa
 Jinny M.J. Yu



back: clockwise from top left

Robyn Cumming
 Phil Delisle
 Kristine Moran
 Insoon Ha
 Jason Hallows
 Soheila Estahani



SHOWCASE.05
 August 26-October 9, 2005

cambridge galleries
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 www.cambridgegalleries.ca

Gallery Hours: Monday-Thursday 9:30-6:30 pm
 Friday & Saturday 9:30-5:30 pm, Sunday 1:00-5:00 pm

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