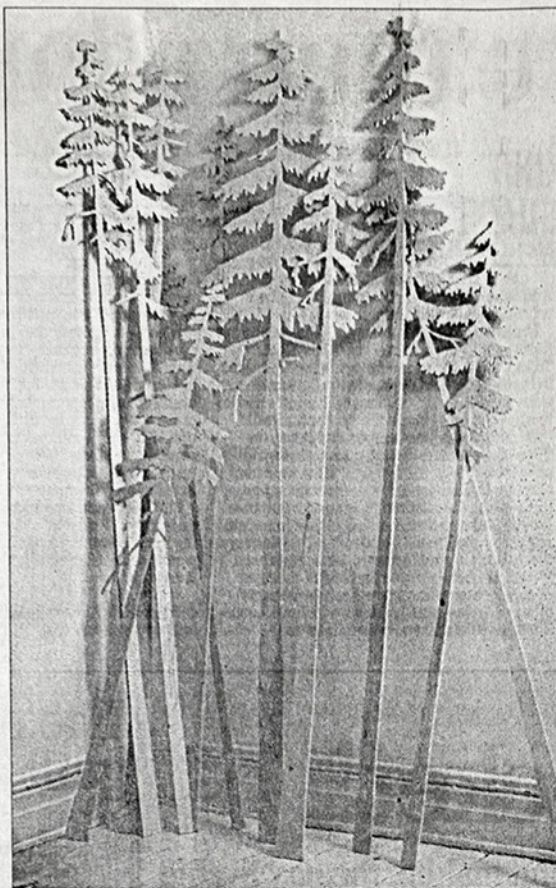
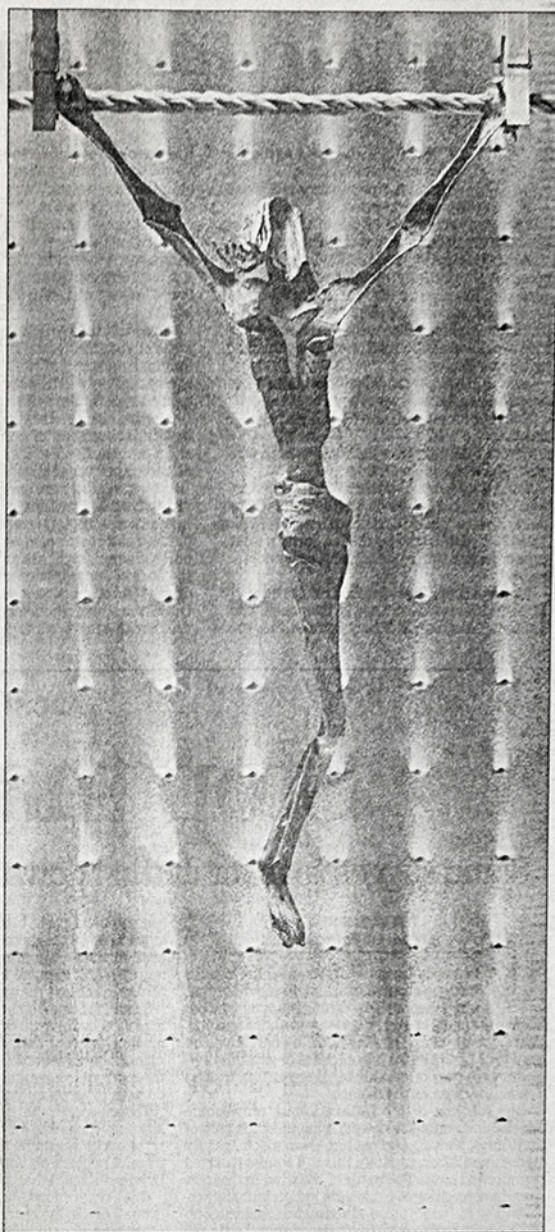


VISUAL ARTS

Clear-Cut, by Montreal artist Paul Litherland: a forest mocking the whole notion of forest.



Part of *Oui*, Allan Edgar's crypto-religious, photographic triptych.



Artifice – the sequel

More toned down than Part 1 of the show, Part 2 seems an invitation to think again

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Part 1 of *Artifice* hit the public like a friendly pie in the face. That segment of the show, which continues until Aug. 13, involves filling several downtown retail spaces with bona fide contemporary art.

Now the second part of *Artifice* is here, spare and sobering, eerily sedate in tone, if not in substance, as if calibrated to counter the buzzing visual overkill of *Artifice 1* (reviewed in these pages June 27).

Part 2 opened July 9 and features just a handful of artists, mainly from Montreal and Toronto. Rather than joining the assault on the city's store scene, this exhibit is entirely contained within the pristine confines of the Saidye Bronfman Centre. (*Artifice*, Parts 1 and 2, were curated by David Liss, Marie-Michèle Cron, John Massier and Katia Meir.)

The most outlandish work in *Artifice*, Part 2, is Montrealer Alfred Abeijon's 3-D comment on immobility, titled *Chariot*. This joy-ride contraption, artifice in the extreme, combines a threadbare sofa and wheels.

The result is an ode to inertia. Strings stretching from the vehicle to an improbable suburb of tiny wooden houses suggest that reality is but a modern mirage. The ticky-tacky boxes, marinating in containers filled with blue fluid, seem to have suffered no major flood damage.

Equally impractical and flimsy, in fact and in

concept, is an unsavoury culinary installation by artist Luc Vassort, appropriately titled *Stereotype* (produced).

The main servings are two human bodies molded from Jell-O. One of these floppy figures lies prone in a long plastic tray, as if waiting for an autopsy.

Perhaps the message, an old one, is that we are what we eat. On another level, the work, mixing 1970s conceptualism and 1980s jiggle-TV, is about breakdown, physical and moral. Then again, like many of the pieces in this show, the main aim seems to be sheer fun.

Montreal artist Paul Litherland's more sombre creation, titled *Clear-Cut*, also has, in its way, to do with transformations. Leaning against the gallery wall are several two-dimensional plywood cut-outs resembling pine trees – a forest mocking the whole notion of forest.

The best work in the show is Quebec City artist Ivan Binet's semi-abstract photo-series consisting of nine horizontal bands. Unframed, these long images, each a panoramic vista of a landscape, are hung one above the other.

What we get is a whole new take on plate-technics. According to this scenario, the Earth is flat, with various sections connected like so many box-cars. On a deeper level, Binet's unassuming creation touches on perception and our notion of self and place.

Place – or possibly placelessness – is the theme of Toronto artist Matthew Slioly's installation housed in a dark room all its own. This work,

with its ludicrously long title – *Hyperornamentalpsychosexualenigma* – involves digital imaging. Symmetrical patterns, projected on three walls, mutate before our eyes. But it is the infernal tower of clicking slide-projectors, situated in the centre of the room, that holds our rapt attention.

And Toronto artist Stacey Lancaster's short video, called *Western* and accompanied by the soundtrack of a movie, misses the mark as a real shoot'em-up comment on the media. The slightly hypnotic view, as if from a moving car, is of roughly textured trees draped with Spanish moss. Have the Wild West and the Old South forged some kind of alliance?

Aside from the promising hard-edge works by Montrealer Barry Allikas, and the brooding, crypto-religious photographic triptych by Allan Edgar, the paintings and drawings in this show disappoint, suggesting that painting is a fading art.

Painter Eric Glavin of Toronto is represented by an abstract sequence toying with the relationship between symbol, logos and pure form. And Toronto artist Elizabeth McIntosh, in her washed-out banners, seems, for the moment, to be treading water.

Perhaps the main role of this second part of *Artifice* is to invite us to consider and reconsider – to see both parts of *Artifice* in cool perspective. What are the trends? Were there some artistic standouts? How well did the *Artifice* concept perform?

Certainly, this art "festival" can't be accused of slickness, of selling out. Yet the second part is, by and large, a limited affair, with works that often seem only half-realized – at times merely half-baked.

In all fairness, some of the art can be seen as still "in progress," or as ideas "in transition" – and while the real free-market economy seems to be producing. Of course, that there is but a finite amount of talent out there – not all artists are equal – is not the fault of the curators. Still, a bit more selectivity would have been in order.

As for the first part of *Artifice*, there is a lot to be said for taking over abandoned retail spaces and inserting contemporary art that is challenging and non-commercial. The art-drek generally sold in downtown malls – not to mention few galleries – is put to shame by the event like *Artifice*.

Yet *Artifice* leaves us with a feeling of let-down, once the initial high of such a joyously subversive event has worn off. Too often, the artists have confused whimsy for wit, concept and complexity for real thought or passion. However, to have gotten non-kitsch, no matter how intentionally kitschy, into prime commercial spaces is a real triumph.

♦ *Artifice*, Part 2, at the Saidye Bronfman Centre, 5170 Côte Ste. Catherine Rd., until Aug. 23. *Artifice*, Part 1, remains at four locations: 209 Ste. Catherine St. E., 2081 and 2989 Ste. Catherine St. W. and Les Cours Mont-Royal at 1550 Metcalfe St., until Aug. 16. Call: 739-2301.