



Elspeth Pratt's *Cloistered* (inset) blends cardboard and laminate, while Adad Hannah videotapes *Ohio on the Beach*.

Sculpture, Stills Spice Up Summer

VISUAL ARTS

Glyptomania

At the Bartlett Performance and Exhibition Space until August 30

• By CHRISTOPHER BRAYSHAW

Glyptomania is an ambitious and accomplished survey of British Columbia sculpture, organized by sculptor and Simon Fraser University instructor Greg Snider. In the last year or two, I've seen excellent three-dimensional work locally by Isabel Pauwels, Jason W. F. Fitzpatrick, Myfanwy Macleod, Jason McLean, Geoffrey Farmer, Robin Peck, and others, but never a group sculpture exhibition. Snider's show is timely and pedagogical, encompassing a variety of contemporary sculptural practices. The exhibition is also well-installed. The Bartlett Performance and Exhibition Space of SFU's School for the Contemporary Arts (611 Alexander Street) is a huge warehouse floor, all high ceilings, skylights, and north-facing windows, with enough room for all 22 works on display to breathe. The sculptures themselves are a mixed bag: some are superb, while others are awful, both technically and conceptually reactionary. Overall, Glyptomania succeeds because there's lots to look at and because Snider has done a thoughtful job of arranging it all, with the possible exception of his decision to put a work of his own right at the front door, which you have to walk around to get to the rest of the show.

The least successful pieces on display either fetishize technique by flaunting their creators' skill at working with metal, wood, or stone, or swamp the object with conceptually and symbolically obscure references. The worst offenders are Capilano College instructor George Rammell, Roland Brener, and Geoffrey Smedley. Rammell's *Gigantipithicus Blacii* is an enormous human skull, cast in stainless steel and set on the floor, with a welding tank and hose beside it. This kitschy, symbolically overblown "artwork" looks like something surreptitiously built by a Fraser Valley teen in shop class. Another Rammell work, *Persistence of Instinct*, consists of a floor-based timber frame enclosing a cast bed of metal "mud" that's peppered with cast bear tracks, and a nearby wall-mounted panel featuring more muddy tracks. A handout claims the work "examines the relationship of contemporary society to the Brown Bear as an original mentor for western culture". This thesis is in no way materialized in the work on display. The symbol of the bear is obviously meaningful to Rammell, but its sig-

nificance to his sculptures is unclear. The technical facility and intellectual obscurity of Rammell's bombastic work is deeply off-putting. Similarly, Ronald Brener's *Cat/Wolf* (two enormous wooden animal heads, locked in each other's jaws) looks like a leftover prop from the local men's group's last meeting in the woods. Brener's lack of humour and bad formal decisions (the animals' "skins" are raw wood, but their hollow interiors are painted a garish pinkish-red) are jaw-droppingly problematic. More technically accomplished, but just as disappointing, are the creations of retired UBC instructor Geoffrey Smedley, whose constructions of wood and machined aluminum are so fraught with overintellectualized allusions to classical architecture and geometry that he pays relatively little attention to his sculptures' physical properties.

There's much good work in Glyptomania, too. Alan Storey's *Circular Wind Tunnel* is elegant in its simplicity: it's a circular hollow tunnel suspended from a slowly rotating turbine blade. Step inside the tunnel's circumference and the rest of the exhibition disappears, leaving you alone with the slowly spinning tunnel and a breeze that reaches out to gently caress your face.

Elspeth Pratt's *Cloistered* is an abstraction made from corrugated cardboard, fake wood-grain laminate, and a chunk of pale blue polystyrene foam. Its visual complexity suggests Frank Stella's huge painted constructions and Frank Gehry's sinuous buildings, but unlike these male artists, Pratt achieves this complexity with little more than a packing knife and a few dabs of glue. She's one of the best local sculptors I know of.

Victoria artist Mowry Baden's *Now Iguana* is hilarious. The work is a little metal hill whose sides are studded with climbing-wall holds. A tall padded pole rises from a seat bolted onto the top of the "hill". You climb up onto it, lean your chin on the supports, and you're thrust into a calm, relaxing pose, like a reptile basking in the sun. Ten minutes of dozing atop *Now Iguana* while an artist friend went to his car to retrieve his cellphone left me smiling and cheerful, briefly at peace with the world.

Other satisfying works on display include a rolled-up mat cast in rubber by Liz Magor, Richard Prince's deco-styled *Sedan Chair for the Machine Age*, and Warren Murfitt's *Douglas Fir Use Book*, which pairs industrial-design photographs from a 1950s shop manual with small squares of stained-green plywood,

an über-material apparently capable of being bent to any use. Murfitt's smart collage aesthetic is representative of the level of innovation and accomplishment present in Greg Snider's ambitious and inclusive exhibition.

Stills

Adad Hannah

At the Third Avenue Gallery through August 31

• By CHRISTOPHER BRAYSHAW

Adad Hannah is or has been a painter, photographer, textile artist, photographer, videographer, clown, critic, curator, arts administrator, performance artist, and gofer for science-fiction artist William Gibson. This list of accomplishments only sounds implausible until you actually meet Hannah for the first time; once you see him in action, you tend not to blink when you hear of subsequent escapades.

Hannah's new exhibition at the Third Avenue Gallery is, like the artist himself, a curious mix of accomplishment and swagger. Most of the works on display are abstractions made by clipping images from video and laying them overtop of one another. These odd-looking, colourful pieces resemble recent paintings by James Rosenquist and Jeff Koons, and are completely unassuming. The stills are garish and fuzzy, and their cut-and-paste compositions fall short of similar excursions into full-blown abstraction by the artist in his 2000 exhibition *The Sewing Room*, at the Surrey Art Gallery.

Better by far are a series of video shorts, *Stills*, projected on a wall alongside the video abstractions. These loops look like snapshots, but are actually real-time depictions of actors standing stock still. (An eye blink here and a twitch there are our only clues.) A maintenance worker waters plants in a corporate atrium; a band briefly confers between songs; a pudgy, middle-aged man gazes sadly off into the distance. Hannah has taken great pains to make his staged scenes look spontaneous, as if snapped on the run with a point-and-shoot camera. Nothing much is going on in most of Hannah's tableaux vivants, and this quiet banality is a source of their great strength. The ghosts of artist-photographers specializing in staged figuration, like Philip-Lorca diCorcia, Teresa Hubbard, and Alexander Birchler, and, perhaps, the early Ken Lum, hover over these modest, conceptually accomplished works. The figurative *Stills* are Hannah's best work yet, though I am sure better work is yet to come. ■