

reetings, Cyberfolk, and welcome to the February Keepers Of Light. If you are reading the Mosaic version of Teletimes, you will probably see the colour images in fairly high fidelity. If you have the downloaded version, you are unfortunately going to be seeing dithered versions of the colour works, though the B&W's should be fine. We here at Keepers Of Light Quality Control are at work on overcoming the limitations of the software involved, and if any one out there has any bright ideas in this regard, we would love to hear them.

This month we visit the Station Street Arts Centre to view Female Nudes, and exhibition by Vancouver artist Skai Fowler. Right. Off we go.

he Station Street Arts Centre

A note for the theatre's front-of-house personnel reminds them to keep a look out for late arrivals, just to make sure patrons don't trip over the junkies in the alley. Station Street Art Centre is a strange place to meet the Masters. Located behind an infamous biker joint, tucked in between the CN Station and the American Hotel lies Station St., from which the art centre, located in a converted pickle warehouse, takes it's name.

According to Sherry McGarvie, the theatre' s feisty marketer/general manager, the building was first converted for use as a theatre by the Fend Players Theatre Company, a group of ex-convicts who somehow decided that theatre was a good idea, and also that it would be a good thing to name their troupe the "Need To Offend Players." Unfortunately, the name offended people, and it was shortened to "Fend" in the interests of getting along with funding agencies.

"Since 1988, Fend has produced over fifty plays, over thirty of them Canadian," says McGarvie, "and of those thirty, twenty were local." The group's output has been impressive. The last production mounted by Fend was "Open Couple", a play written in Italian by the husband and wife play writing team of Dario Foo and Franca Rame. The

play was translated into Spanish, French, English, and Cantonese, and the performances ran concurrently. Alas, the Fend company is currently out of production, this season having been canceled due to a lack of funds, which McGarvie attributes to past mismanagement of resources. However, the 130 seat art centre continues to operate profitably as a commercial venture, and the revenue will insure a production season next year.

As a visual arts venue the art centre needs attention, and it's good to see that it's finally getting some. There has always been work displayed on the walls of the lobby and bar areas of the theatre, and usually with some attempt made to match themes between the art and whatever was playing in the theatre, but the displays always had the feeling of an afterthought. It was a defacto gallery, but until now it has never been considered as a stand alone resource with a spine of it's own. Female Nudes, in fact is the first exhibition to get it's own opening event, complete with wine, cheese, and printed invitations. It will not be the last. The walls have been painted, and I understand they will be refinished and the lighting will improve as funds permit. (Donations are accepted).

The Station Street Art Centre is located at 930 Station Street in Vancouver. The hundred plus seat facility is available for booking for arts events of most types, though it is booked up until the middle of May (at time of writing). Interested parties may call Sherry McGarvie at (604) 688-3337 for rates & dates.

Female Nudes

Photographs by Skai Fowler

Presented at Station Street Arts Centre, January, 1994

The Station Street Arts Centre is a strange place to meet the Masters. Yet, there they were. Rubens, Michelangelo, all the big guns. You would instantly recognize the subjects: Paris; Pan; Aphrodite; Diana, Venus; and...hey! Who's that goddess there? No, not that one, the one with the curly hair. Was she always in that painting? Hey! She's in this one, too...and this one...

Skai Fowler has approached the study of the female nude with a unique perspective. Using herself as a model, she has composited her own images with photographs of reproductions of famous paintings. The results, printed at heroic sizes (about 4 by 6 feet), are fascinating.

Fowler drew on her own experience as an art school model (a "cultural stripper", as she puts it) and wondered how her counterparts two hundred years ago felt when they were posing for the paintings we now enshrine on museum walls. Did they go through the same emotions when they removed their clothes? How did they deal with being exposed and positioned and draped? And what, furthermore, might they have to say

today after hanging in the Louvre for all those dusty years? Might they not want to escape from the over-heated dramas they have been painted into? Do they tire of standing coquettishly? Do the models come to life at night when no one's around, to sit and drink tea, smoke cigarettes, and gossip about the painters they worked for?

I expect so, after seeing Fowler's pieces. From these and other musings Fowler has created a series of enchanting and whimsical images through which she floats like a knowing ghost, sometimes brazenly engaging the viewer, sometimes peering off into corners. Her presence is sometimes obvious, sometimes subtle. It's a remarkably versatile device.

urtains

The simplicity of "Curtains", for example, is deceptive. The skintone match between the painted model and the one photographed is nearly perfect. The graceful curves of the painted model's back are echoed equally as gracefully in the photographed. The imposition of the second figure, so close in form to the first, gives the image a fourth dimension of time. We see a time lapse double exposure. Our twentieth century brains interpret a sequence of events. We are watching a movie, we feel, we know what's going on. And yet, it is the painted model who stares boldly at us, asks "Well, you've had two hundred years to think about it. Why did you never ask what was behind the curtain?"

Secrets

"Secrets" has secrets. The skin tones have not been matched. The photographed model has quite clearly escaped from another work. An upstart has stolen in here to stand in the light on the freezing floor with information to convey. And, thoughtfully (and possibly against union rules), she has brought a chair for her colleague's back. Lumbar support. Modeling is hard work.

Bacchinal

In "Bacchinal", the photographed model is integrated smoothly into the painting. Detail appears and disappears in the darker transparent areas, giving a dream-like glow, and the model fades into history and memory, a participant there, not here, and quite lost to us.

Untitled

With *Untitled*, Skai has made a flawless juxtaposition of images. The painted drapery whips around her hips as she turns to the satyr, and she shares one leg and a breast with her painted counterpart, introducing an odd cubistic note.

This careful compositing is particularly noteworthy since it is extremely difficult to accomplish. All of the images in this show were shot as "in camera" double exposures. Fowler would expose an entire roll of film, shooting images of paintings from art books. Then the film was rewound to the beginning and the camera placed on a tripod. Fowler then arranged the lighting to match that in a painting and posed in front of a black background. She re-exposed the film frame by frame, and the results are what you see here. No additional darkroom compositing techniques were used. The large colour prints were produced by a commercial lab, and Fowler produced the black and whites herself.

Goddess Of The Water

Goddess Of The Water is at once the most direct (and obvious) manipulation, and the least accessible of the pieces (at least to me). The model is superimposed on a painting, and looks directly at the viewer, holding up for approval the very image into which she has been placed. Not an infinite recursion, for it stops after one iteration, but strange.

The cumulative effect of the show was quite pleasant. I enjoyed the feelings they invoked, and the images have stayed with me. I have not had the opportunity to view all of the pieces at their intended sizes. The Station Street Arts Centre is not a large enough venue for the 4x6 foot prints to be displayed, so smaller prints of most images were shown on this occasion. I would like to see the large originals some time, in a proper setting for their scale...perhaps at the Louvre...

Next month: The annual "Eye Of Eros" exhibition at Exposure Gallery.

profile: Skai Fowler

Skai Fowler did her first nude modeling job in 1975. At the time, she says, she was eighteen and convinced that the only real reason nudes were used was to lure students to art schools. She's thirty-four now, still modeling, and still convinced. She started practicing art while modeling part time, and eventually, by 1985, was using herself as a model. Being both artist and model solved for her the unsettling issues of objectification and misuse. In her artist's statement she says, "Some years ago I became interested in my historical counterparts. Every time I disrobed I had the sensation of this very same action having been done for centuries; in doing this I become aligned with all the female subjects of the old masters. It is in this perspective that I started my series on the nude."

We talked while I was making the scans of her prints and Jasper, her dog, amused himself yanking out cables.

SF I use myself, partly because I was the handiest person, and I didn't have to translate for someone else what it was I wanted, I had the luxury of just using myself...you know,

if you use somebody else, what does that mean? Especially because I used a lot of nudity in my photographs. I'd go into all the questions in terms of using some one else's image or abusing it...I'd ask people (to model nude), and they would be uncomfortable with it, or they weren't sure about it. People are quite protective, it's...it's somehow different if you draw them, you know, but if you photograph them they're much more reluctant. Originally I wanted to do this series using all different kinds of body types, so I asked my friends. And they were well, they don't know if they wanna be in a photograph, hung on a wall--

KB I always used a kind of a Tom Sawyer thing. I'd say, "Yeah, I'm doing this series of images and I need a nude model for this shot..." you know, and look at them for a second or two--

SF (Laughing) Yeah.

KB

--then say "nah..." and they'd say like "Hey! What's wrong with my body?"

SF Yeah. This new series that hasn't actually distilled in my mind. I really don't want to use myself for this. I feel like I need to use other people, to explore that, the relationship between the photographer and the photograph and the image and the person...and using myself is sort of an excuse now. It was fine for a time, but now I need to stop using it as an excuse to not photograph other people.

KB OK, what's this [photo]?

SF Oh, that one's...Untitled...there's got to be a great title in there somewhere...

KB

So, this new project, will it be more of the same kind of--

SF No!! It's getting away from this kind of imagery altogether. I've been working on this whole series, this whole Female Nude concept for...quite a while now, and I'm quite tired of it. I really wanna venture off into something else.

KB

But will you be using this collagey kind of--

SF Probably...yeah...yes, in fact. I like putting different realities together...like these, though I also view these as historical advertisements, in the sense that even though many of these are allegories, they're selling a concept of that time. You'll see the Judgment of Paris reproduced again and again, and you can see the change in the body styles, in the things that they choose to represent, so all of that is used to sell a social concept, which is what advertising does. Now you have the tall, thin model, that's the body style of our contemporary period...

KB
This [photo]?

SF
Um, Goddess Of The Water.

KB
Which way does this one go?

SF
It goes the other way...I have a list of all the painters...somewhere here...

KB
Never mind. If they wanna know they can write letters.

SF
Right...and as you can tell, they're all from reproductions, they're all taken out of art books...

KB
No. I thought you were prancing around naked in the Louvre...

SF
(Laughing) Yeah...that would be nice.

KB
That would be fun.

SF
Yeah. And I do wonder, you know? I've been meaning to see if I could get a grant to do it. Go through the channels, write to the Louvre, see if I could do it using the originals...

KB
...the expression "a frosty day in hell" creeps up...but you never know, fill in the forms, and...

SF
well, exactly.

Skai Fowler may be reached at (604) 253-2510

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