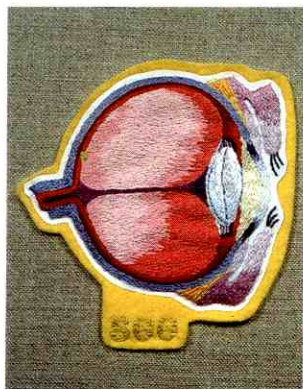


Steffani Frideres, *Body Glove*, 68 x 28 x 30 cm, 1994-1996
(liquid light on cloth).

Anatomical Permutations

Ten Canadian Artists in Mexico

Dianne Pearce*



Dianne Pearce, *Sentiments*, series of 3, 44 x 132 cm, 1998 (transfer, embroidery, photo, acrylic matte medium, linen).

From transplanting to fragmenting, from sensitizing and perfecting to repelling, notions of human beings and being human —the body and the psyche— were magnified by the work of 10 Canadian artists at the 26th International

Cervantes Festival in Guanajuato last October.¹ Individual body parts laying askew on the examination table are somehow reassembled to form a new body, different from the one we knew, now infused with experience and understanding, now a hybrid being.

“Anatomical Permutations” is not an exhibition about the physical anatomy of the human body. Rather, it addresses a broader

concept of anatomy that isolates the parts of an organism to ascertain their position, relations, structure and function. This is akin to an analysis, if you will, of the experiences and events that change the lineal sequence of an ordered set of objects as we know them. The result? Anatomical permutations: changes to the body and psyche in the form of physical change, psycholog-

* Artist living and working in Montreal.

Photos reproduced courtesy of Dianne Pearce.

ical growth, spiritual awareness, cultural understanding.

Without a doubt, this theme encompasses a vast territory of issues, issues that each artist addresses with her own personal exploration. Therefore, while the themes of change and the body unify the exhibition, they by no means preclude figurative art. In fact, there is no common representative object present in the artists' work: while each piece alludes to the body in some way, the human figure may be entirely absent.

In the context of the show, the concept remains central to the curatorial proposal while the medium employed plays almost a secondary role: it provides a means by which each artist can best express the concept. They all employ techniques specific to their studies and experience, resulting in a diverse exhibition that includes fiber, painting, photography, installation, print making, sculpture and mixed media.

The work of the 10 artists was divided into five concepts, each dealing with varied notions of the human figure: Transplanted, Fragmented, Sensitized, Perfected and Repulsed.

TRANSPLANTED

Having moved frequently as a child, Lisa Fedak (Guelph, Ontario) comes to terms with living in a small town while struggling with the demands of an urban art scene. Studying the notion of placement, for her the body becomes a unit of containment, much like a house or garden, that can be uprooted, moved, and placed elsewhere.

Karen Michelsen (Montreal) also comments on the cultural fragmentation inherent in shifting territories. Simultaneously a product of mixed bloodlines and an immi-



Gretchen Sankey, *The Bible According to Barbie*, series of 8, 63 x 81 cm, 1995 (oil on canvas).



Karen Michelsen, *And a Cloth of Tears* (detail), 39 x 71 x 15 cm, 1996 (embroidery, painted fabric, acrylic medium transfer, organza).



grant in a new country, Michelsen sees herself as both giving to and taking from her new environment: not only does she contribute further to the already quilted culture of her new home, but she adds yet another layer of memory to her multi-layered history.

FRAGMENTED

Jeannie Thib (Toronto) references historical sources such as art, textiles, maps and manuals and combines these edited and altered images with contemporary ones to create composite pieces in which objects from the past and present co-exist harmoniously. The amalgamation of these disparate artifacts is a metaphor for fragmentation, a concept that compels humans to leave an archival mark by creating and organizing.

Dianna Frid (Vancouver and New York City) also takes generic images found in pictorial dictionaries and didactic materials such as manuals, maps and guides and assembles them via sewing to form new narratives distinct from their origin. In this way, Frid subverts empirical systems of representation, questions the linear nature of traditional narrative and alludes to the inconsistencies inherent in the system.

SENSITIZED

For Millie Chen (Toronto), culture is communicated through food and shelter so that the sensual intelligence of the body —the senses of taste and smell in particular— can convey psychic and physical memory. The traveler enters into and experiences a new culture via the mouth, which is both the oral passage of taste and the oral tool for spoken words.



Catherine Heard, *Freud's Bride* (detail), 125 cm tall, 1996 (embroidery on found dress and three wax heads).

Dianne Pearce's (Montreal) work highlights the notions of belonging and exile by exploring the "social club" and "badges." We all wear brand names, and we choose them according to the marketed image we identify with.

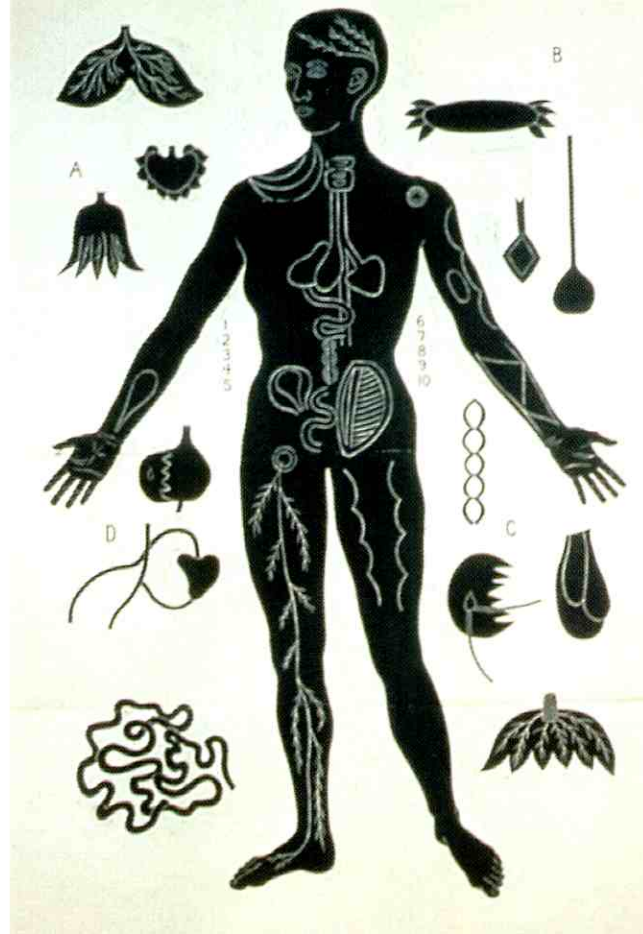
Pearce's intent is to create a "club" for these mad geniuses, complete with embroidered "mad badges" of anatomical drawings of the senses to indicate the heightened sensory awareness of the members.

PERFECTED

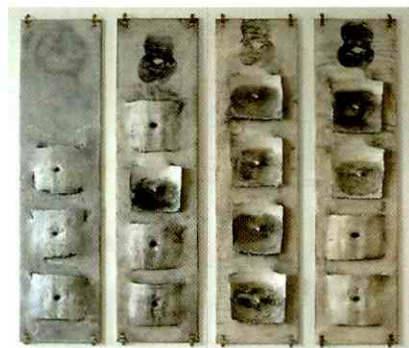
Steffani Frideres (Calgary) comments on the devaluation of women who do not fit into the socially acceptable parameters of ideal size, shape and weight dictated by the media. Women are fed manipulative information from the fashion and cosmetics industries promising attractiveness, youth and leanness if their products are consumed.

Gretchen Sankey (Toronto) examines sexual politics of fairy tales and inserts menacing visual representations into popular folk songs and biblical stories to emphasize the conceptual intersection of faith, sexuality and violence in society today. In her work, a young girl acts out her prepubescent sexual fantasies onto her dolls, Barbie, Ken and G. I. Joe, all of which are highly idealized and wholly unrealistic sexual models for young girls and boys.

Carolyn Pinder (St. Catharines, Ontario) reflects on the innocence and idealism that we feel when reminiscing about our childhood. In her work, Pinder uses familiar children's rhymes and stories which are



Jeannie Thib, *Terra Incognita*, 245 x 191 cm, 1993 (linocut on mulberry paper, ink).



Lisa Fedak, *Endless Column of Bellies*, 122 x 31 cm each panel, 1994 (drywall, polyfilla, plaster bandages).

themselves quite tragic or violent. These distressing tales are reminders that childhood is not wholesome; rather, it is in the revision of our own memory that it becomes idyllic.

REPULSED

Catherine Heard (Toronto) explores incongruous dualities —sometimes repulsive—

inherent in the human form. Heard's richly and beautifully crafted pieces lure the viewer closer until the grotesquely deformed subject is comprehended and the viewer retracts in repulsion. These monstrous freaks both alarm us and at the same time stir us to protect and nurture them.



"Anatomical Permutations" provided a significant opportunity to exhibit Canadian art on an international level and foster relationships between Canadian and Mexican institutions. Also, participating alongside other artists in Mexico offered the artists the chance to share their work with an enormous and varied public.

The exhibition was possible thanks to the generous funding by the Canada Council for the Arts, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Conseil des Arts et Lettres du Québec and Bombardier Transport Group. Also, the goods and services provided by the International Cervantes Festival and the People's Museum in Guanajuato were instrumental in realizing a successful exhibition. **NMM**

NOTES

¹ Artist/curator Dianne Pearce and the artist-run center Observatoire 4 de Montréal presented the exhibition "Anatomical Permutations: Ten Canadian Artists" at the 26th International Cervantes Festival (FIC) in Guanajuato last October. The FIC is an annual festival of music, theater, dance and fine arts which presents musicians, performers, dancers and artists from more than 30 countries in 10 to 15 different venues, as well as the streets of the small city of Guanajuato.