

## Body comes alive in Mississauga gallery

### ART REVIEW

#### LOVING THE ALIEN

Reviewed by Gary Michael Dault

JUST when you feel you've had quite enough of The Body as the subject of contemporary art making, along comes an intelligent exhibition like *Loving the Alien*, at the Art Gallery of Mississauga until Oct. 26, that changes — almost changes — your mind.

All the works of the five young and mid-career artists gathered together by curator Stuart Reid demonstrate what his catalogue essay calls "the new foreignness of organic form." Which means, apparently, that these works — by Philip Grauer, Sandra Gregson, Celia Neubauer, Evan Penny, and Stephen Schofield — address the problems of the body while speaking the language of abstraction.

"From retouched photos in the tabloids," Reid writes, "to the supposed enhancement of beauty with plastic surgery, to the heralded genetic cloning of domestic animals — the alien has been absorbed into the very fabric of our everyday life and into our bodies. *Loving the Alien* presents works which are not a paeon to paradise lost, but instead embrace the artificial."

And embrace the artificial they do — so slickly and confidently it's almost off-putting. Fabricated in mysterious ways from materials that are often jarringly and jauntily odd, these alien-ated works deliver glancing blows at the human body.

Stephen Schofield's testicular earthenware eggs, in their cast scrotum-like sacs, hang forlorn and vulnerable from lengths of raw steel pipe that run like handrails through the gallery. Or, alternately, the whole egg-mass lifts from the pipe like a dancer on pointes, yearning up into the air.

Or there are Sandra Gregson's eerily delicate, and sometimes nearly oppressively poetic, constructions of tissue paper and rabbit-skin glue. Works with heavy titles like *what is passed on*, and *Mind of Flesh (red spine)* sit, lovely as giant dragonfly wings, on slick glass shelves, daring the vulgar viewer to make a connection with them, to internalize them, to squeeze from them their status as tissue samples and etherealized body parts.

Evan Penny's wall-mounted sculptures in polyester resin are as tender as Gregson's feathery glosses on the organic. Coloured plaques derived somehow from the impress of the human body, each of these poignant little casts seems like some exiled shard of skin, muscle, tendon, lost in space beyond

the self, part trophy and part grievous loss — the very essence of bodily dispersion. These are aliens you love because they look as if they once belonged to you.

Celia Neubauer's soft, dark, organically charged drawings, made with powdered charcoal, look as if they drifted onto the paper all by themselves, like soot falling. Like so much of the work in *Loving the Alien*, they seem to function as a delicate memorial to the body, to organicism — the body as reminiscence.

Which is something you cannot say about Philip Grauer's funny and disturbing cast-aluminum shapes, sparkling with their lacquered, rubbed, candy-coated, kustom-kar surfaces. Like weird, industrial slugs and caterpillars, Grauer's objects are slightly sinister. Self-contained to the point of narcissism in their own slick, unenterable beauty, they languish about the gallery on rubber mats, perch on hardware-store garbage cans, are plopped into plastic buckets or ooze out of overturned wastebaskets. Nothing touching or sentimental here; these are bodily beings from other worlds, hard and perfect, amoebas from Mars, as smug and distant from us as we are growing to be from ourselves.