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May 5, 2001

A guide to the galleries

John Bentley Mays
 National Post

From chocolate-covered art hung from the ceiling and swaying in the breeze of an electric fan, to the classic works of Peter Paul Rubens at the AGO or a collective show by the city's most renowned photographers, Toronto's many galleries and museums have an eclectic multitude of art on display. Herewith, a lengthy listing of spring and summer shows.



Courtesy Power Plant

Robin Collyer's photographs appear at the Power Plant...

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ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO

317 Dundas St. W. (416) 979-6648

Opening today, to Aug 12: Rubens and His Age: Treasures from the Hermitage Museum, Russia. An opulent display of 183 paintings, drawings and decorative objects by Peter Paul Rubens, Anthony van Dyck and other 17th-century Flemish masters, selected from the vast holdings of the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg.

The works here, many snapped up by Catherine the Great in one of the greatest art-shopping binges in history, illustrate an era when the sumptuous, grand, plump art of Rubens and company held sway over European painting.

To June 17: Greg Curnoe: Life and Stuff. A tribute to the restlessly inquisitive, prolific London, Ont., artist and the first definitive peek at the huge heap of Curnoe works given to the AGO after the artist's untimely death in 1992. It's Curnoe whole: paintings and watercolours, copybook scribbles, drawings and cartoons, rubber-stamp prints, assemblages, books -- a portrait of the artist as creator of worlds.



Peter Redman, National Post

...Matthew Teitelbaum, director of the AGO, in front of a Rubens painting.

BATA SHOE MUSEUM

327 Bloor St. W. (416) 979-7799

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OLGA KORPER GALLERY

17 Morrow Ave. (416) 538-8220

To May 30: John Brown. Five marvelous large paintings and several smaller mid-career works by an artist well on his way to greatness. Over the years, the visible anatomy of figures has gradually disappeared from Brown's painting, leaving the dark architecture of the thoughts, drives, stirrings that move us. Brown typically visualizes bodily consciousness by slathering on grey or fleshy paint, scratching bits of it away in flakes and swatches, then repairing the wreckage, and undoing the repairs, again and again. What's left at the end of this strenuous process is an art between abstraction and any form of representation, teaching our secret inwardness about mortality, then leading us out again into the light of more abundant life.

July 12-Aug 25: Roland Brener. A display of Swingers, a group of three polyester resin sculptures by the British Columbia artist loaned by New York's Deitch Projects. The eye-catchers here are the three very fat, strangely distorted male figures -- or post-human mutants in business suits of the sort that might crawl out of a storm sewer on their way to work 300 years after a thermonuclear attack. This strange trio is suspended by wires from the gallery ceiling. The effect takes the viewer to the edges of ordinary language and over it into a peculiar kind of floating anxiety. It's the suspension that does the trick, I think -- the visual contradiction of enormously heavy mutant-men on fun swings. And it's what Brener does. He cuts against the grain of ordinary visual expectation, not always pleasantly, but always with with mind-turning skill.

PAINTED CITY

234 Queen St. E. (416) 364-0269

May 12-June 9: Steve Levinson. In creating the work for this debut exhibition, Levinson has used his camera as cameras often want to be used: as creators of dreamscapes, as traps for fugitive weathers and atmospheres we can hardly see, but only sense. The results of Levinson's labour come in two formats. One is a series of large-scale Cibachrome prints, with the fingernail-polish gloss that process inevitably gives to anything printed with it. The other series, abruptly more soft, yielding and romantic, has been made by printing digital images of landscape on heavy watercolour paper.

June 15-July 14: Janet Read. A poet and author of children's book who lives in Port Hope, Read has established a a lyrical, uncomplicated abstraction in her canvases. The colours are high and rich, the compositions evocative of windows and landscapes rising far beyond. Art that pleases, soothes, perhaps calls down a certain silence in a busy room.

ROBERT BIRCH GALLERY

241 King St. E. (416) 955-9410

May 11-June 9: Renee van Halm. You could call these new canvases and gouaches of architectural interiors exciting, had not van Halm so skillfully captured the spiritual blahs and flabby simplicity at the heart of so much everyday modern architecture and design. For 20 years, her works has been