

GALLERY GOING

Participatory democracy

Saturday, October 11, 1997

The Bank of Symbiosis

There is a woman on TV screaming for money in one office. Down the hall, a former bank robber is sounding off against capitalism. A videotaped hand is rifling through a filing cabinet, a cash machine is dispensing fee art and a computer plays a "Wallet Symphony" based on the songs of the birds you see on paper money. The Symbiosis Collective has taken over a vacant Royal Bank outlet downtown, and it's more fun by far than your regular branch. With many of the original signs, partitions and fixtures battered but intact, it is an ideal setting for this chaotic, off-the-wall examination of the root of all evil. Look inside the vaults for Michael Alstad's list of dormant Second World War Swiss bank accounts and inside the bank's promotional literature for Victoria Stanton's subversive interpolations. *Until Oct. 25. 700 University Ave., Toronto. (416) 504-6398.*

John Kissick at Leo Kamen

Into these 31 small, thick, wooden panels -- wrapped with lead and painted, rubbed and scoured to suggest romantic scenery -- Kissick distills a broad panorama of preoccupations, ranging from First World War history to contemporary issues of representation.

A Canadian artist who teaches art at Penn State, Kissick evokes the ghost of painting past in these subtly beautiful works. Layers of golden paint partly rubbed away to reveal burnished lead recall a Turner-esque evening cloudburst; a flaring of sunset colours against a sombre horizon could mean day's end or a bomb exploding in battle. Minute ripples in the lead variously suggest mountain peaks or ornate picture frames. Yet they also draw our attention back to the fabricated nature of these works dense with drips, scratches and seams. Kissick's art is alluring and ambiguous, conjuring illusions even as it questions them. *Until Oct. 25. 80 Spadina Ave., Toronto. 416 - 504-9515.*

Eliza Griffiths at Mercer Union

Lipstick on, jeans skin-tight, nipples erect and navels pierced, Eliza Griffiths' teenage girls are all dressed up with nowhere to go. In *Penthouse Suite*, two friends flip through porn magazines as if pondering their fate. *Another Perfect Day* presents a similar twosome adrift in a suburban landscape, one defiantly wielding a cigarette, the other nervously trying to look cool. The candy colours and shallow space of Griffiths' oil paintings suggest magazine illustrations, but also the sadly restricted horizons of an emerging generation. Her *Karate Girls*, with their bloody noses, sharp high heels and immodest robes, look better equipped to fend for themselves. Yet we fear even for them in a culture which is still so heavily invested in keeping women down. *Until Nov. 1 . 439 King St. E., Toronto. 416 - 977-1412.*

Gillian Mackay, "Gallery Goings: John Kissick at Leo Kamen." *Globe and Mail*, Toronto, October 11, 1997