



In *4 Rooms 4 Artist*, a Master of Fine Arts thesis exhibition in the Visual Arts Building at the University of Victoria, you will find the basic art standbys – painting and sculpture. While art history references play a significant part in the practice of these four artists, this fresh and vital work is about reinventing and reimagining these traditional genres.

Mark Neufeld's work, "Lumpf," contains luscious paintings of cakes that appear to be the stuff of psychedelic dreams and B-grade horror films. The thick brushmarks of neon green and orange mixed up with black and grey form a kind of nightmarish icing; these cakes are literally oozing off their linen support and appear to be melting into thin air. The rich painterly surfaces are both tantalizing and repellant. In another series of paintings, Neufeld has organized the compositional structure around a single corner; painterly heaps reveal a complete abstract expressionist vocabulary including stains, drips, splatters and gestural brushmarks that hold their own against an architectural background. These original paintings evoke unexpected spaces where abstract references contrast with recognizable structures.

Leigh Bridges' paintings in "Roughing It II" exude a delicate warmth and beauty while adeptly conveying a sense of uneasiness. In these scenes of halted activity, a moment in time has been captured and we are uncertain as to whether or not we have arrived before or after the event. Leigh uses a stenciling technique where empty trees are brought to the surface by the negative space around them; shapes become revealed through their absence. The deliberate design of the thinly painted stenciled shapes contrasts with the thick, visceral abstracted paint marks actively delineating the spacious picture planes of these nostalgic landscapes.

"Owner/Operator," by Megan Anderson, suggests ideas surrounding the prevalent do-it-yourself phenomenon. Anderson has made a full-size multiple purpose kiosk of wood plastic that reminds us of the idealistic views of an Ikea furniture generation – where anything can be put

together with a set of instructions. In this era of ever-popular home renovation shows, this work touches on the inherent impulse humans have to make things. Looking at her work, we find ourselves considering the difference between a builder building a structure, and an artist making a sculpture. Issues of intent and context come to the forefront here; the gallery context emphasizes the aesthetic, but if you imagined this piece on a downtown sidewalk or in a market place, function would predominate. Anderson plays in the space between life and art, function and aesthetics, and we find ourselves asking where one ends and the other begins.

Robert Hengeveld's sculptural teal blue monolith in "Small Wonder" takes up a substantial amount of space in the hallway of the Visual Arts building. Walking around this structure, we discover a kitchen that has been made 85 percent to scale. We tower above the recognizable components: the fridge, the stove counters and cupboards. Some of these are made of simulated materials (painted wood stands in for metal) and others are the actual materials (backsplash tiles are made from tiles). The model builder plays with our sense of desire because no matter how exquisite or realistic the model, satisfaction can't be fully attained because ultimately the model's divorce from function will disappoint. In Hengeveld's kitchen we are tantalized with the authenticity of detail while simultaneously being reminded about the fiction of his creation, because he has left us clues that things aren't as they seem; for example, the hole where the sink should be reveals that the drawers and cupboards have no substance beyond the façade. We can only half-believe Hengeveld's marvelous fiction and are left pondering the space between knowing and imaging.

The work of these four graduate students is a clear reminder of how art historical traditions can be revisited and revitalized in a dynamic and individual manner to make for some interesting art.

– Wendy Welch