

THEME 1

ROMANCING THE ANTHROPOCENE EXHIBITION

"ANTHROPOCENE" REFERS SPECIFICALLY TO THE GEOLOGICAL PERIOD SINCE THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION, A TIME WHEN HUMANS HAVE MADE A DEEPER IMPRINT ON THE EARTH THAN EVER BEFORE. NEAR KING WEST OF YONGE AND BAY SOUTH OF RICHMOND, ARTISTIC RUMINATIONS ON OUR IMPACT ON THE PLANET, PROGRAMMED BY KITCHENER-BASED CURATORS IVAN JURAKIC AND CRYSTAL MOWRY, PROBE TENSIONS BETWEEN URBAN ENVIRONMENTS AND THE NATURAL WORLD.



BABAK KHAIRI

HENGEVELD'S PLASTIC NATURE IS A HOWL

LOCAL ARTIST POKES FUN AT HUMANKIND'S LUDICROUS ATTEMPTS TO APE THE NATURAL WORLD **By FRANS SCHECHTER**

ROBERT HENGEVELD: HOWL

Alley behind Bay and Richmond (enter from Richmond or Temperance west of Bay)

In his Bloordale studio, Robert Hengeveld's fine-tuning the roller coaster for Howl, his latest Rube Goldberg installation that uses intentionally exposed mechanical elements and thrift store materials to send up our garish, silly or futile attempts to mimic nature. The two-storey-high steel track is a cartoonish amusement park ride for a coyote and a rabbit.

"The two chase each other," he says, "but it's kind of unclear which

will be chasing which."

Hengeveld's fascinated by decoys. "They all have very particular uses," he says. "The coyote scares off birds, while the battery-operated rabbit attracts coyotes and wolves so we can shoot them. The ducks bring around their peers, and a doe attracts a mate. We create these things to stand in for the natural, and yet they don't quite succeed."

A bunch of animals - including mechanical songbirds from Chinatown, remote-controlled ducks, three dancing deer, a head-swivelling owl and a swarm of LED fireflies - will watch the chase. The hyper-real yet slightly off-kilter landscape will have a pond, waterfall and misting ma-

chine, with sweaters and carpets that act as grass, a Christmas tree forest and cardboard rocks, plus a musical soundtrack that echoes the stop-and-start rhythms of the roller coaster.

He hopes Howl's comedic, spectacle aspects will engage those with Nuit Blanche-induced ADD while also offering a more reflective approach for those who slow down to appreciate the details.

Though he says he's not a hardcore environmentalist, his work fits in with the theme of Romancing The Anthropocene (a human-dominated geological era that began with the Industrial Revolution). He cites concepts like "natural deficit disorder," which especially afflicts children who grow up in cities.

"The work intentionally has a subtle humour but at the same time explores serious concerns about our relationship with our surrounding environ-

ments," he says.

He's particularly interested in how we express this. "We create artificial lumber but stamp wood grain in it. We make an inflatable palm tree; why not make it pink? But there are good reasons we don't make it pink. It's a very complex relationship: we want to control nature, but at the same time we have a deep attraction to it."

