

Outsider Invitational at the Bau-XI Gallery

Not "outsider art" as it is usually understood (art by deluded saints, by jailbirds, by madmen), but as in art lying outside the Bau-XI's usual aesthetic boundaries. Which makes for an exceedingly fresh and vivid show. Much of said freshness stems from the four paintings by Vancouver's 23-year-old Lisa Birke, whose "maniacal sagas," as she calls them, possess a crackling visual inventiveness supported by an almost disconcerting virtuosity with the brush. Her paintings are witty tableaux, bearing such titles as *The War of the Roses went on for weeks but she missed it to get her beauty sleep*. They're full to the painterly gunwales with beautifully wrought things (there haven't been such bundles of flowers since Manet or such oranges since Cezanne), which surround and help to present Birke's rather cartoon-like narratives. Hot stuff. Also surfacing here as outsiders are the greatly gifted Ian Fraser, whose burning skyscrapers are a delight, and Jennifer Febraro, whose patchy, scratchy paintings (*One Way Ocean*, *Musical Stomach*) reveal whole worlds poked, in miniature, into the painted fray. Andrew Rucklidge's moody little industrial landscapes are charming and exquisitely painted (they work better tiny; they're blowsily romantic at a larger scale). And who is this Christopher Collins, who paints with such innocent dementia? Apparently still a third-year student at the Ontario College of Art and Design, Collins makes the kind of loose, free, chromatically gleeful paintings (*Circle of Kids*, *Phonics With Orange*) whose beauty comes at you like a sugary blow to the aesthetic solar plexus. There'll be no keeping this guy down. \$250-\$2,600. Until July 8. 340 Dundas St. W. 416-977-0600.