

THE ARTS

Perogies, parkas and pretend

By Geneva Kevill
Gene Reporter

It's raining inside

Walking high above the bedroom on a riptight, the little boy doesn't cotton.

Instead, he is going to jump into a boat and sail out the door, a school of fish darting around his head.

Welcome to the wonderful flights of fancy found in the works of Jude Grubel, now on display at the Yukon Arts Centre Gallery.

Inspired by Maurice Sendak's storybook, *Where the Wild Things Are*, Grubel's work explores children's ability to use imagination to reverse mundane situations.

"I am evocating childhood imagery and mythology in my adult life," said Grubel.

Building the props and masks worn by his painted subjects, and modeling them on himself and friends before creating his works, Grubel's studio must be a child's wonderland — with boats you can wear like suspenders, hats with paper maché birds hanging from them and masks with long snouts.

"I like people to stretch their imaginations and wonder if something like that was really built," he said.

However, with theatrical shadows and muted autumn colours, his paintings are more reminiscent of gloomy European fairy tales than the colourful kid books often associated with childhood imagery.

Completing a recent residency in Japan, Grubel found his works were a bit darker than the cult he anticipated.

"In Japan, they are so used to big, cute cartoon figures with glossy eyes, in the traditional aesthetic, that they were frightened by my works," he said.

With masks, household pets dressed up in dolls' clothes, some of his works remind viewers of what it was to be a child captivated by imagination and lost in worlds where animals walk on their hind legs and wear clothes.

As in the homegrown version of *Beatrix Potter*, he explained.

"I am interested in the interplay between childhood and imagination and placing this in everyday spaces," added Grubel.

"I am taking instances from adult life and blending them with everyday experiences."

Many of the rooms pictured are spaces where Grubel spent time as a child, as well as spaces he explored later in life, including a number of abandoned prairie houses.

"My works are filled with personal narratives, familiar childhood imagery and storybook references, all reaching a broader context," said Grubel.

Titled *Where David's House Happens*, the real and imagined experiences portrayed in Grubel's exhibit capture viewers, pulling them back to those magical childhood moments when the line between reality and make-believe was not yet so clearly defined.

With an exhibit in Europe, and an opening in Vancouver in February, Grubel was glad to have managed a brief Yukon visit.



ARTWORK... Jude Grubel's work is on display at the Yukon Arts Centre Gallery.

"There is a lot of local mythology attached to the Yukon, so it is interesting to have my work shown here," he said.

"It will give people a chance to recognize their local stories and legends and connect them with their lives somehow."

Leaving the work, simple, beautiful world of childhood fantasy and wandering into the next gallery is a sudden sensory overload.

Giant perogies, hockey quarts (date-clad players being sucked from the curb through huge industrial pipes), stackable apples, domed Mounties and Sumner moose spill out at the viewer, while a segmented, cold-air trier cause softy noses overhead — The Great Canadian Wild Chimney.

Reading an humorous Canadian advertisement, with a Disney-like cartoon quality, Lisa Birke's works are readily accessible.

But they don't let the viewer off easily. Drawn in by familiar, funny imagery, the paintings also reveal deeper, darker levels of meaning, leaving spectators with an uneasy feeling.

"Everything Canadian is advertised in such a kitschy way, but I also find it kind of disturbing," she said.

"Whenever we exaggerate something in society, it tells us something about ourselves."

Taking this exaggeration to an extreme, Birke's works, called *Canadians* and all the places in between, inflame all that is Canadian in a cluttered conglomeration of imagery that is both funny and jarring.

"I have travelled a lot and am always amazed by the culture and would come back to Canada and see green hills, and more green hills," said Birke.

"But I loved Canada so much and I decided I wanted to discover its unique culture."

Inspired by the Group of Seven, Birke assembled a small box of painting sup-

plies and an easel and set out across Canada.

She made it to the Saskatchewan-Alberta border, before her allotted time elapsed. And also managed to drive up to Dawson City and back in 12 days, crossing everything from bridges crossed and RVs passed to music bins acquired.

Born in Germany, she moved to Canada with her family when she was only six.

"I remember being in Kindergarten and the teacher showing us a map of the world and showing me where I was going and I remember being so excited because the country was pink," she laughed.

Now more interested in Canada's looser than its colors, Birke plays with plenty of beaver imagery.

Depicted as a hard worker, the beaver usually shows Canada's early economy during the fur trade, she said, but now it is also viewed as this diminutive symbol — its wet nodder as opposed to an eagle or a lion.

"I like mixing opposites," she explained.

Even her appreciation of art follows a dichotomous path.

Admiring the rigorous staple, minimalist pieces, the casual works so cluttered and rich that borders are required — "so you don't get into brain overload, with all the better sketchy images smashed together," she said.

Her works play with a variety of Canadian subjects, from placing striking hockey players into a quarry to be mined as ore, to cows clamped together atop wetland towers.

Titled *The Great Canadian Satellite Milling Program* this work touches on genetic modification, as does her painting of square, stackable apples.

"I want to make people think and feel uncomfortable," she stressed.

However, some of her works are just

plain fun.

The segmented canoe, which veers out and forth, is not only *The Great Canadian Wild Chimney*, it also has a subtitle, "if it's a rocket, don't come a knockin'" — trying with the quirky shape the Canadians can make love in canoes.

Debating whether to study art or biology after high school, Birke opted for the former, studying and now teaching at Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in Vancouver, BC.

Although biology and art seem worlds apart, Birke maintains they are quite similar.

"They are both looking at life and are both examining how life works and how life is set up," she said.

Art just has a more cultural, social leaning, she continued, where in biology it is strictly more of a physical examination.

"In your studio you still do what they do in biology, you are still collecting information and researching, thus processing all that information and spitting out an outcome — which is the work of art."

"I am a cultural biologist," she concluded.

Sharing the last gallery space, Scotty Kallibar-Combs and Jacqueline Olson also explore culture in their two-person exhibit, *From Within*.

"This exhibit looks at the similarities and differences between Inuit and Inuktitut cultures, examining Inuit and First Nations perspectives," said gallery curator Scott Marsden.

Stretching on a translucent medium, suggestive of hide, Kallibar-Combs' colourful parkas hang away from the wall, held by nails like carving animal skins.

More abstract, Olson's works offer rich layers of texture and colour, which incorporate caribou antlers, socks, sheets of handmade paper and even salvaged hairpins.

"When I'm making paper or mixing paints, I kind of feel like my grandmother making medicine, throwing everything into one pot and hoping it works out," said Olson, a Dawson City native.

Blending contemporary and traditional elements in her art, Olson is exploring the mixed cultures she harbours.

"While I was in art school, they passed Bill C-31 and I suddenly became an Indian," she said.

"But I grew up a white person, and in my art I was working through this — its amazing."

Employing natural materials and mildly earthy hues, Olson leaves her works open to interpretation.

"They are an emotional reflection of me — a solid, earthbound person," she said.

The three exhibits run until December 22 at the Yukon Arts Centre Gallery.

The gallery is open Tuesday through Thursday from 12 p.m. until 6 p.m., and weekends from 12 p.m. till 1 p.m.

It is also open before these performance and during intermission.
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