

Alumni News



LISA BIRKE, 2000 VISUAL ARTS GRADUATE

Alumna Profile: Lisa Birke BY JOY CHOI THIEL

"I am doing what I always wanted to do. I am thrilled. I can't believe that I am doing what I am doing," says painter Lisa Birke, BFA 1998. Positive, warm and radiating energy, Birke's character is reflected in the ambience of her studio, and contrasts with its location, an industrial area near Vancouver's Main Street and Terminal Avenue transportation hub.

The word "rejection" first surfaces when she is asked what she has been doing since she graduated from the Institute. "I sent out a lot – I mean a lot – of portfolios and got only two positive replies from local galleries. The first gallery that came to see me rejected me, but the Bau-Xi Gallery encouraged me." Xisa Huang, owner of the Bau-Xi, returned to visit Lisa's studio five months after her first visit and immediately included Lisa's work in a group show in January 2000. Of her work in the show, Michael Scott of *The Vancouver Sun* wrote: "Birke painted with all the thrilling self-conscious gusto of nightingales singing."

A couple of small shows followed the Bau-Xi exhibition – one local and curated by a fellow Institute alumna, the other in Osqoyoc – then the Bau-Xi Gallery in Toronto included her in a group show in June 2000. Again she got great sales and critical response. Gary Michael Dault, art critic for *The Globe and Mail*, said of her paintings, "They possess a crackling visual inventiveness supported by an almost disconcerting virtuosity with the brush."

"We are breaking natural genetic, reproductive and technological boundaries, we are breeding a new species of techno and bio-engineered humans and animals," she writes in the statement accompanying her January 2004 exhibition at the Bau-Xi. "DNA can be plotted and traced like blueprints for buildings, and babies can be made in test tubes. Knowledge of cloning our furry friends will inevitably lead to the cloning of humans. I am exploring the possibility of a new generation of species bred for the medical, nourishment, entertainment and companionship necessities in the evolution of humans."

Of her time at SCI she says, "I had a great time at Emily Carr Institute. The facilities, my peers and the instructors made the overall experience fantastic." Asked what she would tell this year's grad class, she says, "Pursue your passion. Schooling in art can be frightening with the emphasis on theory and meaning. You just have to create with sincerity, delving into your passions and bringing meaning to life. When you graduate, you have little to lose by experimenting; you are just beginning your career – it is a time to take chances."

She continues to work in the large format she prefers, hewing to the passionate course she recommends other artists follow. "I should learn to paint on smaller canvases," she says, partly joking. "It would be very practical." She has seen prices for her work rising recently, enabling her to quit her second job. Now she now has more time to paint. Her passion for what she does is evident. She works hard, she is disciplined and blessed with a warmth of character that continues to attract appreciation and admiration, as well as more collectors.



DETAIL OF
2004 EXHIBITION