



— NEWS PHOTO TERESA FALK

B.C. artist Lisa Birke sits among large keyboard keys and in front of one of her pieces of art featured in the exhibit *Search Engine*, which is on display at The Esplanade art gallery until June 17.

Birke searches art

TERESA FALK
Medicine Hat News

Using images derived from Internet searches, B.C. artist Lisa Birke created her vibrant exhibit *Search Engine*.

The exhibit opens on Thursday at The Esplanade art gallery and runs until June 17.

"I took billions such as 'being red', 'beauty is skin deep', 'wolf in sheep's clothing', and I image Google searched them. Then I took all the images that came back and I chose images for their connect and their disconnect," she said, adding, "In my paintings I usually combine cartoon imagery and historical imagery in a very traditional oil painting style. So it's almost like a conglomeration of a bunch of different sources all sandwiched together."

The nine oil on canvas pieces were created within the past 12 months. Some of the larger pieces have several layers to give the impression of windows on a computer screen overlapping. Birke also physically links the canvases together with computer cables, cords and wires. Common computer icons such as arrows and cursors are integrated into the paintings.

Birke believes her work reflects today's busy culture.

"I wanted to accentuate that busyness. And I really think our culture has become like that. As soon as we turn on the TV we're

bombarded with millions of images in increasing speeds," she said.

While Birke focuses mainly on technology in her work, she also ties her personal feelings into the paintings.

"A lot of the pieces are very autobiographical. They'll have elements of relationships or personal experiences," she said.

Birke feels the exhibit will draw people in and make them think.

"We can connect with it on the level that it's very contemporary. I work with a kind of Disney kitsch aesthetic on purpose to pull people in," she said. "It's that glossy colourful happy feeling, but I always have an underlying darkness or theme. So there's actually lessons and things to think about."

Birke is a practicing artist working primarily in painting, drawing and sculptural installation. Since graduating from the

Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in Vancouver in 1993, Birke has had public and commercial solo exhibitions in Canada, the United States and the Netherlands.

An opening reception will be held on Thursday at 7 p.m. at The Esplanade. Birke will be in attendance.

Birke will also lead an adult workshop on *Painting and Collage in the Digital Age* on Friday from 9:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. Registration is \$25 plus GST. All materials are included. Advance registration is required in person at The Esplanade attendant desk or by phone at 502-8793.

Search Engine
The Esplanade
Runs until June 17
Artist reception
Thursday at 7 p.m.