

SOPHISTICATED FOLK

ManWoman, Michel Boutin

ROSEMONT
ART
GALLERY



December 1 -
January 26, 2005

2006

Rosemont Art Gallery
Neil Balkwill Civic Arts Centre
2420 Elphinstone Street, PO Box 1790,
Regina, Saskatchewan S4P 3C8
Web site: www.rosemontartgallery.ca

Kenderdine Art Gallery
51 Campus Drive
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 5A8
306.966.4571 / 306.966.6816
Web site: www.usask.ca/kenderdine

ISBN # 1-896432-69-7

Curator: David Garneau
Design: Steve McDonnell: Dalek Design/www.dalek.ca

ManWoman is a senior Canadian artist with an international reputation. He studied at the Alberta College of Art from 1959 to 1963 and has been exhibiting his work for more than 40 years.

Michel Boutin graduated from the University of Regina with a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in 1996 and has been exhibiting his work regionally for the past 15 years.

Cover: ManWoman, "Welcome Home", acrylic on canvas, 22 x 28", 1995

The exhibition and the publication have been supported by the University of Saskatchewan, the Kenderdine-Beamish Trust, Museums Association of Saskatchewan, The Canada Council for the Arts.

The Rosemont Art Gallery gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the Regina Arts Commission, the Saskatchewan Arts Board, the Saskatchewan Lotteries Trust Fund for Sport, Culture, and Recreation, SaskCulture, the Canada Council for the Arts and the Cathedral Free House.



SOPHISTICATED FOLK

Sophisticated Folk

Sophisticated Folk is an oxymoron. But the two gentlemen in this exhibition, Michel Boutin (Prince Albert, SK) and ManWoman (Cranbrook, BC) are just that, sophisticated folk who make sophisticated folk art! Like much folk art, their paintings employ a flat, 'graphic' style, bright colours, and present content in a didactic manner that stimulates your eye, mind and heart. And they take on the big existential themes favoured by the greatest folk artists: the Bible and religion, sex and death, love and hate, temptation and hope for redemption. They use direct and popular methods to relate these complex realities and experiences.

But ManWoman and Michel are also sophisticates. Graduates from post-secondary art institutions, they know the art world but are driven by callings that demand they follow their own path rather than play art world games. Though informed by high art, their paintings are addressed to regular folk who might not be savvy to that realm. ManWoman and Michel have absorbed Pop art and European Renaissance and East Indian religious painting, mixed them together with their unique sensibilities, dreams, visions and personal and collective experience. The mess gels in their imaginations and is then poured on to their panels with less censorship than artists who are beholden to a particular faith, institution, or patronage system. The resulting paintings are hilariously serious. These jesters deliver sermons that provoke laughter, blushes, and if we are open to them deep thoughts and feelings about our mortal coil and hopes for what comes after.

ManWoman has been on a spiritual quest for more than 40 years. He is an extraverted mystic who cannot repress his insights. And because he came to artistic age during the Pop art period, he expresses his visions and concepts in the visual currency of that cultural moment. As the great philosopher of the Spirit, Carl Jung, explained, artists rejuvenate archetypes by expressing them in a contemporary language so they can be understood and appreciated by a contemporary audience.

ManWoman was raised in the Roman Catholic tradition and in the pop culture world, and both of these elements appear in his paintings as aspects that he, at once, embraces and wants to transcend. (If he had been born 5000 years earlier he would have given Bosch a run for his money.) The material world is less real than the spiritual one; but, because we are encased in bodies and religious traditions, we might as well enjoy what we can and even use both our bodies and faith traditions as means to the spiritual most of his works seem to imply. Sometimes the artist seems to be like a campy evangelist promoting his spiritual discoveries like soap. This may be a critique of the commodification of spirituality, or it could be that he is so excited by his experiences of this truer realm that no means are beneath him to get everyone to the Truth. I am particularly interested in ManWoman's Mr. Death pictures. This Mr. Peanut like character uses humour to encourage us to face the inevitable with humour and grace. The big question is not how or when we will die, but how do we accommodate ourselves to this fact with or without faith in a metaphysical Being-after-being.

commands he has, with gusto. His fuel is joy! As a result of metaphysical certainty, his paintings are not so much struggles or "working through" as a direct publication of his revelations.

This is a small sampling of ManWoman's work, but what is here does reveal two trends in his work. There are the ecstatic paintings (especially of the 60s and 70s)



Michel Boutin, "Religion", enamel on wood, 16.5 x 18", 2004

that record the afterglow of metaphysical experience. These are giddy scenes often featuring radiant babies ascending from the material realm to the metaphysical. The sentiments are clear and untroubled: "All is One"; "Transcend My Friend"; "Death Defying Joy". And the destination is the beyond. The second strain maintains the joy but recognizes our fallenness into the world. How does the mystic cope with an often tragic and ridiculous world once he has glimpsed perfection? How does one manage Being-in-the-world rather than just pining for the infinite? Heavy questions for folk art to tackle.

There are two Sister Serena paintings that could be bookends. here. In one, the



Michel Boutin, "Spring Dance", enamel on wood, 35 x 47", 1996-98

