

But is it art?

New modern exhibit opens at Confederation Centre Gallery

by Sean McQuaid

When is a tree not a tree? When its stripped, dipped in beeswax and suspended upside down from the ceiling. Then it's art.

If the preceding riddle intrigues you then you may want to check out the new Gallery of Contemporary Art at the Confederation Centre Art Gallery & Museum. The new exhibit, housed in the newly renovated west galleries, is a broad, eclectic mixture of artworks in a variety of styles and mediums.

The centrepiece of the new exhibit is the aforementioned tree, an "installation" artwork by artist Richard Reitzenstein. The piece is meant to link art and nature, reminding people that the Earth is the ultimate source of our culture, art in itself and deserving of consideration and protection. It's an environmental statement and an expression of the beginnings of art, symbolic of the sacred Edenic grove and the mythical origin of human knowledge and awareness. The beeswax that coats the upside-down tree is symbolic of the collectivity of nature and humankind (in recollection of the collective nature of bees in their hives). The huge upside-down tree is very striking in itself, but is not the

only element in this installation piece. Below it are rows of wood slices and a pile of wood and containers of spruce and cedar oils, all symbolic of man's exploitation of nature. The piece speaks to viewers on a number of levels.

The new gallery also houses a number of more conventional forms of art, though all are unique in their own ways. Reitzenstein's other contributions include drawings of skeletal muscles in earth powders, chalk on paper. A more powerful and immediate study of human physiology can be found in the huge untitled pastel drawing of a hand by Allan Harding MacKay, an arresting work with an enigmatically monumental quality. Equally enigmatic is Robert McNealy's pastel diptych drawing of an abstract human figure within geometric lines and planes, a basic but thought-provoking study in form.

More accessible to most viewers is the "Small Wharf Over the Pond", an impressionistic landscape in pastel, acrylic, and gouache paper. The rich, deep blues and purples of the jewel-like rippling water and the darkened sky make it a simultaneously tranquil and intriguing piece.

The exhibits also include less representa-

tional pieces, like Harold Klunder's painting "Hymn to Matter"; a swirling whirlpool of color and form that has an almost religious intensity in its celebration of color and movement. Starker and less easily interperable pieces include Ron Shuebrosk's "Plea" (a painting dominated by solid reds and blacks), and Roland Paulin's "Dans D'Etendu" (a charcoal drawing of black forms on white). Some of the strangest and most colorful works are those of Ron Martin, whose "It's Emotional" is a thick, paint-encrusted, multi-colored mass of acrylic on canvas. A bit more refined is Martin's esoterically titled "For the Composite Power #8", a wavelike mixture of sand and acrylic on canvas creating a grainy, rippled surface that look likes black beach sand. Martin's works rely more on color and texture in themselves for emotional effect rather than representing any particular subject.

The new gallery houses a wide variety of works in a multitude of styles, and if approached with an open mind it can be a great source of enjoyment. Admission is fairly cheap, and free on Sundays, so it's a bit of high culture that even students can enjoy. ●

