

Arts world

By BOB LANE

Do Canadians read books? A recent Service Bulletin from Stats Canada attempts to find the answer to that question. It seems an important question to ask because it is often claimed that books reflect a nation's culture, and by their power to entertain, instruct and inform they also influence the culture of their readers.

It is interesting to note that in 1977 over 72 per cent of the revenue of books sold in Canada came from imports. Although the percentage has lowered in the past two years exact figures are not available.

One disturbing fact is that, according to Stats Canada, 57 per cent of the Canadian population, or 63 per cent of the men and 51 per cent of the women, do not read books. Television, on the other hand, monopolizes the average Canadian's attention for 20 to 25 hours a week.

Considering these statistics carefully can lead one to a number of tentative conclusions. If we average Canadians are influenced by what we read and what we watch then television clearly has the upper hand. No wonder we have such funny ideas. Many of us believe that any domestic problem can be solved in 30 minutes minus commercials, forgetting that most of us don't have clever script writers or any control over how the episode will end.

The end result seems to be that we find it difficult to carry on extended conversation or argument. We keep expecting a commercial break at a dramatic moment. But in real life (whatever that is) the breaks don't come, the camera doesn't focus on us, the lines are not clever, and the pace is slow.

Is it any wonder that sports metaphor abounds? It creeps in to national politics, international relationships, and even our own lives. But life isn't a hockey game or even an NFL football game, any more than it's a butterfly.

If only we could put together a team like the Steelers we could gain yardage against pollution, energy shortages and bad breath. If only we could find the right person to call the signals we would surely score.

These metaphors permeate our lives. Perhaps we should try returning to books.

Bob Lane's Artsworld

The Madron Exposition Centre is living up to its promise to the community to bring a wide variety of quality art together for us to experience. Their current show lives up to the promise. Two local artists are represented — Robin Field and Carol Evans — in two quite different and yet complementary shows.

Robin Field teaches art at Malaspina College. He is a good teacher, a talented artist and a gentle and creative man. He has had show in Madrona before as well as in Calgary, Vancouver, Banff and Montreal. He is a careful and thoughtful craftsman who has been investigating the images of our northern frontier for several years.

In the program notes he writes, "The Inu, and life force of my northern mythology is the focus of this exhibition. 'Eclectic' comes from the variety of sources from which I have drawn my inspiration and supporting imagery over the last year, as well as the diversity of materials which make up the works."

Yes, 'Eclectic' is a good word as it suggests selection without a preconceived pattern, freedom of choice without the need to justify the choice. And yet, my one criticism of Field's show is just that: it lacks a real focus. O.K., he says in the title it is going to be eclectic. But does that really let an artist off the hook? There is a wide range of material — and that's fine. Lots of color — and that's fine. Beautiful lithographs displayed just right — and that's more than fine.

But I think the show needed an "editor," someone to say "no" to some of the works; for example, the Northern Lights piece which is overpriced and not very exciting. It detracts from the many first rate pieces like the terracotta Inus, small, gently shaped, humorous and lively. Or like the Inu Womb World Mandala lithograph framed in a cluster of 12 unframed studio proofs of the same image; each slightly different, amazing in its uniqueness.

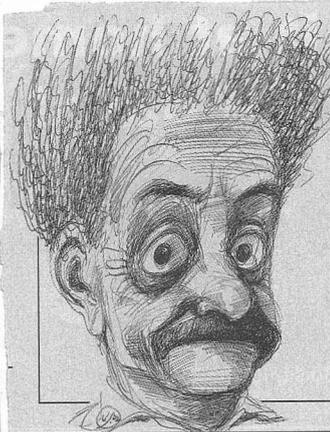
"Spirit White Light I and II representing transitory physicality and individuality is given its life by the shape of Spirit White burning through and becoming one with the transitory and fleeting shapes of snowflakes. These dramatic pieces are in the same show, however, with some styrofoam sculptures that are not so good.

My response, in short, was mixed. Some of Robin's work is excellent; some did nothing at all for me.

Downstairs, Carol Evans has her watercolor plates for the illustrations for HagHead, a book by Susan Musgrave, illustrated by Carol Evans. They are interesting, exciting and fun. The panel which appears as the frontispiece of the book is called The Haggy, Shaggy, Rarely Seen Mysteries of Hallow's Eve and shows a group of kids in costumes off on the trick or treat circuit unaware that behind them is another group of figures — but these have no costumes, they are the "real" ghosts, goblins and witches.

The walls downstairs are alive with trees and populated scenes of ghosts, spirits and other other-worldly creatures. They are good illustrations and one can imagine the book doing well.

Two quite different shows, but each a valuable and interesting experience. See them. You have until November 15.



'True terror is to wake up one morning and discover that your high school class is running the country.'

—Kurt Vonnegut