

ENTERTAINMENT

Barbara Crook • 605-2120 / FAX 605-2521 • E-mail: bcrook@pacpress.southam.ca

C5

ARTS

Cutting fine figures

Sculptor David Robinson asks us to look at each other through his eyes

■ MEANS AND ENDS
Figurative sculpture by David Robinson,
Evergreen Cultural Centre, 1205 Pinetree Way,
Coquitlam, until Nov. 15.

MICHAEL SCOTT
Surrey, B.C.

He might be sitting beside you on a bus, or a few seats down in a movie theatre; he might be sprawled across a sidewalk or standing outside an art gallery as you pass by. These pale, quiet figures are all friends of David Robinson's, people he'd like you to say hello to over the next few weeks.

The Vancouver sculptor is interested in the way we brush past scores of strangers every day without even once registering their presence.

It makes a certain cock-eyed sense, he says, in a city without a memory like this one. If we can ignore the need to save historic neighborhoods, why would we carry memories of faceless bystanders?

As a way of addressing that dull anonymity of urban life, Robinson created a platoon of life-sized male figures, cast them in polymer gypsum and then painted them with a milky white egg tempura glaze. The figures, called *Inhabitants*, will pop up in very public sites around the city for a few weeks at a time.

The goal, Robinson explains, is to inspire memories of the urban landscape through which we move. We might or might not remember having to step around a drunk on the sidewalk. But if the drunk has been rendered monumental, cast in resin life-size or larger, he becomes controversial.

He wants to argue with us, debate his right to be there, his right to lie on the sidewalk and still be a person. Our chances of carrying away a memory from that sort of encounter are much improved.

Robinson has been the subject this year of not one, but two curated museum surveys of his work. *Means and Ends*, the exhibition now on at Coquitlam's excellent Evergreen Cultural Centre, is an artist of conspicuous gifts at a major turning point in his career.

In recent seasons, Robinson has focused on intricately detailed juxtapositions of humans and their urban environments. His trademark works feature male figures bound up in mechanical apparatus, as if the human body were an actual gear in a larger machine. In his early days as an artist, Robinson supported himself as a construction laborer, and some of that experience has found its way into his art.

In 1993's *Care Sample*, for instance, Robinson positioned a male figure in an elongated, tubular pose, as if it had just been extracted from a drilling site.



WARD PERROW/Vancouver Sun

GO FIGURE: Sculptor David Robinson gives way to one of his life-sized sculptures.

The bronze statue is dulled with silver nitrate in imitation of mineral ore. From the same year, *Arrifor* and *Edifice* encase a half life-sized human figure in a high-rise crane derrick, the body providing the tower on which the derrick ought to pivot. That effect is intensified by placing the sculpture on top of a tall plinth, as if it were being viewed from the unfinished roof of a West End highrise.

While early figures are precise and realistic, recent figures are bundles of sinews and tendons, the hungry, flayed bodies of anatomical studies.

In the last year, Robinson's work has evolved considerably, becoming less minutely detailed and more expressive. Where the early figures are precise and realistic, recent figures are bundles of sinews and tendons, the hungry, flayed bodies of anatomical studies.

Created with drips of hot glue from a glue gun and then cast in metal, these raw, rangy figures are reminiscent of Giacometti, without the great Italian's terrifying sense of dread and anguish. Robinson also seems to be thinking bigger that before, on the scale of true public art. *Opportunity Moment*, produced earlier this year, is a tall face of

rusty steel with a human figure poised on the sill of an opening, as if ready to fly out. Although room-sized here, the work could easily be rendered on a massive scale.

In *Maquette for Inhabitants*: an *Urban Installation*, the flayed figures are posed against the steel walls of an building excavation. The steel panels that hold back the earth, rusted and flaking, begin to look like sculptural elements themselves — the plate forms of Anthony Caro, say.

Robinson's work cries out for full-scale realization — a degree of acknowledgment that normally comes only to the most senior artists, to creators such as Bill Reid and Jack Harman.

But Robinson's superb sense of surface and nature of theatre qualify him for work as a monument builder.

He says, humbly, that he worries about making so grand a statement as a monument, in a society as pluralistic as this. But his *Equestrian*, for instance, a mounted figure created in 1991, has a greatness unattained by any sculpture in Vancouver, save for Reid's *Spirit Cane*.

This image of a figure, loosely meshed in cord, astride a horse over which he has no control, is a plain-speaking metaphor for the way many Vancouverians feel about their lives.

It deserves to be cast in bronze, larger than life, planted where we can all share its puzzled and accepting expression.

Fate of the independent film debated at forum



KERRY GOLD

While last year was touted as the year of the independent film, all we've seen so far this year are dismal action films that could make us use the day Quentin Tarantino breathed life back into the John Travolta's career.

The days of films like *The Deer Hunter*, *Midnight Express*, *Raging Bull* and *Chinatown* have been replaced by studio films that favor technological wizardry over dialogue and point of view. It looks like Hollywood has decided to leave artistic integrity up to the independents and devote itself exclusively to the hand-nosed world of the bottom line.

As the Vancouver International Film Festival's Trade Forum begins today, it delves into this new state of cinematic affairs with a panel entitled *How to Make an American Quirk*. And the *Roundtable* on *Not to Hollywood?* (today at 3:10 p.m. at the Hotel Vancouver's Pacific Ballroom). It's a subject that touches everyone in the film industry.

From their offices across North America, three producers who will be in Vancouver for the forum discuss the issue of independent film-making versus working within the Hollywood studio system, and they've got credentials in both areas.

Scott Rosenfeld has produced *Home Alone*, *Mystic Pizza* and *Extremities*; Midge Sanford's credits include *How to Make an American Quirk*, *And the Band Played On*, *Love Field*, *Immediate Family*, *Eight Men Out*, *River's Edge* and *Desperately Seeking Susan*; Kids in the Hall director Stephen Surjik made his feature debut with *Wayne's World 2*, followed by the series *Road to Avonlea*, *Max Glick* and *The X-Files*.

All were forthcoming on the question of the big studio system and its inherent opposition to creative integrity.

"Studios have gotten out of film-making and into the business of show business," says Surjik, a director and producer. "Subsequently, the quality of the material is suffering tremendously. The films this summer were an embarrassment."

Like everyone interviewed here, Surjik prefers the relative ease of working on a low-budget film to a high-powered, high-stakes torment of a studio production. His award-winning TV feature *Lite Criminals* had a budget of \$2 million. Because of the small budget, it was a dream job.

"It was a real pleasure to shoot because the stakes in the show weren't that high for the network," says Surjik. "The more money there's involved in a project, the more difficult it is to retain control."

Please see Mid-range, C8

Controversy brews over Granville Island cinema complex



PETER BATTISTONE/Vancouver Sun

PETER BATTISTONE AND JEFF LEE

Vancouver Sun

Developers of a six-screen cinema complex on Granville Island are fighting opposition to the project.

Famous Players vice-president John Bailey and local partners Abe Sachs and Michael Seelig, who operate Bridgeway restaurant on the island, announced Tuesday that Elizabeth Ball has been appointed artistic director in charge of programming at the proposed Granville Island Film Centre.

They have also enlisted the island's Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design as a potential partner. The school is looking at the idea of creating a museum of film history in the complex, said Emily Carr president Ron Burnett.

The announcements, made at a Tuesday press conference, were designed to counter criticism that the cinemas will destroy the tourism appeal of the island and worsen its traffic problems.

The proposal will not reduce the island's current parking capacity. It includes plans for a restaurant and retail stores on the main floor of the new complex, to be built just north of the recently redeveloped Granville Island Brewing Company. On the second floor, six cinemas will show a mixture of commercially popular movies, art-house films and special programs such as student films.

Since rumors about the complex surfaced this spring, Granville Island tenants and supporters have said a commercial cinema complex shouldn't be allowed on the island.

But Ball said she was thrilled to see a film component coming to the unique island community she has known for 20 years, most recently as artistic and managing director of Canoe Theatre.

Burnett said his school is studying the idea of creating a Canadian Museum of the Moving Image, designed on the lines of similar centres in London and New York, to offer film-makers and scholars an archive of film history.

Bailey said Famous Players has never entered into a venture like the proposed "Under the Bridge" entertainment centre, but it's clear to us that Vancouver is under-served and more than ready for such a unique idea.

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation representative Ken Tunncliffe said the federal agency, which operates the island, signed an "agreement in principle" with Sachs and Seelig last year to allow development of an area behind the brewery, which recently moved its main facilities to the B.C. Interior.

The developers are putting the finishing touches to the proposal and will file it with CMHC and Vancouver's development permit board within a month, he said.

But Granville Island business operator Al Clapp says a commercial cinema like Famous Players has no business coming on Granville Island.

"I am adamantly opposed to this, I like many of my friends, have great concerns that this will go through. We have concerns over parking and crowding, as well as the fact that this is not the kind of business which was intended at Granville Island when it was set up 25 years ago," he said.

Clapp said CMHC has not created any space for artists' studios recently, and should use the area for arts-related services.

Seelig, who is also a planning professor at the University of B.C., has accused critics of cultural snobbery, saying they seem to feel it is appropriate for someone to spend \$75 on dinner and a show at an island playhouse, but not at movie houses.

The project is designed by architect Norman Hooton, CMHC's approving architect on Granville Island movies for 20 years. Tunncliffe said CMHC will hire another architect to scrutinize Hooton's work on the cinema, since it could be considered to be a conflict with his regular CMHC duties.

ELIZABETH BALL: Centre's artistic director.