



located in the **St. John's Arts and Culture Centre**

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Art Gallery

of Newfoundland and Labrador

montage/collage technique as a means of visual storytelling. Tasker has made the discovery, but she needs to push the possibilities much further if she is to achieve more than a faint echo of the masters.

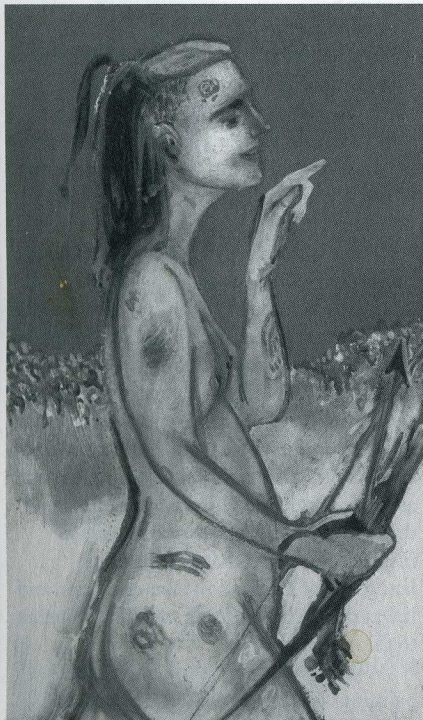
15 - 20 May 1995

ROBIN METCALFE

Cliff Eyland: Illustrations For Nothing

Anna Leonowens Gallery, NSCAD, Halifax

Cliff Eyland's return visit to Halifax was a long and much anticipated event, and this exhibition in particular an anxiously awaited opportunity to see what he's been up to since his move to Winnipeg last year.



Cliff Eyland, Various titles including..., 1995, paint on board, 7.6 x 12.7 cm.

Unfortunately, it was an event of much disappointment to me, for while Eyland's work has surely changed, it hasn't been for the better.

Twenty-five separate pieces done in Eyland's trademark index-card dimensions comprised this rather elegantly mounted display. Works were hung in an alternating arrangement of horizontal and vertical paintings that contributed enormously toward a powerful sense of overall structure and unity. And Eyland also enclosed each of the paintings in a simple box-like frame that lifts the work off the wall a few centimetres and contributes a surprisingly effective sense of depth and demarcation.

But that introduction of framed dimension was necessary, for these new paintings are flat. Really flat. There are no thick glops of paint here, and no objects (like the working calculator found in one of Eyland's paintings from several years ago, or the dead mouse of another) collaged into a work. In short, nothing remotely textural or painterly, nothing to lift a work itself off its flat visual plane.

And this is all highly enigmatic stuff, not that there's anything wrong with the enigmatic *per se*; but these paintings seem, if anything, designed to fit within a larger context of accompanying textural narratives. Maybe some of these works are intended to illustrate travelogues; here for example, were landscape paintings of what appeared to be northern Canadian bush, and over there the rising smoke of a bush fire. But what, and where, was the story itself?

Or maybe Eyland is working with fantasy stories, judging by some of the somewhat fanciful, Boschian, and suspiciously doodle-like images of humanoid figures – a naked woman with tattoos over her body clutching a bow and arrows, or the head of a male figure within whose neck a set of stairs rises upward.

These paintings are true to the title given this exhibition: they are certainly

illustrations. And, in the absence of an accompanying and contextualizing narrative, they are indeed "for nothing." In that sense, this was a successful venture. But it goes to show that the closed loop of the self-referential and the tautological – of, here, an exhibition of art that merely satisfied the dictates of its title – doesn't always make for something meaningful for the rest of us.

16 - 27 May 1995

GIL MCELROY

Mary Pratt: The House Inside My Mother's House

Mira Godard Gallery, Toronto

In a 1994 article in *Canadian Art*, Robin Laurence noted that despite the "unassailable success" she has achieved in the past two decades, Mary Pratt has become, as she herself says, "more pessimistic." Her paintings, he pointed out, have become "more overtly symbolic, more considered and more sombre... It's as if the light of her early epiphanies were being overwhelmed by the darkness of a larger social and historical condition."

In some ways, *The House Inside My Mother's House*, Pratt's last show at the Mira Godard Gallery, appeared to be a return to those "early epiphanies." About half the show consisted of her trademark photo-realist, feminine still lifes (both oils and mixed-media on paper): luminous close ups of bowls of cranberry jelly, fancy glass fruit bowls, flower-filled vases and the like. The rest of the show was comprised of interiors of the Fredericton house where Pratt grew up, and in which her mother still lives. To top it all off, two actual doll's houses were included – one standard-sized wooden structure with clay figures and furniture inside; the other a small, mirror-bottomed, clear glass model, with another tiny red glass house inside it.