

OAKVILLE GALLERIES  
AL McWILLIAMS  
JANUARY 9 - FEBRUARY 14, 1993  
CENTENNIAL GALLERY

Vancouver artist Al McWilliams has continued to explore the relationships between materials, language and the body, creating works with a strong physical resonance. In this series of figurative wall works, McWilliams pairs lead-covered aluminum panels with photographic details of early Renaissance sculptural reliefs. Depicting key narratives from the Old and New Testaments, such as the Birth of Eve and the Fall and Expulsion from Paradise, they express, through the language of the body, the historical representation of male and female roles.

As didactic tools, these narrative reliefs encoded and communicated an entire ethical tradition - specifically that of patriarchy. McWilliams opens up the narrative to subtler and more complex readings. What he sees and isolates in these sculptural works challenges these doctrines. Through his choice of images and his materials, McWilliams questions the notion that significance or value is hierarchical. While the materials he employs have their own histories of use, of value and of meaning, no single material or element dominates.

McWilliams' thematic concerns are formally echoed in his split panel constructions. Reminiscent of pages in a book, the traces of light in the photographic images contrast the relative darkness of the lead surfaces which encase and separate them. In some works, the images are set behind sandblasted glass. In others, beeswax covers the photos, its milky, translucent glow lending a softness to the imagery, making it unclear as to where the surface and the picture plane really are. Contrasting the hardness of the lead panels which surround them, these malleable and delicate surfaces denote the sensuality, frailty and mortality of the human body. The cropped body parts and isolated gestures convey an ambiguity of gender which further complicates the work. Fragmented, repeated and isolated from their context, McWilliams' images formally suggest the consequences of the Fall from Paradise.

Al McWilliams' exhibition is organized by Karen Love for Presentation House Gallery in North Vancouver and is accompanied by a full colour catalogue with an essay by Russell Keziere, and a French translation by Colette Tougas.