

Losing It Completely: INSIDE VANCOUVER'S GYMS

VANCOUVER

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THE SMART

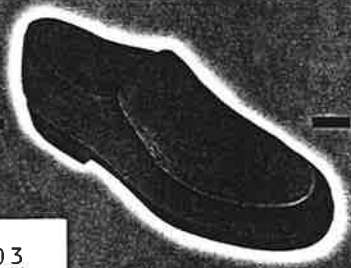
LIST



45
*of our
city's
savviest
people.*

AS SMART AS EVER: CAROLE TAYLOR & ART PHILLIPS

{PLUS}



Wild Spring Style • Vintage Vancouver • Hot West Side Eats

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POST CARDS FROM — THE — EDGE

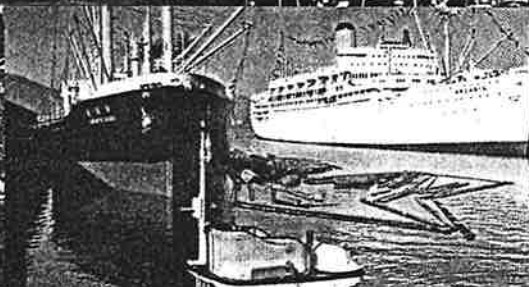
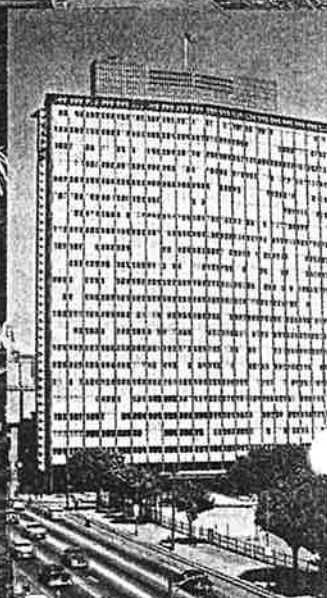
A SHOW AT THE PRESENTATION HOUSE RECALLS A TIME WHEN IT NEVER RAINED,
IT NEVER SNOWED AND PROGRESS WAS MEASURED BY CONSTRUCTION SURVEYORS.

BY CONNIE LEIS-PAWLOWSKI FOR ALL OF VANCOUVER'S CURRENT HUBRIS, IT'S worth remembering that our period of greatest growth, optimism and "progress" is now two decades past. From the end of World War II to roughly 1980, the city and province were developed at a furious pace, and with rarely a second thought. "It Pays To Play," an exhibition of postcards showing at North Vancouver's Presentation House Gallery February 24 to March 31, provides a particularly apt summation of the era in that



THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE: BRIGHT AND SHINY GREETINGS FROM ALWAYS SUNNY VANCOUVER.

the period marked both the arrival of colour photography and a well-developed tourism industry—and hence, an explosion of postcards. And, while collections of such cards are often exercises in nostalgia, independent curator Peter White uses the 2,500 assembled here to examine how the province was represented—not only as a place of extraordinary natural beauty, he says, "but as an ideal in terms of a generation's aspirations for a desirable place to conduct a good and productive life." In the B.C. of natural beauty, it never rains and it never snows. In the B.C. of a good and productive life, the contradictions are equally telling. One of White's favourite cards, part of a series on the smelting town of Trail, depicts a group of people arranged around a picnic table. Spread out behind them is an industrial disaster zone worthy of a *Simpsons* episode. And everyone, of course, is smiling brightly. ♥



Postcards and Paris Scenes Manipulate Perceived Realities

VISUAL ARTS

Vikky Alexander

A la recherche du temps perdu

At the Catriona Jeffries Gallery until April 4

It Pays to Play: British Columbia in Postcards, 1950s-1980s

At Presentation House Gallery until March 31

• BY ROBIN LAURENCE

"Reality" and "Representation"—the relationship between them has been one of the great preoccupations of our postmodern age. (If, indeed, we've reached a condition of postmodernity. Sometimes I think we're just locked into modernism's long, long, mannerist end.) Whether through artists making critical images or appropriating popular ones, or through curators and historians examining images produced in earlier times, the Reality and Representation dialogue continues apace.

Vikky Alexander is a photographic and installation artist who has developed a substantial body of R-and-R work, with interwoven references to consumerism and sexual stereotypes, architecture and artificiality, the failure of modernist ideals and culture's construction of nature. Alexander's work has evolved from appropriated fashion photographs to installations of mirrors, fake wood veneer, and rec-room photomurals, and from glass furniture to large colour photographs of Disneyland, the West Edmonton Mall, and Las Vegas. Nature exists in her work as a displaced, fractured, or nostalgically fictive presence—mimicked in plastic, planted in pots, channelled into cement-lined streams and pools, clipped into fantastical shapes, housed inside vast, baroque buildings, or framed and reflected in a thousand dazzling mirrors.

Recently, Alexander spent four months in France as a recipient of a Canada Council Paris studio grant. Her intended project was to photograph Euro-Disney, but she discovered, once there, that she'd "had it with those kinds of places. Every shot I took looked like shots I'd taken before." Instead, she allowed herself to "relax" and take pictures (shown here as large-format, Type C prints) of Paris and the palace of Versailles.

Of course, her R-and-R preoccupations asserted themselves in images of architecture and landscape, of consumption and display, of nature mediated through culture and visual experience mediated through windows or mirrors. They are also manifest in images of light. Alexander seems to revel in the touristic cliché of Paris as the City of Light, and her Versailles is all about light, too.

As in her earlier work, there is the constant play between the real and the artificial, the natural and the not. Many of the light sources in Alexander's dark and dusky photos are doubly artificial: electric light fixtures reflected in mirrors or windows, the fixtures themselves simulating candelabra or gas lamps. Sunlight is either reflected off polished interiors or greyed and diffused by winter clouds.

The images—which include nighttime boat rides along the Seine, sumptuous shops seen through reflecting windows, formal and Romantic parks and gardens, Proust's grave, and the baroque interiors of Versailles with their tall, arched windows, glittering chandeliers, marble busts, and gilt-framed mirrors—drift in and out of focus like memories or

dreams. Like fleeting notions of what's really there.

The work that stands out, that is both exemplary and exceptional, is *La Fenêtre, Versailles*. In this photo, a view of one of Versailles's formal gardens through blue-sashed windows, nature is quite literally framed and deconstructed. The effect of the flash Alexander used was to burnish the foreground window frame within and flatten the background landscape without. The effect of viewing the garden through the grid of mullions and wobbly old glass panes is to isolate, stylize, and distort an already highly isolated, stylized, and distorted version of nature. The sum of these effects is a photograph that looks remarkably like a folk-art painting. (This is unusual for Alexander, whose photographs usually look quintessentially photographic.) Closely pruned trees and human figures walking among them take on almost the same shape and density—humorously consolidating the nature/culture interface. Each seems to be the dark, oblivious invention of the other.

The postcard show at Presentation House, *It Pays to Play*, has been glibly characterized in the media as "Postcards from the Edge". But surely these British Columbia scenes, produced during the so-called golden age of economic growth and industrial development following the Second World War, are postcards from the middle. From the centre. From the mainstream. They reveal myths and values of the dominant culture and, with their improbable azure skies and endless sunshine streaming down on the heads of blonde families, quite happily exclude the edge and the margins. Unless, of course, the margins conform to mainstream notions of the picturesque or the exotic, and can be consumed at a safe distance from their original context. (Thus we have tourist-pleasing views of neon signs in Vancouver's Chinatown and of Northwest Coast Native totem poles, plunked down in Stanley Park.)

Organized by Peter White and comprising some 2,000 postcards borrowed from private collections, the show asks us to see past these popular representations of B.C. to the reality beneath them, to the political, social, and economic agendas, along with "the formal conventions and emotional values", underlying their production. "The optimism of the times and the upbeat character of the postcard," White asserts, "were never more in sync." He warns viewers, though, against indulging in nostalgia (pretty difficult for those of us who remember childhood summer holidays in any of the sunny places represented here) for a fictional past, for a way of life that "may never have existed".

Among the modernist-industrial-consumerist values asserted here is the wholesale embrace of car culture. White has dug up endless postcards of cars—cars on highways and on beaches, cars on city roads and in mountain passes, cars parked in front of motels and on B.C. ferries and beside lakes and streams. Cars in blissful communion with nature and with man.

As White tells us, cars signify not only the prosperity of the age and the growth of the middle class, but the mobility that is a significant factor in the production and consumption of these very car-representing cards. Should we anticipate seeing tourist images of air pollution and the greenhouse effect? Those really would be postcards from the edge. ■

entertainment



Photo submitted

NO 1960s scenic postcard would be complete without the prerequisite automobile in foreground. *It Pays to Play: British Columbia in Postcards 1950s-1980s*, an exhibition of more than 2,000 postcards, is at Presentation House Gallery, 333 Chesterfield Ave., North Vancouver, to March 31.

Postcards form past

Sunny optimism found in pre-WW II postcards

BRITISH COLUMBIA'S history is in the cards.

By Layne Christensen

Community Reporter

An upcoming Presentation House Gallery exhibition, *It Pays to Play*, is a snapshot of B.C. life during post-Second World War years as represented through postcards issued during that time.

The exhibition, which opens Sunday, Feb. 24, has been organized by Peter White, a former resident of Vancouver who is currently working in Montreal as a curator and writer.

A collection of 2,000 color postcards, or "chromes" as they are known in the trade, will be on display. A selection of cards will also be shown in slide format.

The earliest cards date from the 1950s. Prior to

that, said White, postcards were hand-colored and therefore were more avidly collected items.

The focus of the exhibition is not the value or rarity of the cards but their depiction of an era of progress, said White, who is in town for the exhibition opening.

According to White, the postcards evoke "a kind of sunny optimism" in their depiction of the "good life," those prosperous years of the '50s and '60s. Landscapes with automobiles in the foreground, small-town main streets and even picturesque aerial shots of pulp and paper mills with smoke spewing into the air are common themes. Though the choice of photo subjects may seem odd today, at the time they were regarded "with an openness and pride," said White.

There are also postcards from the '70 and '80s, including a number taken during Expo 86.

The exhibition runs to March 31 at Presentation House (333 Chesterfield Ave., North Vancouver).

In addition, White will give a walking tour of the exhibition on Saturday, March 2, at 2:15 p.m. with a reception to follow. The event is free and open to the public.