

Awesome, reflective – and fun

Three contemporary sculptures are on show at Open Space (510 Fort St. until April 27). Dominating in its quiet majesty is Tom Bendtsen's *Argument No. 3*. By piling book upon book on a broadly circular base, the artist has created a massive pillar that rises from the gallery floor and appears to hold up the ceiling.

As an object, it's awesome. As a construction project, it looks like a lot of fun. Approaching closely, one begins to read the titles — these discs and remainders level all human knowledge to a trivial babble.

I wonder about Bendtsen's operative plan — are the books arranged by the Dewey Decimal system, from bottom up? Are they positioned by colour choice, making meaning simply decorative? The artist has brought into being a physical reality that really sticks in the mind. Bendtsen's *Onward No. 2* is a human head — of sorts — hooked up to a refrigerator compressor. As the show progresses, it will become ever more thickly coated with frost.

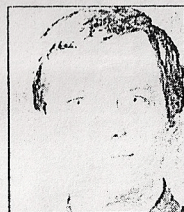
The gallery handout encrusts this simple sculpture with a hoary layer of art-speak. It is said to convey "a kind of gothic nervousness, suggesting the collapse not simply of the things, machines and spaces around us, but of our very notions of self, knowledge, and progress."

These two intriguing sculptures by Bendtsen are conducive to reflection. Karen Kazmer's installation at the rear of the gallery is mostly memorable for a ceaseless wail of its air pump, which doesn't encourage one to linger.

Imagine being 95 years old, with a memory so clear that you can recall 1935 in crisp detail.

Hilda Hale is just such a woman, and has seen much worth remembering. She tells all about it in her new book, *Indomitable Peking Bride*, (published by Hilda Hale, 138 pp., ISBN 0-9683139-2-2, available at the Gallery Shop, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria and local book shops).

When Hale was a young school teacher in



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Montreal she went on a blind date with a suave young man. He was on leave from Peking, where he was manager of a Thomas Cook Travel Agency. He knew they were meant for each other and, after a five-year courtship by correspondence, young Hilda sailed to join Bertram in the Far East.

That first year was full of surprises, and in describing them Hale shows herself a skilful raconteur. With a charming old Chinese courtyard home and seven servants to pamper the new-lowed, the Hales were well positioned to enjoy the last moments of old China.

Her keen curiosity about Chinese lace, about the princess who was turned out of the palace, about the wives of Russian diplomats who bought handbags by the dozen — all offer endless subjects for this late-in-life literary lioness.

Some years ago Hale was dubbed *indomitable* by our own Jim Gibson, and her first book was titled *Indomitably Yours*. It is a broad memoir, centring on her experience as a prisoner of war under the Japanese in China. Her second volume, *Indomitable Immigrant*, details her new life in Victoria shortly after the Second World War.

This third volume, shorter than the others, describes 1935, her first year in China. Hale told me she is going to retire as President of the Asian Art Society — for the third time! She's just returned from Hong Kong and Beijing full of fresh ideas and new memories. Indomitable, indeed.

There is no mistaking the paintings of Millie Shapiro. They are large, vibrant Expressionist oils

of women and animals. What are they about? I looked in on www.millieshapiro.com and found out:

"Her lush, figurative style unabashedly projects female power. She with the flaming red hair and strong eyes who occupies the centre of so many of her works is a composite fantasy — a force of nature. Supremely confident and at ease with her sensuality, she is willing to share it, but only on her own terms."

You can sit and sip under the blazing energy of these obsessive evocations at the Small City Bistro, 1871 Oak Bay Ave., until May 31.

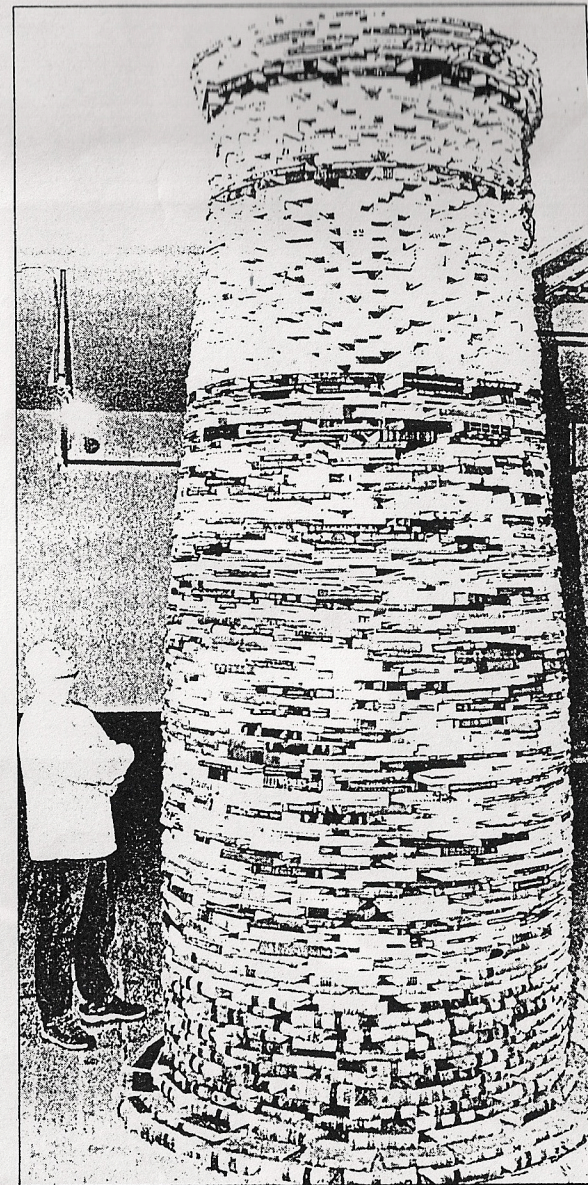
"Pierced mattresses, larger-than-life paintings depicting raw meat and sculptures oozing resin." Have we got your attention yet? You can probably guess that this is a press release about the UVic visual arts graduating class show (April 18 - 28 at UVic's visual arts building).

'Tis the season for grad shows all over the city. This one, titled *Face Value*, is the big one — presenting more than 100 exhibits. Take in the show just about any time, but if you want to savour the real buzz of an up-to-date Department of Fine Art, you'll be at the gala opening, 7 to 11 p.m., Thursday, April 18.

The first Fairfield Artists Studio Tour takes place this weekend — 17 artists in close proximity to the Cook Street Village open their doors Saturday and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Free maps available at many Village stores.

Tannis Warburton wrote to tell me of her "modest show" at the Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary (479-0211). "Appropriately," she explained, "the paintings in the show all feature plants, mostly flowers, indigenous to the Saanich Peninsula." The exhibition continues until May 5.

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Open Space's Todd A. Davis examines *Argument 3*, by Tom Bendtsen, on show at the gallery at 510 Fort St.

Ray Smith/Times Colonist