



Jacki Danylchuk *Oreilles* 1997 Épreuves couleur découpées et superposées 63 x 63 cm
 Courtesy: Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal

Of Fire and Passion, at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, proved an extravagant and long overdue debut for a "new" generation of "young" Quebec artists. Yet of all the characteristics that might have described this twenty-two artist survey, fire and passion were not words that readily came to mind.

That the exhibition lacked emotion and abandon was not altogether surprising. Artists today are well-educated inheritors of a complex century of rapid development, media and information saturation—and at least two recent decades of art dominated by conceptualism and academic theory. While the artworks in the exhibition proved well conceived, intelligent, sophisticated and impeccably rendered, the show itself was conspicuous in its avoidance of any overtly confrontational imagery or provocative social, political, sexual or otherwise controversial issues. It offered no kitsch, no violence, no deviance, no excess of any kind. There was no blurring of boundaries between "high" and "low" art; no colouring-outside-the-lines of acceptable museological decorum. Given the prevalence of these themes and issues in contemporary art in Quebec and around the globe such an

omission was a glaring oversight.

On the other hand, there were some healthy doses of humour and irony. Despite the slick production values, most of the artists had the savvy to not take themselves too seriously. Lucie Duval's installation, *Femmes du Sud* (1995–1997), for instance, mimics traditional museological structures to subvert the historical museological gaze. Carl Bouchard's four-part installation, *Suicide et autres assassinats* (1996–97), makes playful use of mundane materials and visual puns in a mocking analogue of human desire, pathos and fragility.

The least didactic works in the show, however, resonate strongest and pack the most effective visual and psychological punch. Karilee Fuglem's eerily glowing, subtly breathing latex lozenges in *Languor* (1997) hypnotize viewers into a vaguely disturbing state, suspended between desire

and unnameable anxiety. Eugénie Shinkle's black and white photographic collages of rock faces—*Rebuild II*, *Réseau*, *Rue des Seigneurs* (1996–97)—are composed of thousands of tiny images cut from contact sheets, layered and arranged in mesmerizing mosaic patterns. Obsessively constructed, they effectively elicit obsessive and prolonged viewing.

So, what is the problem if the ratio of good work in the show is high? One answer might be the museum's insistent effort to present a "new generation," even though the artists in the show range in age from twenty-six to forty-six. Until now, Montreal's major museums have not been open to this generation. The artists have spent years exhibiting in artist-run centers, dilapidated warehouses and other alternative and guerrilla-style, no-budget situations. In *Fire and Passion*, the work is ripped from this context and spirit. The grunge and grime have been polished clean. In the end, the quiet, elegant surroundings of the museum and its way-too-perfect installation of the work smothers the fire and passion of this "lost" generation of Montreal artists. ■

by DAVID LISS