

Five takes on one place

By ROBERT REID
RECORD STAFF

The Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery rings in 2007 with five exhibitions with links to Waterloo Region. Featuring work by Monica Tap, Sara Graham, Kim Adams, Alison Norlen and Shannon Reynolds, the exhibitions generate thematic echoes that resonate off one another.

RIVER GRAND CHRONICLES

The ongoing River Grand Chronicles features contemporary projects that examine conceptual and visual themes associated with the Grand River watershed.

Toronto artist Monica Tap pays homage to the Grand River and to Homer Watson with groupings of small and large paintings under the umbrella title of *Séance*. The experience of the landscape for many of us is mediated through vehicular movement. We experience the landscape as we speed along in cars and trucks, buses and trains. Tap's small paintings are depictions of scenes recorded with a digital camera through a window of a moving vehicle along Kitchener's Homer Watson Boulevard.

The best works convey a sense of speed. Two large abstract paintings, *Past Cressman's Woods*, are derived from multiple photos Tap shot from a canoe drifting along the banks of the Grand River.

Two other large paintings, *The Road to Lily Dale*, are derived from footage shot from a train en route to Lily Dale, N.Y., the oldest existing spiritual colony in North America, which Homer Watson visited late in life. Tap's large paintings are essentially studies in colour built on a strong dynamic between vertical and horizontal brush strokes.

Past and present, history and art, homage and subversion overlap in Toronto artist Sara Graham's *West Montrose (Un)covered Bridge Project*.

Built in 1881, the West Montrose Bridge, known locally as the Kissing Bridge, is the last covered in Canada.

Graham would have become familiar with the bridge while working on her master's degree in fine arts at the University of Guelph. She uses historical and archival material as a basis for making maps, portraits, diagrams, chronology tables and text in order to speculate about what West Montrose and Waterloo Region would be like were the bridge not covered and, as a result, fell into disrepair.

ROADSIDE ATTRACTIONS

Toronto artist Kim Adams is making the rounds of Waterloo Region galleries. This exhibition in Kitchener joins an exhibition on view at Cambridge Galleries. The exhibition's title



KITCHENER-WATERLOO ART GALLERY

River Grand Chronicles:
Monica Tap — *Séance*
Sara Graham — *West Montrose (Un)covered Bridge Project*
Kim Adams: Roadside Attractions
Alison Norlen: Edifice
Shannon Reynolds: faceLIFT
On view through: March 25
Phone: 519-579-5860 for hours



Shannon Reynolds' *faceLIFT* (top) greets people as they make their way to works such as *Edifice* by Alison Norlen (left), and *The Road to Lily Dale* by Monica Tap (right).

is apt because there is a Tom Robbins-esque sense of mania, fantasy and absurdity attached to Adams' miniature industrial landscapes and deconstructed vehicular sculptures made from HO scale model parts — 1/87 of actual size. The model sculptures and notebooks accompany several prints from the gallery's permanent collection.

EDIFICE

Saskatoon artist Alison Norlen based her monumental mixed-media drawing, made especially for the gallery,

by perusing historical and archival photographs at Kitchener Public Library.

However, you have to look closely and intently at *Edifice* to apprehend any local references.

Dense, complex, complicated and cluttered, *Edifice* brings to mind the kind of computer graphics that have replaced traditional sets in such Hollywood extravaganzas as the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

The drawing thrusts skyward with a confusion of architectural components including cranes, scaffolding and lad-

ders, beams and girders used in the construction of buildings and bridges.

In sheer energy, the aptly titled drawing brings to mind the manic vitality of Rick Pottruff's large-scale drawings that accompany Adams' miniature sculptures at Cambridge Galleries.

faceLIFT

Located in the lobby as you enter the gallery, Shannon Reynolds' *faceLIFT* comments wryly on all of the exhibitions. The Kitchener artist subverts the conventions of traditional portraiture

to investigate the nature and effects of art — how it is made and how we respond to it. Shannon solicited local actors as models for the audience portrayed in *faceLIFT*.

Remarks they made in response to various works of art have been recorded, which is activated when viewers walk past the painting.

As a result, fine art and performing art, creator and audience, execution and response are all held in dynamic tension.

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Sundance in search of next ray of Sunshine

By DAVID GERMAIN

PARK CITY, UTAH

Fresh off one of the sunniest hits ever to come out of the nation's top independent-cinema showcase, here's the big question: Is there a Little Miss Sunshine lurking in this year's Sundance Film Festival lineup?

A year ago, Little Miss Sunshine blew audiences away and wound up one of the costliest Sundance acquisitions ever, with Fox Searchlight paying somewhere north of \$10 million for the road-trip romp.

Sundance veterans sneered a bit, figuring the movie might prove another *Happy, Texas*, which Miramax bought for \$10 million on the strength of great Sundance buzz in 1999. The movie rolled over and died at the box office. Then Little Miss Sunshine, a

charmer featuring Greg Kinnear, Toni Collette and Steve Carell as members of a horribly messed-up family en route to their little girl's beauty pageant, hauled in nearly \$60 million at theatres, one of the most-profitable Sundance buys ever.

The film caught on critically, too, showing up on reviewers' top-10 lists and becoming a serious candidate for a best-picture slot at Tuesday's Academy Awards nominations.

Little Miss Sunshine was that Sundance rarity that maintained the personal, idiosyncratic sensibilities of independent cinema while also clicking with a broad audience. Other costly Sundance acquisitions such as *Girlfight* and *Tadpole* found adoring audiences at the festival but were ignored and quickly forgotten in the real world.

The festival overseen by Robert Red-

ford's Sundance Institute opened Thursday. Redford founded the Sundance Institute in 1981 as an artistic incubator for undiscovered film talent. The institute later took over a regional film festival, which became the organization's marquee event as films such as Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* and Kevin Smith's *Clerks* came out of Sundance in the 1990s.

Since then, festival organizers have had to fend off gripes that Sundance has grown overly commercial as celebrities descended on the ski resort of Park City and film buyers raced to find the next indie hit.

The acquisitions frenzy is misplaced, as only a handful of notable successes have come out of Sundance, such as *In the Bedroom*, which pulled in \$36 million at the box office and earned five Oscar nominations, best

picture among them, and *Hustle & Flow*, which took in \$22 million and brought Terrence Howard an Oscar nomination.

In 2004, Sundance produced its broadest slate of commercial hits with *Napoleon Dynamite*, *Garden State*, *Open Water*, *The Motorcycle Diaries* and *Super Size Me*. Big awards contenders also came out of that year's festival, with Catalina Sandino Moreno earning a best-actress Oscar nomination for *Maria Full of Grace* and *Born Into Brothels* winning the best-documentary Oscar.

The rare Sundance hits come from a lineup each year of about 120 films, most of which are never seen beyond the festival circuit.

A handful of films up for sale at Sundance had buyers eager to catch them at their premieres, among them

director James C. Strouse's *Grace Is Gone*, starring John Cusack as a husband whose wife is killed in military service in Iraq; David Wain's *The Ten*, featuring Winona Ryder, Jessica Alba and Paul Rudd in a collection of comedy shorts based on the Ten Commandments; and Deborah Kempmeier's *Hounddog*, with Dakota Fanning as a child rape victim.

Overall, the films have a more sober tone than usual, and many Sundance veterans came in generally unexcited about the lineup and skeptical that there were any surprise hits to be had.

Then again, some critics last year pegged Little Miss Sunshine as just another film that played well for festival audiences but might not cut it outside the thin, high-altitude air of Park City.

• *Associated Press*



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