

CULTURE

EDITOR: CHRIS DART • CULTURE@BROCKPRESS.COM • 905.688.5550 X.4223 • OFFICE HOURS: WEDNESDAY AND FRIDAY AFTERNOONS • MARCH 2, 2004

New exhibit examines issues of religion

BY KAYLA HILLIER
The Brock Press

The Niagara Artists' Company's newest two artist exhibit, *Ethereal Constructions*, is held together by one overriding theme; religion.

The choice of topic could not be more timely, given the controversy surrounding the film *The Passion of the Christ* and the current theological debates surrounding the issue of gay marriage. *Ethereal Constructions* attempts to take a less aggressive look at issues of faith and avoids looking solely at Christianity, with half of the exhibit dedicated to an examination of Buddhism.

Hamilton-based artist Elysia Dywan had two giant pieces on display, both approximately 20 feet long with vibrant, primary colour backgrounds. Both paintings depict Catholic saints. The actual paintings themselves are stylistically similar to pictures one would see in a church or Bible. More interesting is the placement of the canvases. Both paintings are placed horizontally.

"They are on their side for a reason. The one on the left is Gabriel when he was approaching Mary... for the Annunciation, to bless her," said Dywan. "Then the others are two saints who were beckoning Christ to come follow them... By putting them on their sides it's as if Gabriel were blessing the people in this space ... he then



ALEXANDER HRYSHKO/THE BROCK PRESS

Jumping off the walls Barbara Berry specialized in three-dimensional paintings.

interacts with the people. The two saints also seem to beckon people looking at it."

Dywan says that she likes also likes putting these painting on

their sides because they look more powerful and they appear to take up more space.

Nova Scotian artist Barbara Berry, a practising Buddhist, was

the other artist in the exhibit. Her paintings are based around the symbolism and mythology of Tibetan Buddhism. The paintings depict wrathful and peaceful

scenes alternately, prominently featuring deities, animals and nature.

What makes her Berry's work stick out visually is her ability to work in three dimensions. She cuts holes in the original canvas, then adds on pieces that go outside of the frame. She also adds layers and depth to her art with pieces of wood that are glued or nailed on to the canvas as well as other materials, like a crochet blanket and beads. Berry uses the three-dimensional form in her paintings to have her work move away from the wall and approach the people looking at it. Some of her previous works have come out so far from the painting that they were considered sculptures.

One of the images frequently shown in the wrathful paintings is of one of a deity or person standing on a human form.

"When you see them standing on the human form, it relates to the ego ... negative parts of ourselves ... It's that part of you being suppressed or removed," said Berry.

Berry says that although the paintings depict religious icons, they are deeply personal in nature.

"[On one of these paintings] I used my daughter's face ... and some of these are very woody," said Berry. "This reflects where I live in Nova Scotia."

Ethereal Construction runs until April 14 at the NAC in St Catharines.