

Steve
Menhinick

ART REVIEW

If you want to see art that pushes back frontiers, then look no further than the "Asking Questions" exhibition at Glenhyrst Art Gallery of Brant. Four artists explore and manipulate media in unpredictable and imaginative ways, providing visual statements which provoke and challenge the viewer on both an artistic and political level.

Dawn in Banaras, a piece by mixed media-artist Mansaram, draws on imagery from the Indian subcontinent to evoke the mood of a place where people co-exist with animals. Overlaying photographic and hand-drawn imagery, the artist combines vibrant colour with a complex arrangement of space to reveal a narrative which is both implicit and engaging. Mansaram is clearly a cutting-edge artist who is capable of shaping a surprising range of media in unexpected ways; the results place him firmly in the current avant garde of Canadian art.

Another artist who provokes and challenges with a completely uncompromising approach to making art is Paul Roorda. In *Congregation of the Ambivalent*, his sculptural installation evokes an intense passion for the spiritual subject matter. The meticulous handling of materials leaves the viewer with a sense of awe for the collection and arrangement of the pages of sixty Bibles that were wet, dried and forced open, creating a visually powerful statement. In *Christ [Self portrait levitating over a bed of nails]*, Roorda ties small waxed paper parcels into which the image of Christ is painted in rust — an inventive way of linking Christian iconography. *Truth Serum*, using syringes filled with dye extracted from Bibles, continues Roorda's interest in linking controversial issues with unlikely media.

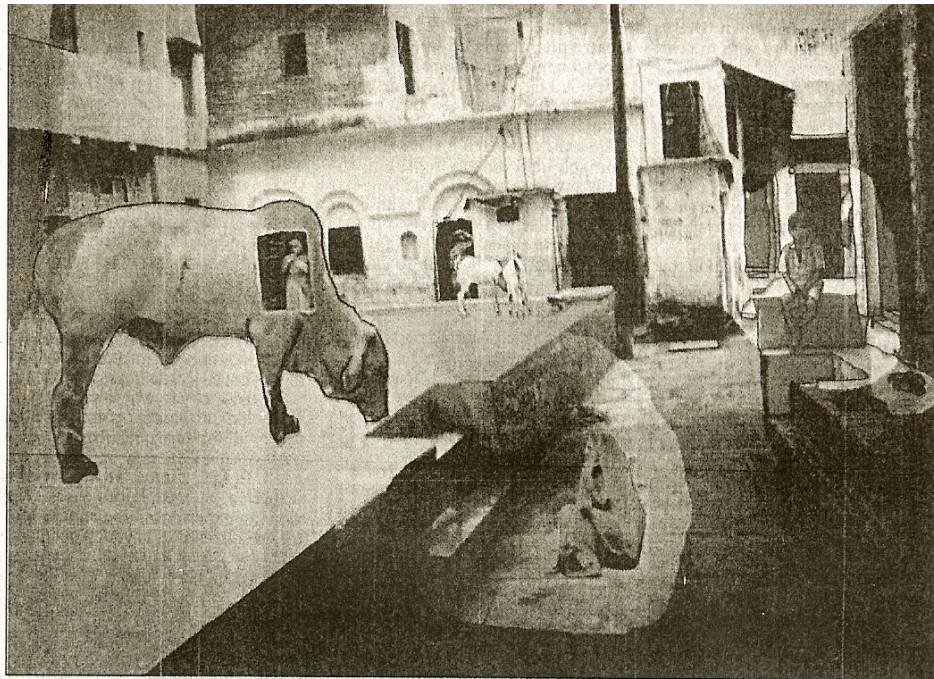
Iona Staples is another innovative artist who explores political concerns by taking mundane objects, and investing meaning and imagery that is anything but mundane. The powerful hanging construction piece, *Ties that Bind*, uses twist ties to identify the member states of the United Nations in chronological order according to their year of admission. *Invasive Species* tackles a more locally focused environmental issue, the invasive trends of new flora and fauna in the Great Lakes. In this piece, Staples paints the various species of fish onto stacked cardboard boxes.

Margie Kelk creates a collages of paint and photographs to overlay the complexities of Chinese life. Her calligraphic style of painting and her sensitivity evoke a positive yet ambivalent view of China's struggle to deal with an increasing tendency towards westernisation.

There is nothing safe or comfortable about this exhibition. But if you believe that art should exist to challenge and provoke, then this is clearly a powerful example of the potency of this form of communication.

The exhibition will run until May 25, and there will be a talk by contributing artist Mansaram, at 1 p.m. on Sunday at Glenhyrst.

Steve Menhinick is head of the art department at North Park Collegiate.



Mansaram, *Dawn in Banaras*, Mansa-media on paper and masonite, 70 x 95 cm.

NOW SHOWING

- ◆ **What:** Asking Questions, a four-artist mixed media exhibition
- ◆ **When:** Until May 25
- ◆ **Gallery Hours:** Tuesday to Friday, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturday and Sunday 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.
- ◆ **Where:** Glenhyrst Art Gallery of Brant.

Below: Margie Kelk, Detail from *Enigma of China*, series of seven panels, Chinese ink, watercolour on mylar. Right: Iona Staples, *Invasive Species*, acrylic paint on cardboard boxes, 145 x 125 x 90 cm. Below right: Paul Roorda, *Congregation of the Ambivalent*, 60 Bibles with wrinkled pages, 120 x 540 x 75 cm.

