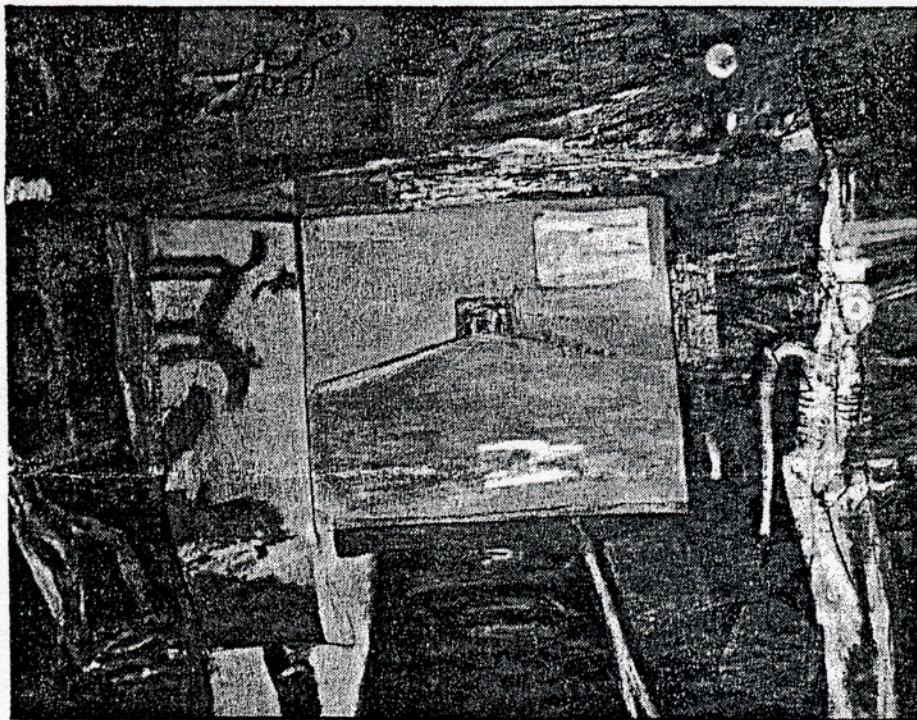


ARTS

Shining through darkness



by Caeri Bertrand-Crump

Margie Kelk
Morality Tales
 Artcote until Feb. 4

Morality Tales is an exhibit about the levels of human thought: how we perceive ourselves, women, the living and the dead, our environments (physical, mental, emotional) and art.

Toronto-artist Margie Kelk works in acrylic paint on plywood and canvas, layering her surfaces in a fashion similar to Montreal abstractionist Jean-Paul Riopelle; rowelling, slathering and ornamenting the work in endless layers to create a third dimension, a message space closer to the message space (society) we live in.

Kelk's use of colour is particularly striking - vibrant, even florescent jewelled tones merge in and out of the images, an illustration of contrast between concepts and their environment.

In *Plus ça change* the energy-laden colours emerge as the flesh of women who are submerged in the muddy black of their environment. The women shine through the darkness; they surface despite the slathered oppression. The result is a strong statement about the power of women and the depth of the societal darkness, jubilant and depressing at the same instant.

Riotous colours combine with carving and simple shapes in the twin works *The Fruits of His Labour* and *Mentally we Ride Around, Blowing Ourselves Off The Ground*. The depiction of the ethereal horse and shadowy rider (the onlooker), floating in the blue-red fiery environment of paper-doll cutouts and chalkboard scrawls, leaves a positive image.

The flying subject is the childhood philosopher, 'blowing' out of reality into the land of questions and fantasies, out of the darkness and voyeurism of the first piece and into the vibrant chorus of the second. Again, the question posed concerns the oscillation between good and bad. If imagination is this beautiful and free, is it the only thing we know that is so good? Kelk has a way of slyly painting



Lance photos by James Crum

Impressive and complex statements of identity, survival and transcendence. Margie Kelk's exhibit continues through Feb. 4, at Artcote.

on both sides of the coin.

This theme of humanity and philosophy surfaces in *The Silent Conversation*. Again the men/women are vibrant, one is dusted in florescence (stardust?) yet is undefined, or visually silent. The scene is illuminated on shreds of canvas, alluding to the tearable, unstable quality of human life.

The pasted-on globe between the faces lends to a further otherworldliness: Where are we and our lovers in relation to our concepts of space, geography, reality? Where do we place it all within our mental (imaginary) lives? Does death, the black, swirling side of this canvas, take us further from earth or closer to it and its secrets? The endless questions brought about by the sharp, vivid contrast of blue sky and black night are powerful and compelling.

Kelk's use of the media is resolved and final; there is no hesitation or discontent. Kelk's show exhibits not only her ethereal work, it showcases an artist in touch with her environments. These works are a bridge, a springboard into the realms of real and imagined, humanity and our space, and the levels of space itself. □