

FINE ARTS

Commanding words, images

Contrasts of an ever-changing vision, works of optically disturbing bull's-eyes

By ANN ROSENBERG

FOR ALMOST 30 years, Roy Kiyooka has been a leader and teacher on Vancouver's art scene.

Even before he moved here from Winnipeg in the early '60s, several local artists — including Claude Breeze and Brian Fisher — had already been influenced by his svelte paintings of mandalic images. And Kiyooka's reputation for a way with words, both on paper and in person, had also preceded him.

This month, with two mini-retrospectives at the Or and Artspeak Galleries, Vancouver has a good opportunity to take a good look at Kiyooka's multi-media, interdisciplinary body of work. (Or Gallery, 314 West Hastings, Artspeak Gallery, #3 - 311 West Hastings. Both to May 26.)

One can see how Kiyooka moved with grace from his minimalist paintings and sculpture (with few colors and few words) to the personal, text-enriched photography of his recent art.

Kiyooka's earliest works — from the late '50s to the early '70s, when he was principally absorbed by abstraction — are at the Or Gallery.

The five black rectangular paintings of 1959 to '60 and the 19 black and white oval collages of 1964, all works on paper, are distinguished by vigorous, often rasping brushwork, and well-designed compositions.

Hoarfrost, a large 1958 painting, captures the beauty and chill of a frozen lawn with fat brushstrokes in various tones of white and grey. Red Bend, a 1963 collage on canvas, spills gut-like coils over a backdrop of black and white.

In the '70s Kiyooka made several sinuous cedar sculptures that feature ovals laminated into worm-like coils and loops. While many artists have spent their creative lives extending the possibilities of similar imagery and design, below the review of Kiyooka's work at the Heffel Gallery, Kiyooka did not marry himself to non-representational abstraction,

nor did he remain in that thematic groove.

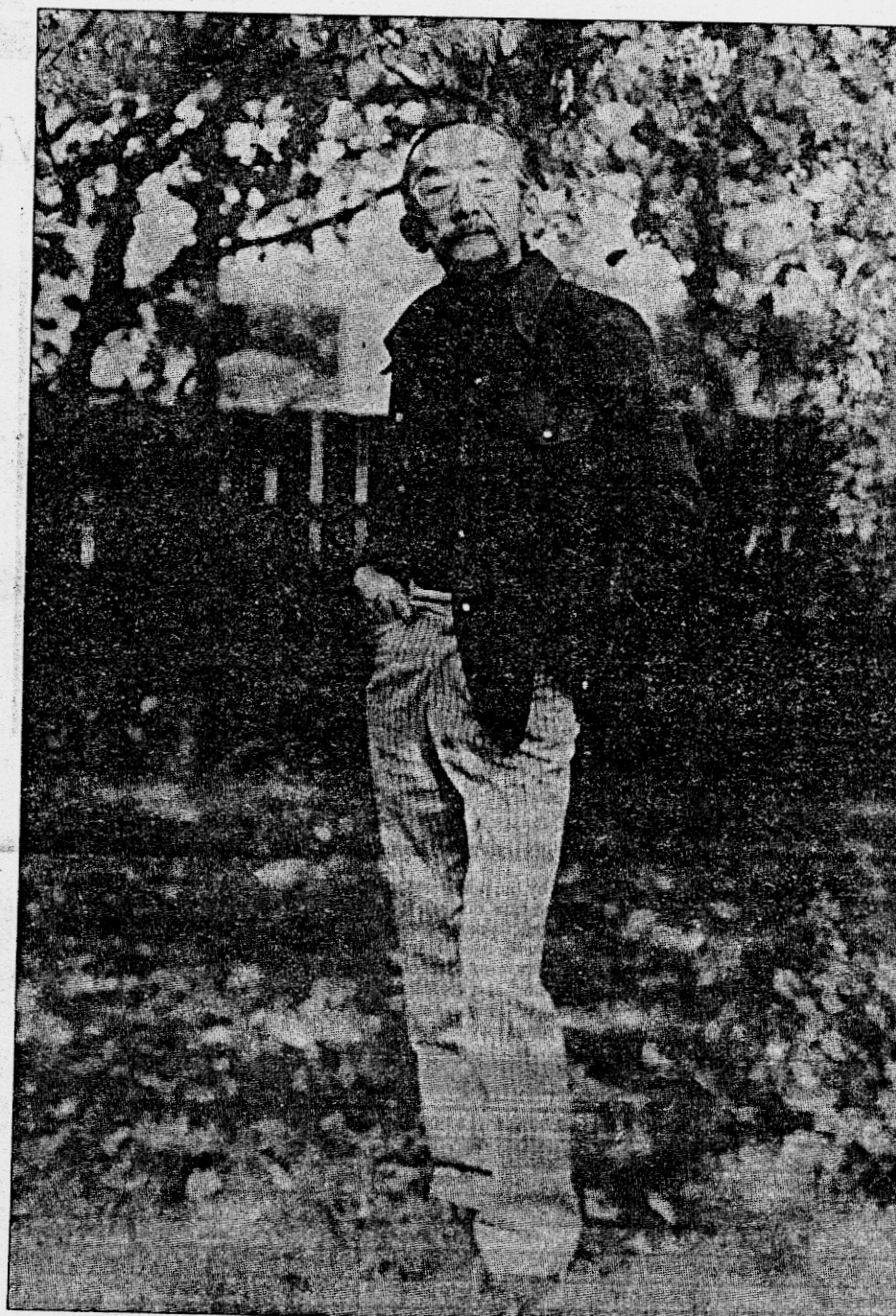
Even in the formal oval collages of 1963, Kiyooka had a subplot of photo-based imagery and words. In one of the series, the image of a cat perched on the top of a giant cactus has been sandwiched between the three textured shapes. In another of the series, a media shot of the dying Malcolm X is included in the top half of the oval. In others in the suite you discover words like "Brie" and a series of letters like "RRSSSTUUU." Even then, it would seem, the stage had been set for Kiyooka's move away from the abstract and into the realm of representationalism.

Kiyooka's photo and Xerox-based works are on display at Artspeak.

In 1969, before he moved away from abstract painting and sculpture, Kiyooka began to use large-scale photography as means of producing works in series such as Stone DGloves, one of his most provocative investigations of the relationship between imagery and language. This moving cycle presents visual equivalents of the idea of stoned gloves: half concealed by sand and dried leaves, worn garden work gloves lie on concrete, evidence of man's presence in the urban wilderness.

Kiyooka's combination of pictorial image and written message are well represented at Artspeak. Replacement Parts for Humans (1979), for example, is a wry collage of dental surgery documentation, magazine references to penile implants and the strength of fetal grip, a medical illustration of a pig's heart valve, media photos of giant gatherings in third-world countries and gloved hands — all rendered in colored Xerox, before that medium became a fashionable artist's tool.

The photographic triptych, Four Generations (1982), and two 1984 multi-image murals accompanied by explanatory texts — "a small harbour on nomi island one afternoon" and "her last trip to the family grave" — provide insights into Kiyooka's recent concern with genealogy and his own ethnicity.



ROY KIYOOKA: combines pictorial image and written message

FRED DOUGL

The most recent Kiyooka — two photographic works from 1986 that contain words that praise the beauty and succulence of pears — can be found back across the street at the Or Gallery. These make a nice connection with the book of pear poetry that Kiyooka published that same year.

Pears, of course, are shaped like two combined ovals. So even though Kiyooka has moved into representationalism in his imagery and texts, there are compositional and other threads that link a diverse body of work.

In addition to the gallery shows,

a screening of Kiyooka's films will be held tonight at 8 p.m. at the Western Front, 303 East Eighth, and a reading will take place May 26 at 8 p.m. at the Kootenay School of Writing at 152 West Hastings.

A contrast with Roy Kiyooka's ever-changing vision is the career of Quebec's famous target painter Claude Tousignant, the subject of a 40-year mini-retrospective at the Heffel Gallery (2247 Granville. To May 19).

Tousignant's works at the Heffel date back to his days as a student at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts' school of art and

design. What he did then anticipated the commitment to abstraction he has followed throughout his artistic life — a course paralleled, in general, by the works of Yves Gaucher and Guido Molinari, also Montreal-based artists with international reputations.

Although he is five years younger than Kiyooka, Tousignant has never looked to means of expression substantially different from those he embraced in the early '70s, a period when Kiyooka was most in sync with the minimalist

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NATURE WALK by David Walker: works are reminiscent of Cezanne

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esthetic but, with StoneDGloves, had already begun to turn to photography as a medium.

The pleasure in viewing the Tousignant show is in coming to terms with his progression from the amorphous shapes and visible brushwork of his mid-'50s color swatch paintings to the severe geometrics and flat surfaces of his later paintings and skillscreens in which homages to Mondrian and Joseph Albers are apparent.

Tousignant's target theme is examined and re-examined. His Accelerator Chromatique, from the late 1960s, is one of a series of vibrantly hued, optically disturbing, banded bullseyes designed to knock the viewer's visual socks off. In the '70s, however, Tousignant moved to a simpler target form — a circle on a circle. In these works we are expected to be mesmerized by the subtle color changes worked by one tone of grey in the presence of a blue and a green of equal value.

In the '80s Tousignant was still doing targets, represented in this show by two very sombre black ink bullseyes. The sobriety of these targets matches the mood of a drawing from the 1986 Wittgenstein Suite with its rectangular shapes, which, in turn, accord with the strict formats that Tousignant has used to compose the two handsome sculptures in this exhibit.

These sculptures — Spearhead in Blue and Violet, and Prolegomene Crucial (both 1989) — are painted aluminum. No hint of texture troubles their beautifully colored surfaces. To experience these works is to come close to an

appreciation of what Barnett Newman's Voice of Fire (recently purchased by Canada's National Gallery) is about. For that reason alone it is worth catching the last day of this show.

If you miss the Heffel show you can still see the Vancouver Art Gallery's Tousignants on display until July 2, alongside work by Gary Lee-Nova and Michael Snow.

While Tousignant's work represents the purist and academic phases of North American abstraction, the colors are often seductive. The compositions either soothe or excite and no information from the everyday world interferes with the appreciation of these basic esthetic pleasures.

Vigorously painted beachscapes, reminiscent of Cezanne, dominate David Walker's exhibition at the Diane Farris Gallery (1565 West Seventh. To May 23). In the largest of the canvases, the beachscapes provide backgrounds for strange dramas taking place at the water's edge or in barn-like structures near the shore.

In Follow the Leader a man in a trenchcoat, who looks rather like Van Gogh, seems to be practicing tai chi. If this man is the leader referred to in the title then he is ineffective. No one seems to be following him in his particular activity. Indeed, the other generalized, none-too-solid, self-absorbed wraiths in this work seem to be lost in a morass of conflicting impulses that cripples their progress along the sun-drenched beach.

In two other paintings, unseen obstacles cause men to stumble so that they almost drop the cameras slung around their

necks. This symbolic gesture of ineptitude could refer to the fears that artists face as they put their skills to the test on the uncompromising surface of the white canvas — fears akin to those faced by photographers when they attempt to take the perfect picture.

In the several works that depict barns, naked males crouch and grovel as though they are in fear of failing to survive or failing to be suitably technical. Fear is palpable.

Typical of many artists of his generation, Walker is concerned with the figurative, but not at the expense of the abstract. In new

DAVID WALKER
May 5-23

DIANE FARRIS GALLERY

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expressionist painting, paint is often visible and even luxuriously applied. Colors may deviate from the expected in order to amplify a mood. Hence, Walker's barn interiors are touched with blood reds and deep blue-violets and the searing hotness of the landscapes is rendered in whites and the palest of golds. Brushstrokes create neurotic, repetitive rhythms that amplify the general nervousness of these unsettling works.

At Fifty-Six Gallery, Mark Gaskin presents us with 11 new icons that celebrate mysterious worlds and states of being (56 Powell, to May 26). Their images are surrounded by heavy frames of solid gold leaf dusted with copper powder and treated to an

acid wash. The frames are decorated with incised circles, applied plaster scallop shell reliefs and are occasionally inscribed with objects — devices that increase the religious and Renaissance associations of the works.

This first one-person exhibit by Mark Gaston has, at first glance, an *arte povera* quality reminiscent of early Robert Rauschenberg. Like Rauschenberg, Gaston has occasionally used old newspapers to create surfaces on which to paint and he has painted on the backs of used canvases. But the effect is rich, not poor. The acid wash of the frames, the heavy textures and faded quality of the paper, endows his icons with an aura akin to that of "distressed and pre-stressed" antiques.

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