

EX ACADEME  
Contemporary Art Gallery  
October 31—November 27, 1984

*"Athens, the eye of Greece,  
the mother of arts,  
and eloquence  
native to famous wits or hospitable,  
in her sweet recess,  
city or suburban,  
studious walks and shades;  
See there the olive grove of Academe,  
Phoebus retirement where the Attic bird  
trills her thick warbled note the summer  
long."*

*Paradise Regained, John Milton*

Academe, as versified by Milton, becomes a domain where thought or concept development can be produced with prodigiously fertile results. In comparison, is the secluded and intensive academic fine arts environment with which we are familiar actually conducive to collaborative and communicative aspects capable of production quality above what is produced outside of those hallowed halls? Or as the curators of this exhibition point out, the resultant production most definitely will "serve as a catalyst for discussion of broader questions concerning the making of artists—including their training".

With the exhibit titled *Ex Academe* or "out of the University" we as viewers are pointed towards the question of environment before we reflect on any artist's individual concerns. Allusion to influence, direction, capabilities and need are all part of an environ which ultimately come to bear on specific production. We must not forget that students are a captured audience, if that is what the professors of art want and need; a group which seems frequently to be malleable to the point of willingly excluding all influences beyond those sanctioned by their teachers of the moment. As a result "the group", made up of individuals, becomes indicative of "an environment" with the individuals reflecting their own specific concerns, although influenced by their surroundings. This circle of self-perpetuation which any environment with its capabilities will produce is left for the participants to control.

When one asks the question does the environ define difference in product and product quality we are asking the individual participant to better judge the environment. Case in point is "the universities which have provided the intellectual atmosphere and attitudes favorable to the production of art with a strong intellectual emphasis, and at the same time they have generated the criticism on which such art is dependent". When we actually consider the circumference of this circle we realize that it includes the majority of artists, educated in an academic environment, the seventy-one (71) ANNPAC spaces, the commercial galleries and cultural institutions and last, but not least, mother to us all, Canada Council. These are domains which, although necessary in this person's eyes, should be scrutinized by all participants and kept at arms length. Another question we can ask of this

exhibit, specifically, does the work which purports to come "out of" an intellectual/analytical environment fulfill that reflection, or does it merely portray (the look of) intellectualism? This group of artists pulled out all stops in their attempts to out-intellectualize each other. Congdon, Laskarin, Linsley, Lum, Naylor and Speier have produced work that is insular to the extent that criteria and content have been excluded or at least buried so deep in personal aesthetics even their teachers of theory would have a hard time digging it out.

Although the concept of the exhibition brought forth some necessary questions for the community, none of which were answered either formally or academically at the accompanying panel discussion, the work itself saw my interest wane. As a group of works what we have is the look of Academe and the feel of Academe without the taste of Academe.

All quotations from curator's statement.  
(Alvin Balkind, Doris Shadbolt).

Todd Davis