

Artery
Spring 1988

The judgement of New York
Three isms at the Western Front

There's something about a new *ism* that just gets me wild, and with the surfacing of three, count 'em, three of today's trendiest *isms* appearing at the Western Front this past year, one can easily comprehend my frenzied state of aesthetic euphoria.

The leader of the pack is easily Terry Ewasiuk's photomannerist show RECEIVER, which was on view from Nov.

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17 to Dec. 4, 1987. Ms. Ewasiuk has been successfully manipulating the photographic medium for a number of years, from large format b & w photographs of staged tableaux to geometric joiners of polaroid snaps. Now Ewasiuk is using her photos as both content and context, and the results of her efforts are stunningly effective.

Her method is quite simple and effortlessly direct. She matches 1920's style b & w photographs with common everyday decorative wrappings. This analogy suggests that the images in the photographs (the content) is reduced to the value of the consumer ideal of "pretty yet useful, but always disposable" (the context).

A small piece of handcarved wood ornamentation is matched with tacky wood-grain Mac Tac. Bright red polka dots accompany the image of an eye painted on porcelain. Beautifully coiffed women luxuriate beside unimaginative wallpaper (to be seen and not heard). A white bowl awaiting its contents, rests on bold stripes of green wrapping paper, while a phallic bicycle seat hovers on a pillar of horizontal red and white lines. All the receivers with their allotted status in today's image saturated consumer society.

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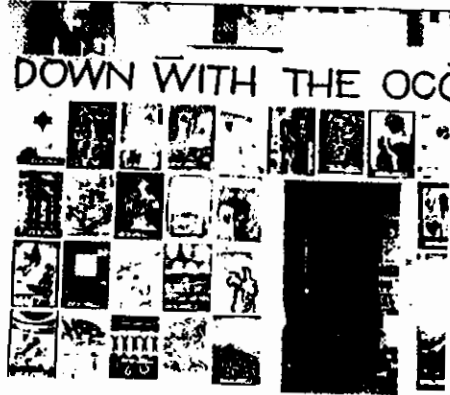
At left: photo by Jacques Bérubé supplied by the artist.

Below: 'Tutuchisms' 1987, 30 1/4" by 28 1/4". Black and white silverprint and wallpaper by Terry Ewasiuk. Photo by Nick Pellegrino.

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Individually these pieces could be seen as a statement of society's growing lack of respect for quality and complacency in accepting established values as the norm. Mass produced for the masses whose values are manipulated by the mass production of selected images. But while viewing the works as a group, the focus becomes clear: like the object (i.e. the empty bowl), the recurring image of women become decorative receivers in a field of consumer display.

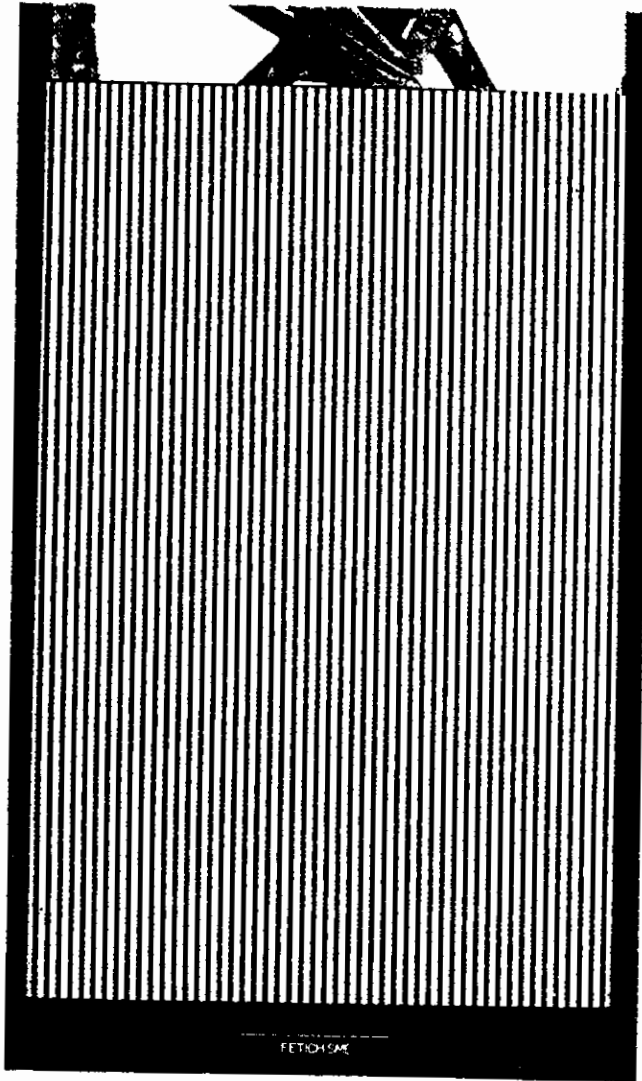
It's not blatant sexist imagery that Ewasiuk is addressing, but the subtle images that we too often accept as



normal, in our rush to view the more obvious. With a distinct lack of subtlety in content, and a playful subtlety in context, Ewasiuk mixes and matches a brilliant ensemble that speaks directly, so that any bimbo could afford to understand, though more likely will choose to ignore. But in the long run, I can only assume that works like those of Terry Ewasiuk's will endure, with the ability to communicate to a large audience.

The next *ism*, while decidedly less imaginative warrants attention due to its rampant proliferation. I am of course referring to the trendiest of all *isms*, *Careerism*. Where as Ewasiuk's *Photomannerism* spoke in a clear and direct voice, the next exhibit to come to the Western Front, a collection of monoliths, ugly photography, childish drawings of strategy, and pointless text, babbled on in a foreign language.

The installation in question, FULCRUM by Phillip McCrum (Dec. 8, 1987 to Jan. 8, 1988) is an ideal example of this state of the arts. With lots of context, a smattering of content, plenty of documentation and no art, the careerist statement is made: "Fuck art let's talk about me."



is perhaps the real medium of careerist art) and ultimately becomes the focus of the work. Keep the public talking about the most important element of the work — the artists' stature in the art community, since little or no actual art is produced by the careerist, we are left with just the mounds of documentation and a void of culture.

It will be interesting to see how history remembers *Careersism*, and how future generations interpret this movement with a perspective on our times. As for McCrum, with his evident naturalist display of talent with this particular *ism*, I can only see him surfing the crest until the wave hits the beach.

The third and final *ism* is a form of visual communication that merits artistic status only because it appears in this artistic milieu. Vocal *Opinionism* has been around for ever in the art world, but every now and then it manifests itself in a physical manner. Some examples of this Physical *Opinionism* would be a 1930's dada art show that was destroyed by zealous students who did not share the artists' views on art, or the hammer wielding gentleman who assumed he could improve upon Michaelangelo's *Pieta*. In both cases these individuals effected a physical change in content in order to reflect their personal interpretation of art: their opinions.

This demonstrative form of *Opinionism* was briefly on view during the previously discussed FULCRUM exhibition. While the actual installation was not physically harmed, it was physically altered. In the early hours of the day, before the gallery's opening hour, a group of opinionists gathered and placed a large Santa Claus head over the photographic element in the installation and photo documented their activities. This mode of expression could almost be labeled graffiti, as the artists merely added to the existing structure rather than destroying it. Since it wasn't permanent and was removed minutes after the gallery opened, few people actually observed it in its altered state and the opinions expressed were short-lived.

While a majority of the few who saw the opinionist statement found it funny, others felt it was a desecration of the sacred art object. I suppose like *Opinionism* itself, it must be left to the viewer to decide about such art work. It certainly would be more respectful if these individuals found their own medium for expression, but as the art community continues to struggle through the changing tide of *isms* and values, the questions of right and wrong expression, good and bad art, will continue to hang in limbo and await the judgement of New York.

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