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Betty Ann Jordan

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Euan Macdonald

Based on a True Story

Curated by Christina Ritchie

Art Gallery of Ontario in the Present

Tense Room

March 12 to June 29, 1997

Euan Macdonald's *Coconut Trees* is one of the funniest paintings I've ever seen. Black and white and flat like wallpaper, each of these gawky palms has been scratched into being. Such brave little icons signifying their hearts out. *Land of the Giants* is a sculpture that describes a world where airplanes are the size of songbirds. And they have sex like dragonflies. (That would make us people pretty big and powerful, would it not?) It's like a child's fantasy: What if I were big? The *City Boy* blockheads also look like children. They are vacuum-formed clear plastic rectangles with paint on the inside. Two circles have been left for eyes. The colours are, like everything in this show, pale and unassuming. These blockheads aren't going to get in your way, they'll just look at you. Maybe they are watching from apartment windows? They are silent and curious and don't take up a lot of room. They're meek and beautiful.

Sally McKay

Euan Macdonald at the Art Gallery of Ontario

Macdonald's subtle paintings are exactly opposite to Sheila Gregory's outgoing abstractions. He pares his imagery down to the bare minimum, and uses muted, tasteful colours such as you'd see in the pastry section of your local bakery. Instead of building up a cacophony of marks, he scrapes pigment away from opaque painted plexiglass or metal surfaces, making tight little line drawings. With Macdonald, the appeal comes from watching an intelligent artist rummage through the flotsam and jetsam of visual culture, cherishing little jokes, incongruities and perceptual phenomena — for instance, the way we reflexively read two side-by-side holes as eyes in a face. *Until June 29. 317 Dundas St. W., Toronto. (416) 979-6610.*

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Gillian MacKay

Euan Macdonald at Robert

Street This talented young Torontonion manages to make a little look like a lot, which dovetails nicely with the stripped-down mood of the '90s. City grids fascinate Macdonald, as do airplanes, trucks, cartoons and James Bond movies. In 23 small works, he deploys his macho vocabulary with whimsy and restraint; tiny but compelling images of gunshot explosions and island enclosures are lightly scratched or delicately drawn onto painted grounds. His sunny-coloured paints come from the hardware store; his surfaces range from yellow glass hand-somely wrapped in galvanized steel to industrially produced plastic forms shaped like TV screens. Rather than flaunting the ugliness of such materials, these engaging works celebrate the lure and lustre of the commonplace.

Until Oct. 12. 242 1/2 Queen St. E., Toronto. (416) 955-9410.