

Saturday Review



Michael Banwell broaches the subject of the cultural use of wilderness in his mixed-media installation *Development and Desire* (detail, left)

Michael Banwell is an accomplished sculptor, installation artist and community activist who (much to the horror of die-hard formalists) provokes us to think about social and political issues.

A long-time resident of Strathcona, he has created temporary public art works for that neighborhood, some of them addressing architectural heritage, urban land use, shelter, public safety, prostitution and the drug trade.

More recently, Banwell has broached the subject of the cultural uses of wilderness.

Development and Desire, his mixed-media installation at the Or Gallery (112 West Hastings, until Feb. 12), takes the form of a generic "administrator's office."

False oak paneling and recorded bird songs, backlit wilderness photos and a handsome rowboat (it hangs overhead, as if we were looking at it from the bottom of a bureaucratic pond); glossy maps and a black desk spread with publications (glossy maps and a black desk spread with publications from a variety of government, forest industry and environmental sources — all these suggest various ways in which we construct a sense of the natural world and our place within it).

The wonderful thing about Banwell's installation is that he doesn't load the polemical dice in favor of one position or another. Represented here are all views, from the "for profit" intentions of industry through environmentalist commitment to conservation and recreationalist devotion to idyllic pleasures.

Still, we can guess where Banwell's sympathies lie by simply contrasting the love with which the beautiful green rowboat has been made with the synthetic swiftness of the office furniture and paneling.

There's irony, too, in this subtly conceived and immaculately executed installation — more real

wood (from real forests) is so much more delightful than fiberglass or plastic. <

South Granville GALLERY ROW	
BARON 733-7011	JENNIFER YOUNG "The" a recent painting Brenda Foster "Endless Values" Jan. 20 - Feb. 14
DOUGLAS UDELL 736-8900	Jack Hanson "New Paintings" Jan. 27 - Feb. 5 NEW NORTH "Wanted Society" Feb. 7 - 20
TRIBAL ART 732-4555	Dorothy Sutton "Playing Cards" Contemporary and Traditional Canadian Art Feb. 12
PETER JONES 736-0003	NEW NORTH "Wanted Society" Feb. 7 - 20