

VANCOUVER'S
DEFINITIVE
ENTERTAINMENT
GUIDE

Queue

RESTAURANTS

MOVIES

MUSIC

ARTS

EXTRA

Darkzone

UBC's Belkin Art Gallery chose a storefront gallery in the Downtown Eastside as the frame for a collection of Emily Carr's and Jack Shadbolt's bleakest visions. The question is: Why?

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JUNOS: Colin James, Matthew Good Band lead the way. Page 18

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Thurs. Jan.

28

Thurs. Feb.

04



JACK SHADBOLT: The west-coast artist is being remembered at events around the city. See page 17.

fore

Art Thou?

Opera Lover?

It has been more than four centuries since William Shakespeare penned *Romeo & Juliet*, his classic tale of doomed young love. The tragedy continues to mesmerize and haunt romantics to this day.

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ON THE COVER: *Adjustable Venus* (1969), by Jack Shadbolt.

Masterworks of gloom

An exhibit of works by Emily Carr and Jack Shadbolt reflects natural and cultural decay in a neighbourhood well acquainted with visions of hell. Sun art critic Michael Scott found much to contemplate.

MICHAEL SCOTT
SUN ART CRITIC

Even on a wet day in January, the sidewalk outside the Or Gallery smells of piss and vomit. Down-and-outers shove and argue in nearby doorways, their drunken shouts echoing off the boarded-up windows of the old Woodward's department store across the street. We have arrived, like Dante at the end of his journey into hell, among the lowest of the damned. If there is a more forlorn patch of ground in downtown Vancouver from which to contemplate art, I have yet to find it.

It is hard to know whether to applaud or condemn the exhibition that is the specific object of these Downtown Eastside attentions. As part of its community outreach program, the Belkin Art Gallery at the University of British Columbia has selected paintings by Emily Carr and Jack Shadbolt that contemplate the darker side of our relationship with the landscape around us. Carr's famous images of logging clearcuts are paired with Shadbolt's pictures of decay and the disintegration of cultures.

It is impossible to ignore the frame provided by this sorry neighbourhood. Had these pictures been exhibited at the Belkin Gallery at UBC, Vancouver's well-heeled West Side art patrons would have had only the university's faculty and students to step past on the way in. A knowing audience would have come to admire equally knowing artists.

Down on Hastings Street, the paintings speak with a more hectoring, voice. "See," they appear to say, "life really is hell." The quarreling addicts on Hastings street — extreme examples of the very kind of alienation that the paintings address — provide a human exclamation

mark for the exhibition. It is a juxtaposition the exhibition's organizers were obviously aware of. But situating such a show on the Downtown Eastside and calling it Heart of Darkness can also be seen as a variety of exploitation, an effort to make intellectual points on the backs of the disadvantaged.

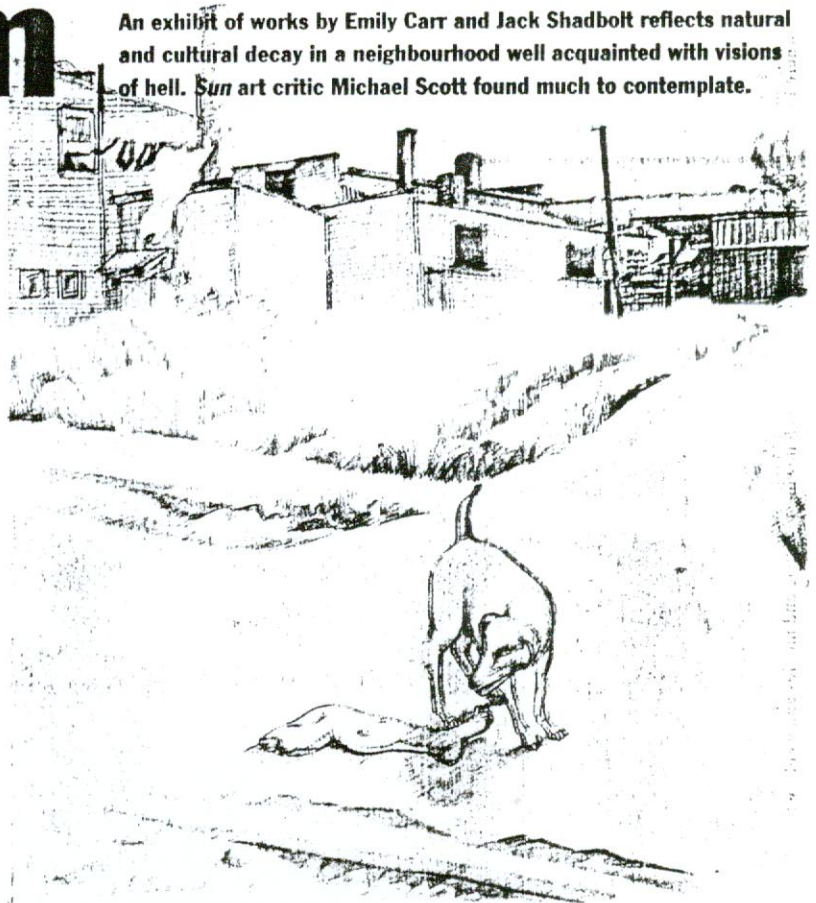
To borrow further from Joseph Conrad's metaphor, we are a long way upriver here.

Whatever their location, the images in Heart of Darkness are provocative. Carr and Shadbolt make a fine pair. They shared a dark image of the West Coast, both addressing a brooding primal energy that is instantly recognizable to anyone who has ever walked in what little remains of the original rainforest hereabouts.

The Carr works are a fugue on the theme of despoliation and natural renewal. Man gouges out the forests, and Nature repairs them. Carr's 1938 painting, *Wasteland*, shows this clearly: a muddy scar on the land that is mitigated by the shimmering, spirit-laden forces of light and air that the artist tried so hard to express in the last part of her life.

"Carr frequently chose to paint not just nature, but industrialized nature in the form of scars and 'ruins' left by the logging industry," notes one of the show's text panels. "She was as interested in this encroachment as she was in abandoned villages. Indeed, the [two] themes were similar for her and are the darker side of her work. For while her paintings celebrate the restorative powers of the forest, she sees the works of man as futile and destructive."

The exhibition underscores this with Shadbolt's *Image in a Cedar Slash*, from 1947. The broken roots and tangled tree limbs of a logging slash are reorganized in the form of a skeleton figure, its viscera glowing



THESE ARE SIGNS OF ATROCITIES: Jack Shadbolt's 1942 drawing is part of his *The Occupation of Point Grey* Series

Sacred Heart red between the twiggy bars of its rib-cage.

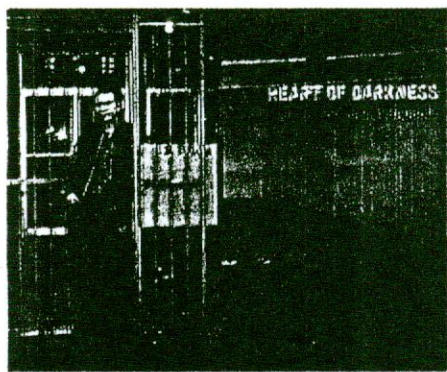
A text panel explains that Shadbolt's wartime work in London, where he viewed hundreds of photographs of recently opened concentration camps, as well as his nighttime strolls through the bomb-marked city, contributed to this image.

There is no doubt that the young and sensitive Shadbolt was much affected by the war. Images of battle haunted his work for years afterward. And his artistic interest was

engaged early, as witnessed here by four exceptional drawings from 1942. In his *The Occupation of Point Grey* series, Shadbolt imagined the city's tranquil West Side in the aftermath of a battle. Here, on leafy streets unmarked by shelling, Shadbolt places his human casualties: a male figure slumped in the doorway of a dry cleaning shop; a family gunned down near a gas station; a dog worrying a dismembered leg where it lies in the road. Overhead, bombers fly past in silhouette, eagles to the

citizenry's rabbits. In *The Hand*, Shadbolt depicts an utterly placid street corner of manicured lawns and modest houses. On the sidewalk stands a pair of mail boxes. The only sign that things are terrible in Point Grey is the human hand, severed at the wrist, that lies near the curb.

Clearly, Shadbolt was influenced by Francisco de Goya's savage *Disaster of War* series. But where Goya's draughtsmanship was as anguished as the atrocities he was recording,



GLENN BAGLO/VANCOUVER SUN

Or Gallery on the move at the end of February

After six years at 112 West Hastings, the Or Gallery is moving uptown. With its formerly modest rent recently doubled under a lease agreement, the move was hastened by vandalism and because patrons feared the busy drug-trade action on the street. "Given more money and more staff to deal with the situation constructively, I could have seen staying," says artist-in-residence/curator Reid Shier. "It would have been nice if the city would have liked to see us stay down here, recognizing us as a positive influence. I just feel like they're letting the street bleed to death." The Or Gallery will vacate when *Heart of Darkness* closes on Feb. 27. Its new location will be #103-400 Smythe (at Richards). Plans are to open a new show in late March, after renovating the new space. The Or Artist-Run Centre was started in

1983 by Lalwan, then an ECIAD student living in a storefront on Franklin St. The gallery was named when she painted over the other letters on the word "store" out front. Artist Ken Lum inherited the space, "setting a precedent of one artist handing it over to another," says Shier, Or's tenth artist/curator. That building burned in 1987. After a couple temporary sites it moved to the current address in 1993. Heart of Darkness, organized by the Belkin Art Gallery, is something of an exception to Or's regular mission. "The gallery's mandate is to give a practicing artist the opportunity to curate their peers, as the possibilities change with each new artist, but there has been consistent priority in exhibiting emerging contemporary artists."

— Tim Carlson

Shadbolt remembered: Exhibitions and a tribute

Jack Shadbolt's rigorous intellect, his understanding of West Coast life as a perplexing synthesis of native and non-native cultures, and his productive outmaking left an important mark on our imaginations. One of British Columbia's most significant artists, he died just before Christmas at the age of 89. Honoured in his lifetime for decades of teaching and philanthropy as well as for his art, Shadbolt was a figure of truly heroic proportions.

In addition to the display of his work at the Or Gallery, Shadbolt is also remembered in other locations around Vancouver. The Kiss Project festival of dance and theatre on Granville Island has arranged for several of Shadbolt's paintings to hang in the lobbies of the Performance Works theatre on Granville Island until the end of February. The mini exhibition also includes works by Bill Reid, another artistic giant who died last year.

On Friday, a public gathering organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery, will celebrate Shadbolt's life and work. The event begins at 6 p.m. in the Robson Square Conference Centre. The public memorial will include music, poetry and spoken tributes from individuals such as artists Alan Wood and Hank Bull, curator and critic Scott Watson and architect Abraham Rogatnick. There will be a reception in the art gallery immediately following the ceremony. Doris Shadbolt will be present to meet people and share their memories of her late husband.

As a special tribute, the Vancouver Art Gallery is showing a small survey of the artist's work, until May 2.

— Michael Scott

Shadbolt works with a smooth and precise hand, increasing the bitter irony of the works. In fact, Shadbolt's remarkable facility as a draughtsman is a revelation: such talent with a pencil was not always evident in the abstract images of his later years.

The battlefields that the artists depict — ravaged clear-cuts or imagined atrocities on Vancouver's leafy west side streets — are no different than that suffering stretch of modern-day Hastings Street. The link between decades-old work by B.C.'s two great-

est painters and the alienation today in the province's poorest neighborhood is profound and disturbing.

Another incredible Shadbolt image, finished several years earlier than *The Occupation of Point Grey* series, is entitled, simply, *Indian Totems*. In it, Shadbolt has imagined male and female totem figures, rendering them in charcoal and ink on dark paper. The image is shadowy, haunting as a forest at twilight. Although the exhibit text discounts this quality of brooding, primal terror as unsupported by



WASTELAND: Emily Carr's 1938 painting depicts destruction by man's hand and the restorative power of nature.

recent thinking on First Nations ethnography, the effect is powerful nonetheless. The masterful image says as much about life here and now as Grant Wood's *American Gothic* does about his country's heartland.

By the 1950s, though, Shadbolt was ranging far afield in his search for elements of world aboriginal art. In *Jesting Grasses* from 1953 and *Adjustable Venus* from 1969, we see a wholesale importation of tribal icons: African and South Pacific elements in the first case; and American Southwest images in the second.

"Like other post-war painters, [Shadbolt] thought that aboriginal art would invigorate and revive the ex-

hausted traditions of Western art," a text panel observes.

The small exhibition builds to a crescendo with Shadbolt's 1979 *Swamp Forms*. This large triptych shows various tribal elements — a mask fragment here, a headdress there — sinking into a kind of tangled bog, like so many sabre-tooth tigers trapped in a tar pit. Shadbolt was thinking of swamps as a metaphor for cultural composting, we are told — places where cultures decay and new ones impose themselves.

Happily, the most beautiful work in Heart of Darkness, is not about darkness at all. Emily Carr's *Forest Interior*, 1932, shows a young tree glowing as

if lit from within. Around it, the land is moving in great crested, jade-green waves, the wider landscape a swirl of ultramarine and amethyst, the whole business foaming and frothing at the feet of the little tree. As hopeful as anything here, *Forest Interior* offers a moment of redemption in an otherwise glum little survey.

HEART OF DARKNESS

Paintings by Emily Carr and Jack Shadbolt
Or Gallery, 112 West Hastings,
until Feb. 27.