

VISUAL ARTS

BY ANN ROSENBERG

Lured into wolf lore by harmonious pairing

At two of Vancouver's most important commercial galleries, group exhibitions by young people are combined with solo shows by mature artists. In one case the marriage is a compatible union based on common interests; in the other, it's question of opposites being attractive.

The more harmonious pairing is in the Diane Farris Gallery at 1565 West Seventh. It combines recent wolf paintings by Gloria Massé with Killarney secondary school students' portraits of wolf-like creatures.

For Massé, wolves have been an obsession since 1989. That was the year she first showed canvases of imagined wolves inspired by Lois Crisler's accounts of living among these animals in the Arctic tundra. Since then, Massé has watched and been watched by timber wolves. She's even hand-fed members of a specially reared pack.

This intimate knowledge, this affection, shines forth in paintings that interpret the spirit of a misunderstood beast that's still

the stuff of legends and the object of persecution. Although truth to nature is one of her aims, zoological knowledge does not preclude Massé's depictions of wolves with neon fur or wolf skeletons that act as escorts to her canine tribes.

In this show, the artist has envisioned the wolf in mysterious activities and territories outside of its normal habitat. In two of the strangest works, wolves howl on top of bush planes' wings — icy spectres protesting (or abetting) their surveillance. One is reminded of the crazy stunts that aerobats used to perform on early flying machines, and of Massé's friend, the artist/pilot Judith Currelly, who is also haunted by these endangered animals.

Neil Prinsen's class at Killarney created a series of portraits of themselves as wolves after Massé did a workshop with them. As each portrait is produced on

boards of a similar format, the exhibition has a museum-like consistency and solidity.

But because each wolf-like image is rendered in a different fashion — conceived in any medium, sculptural or two-dimensional — there is also tremendous variety. There are sheep-like, raccoon-like, bear-like and dog-like wolves — wolves inspired by Northwest Coast design, by Robert Bateman and the Group of Seven. Schizophrenic wolves, Beer & Smokes wolves and wolves to die for.

The exhibition starts today and continues to July 2. But join the pack at the opening reception on Saturday, from 2 to 4 p.m., when Massé and the student artists will be in attendance.