

Cynthia Short at the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, 80 Spadina Ave., to June 13.

It's getting to be late afternoon in the office, two hours from closing time, but there's only some routine work to be done. Before you know it, your mind is drifting away into the strange, languorous space of day-dreaming, while your body keeps going through the workaday motions.

Then inside your day-dreaming brain, without your doing anything to help it, an image begins to condense out of the mist. This image depicts a general, unknown woman who is intently doing or holding something — what, you can't quite make out. Your mind is suddenly engaged by the image's enigma — but that attention seems too strong for it, and it vanishes, leaving only a troubling, enigmatic trace.

Cynthia Short's lifesize sculptures of earth, wax and papier maché — squatting, standing, kneeling — exist in this twilight of dream, between disembodied concept and full

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embodiment, and they are remarkable for the balance they maintain there. They are materially strong, and structurally resolute: in portraying her women, Short has avoided the traditional volumetric play of sculpture, giving us instead a series of female icons as static and dramatically blank as Egyptian idols, or architectural drawings.

In common with a number of other contemporary Toronto artists, Short is centrally concerned with the presentation of complex, passionate, half-understood states of consciousness. Such concern has been central in advanced Toronto art for some time — so much so, in fact, that it runs the risk of becoming a kind of affectation. Short's sculptural work teeters between urgent originality and melodrama. It stays on the right side of this line, but it does offer a lesson in the dangers inherent in delving into the preconscious mind, and trying to make art of what's found there.

Frederick Hagan at the Madison Gallery, 334 Dundas St. W., to June 15.

Hagan, who recently retired after 37 years of teaching at the Ontario College of Art, grew up during Toronto's dirty thirties, in the neighborhood known as Cabbagetown. Since then, the area has been allowed to slide into slumdom, and more recently has been a battlefield, with battalions of avid fixer-uppers moving in to conquer urban rot. The group of 36 oil paintings and sketches in this show, executed between 1937 and 1941, give us a quite personal visual record of what Hagan's picturesque neighborhood was like before all that.

The old residential streets aren't much different now — one still finds the graceful,

acades. What's perhaps most strikingly different about Hagan's world is the vividness and mixture of the street-life — a proletarian tumble of Sunday afternoon parades by the Salvation Army, painted hookers, lady shoppers and working men just hanging out.

It's hardly possible to see these expressive, immediate paintings from 40 years ago without thinking about the portrayals of street-scenes and downtown interiors now being done by Toronto artist Brian Kipping. Kipping's brooding, moody style is the exact opposite of Hagan's loose, muscular expressionism. In the work of these two artists, we can make out a history of ways to feel about Toronto — a history which has involved changes of affection perhaps more important, in the long run, than the more obvious changes in architecture.

Tom Nickson, Jerry Pethick, George Saw-

chuk and Buster Simpson at Mercer Union, 333 Adelaide St. W., to June 23.

Gloria Massé, John Clair Watts, Wendy Hamlin at the Isaacs Gallery, 832 Yonge St., to June 8.

These group shows, which have coincided by happy accident, feature new paintings and sculptures by seven artists working along the West Coast between Seattle and Vancouver. Taken together, they offer Toronto gallery-goers an unusual chance to get acquainted with some of the quirkiest, funniest and most exuberant artists now working in Canada.

Organized by Daina Augaitis, curator at Vancouver's Western Front, the Mercer Union show is called Reconstituted Elements. That's a rather hifalutin way of saying it, but it gets the point across. Augaitis's artists have raided the junkpiles, warehouses, hardware stores and toy boxes of modern industrial culture, pulling out hospital sheets, toilet seats, crowbars, Cheerios, things that go *squish* and everything else you can think of, except the high-art stuff of oil paint and marble. Then they have combined this stuff in various ways to make sculptures, most of them big and all of them (in this show, anyway) rather smart, wacky and wonderful.

If the actual materials used in these pieces are not high-art, the tradition of assemblage is a fact of modern art that is venerable indeed. It's so venerable, in fact, that there's a chance these sculptures may strike the educated viewer as mere exercises in a mix-and-match practice going back to Picasso and Dada and the early movies.

That history is surely one reference in the work. But there's another that is more interesting: the folk-art tradition of just fooling around to pass the-time out in the logging camp (or wherever). The off-hand, funky qualities in this work make it lots of fun, if not exactly compelling. Intelligently chosen by Daina Augaitis, uncomfortably crowded into Mercer Union, these pieces provide a nice counterpoint to the stern, melancholy, psychologically vexed and anxious work being produced by some of Toronto's best new sculptors. *Toronto 1984*

The three-person show at the Isaacs Gallery has been put together by Vancouver painter, sculptor and performance artist Gathie Falk. It's not hard to see why she chose Massé, Watts and Hamlin, first as friends in Vancouver, and now as featured artists in her Toronto show. Though the three work in different ways, they seem to share Falk's whimsy, theatricality, wry bemusement at the human condition, and interest in cultural pastiche and collaging. This is a good little show that should not be missed.

In terms of medium, the most old-fashioned artist here is the painter Gloria Massé, who here presents closeup pictures of Indian bullocks and water-buffalo, beautifully painted, beribboned and otherwise gussied up for Hindu rituals. The results are not items of Indian village anthropology. Built up from a busy thatch of brush-strokes, the most handsome pictures record a blunt, profound animal and sacred beauty.

The funniest work here — and one of the most wickedly funny things I've ever seen in a Toronto gallery — is Wendy Hamlin's B-Chubs series. It seems that Hamlin's boyfriend, named Rob, has always had this thing about eating bananas. Some might think such an obsession is one of those little pillow-talk secrets that shouldn't get public airing. Wendy Hamlin doesn't agree. In the first series of drawings here, a chubby baby Rob is presented, 20 times, as a little monster with banana all over his face. In the second group, a bigger Rob is also shown gobbling bananas (or in a state of post-gobble satisfaction).

All of which may make the Toronto reader wonder what contemporary art is coming to. Vancouver viewers, on the other hand, have been putting up with such affection, mayhem and personal apocalypse in art for decades. And who knows? Maybe Toronto could stand more frequent doses of such kinkiness from beyond the tall, noble mountains.