The Best of the Rest

Other artists who have changed the face of sculpture in Canada

Kim Adams
Canadian sculpture’s horseman of the apocalypse, Adams has developed his hybrid creations that sometimes look like Home Hardware on an acid trip. Scale is one of his favourite toys to play with; his works are either impossibly large (two minivans joined at the snout, or sculptures involving mini-tractors or prefabricated sheds) or impossibly small, like his compelling models of miniature artist-colony utopias built out of model kits and inhabited by swarms of inch-high citizens. His little Attempted Kite (2001), which surfaced at the Canadian Art Gallery Hop auction this fall, is particularly likely a whimsical Popeyemon/Olive Oyl reprise of the Rodin classic.

Brian Jungen
This British Columbia wunderkind hit the art-world radar in the late 1990s with his suite of what seemed like ceremonial Northwest Coast masks. In fact, they were masks from Nike sneakers, cut up and reassembled in ingenious ways. Then, last year, Shapeshifter rocked our world — an enormous white whale skeleton, meticulously fashioned from disembowelled plastic lawn chairs, which has found a permanent home at the National Gallery of Canada. Next year, Jungen will have a show at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, where he will continue his subversive recycling campaign, possibly extending it to include the fabrication of blankets, amulets and other ceremonial effects.

Geoffrey Farmer
Another emerging talent in Vancouver, Farmer is making a name for himself with his quirky cartoon-like drawings and kilnsculptured sculptures. At the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO), Jungen showed his Hunchback Kit, a film clip fitted out with everything for the aspiring denizen of Notre Dame. In days, you can see his work in the exhibition Promises at the Contemporary Art Gallery in Vancouver, where his new Puppet Kit is on show. Jungen is a man crammed full of Muppets, a real does a nifty snooting storm — a fuzzy reprieve, perhaps.

Eric Cameron’s Crouching lobster after 3,353 coats of paint.

John McSween’s phantoms canes.

Liz Magor’s Double Cabinet (blue): Reloading realism with trowels made of latex concealing beer cans.

for us, never left. Moving on to study at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, she immediately set about creating her melancholy and moving testimonials to political suffering, which, as well, the transience that is a part of all mortal human experience. Her village of diaphanous huts, a kind of ghostly refugee camp of the mind, was the standout piece at the National Gallery of Canada’s Crossings exhibition in 1998. Until Nov. 24, this work, titled Cradle, is being shown again in expanded form at the Galerie de l’Université du Québec à Montréal. She is also showing her new work, Tulip — a poetic archive of notebook drawings made with pencil and smoke densely arranged in a sculptural vitrine.

Liz Magor
Her sculptures have comprised everything from faux hollowed-out logs (stuffed with sleeping bags) to immaculate latex facsimiles of the acruftest of backpacks (filled with real Cheezies) or, more recently, what appear to be stacks of towelettes concealing beer cans and soft drinks. While makeshift or transient culture is one of her abiding interests (she has executed a wonderful series of photographs of hippie shacks in the back woods of her native British Columbia), too, is the definition of realism, which she continues to press upon in interesting ways.

Sarah Stevenson
Though Stevenson continues in the tradition of body art for which Montreal is so widely noted (Genevieve Cadieux, Betty Goodwin, Janu Sterba), her work has a decided more exuoyant feel. Some of her works are presented in small wooden vitrines, while others, though light as air, are room-sized. Executed in such materials as latex, wire mesh and glass, Stevenson’s sculptures evoke natural forms in ways that are haunting and often lyrical. In a show at Montreal’s Galerie René Blouin in 1999, she exhibited an enormous blob-like form in light mesh titled Hypnos, Beneath Two Places. Is it a breast? A deflated zeppelin? Our imaginations work overtime to conjure meaningful.

Tom Dean
In the seventies, Dean established his reputation with Flaying Horse, a gigantic and willfully failed monument to entropy which he eventually set ablaze on Lake Ontario. The Excerpts from a Description of the Universe, which followed, were an intricate conundrums of forms both haunting and bizarre. With his charred babies and long-tailed bronze she-dogs of the nineties, he created icons of Canada himself: a sculpture that stick in the mind like burrs, and probe the darker reaches of the imagination. His most recent show of vamps and romping babies sent to the Toronto Sculpture Garden this summer, continue his exploration of the themes of security and transformation.

Stephen Schofield
Schofield has a thing for materials. For decades now, he has been building and breaking down his installations of metal to silk to plaster and cement. His earlier works involved stitched-up hummable and truncated little humanoid forms filled with air, which he subsume uncannily. Of the same vintage are his sculptures of strange-tipped like appendages (actual casts of clusters of rippling, that bloom from metal pipes — the very sort of thing you fear may be growing under your skin in your house). Most recently, he has realized a suite of fabric sculptures which have been soaked in sugar for stiffening and then inflated with a vacuum to create a series of pulpit-up miniature garments or body parts; others are complex fragments of the formal curve.

Eric Cameron
What do you get when you dip a book of matches in 4,453 layers of white acrylic gesso and acrylic paint? You need wonder no more. Cameron now lives in Calgary, but for many years he taught sculpture (or was it painting?) at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. At the same time, he has been devoting himself to these painstaking works, which one could be forgiven for finding a tad compulsive. (They are only complete when they are sold, or, as he says, when he dies.) From the antiquarian scores of everyday objects — a dead fish, a beer bottle, a telephone directory, an alarm clock, a Danish pastry — bloom extraordinary constructs of paper shapes that scarcely hint at what lies at their core. The resulting works, which he calls Thicken Paintings, are testimonials to the unanticipated poetry of the material world; and to the passage of time.

— Sarah Milroy