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BAM exhibit is doing its part to close the Canada-U.S. art divide

By REGINA HACKETT
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Setting a bad example for everybody who's trying to quit, the Bellevue Art Museum has taken up smoking. Big gaseous burps of gray air trail from an entryway duct. Buildings that smoke should hide in the alley or do it after dark, when nobody's watching. If buildings can't control themselves, how will we?

VISUAL ART
**BOUNCE/IN THROUGH THE OUT
DOOR**

WHERE: Bellevue Art Museum, 510
Bellevue Way N.E.,
<http://www.bellevueart.org/>

WHEN: Through Oct. 26. Hours:
Tuesdays-Saturdays, 10 a.m.-5 p.m., till
8 p.m. Thursdays; Sundays, noon-5
p.m.

ADMISSION: \$6 general, \$4
seniors/students,

free for children under 6

Turns out that Toronto artist Germaine Koh is responsible for the smoke, and the building is an innocent bystander.

Koh is part of "Bounce/In Through the Out Door," two exhibits in one from Toronto's Power Plant.

The three artists in "Bounce" are from Vancouver, B.C., and the three in "In Through the Out Door" are from Toronto. This conjoined pair of shows falls on us like manna from heaven, serving as the first step to filling our serious Canada gap. Seattle is about three hours south of Vancouver, but a Berlin Wall couldn't further divide our art commerce.

Sure, we've seen Vancouver stars from the 1980s, such as Jeff Wall, Jerry Pethick, Stan Douglas and Rodney Graham, but no memorable show that tried to put their accomplishments in a geographical context, never mind shows featuring more than stray pieces from artists who've come after.

All eight of the artists here fall into the come after category, emerging in the 1990s.

Koh is a cunning conceptualist. In the piece titled "Prayers," she uses smoke as a mirror for the museum's inner workings. When a clerk types on a computer inside, gas gathers outside to belch punctuation, turning museum data into clouds.

Her "Fair-weather Forces" is a turnstile in constant motion, driven by weather conditions outside. The piece takes on new, melancholy meaning in a museum that is still in search of an audience. Even the coffee bar had to close on the weekends thanks to a dearth of customers. (During the week, people who work in the area keep it alive.)

The first truly successful piece of art to occupy the unwieldy ground floor is one that ironically we've seen before, and recently. Vancouver's Brian Jungen's "Cetology (Bowhead)" is a whale made out of plastic patio chairs. Earlier this year it was at the University of Washington's Henry Art Gallery.

It looks better here. The whale's white plastic bones have room to breathe and seem to be swimming in a space that has been unfortunately blank without them.

Off in a corner under the stairs is Toronto artist David Armstrong-Six's carved and painted wood figure of an aging hipster reveling in his inside track. Titled "All Around," it's a pitiless self-portrait. I love the smirk, the black jeans and T-shirt, the studied nonchalance of his stance. Short to the brink of disappearance, he takes up almost no space and acts as if he owns the place.

Where are the painters? Vancouver's Damian Moppett doesn't qualify. He's redoing Rubens through William Hogarth, with

Rubens' flesh and Hogarth's morality. Hogarth disapproved of drunks and sex outside marriage, and Moppett seems to think fat is a moral issue. He'd have to be fabulous to pull that off, and he isn't.

Also on view are Nestor Kruger's video of poplars in snow ("Bladerunner" revisited), and Myfanwy MacLeod's outhouse on-the-edge and concrete wood pile. All in all, well worth a visit.

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