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Richmond Art Gallery
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NEWS RELEASE

Date: January 9, 2006

End Date: January 20, 2006



Misa Nikolic , West from Westin, 2005

36x24 in, acrylic on canvas,

Exhibition Dates January 21 - March 3, 2006.

Opening Reception January 20, 6:30pm - 8:30pm.

Misa Nikolic; *Architectonics*

Misa Nikolic's paintings reflect his interest in the relationship between architecture and history. For this exhibition the artist depicts buildings from a vantage point that makes the height of the buildings and the businesses they house ambiguous. Through his representation of these buildings, the artist reveals the juxtaposition of the style, scale and various states of repair and disrepair that exists in cities. Nikolic's focus on Western Canadian architecture stems from an interest in early colonial land divisions, where space was partitioned with an apparent disregard for the local populations and geographies. His paintings articulate these divisions as they relate to the contemporary city where land is divided and zoned for specific uses. This series reveals a historical authenticity, which is not simply an archival documentation of a site but is a relevant re-interpretation of the history of the area.

A painter and writer based in Vancouver, Misa Nikolic earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Alberta College of Art and Design in 1997 and a Master of Fine Arts from the University of British Columbia in 2001. He has exhibited his work in solo and group exhibitions in Western Canada since 1994. This is his first solo exhibition in a public art gallery.



Jane Wolsak *Air India Trial*, defendants (detail) 2003

Pencil crayon, 11 x 14"

Exhibition Dates January 21 - March 3, 2006.

Opening Reception is January 20, 6:30pm - 8:30pm.

Jane Wolsak; *Courtroom Drawings*

In addition to pursuing a career as a painter and contract illustrator, Vancouver-based artist Jane Wolsak, supports herself and her practice as a courtroom illustrator. She has worked on many high-profile trials, such as Air India and the preliminaries for the forthcoming trial of Robert Pickton (Vancouver's missing women investigation). While the images she produces are an integrated part of our visual world, we do not often stop to consider that the scenes have been interpreted by the hand of an artist, capturing a gesture, an expression and rendering specific courtroom details. In Canadian courtrooms, where cameras aren't allowed, the media depends on the artist's sketchbook as a vital communication tool. This exhibition provides insight into the narratives created through these representations.

Jane Wolsak has studied art, design and art education in London, England and in Canada. She has shown her work in solo and group exhibitions around the Lower Mainland, including a solo exhibition at the Richmond Art Gallery in 1995.

The **opening reception** is on Friday, January 20, 6:30pm - 8:30pm. The exhibition continues until March 3, 6pm.

The Richmond Art Gallery is located at 180-7700 Minoru Gate. **Gallery hours are 10:00am to 6:00pm** from Monday to Friday and 10:00 am to 5:00 pm on Saturday and Sunday. For more information visit our website at www.richmondartgallery.org or contact us by email at gallery@city.richmond.bc.ca.

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Artist's Statement Courtroom Drawings

In Canada, cameras are not allowed in law courts, so when there are events of public interest courtroom illustrators are employed by the media to add visuals to the news story. I have been drawing in B.C. courtrooms, mostly for C.B.C./Newsworld, since 1999, and this show is a selection from the 800 plus drawings that I have accumulated.

I've attended several high profile trials, such as Air India and Glen Clark's, but I'm not there every day, only when there's media interest in, perhaps, the start of a trial, or a new witness, so these drawings are just glimpses of the process. I'm usually told by the reporter what the focus of the story will be; the defendant, often, but it could be a particular lawyer, a witness, or the presiding judge. Some days they hope for all of these and more! Sometimes, at a first appearance, when the accused simply has to appear before a judge for the arrangement of a future date in court, I have less than a minute to catch their characteristics, and, yes, mistakes have been made! At other times I have the whole day at a trial where faces have become almost familiar by my having attended previously on several occasions.

Some courtroom illustrators use felt tip pens, which fill areas on the paper with strong colour quickly, but they are permanent, so I would find it very difficult to correct my mistakes. Another I know uses watercolour paints. I'm impressed, I can't imagine how I would deal with little water containers and wet paper. I like using coloured pencils in this work. I start with a light grey and when I'm happy with the structures I build over with darker colours. I concentrate on the people, leaving much of the background and furniture to be filled in later, over lunch if necessary. Coloured pencils are slower to work with, but somewhat forgiving; I can erase my mistakes so long as they haven't been drawn in too strongly, and they don't smudge much when I'm going back across my drawing to fill in the areas I've left for working on later. I use an 11" x 14" spiral bound sketchbook, it fits on my lap, and it's easy to turn to a new page, and back again, if required. I have all the basic colours that I know I always need in a 24 pencil size tin, and a wide selection of colours, in another box away in my bag, to deal with that orange scarf or purple shirt .

As today's substitute for a camera in courts, I try to portray the scene as accurately as possible. A likeness of the main player in the story is the priority, but I try also to catch a gesture, an expression, courtroom details, and, if possible, a composition that is interesting, yet within the particular requirements. Sometimes it comes easily, sometimes it's a crazy struggle. I enjoy the challenge, I'm delighted to be paid to sit and draw, but there are stresses that come with this work. Time pressures, both in the court; those brief appearances, sudden changes in schedules, and outside, with the waiting cameras having deadlines for both television and newspapers. Canadian Press in Toronto usually needs completed drawings by midday, Pacific time. At a high profile trial there can be space constraints; obstructions to my view despite my best laid plans, and the restrictions, in a full courtroom, of having just one seat with my sketchbook, pencils and paraphernalia, and, yes, accidents happen!

Courtroom drawing, for me, has one distinct advantage over many of my other art projects. I can't agonize long over my work, there's a limit to the alterations and fussing a perfectionist like me can do before the camera people need to take over, film my drawings, and get them, with everything else they've been working on, back to the studio for editing. Very quickly, it's yesterday's news.

Jane Wolsak

Artist's Statement

Architectonics

In the 1930s, the German critic Walter Benjamin amassed a huge archive of material related to the shopping arcades of Paris. This city stood for him as the epitome of Modernity, in its urban plan, its mass-produced consumer goods, but most especially in its architecture. I am interested in this relationship between architecture and history. By creating typologies of architectural structures and features (e.g. the bridge, the cornice) I hope to invoke not simply a form of archival documentation but a dialectical method of re-interpreting history. Thus many periods and styles are juxtaposed, not in a random fashion, but according to existing geographical relationships.

In photography, similar projects were conducted in Germany by Bernd and Hilla Becher, and in the United States by Ed Ruscha. The Becher's black-and-white photographs of mineheads, reservoirs and factories are always mounted in pairs and series to show the archetypal relationships; the neoclassical rubbing shoulders with the Modern, Bismarck with Bauhaus. Also in the sixties, Ruscha's polaroids of Los Angeles apartments showed each building along a block, ending with the very 1-hour photo store where the prints were developed. Both projects hint at typologies of architecture, constantly overwritten by competing ideologies.

By painting my images rather than simply photographing them, a triangulation between painting, building and subject is created. This constellation of ideas pays homage to Benjamin's unfinished "Arcades Project," where the linear narrative of history is collapsed into a montage. My goal is no less than to create a Benjaminian hermeneutics of painting. To this end, I have begun creating a painting archive of urban architecture in Western Canada. Rather than collecting quotations and photographs, I have borrowed Benjamin's notion of the fragment to paint architectural features rather than city scenes and panoramas. By painting buildings in series that reflect their geographical placement (i.e. every building along a block as opposed to choosing only the prettiest or most photogenic structures) I am able to show the juxtaposition of style, scale and disrepair that exists in the city. Naturally the presence of the artist cannot be entirely removed from these choices; but it should be clear from the images that I am interested in neither nostalgia nor urban decay. The paintings act as much more than historical documents; they reveal a living historicity.

My interest in Western Canadian architecture stems from early colonial land divisions. Despite the variegated influx of immigrants, and with total disregard for local populations and geographies, a homogeneous rural land use system was developed. Space was set aside for farmland, schools, churches; just as, in the contemporary city, land is zoned for commercial, residential, or institutional use. My paintings will follow these divisions, starting with skyscrapers and their antecedents. Other series to follow will depict churches, schools, hospitals, and houses.

Misa Nikolic