

Modern minimalism at Burnaby show

By Robin Holder

(Entertainment from 2001-11-23 Edition) copyright 2001 *Bermuda Sun*

THE Burnaby Gallery's current exhibition featuring work by Mary Gillis and Paul Doughty presents a timely discourse on the modern era.

A combination of geometric and painterly abstraction, the work on display by Gillis does not fall within conventional parameters of any particular art movement. Consequently, the observer is challenged to interpret her minimalist designs and become an active participant rather than a passive consumer of ready-made material.

Any work of art requiring an engaged response is worthy of note. The paintings by Gillis – made of oil and polyurethane on aluminum – invite the audience to examine how we interpret the world.

Junk DNA and Sequence both stem from controversy surrounding genetic testing and the Human Genome Project. These scientific developments affect society and open up new possibilities for human development. It is apparent Gillis has observed contemporary events and incorporated them into her subject matter.

Her monotypes are structured along four horizontal bands. Within these bands there is a miasma of colours expressing various moods. Though abstract in nature, there is a sense of balance and rhythm to the shapes and lines on the surface of the panels. Gillis describes this style as simple geometry anchoring and lending form to chaotic or ambiguous space.

The juxtaposition between refined colours and individual gesture is reflected in flamboyant brushstrokes, adding a layer of complexity to her compositions. Perhaps there is an inner struggle being waged between cold science and the warmth and passion of humanity.

Evidently there is a conflict between structure and non-structure. This conflict between order and chaos brings to mind Raphael's *The School of Athens* featuring Aristotle and Plato. One of the major themes in this painting was the conflict between nature and ideas.

"Within these monotypes the strong tonal variation sets up an illusion of space and you can almost read into them," Gillis said.

Through the application of industrial materials she appears to reflect the movement towards acceptance of using non-traditional materials. We live in an industrial age and Gillis has chosen to express her vision of the world by using both traditional and non-traditional materials.

Beyond the abstract mode of expression visible in Gillis' art, there is a spiritual element existing within her constructs. It is not immediately perceived but a deeper consideration of the works sets the mind in an intellectual journey. There is also a surreal quality where lines blur and fuse, playing with mood and texture.

The Burnaby Gallery show continues until November 27.