

VISUAL ARTS • DONNA WAWZONEK

Creation's laughter in native art

The works of Barry Ace and David Hannon may be similar in their use of found images and positive reconsiderations of Indian culture, yet the artists' esthetic and approach could not be more different. Both artists confront popular conceptions of the history of the First Peoples and the reality of contemporary Indians.

But Hannon makes his point with well-constructed canvases. Ace's installation works, on the other hand, defy boundaries.

From the street front a glance through the window of Gallery 101 suggests the stereotypical gallery environment: an empty room with brightly coloured paintings hung neatly on the walls. If you are seduced by this you will be rewarded with the accomplished works by Hannon in his series titled *Hidden Heroes*. Fading photographs are blown up and coated in encaustic paintings — a process of rendering with coloured wax. The effect is that of pigments built up to rich colour fields that obscure and inform the photographs.

In *Camping Stories* the familiar red and white stripes of an old camping blanket are incorporated into the work, which features a photograph of a Hannon family outing. The nostalgia evoked by this image and the old blanket are balanced with the visual and textural interest of the thick waxed

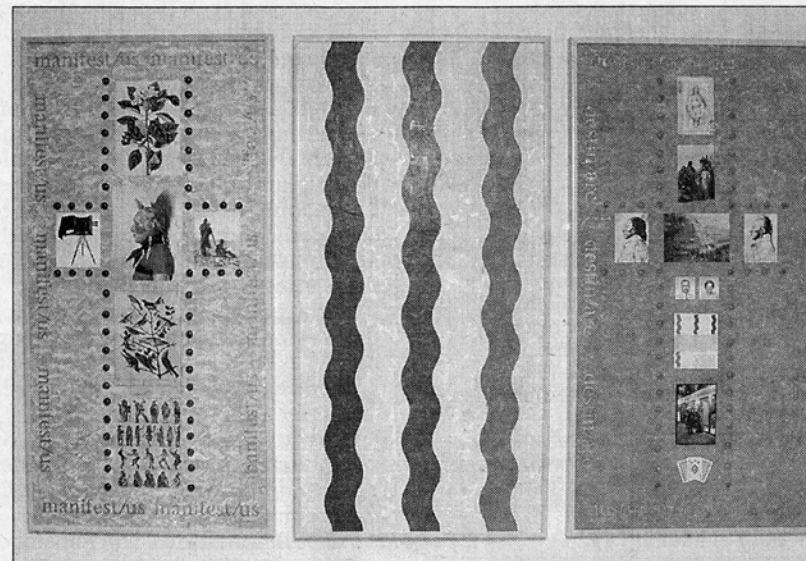
colour fields. The photo is a personal document of a family event but when presented in this large scale it becomes a reality check concerning the representation of contemporary Métis.

Upstairs a whole world of wonder opens up. Barry Ace has installed a collection of recent work that is so diverse in execution and media that the integrity of the entire show is precarious. Ace's deconstruction of the Indian archetype and his sense of humour are the threads which hold this show together. Each piece is of such visual and intellectual interest that less would certainly have been more, but the job of deciding which pieces to omit would not be an enviable one.

With a show such as this the description of one work is less an indication of the entire exhibition and more a tempting appetizer to the buffet that awaits the visitor.

After spending an hour with Barry Ace and seeing the work through the artist's eyes, it became clear that the interpretations and delight offered in these works are boundless.

Ace's box constructions are the most accessible, offering kitsch, text and parody. *Alter* plays on the dual meanings of sacredness and otherness in text and image through clippings from a dictionary, vintage post cards of "typical Indians" and other little toys that perpetuate the false cultural



PHOTOS BY PAT MCGRATH, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

Barry Ace opens a world of wonder at Gallery 101. An example of his new take on Indian archetypes is, above, *Manifest/Us Destin/Are*. On right, his *Touched by the Hand of God* 1997.

construct of "Indianness."

Ace's positive spin on mistakes of the past and his sense of humour is perhaps drawn from the Ojibway mythical character Nanabush, that infamous trickster whose foolishness and discoveries served as lessons to the wise; lessons that are evident in the work of Ace and Hannon alike.

Gallery 101, 236 Nepean Street is open Wednesday to Sunday from noon to 5 p.m. This exhibition continues until April 25th. A panel discussion April 19 at 3 p.m. entitled *Hybrids, Half-Breeds* and the Myth of Whiteness will include the artists, as well as Susan Douglas and Jeffrey Thomas.

