

Man keeps pace with artist's nautical colossus

GALLERY GOING
MARY MICHAEL DAULT

The Norwegian super cruise ship modestly named The World set sail in March of 2002 on a never-ending age of global circumnavigation like The Flying Dutchman with entities. A five-star resort community at sea, The World is a constantly moving constellation of dos, a floating complex of purchasable suites and apartments which hauls your new prestigious press to 150 ports of call in 45 different countries each year. Would you desire to see a different world-view from your kitchen window every morning when you wake your coffee, The World is for — or at least it can be for a \$2.5-million dollars (U.S.) for a two-bedroom apartment. For Euan Macdonald, a Canadian artist now living in Los Angeles, The World appears to have become a powerful symbol for the line of the West — a ship of dreams. For his new exhibition at Toronto's Robert Birch Gallery, Macdonald has provided a suite of paintings (The World Series) in which The World is first depicted in its nautical hauteur, and then, in drawing after drawing, slowly begins to settle into decline. In the end, the super-ship lies mangled on a cracked desert floor, broken into pieces like a titanic pile of dinosaur bones. There are two other series of paintings in the show (The Flag Series and the not very edifying Bed Series), but the next best thing to the World Series is Macdonald's six minute video project called *Snail*. The piece is sim-

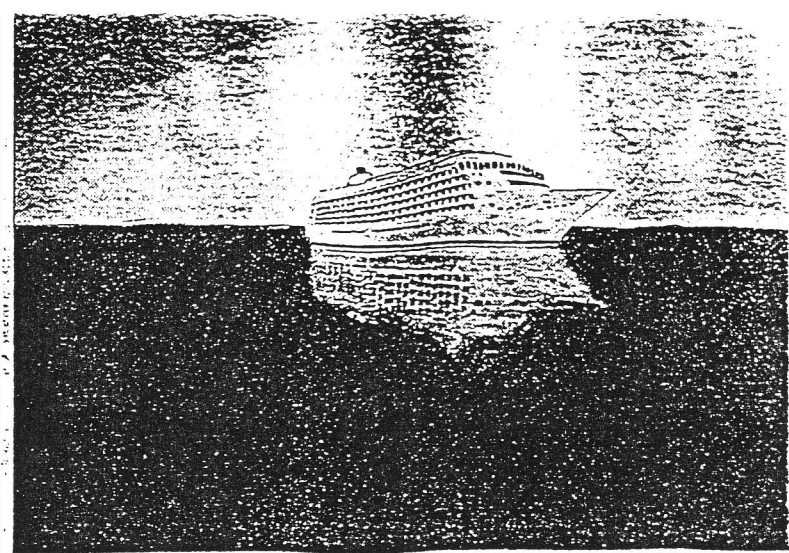
plcity itself: a big fat blue snail bearing an alabaster shell and probing the air before it with its gently waving blue antennae makes its slow, slippery way from one side of the screen to the other. Does this sound less than gripping? It's not. What delicate sympathies are awakened in the viewer by the mere act of the creature's so diligently traversing space! And what stirring inexorability there is in its progress! It's like watching The World ply the high seas.

\$500-\$6,500 (U.S.). Until Aug. 2, 55 Mill St.; Building 3 in the Distillery Historic District; 416-365-3003.

Peter Freitag at Gallery TPW

For his first exhibition in Canada, Berlin-based artist Peter Freitag is showing a strangely unsettling suite of 16 digitally altered colour photographs which together make up a project he calls *Examples for Communication*. The exhibition might just as well have been called *Examples of Miscommunication*, however, for what Freitag has done is to begin with a clutch of cheerfully bland images lifted from European travel brochures and then, employing the surgical precision of which digitalization is so capable, carefully extricate from each of them "all movable objects" — dishes, books, pictures, everything portable and non-architectural. This sounds simple enough — though it has been deftly done — but the effect is quietly devastating.

Now, instead of enjoying a happy holiday meal, a family — mom, dad and two kids — sit at a table and grin foolishly at each other across an expanse of nothing. Now a man gently touches the knee of a



Euan Macdonald's *The World* at Toronto's Robert Birch Gallery.

woman sitting on one of the room's twin beds. Because there is now no context for this act of implied intimacy, the two of them look static, sculptural, robotic. The act of connection suddenly seems as profoundly emptied of meaning as the banal room that contains them. And so it goes, in photo after photo. As Berlin-based critic Stefanie Heckmann puts it, in her essay accompanying the exhibition, "Without the enlivening presence of the objects with which the figures were originally involved, the other furnishings become frozen into mere scenery. The rooms resemble empty stages, on which the figures are abandoned and act in seeming isolation from each other." Is this all it takes to dehumanize us? Maybe so. By our objects and accessories shall we apparently know us.

\$1,850-\$3,900. Until July 26, 80 Spadina Ave., Suite 310. Toronto: 416-504-4242.

'Montreal' at Sable-Castelli

Every summer gallery owner Jared Sable gives over his gallery to his associate director, Barbara Edwards, to do with as she wishes. For this summer's "invitational," Edwards has chosen to exhibit work by four Montreal-based artists: Paul Bureau, Pierre Dorion, David Elliott and Francine Savard.

Edwards's Montreal show is as fresh and edgy as her previous

summer exhibitions. Oddly, though, it tends to cleave itself into halves, the deep quality of the work by Dorion and Savard pitted against the slicker bravado of the work by Elliott and Bureau. Bureau is a flashy but enjoyable painter who, in an act of sustained homage to the work of veteran Montreal abstractionists such as Guido Molinari and, I should think, Ulysse Comtois, paints juicy stripes of paint over previous juicy stripes of paint until his canvases pulsate with eye-rocking colour. Elliott, whose paintings are the most initially exciting but finally the least satisfying of the works here, has been looking too long at painters of disparate, centrifugal, flyway compositions like Robert Rauschenberg and David Salle, and appears unable to curb his enchantment with the raucous fun of unexpected juxtapositions on a field. By contrast — by happy contrast — the deep, smouldering, monotonal explorations into the nature of surface and shape and language by Savard seem exuberantly mature, as do Dorion's truly wondrous photographs — like oil paintings on linen, where, by some imperative of transformative strangeness, in the world we know (a man collapsed at a table to the left, an empty towel-rack to the right), we are encouraged to see into the heart of things.

\$300-\$15,000. Closes today, 33 Hazelton Ave., Toronto; 416-961-0011.