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Mitchell's art from all sides now

Prairie girl comes home

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Last month, Saskatoon's modest Mendel Art Gallery weathered a storm of national and international interest when it unveiled its latest exhibit, *Voices: Joni Mitchell*. The show is the first ever major retrospective exhibit of Mitchell's visual art — a small coup for the Mendel, which plans to tour the show through larger Canadian galleries (yet to be determined) in the coming year.

Mitchell, who considers herself primarily a visual artist despite her obvious success as a musician, was in attendance at the June 30 opening. The event drew a substantial crowd — though significantly smaller than the 5,000 attendees expected by organizers. It also turned Mitchell's quiet hometown (she now lives in Los Angeles) into a celebrity-watcher's dream, with rumors that everyone from Jack Nicholson to Neil Young would be in attendance. Finally, though, the only celebrity on hand was Mitchell herself, accompanied, in unassuming prairie style, by her partner and parents, all of whom still live in Saskatoon.

Mitchell and curator Gilles Hébert (formerly of the Winnipeg Art Gallery) have selected 81 pieces covering 35 years of Mitchell's work, which includes paintings, drawings and photographs. In addition, song lyrics are posted throughout the gallery and selections of Mitchell's music are played on a continuous loop, offering sometimes subtle, sometimes startling connections between the different aspects of this multi-faceted artist's work.

And while the quality of the work is somewhat varied, there is enough interesting material

in the exhibit to make the trip to Saskatoon worthwhile for loyal fans and interested observers alike.

Several captivating and very successful self-portraits comprise the centrepiece of *Voices*. "Both Sides 1 and 2" are two remarkably candid oil paintings of Mitchell from front and back, smoking alone in a bar under a "No Smoking" sign. Funnily enough, the Mendel broke its own no-smoking policy to allow Mitchell to smoke during the opening. "Turbulent Indigo" is probably her best-known painting, an imitation of a Van Gogh self-portrait that was used in the cover art of her 1995 album of the same name. Mitchell's version is rich in depth and colour, a somber examination of a middle-aged artist.

The most striking feature of the exhibit is Mitchell's obvious affection for and preoccupation with the Saskatchewan landscape. In "Flaming June Revisited," another oil painting, she carefully transposes Edward Leighton's classical figure onto a distinctly Canadian panorama, as if claiming the image as her (and our) own. "The Road to Waskesui" and "40 Below 0" are simple winter landscapes Mitchell painted from photographs she took on one of her frequent treks through rural Saskatchewan.

There are a number of huge abstracts, some of which work better than others. 1982's "Malibu" is bland, washed-out and overly pastelly, while "The Road to Uncle Lyle's" hits closer to home and is more successful for it.

It is in her photography, however, that Mitchell truly shines. *Voices* includes a 1986 photo series in which darkly haunting images of her gaunt-



40 Below 0 by Joni Mitchell, part of her retrospective exhibit

looking face are gently superimposed over such provincial mainstays as grain elevators, tumbled-down barns and railway tracks. The series comes closer to capturing the soul of Saskatchewan than anything else in the exhibit.

Mitchell's visual art, even in a high-profile exhibit such as this, is unlikely to ever bring the acclaim — and, let's face it, financial compensation — afforded by her musical career. But the intelligence and artistic commitment she readily displays in *Voices* mark her as an artist worth paying attention to — whatever the genre.

Voices: Joni Mitchell continues at Saskatoon's Mendel Art Gallery until September 17. Admission is free.

Mood Ruff, *Politic Different*, Slo Coach

Winnipeg's finest hip hop duo is back for round two in a fantastic follow-up to *Night Life Types*. Garfield Williams (a.k.a. Odario) and Eli Epp (a.k.a. Spitz) showcase their educated, thoughtful lyrical style throughout, while strong beats flow in every track. Although each song has much to appreciate, the two highlights are Spitz's solo "Sugar Track," a love song, and "Civil Wars," featuring Citizen Kane and forceful beats relating to their struggle with the rap industry. "Cruda & Taquitos" contains a funny skit, a conversation between a rapper named Killah and his hilarious girlfriend. Track 14, which is untitled, has a "hidden" song and some erotic poetry in it, so keep your disc spinning for about a minute after the last track ends. Odario and Spitz are probably the most under-appreciated and underrated MCs around. Lovers of hip hop are sure to enjoy this CD. You have no excuse not to pick it up. Trust me, you won't be disappointed. ★★★★★1/2

— Thor Warkentin



Café Del Mar, *Volumen Siete*, Mercury

Unlike the other albums in the Café Del Mar compilation series, *Volumen Siete* is not compiled by Jose Padilla, but rather by a man named Bruno. No information is given about him, which begs the question: Who is this elusive Bruno? He must be musically brilliant, because he certainly has done a fabulous job on Café Del Mar's *Volumen Siete*. This CD is an ambient conglomeration of various artists, including Moby, John Digweed and Lux. My favourite track is "Winter Pagent" by Aromabar. It's simply yummy — a cross between Single Gun Theory and Sneaker Pimps with a haunting melody and sexy, catchy lyrics that I caught myself singing in the shower. The eighth track is another auspicious mix: "Beautiful Strange" (mixed by Bedrock and written by Digweed and Nick Muir) is a dream-like, sleeping-under-the-open-sky-with-the-wind-whispering-this-tune-in-your-ears-as-it-sweeps-past kind of melody. Only one song on this album doesn't fit in with the general ambient feel of the rest of the CD. "One More Try" by A New Funky Generation featuring Joy Rose has a salsa/pop/house feel to it that's much more like the preceding Café Del Mar compilations. If you plan on day-dreaming to this album, (which I highly recommend) program this song out. It will jolt you out of the comfortable lull created by the other tracks. ★★★★★1/2

— Lee-Anne Peluk



10 Random Questions

Every issue, the *Toban* asks a different artist to answer 10 random questions. This month, prolific author and U of M English prof Dennis Cooley accepts the challenge....

1. What is under your bed?

Dust. This is the standard answer, right?

2. Is free speech absolute (or should it be)?

No. I think there are a number of constraints upon our speech — and not just legal constraints. I don't think that legally there should be [absolute free speech], and certainly not ethically or socially. That's not to say that we can't push the boundaries.

3. What is your guilt book — the one you keep meaning to read, but never quite find the time for?

Oh my. That could be a very long list. There was a time when I felt I should have read *The Faerie Queene*. But I no longer feel guilty about that.

4. What is the best thing you've ever tasted?

A homemade mango milkshake.

5. What's your favourite cartoon?

One of the very few that I do see is *The Simpsons*.

6. What is your guilt CD — the one you adore, but pretend not to for fear of irreversible negative social consequences?

There are lots of these, though I feel much less guilty or embarrassed about them than I once would have. I listen to fifties pop music all the time. And country music.

7. What room of your home do you spend the most time in?

My study.

8. What is your favourite sandwich filling?

The world is difficult! These questions are hard. How about smoked salmon?

9. What would you find most difficult about being in prison?

Boredom.

10. What is the best toy you ever owned?

My computer. That was the easiest question. My Macintosh computer — a little propaganda.

Dennis Cooley's new book of poetry, Irene, will be launched at McNally Robinson Grant Park on August 30.