

Mixed-media show stopping passers-by in their tracks

Carson's inventive work receiving long-overdue recognition

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Chris Carson's mixed-media works are literally stopping people in their tracks as they walk through Commerce Place downtown.

The attention is both deserved and long overdue.

Carson has labored in the Edmonton art trenches for many a year now, working for the Douglas Udell Gallery and the Alberta Craft Council, among others. He's been a finalist in the Medici Foundation's search for a new artist competition.

But his new work is a knock-out. These three-dimensional reliefs are like pop-art puzzle pieces, mixing high art with low culture.

For instance, that really is Ronald McDonald crashing a Bruegel feast scene. Elsewhere, the Golden Arches rise like the sun in the background of one of Franklin Carmichael's towns. Picasso gets Dolly Parton and Santa Claus, and even Elvis puts in an appearance.

Carson seems to be telling us to take it easy; it's only art, so let's enjoy it. Hands down, this is the most imaginative, inventive work to appear in Edmonton in ages.

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They're not called the Arts Barns for nothing. One of the South-Side sheds is packed with paintings and sculptures through this weekend.

The Edmonton Contemporary Artists' Society wisely decided to move their annual show from the ground floor of a downtown mall to the barns.



Charles
Mandel

Visual Arts

The difference is notable.

For starters, a shade more natural light manages to penetrate the dusky space. Secondly, the generously sized room accommodates the sculptures better.

In this year's ECAS show, the fourth, it is much easier to relate the different sculptures to one another. It brings a new perspective to the artwork.

The centrepiece is Ken Macklin's *Red Chimes*. Macklin is, of course, the creator of the hotly disputed commission for the Polish Centennial Memorial.

If the Polish Community is flabbergasted at Macklin's proposal for the memorial, what would they think of his ECAS piece? The size of a motorboat, *Red Chimes* consists of several wavy sheets of painted steel topped with a series of pipes and bowls.

The latter appendages push outward dramatically. It is as if a note had been struck and the musical response is bursting free into the air.

Nearby is the quieter, even mournful, work of Douglas Ben-them. His work titled *Sleep and Dreams* features tombstone-like bedsteads of steel plate protectively cradling a heap of rusting pipes and scrap.

Again, another sculpture, another

contrast. Peter Hide's *Hindu Lao Coon* is a heroic, even bombastic, assemblage of welded steel. The piece works off a base with a large slab-like girder running off at an angle.

The sculpture gives the impression of extraordinary weight. The girder rests on a block of wood the way someone with gout might prop a swollen leg upon a stool.

The sculpture is so massive near its base, yet so light near the peak, it is as if the art is emerging out of the raw material before our eyes.

Katherine Sicotte's *Sienna* provides an elegant companion to Hide's muscular work. This figurative piece is all loops, curls and curves pivoting off a central spine. It immediately recalls American sculptor David Smith's work of the 1950s.

A couple of painters also make notable contributions to the show. John King's *Eastern Drum* is outstanding. The half-circle canvas dances to its own certain rhythm.

And as always, Robert Scott offers one of his dark, brooding abstractions.

The artist has slashed and plowed through the thickly applied paint of *Raven's Feast*, leaving behind what could be the topographic map to a harsh and enigmatic land.

Overall, this is a sculptor's show this time out.

Undoubtedly, some of it has to do with the exhibition space. But to give credit where it's due, Edmonton's formalist community continues to follow their hearts, regardless of whether their art is in vogue or not.