

# Emotional intelligence

Pair of artists show that it takes effort and skill to convey messages through their work

JOHN POHL  
GAZETTE VISUAL ARTS CRITIC

Two exhibitions of figurative art, one of a mature artist at the Galerie d'Este in Westmount, the other of a young artist at the Galerie d'art d'Outremont, demonstrate how paintings of emotional power are produced by effort and skill, not by an outburst of emotion.

Joanna Abrahamowicz, who is just past her mid-20s, describes her paintings and drawings in terms of a "quivering emotional experience," that, she said, she "spreads on the canvas before it loses its vitality." But it is Abrahamowicz's disciplined effort and skill that gives her work, mostly self-portraits, their powerful visual life. A few years ago in a Concordia

adults. The forms are built from pieces of photographs and paper, she said, just "as I, a trained painter, would do with paint, gesture and line."

The painting that gives the exhibition its name, *Three Thistles*, is of boys. But most of the paintings are of girls who are just becoming aware of the male gaze. Females, she said, "realize as they grow up how they are always being regarded. How do they feel about that? How do they use their power?" In *Gang of Three*, three girls huddle together, but one turns her head, "aware," Grossmann said, of being observed.

Grossmann has been making somewhat idealized images of beautiful young teens for a long time. They remain young gods and goddesses in casual clothing, but have

in a frontal view of the girl. The off-kilter view creates a feeling of the subject being uncomfortable with her body, although the image was unplanned. "I'm just part of a process that's beyond my (intellectual) control. Now, analyzing it, I can't say it means anything. And I don't want to pin it down."

In the end, it's left to the viewer. But she said she was disappointed to hear a male visitor call one of the girls in *The Sculptors* a "prostitute" because a cut-out in her skirt exposes a buttock.

Another reaction bothered her. "I was talking to a woman at the show who was very offended by what she perceived as my exploitation of the images of young girls," Grossmann wrote in an email. "She didn't have any complaints about the boys. I thought this was quite curious and rather telling."

*Three Thistles* and other works by Angela Grossmann is showing until Nov. 28 at Galerie d'Este, 1329 Greene Ave., Westmount. 514-846-1515, or [www.galeriedeste.com](http://www.galeriedeste.com).

Face à face, drawings and paintings by Joanna Abrahamowicz is showing until Nov. 21 at Galerie d'art d'Outremont, 41 St. Just Ave., Outremont. Call 514-495-7419.

Ten years ago, Liliane M. Stewart donated the entire collection of the Montreal Museum of Decorative Arts, about 5,000 objects reflecting international design from the mid-1930s to 2000, to the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. The collection included furniture, jewellery, glassware, metal objects, textiles and graphic works. This week, museum director Nathalie Bondil announced that next September, the entire Liliane and David M. Stewart Pavilion will be devoted to decorative arts and design, doubling the amount of space available to show the design collection. Visitors will be able "to trace the history of decorative arts from the Renaissance to today," Bondil said.

[jpohl@montrealgazette.com](mailto:jpohl@montrealgazette.com)

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Angela Grossmann

studio, I saw her working and reworking her self-image on canvas after canvas, attempting to achieve subtle details with broad strokes. Her mastery of this technique can be seen in *Woman Walking*, which, she said, represents her "secret triumph that I could handle a schedule" that, each day, involved three hours of painting, one hour of studio cleanup and one hour to walk to her job at a downtown bookstore, where she put in six hours.

Angela Grossmann is a British-born artist in her mid-50s, who received her MFA from Concordia in 1991 and teaches at Emily Carr University of Art + Design in Vancouver. She has a fully articulated conceptual foundation for her practice, which involves making collage paintings of teenage boys and girls on the cusp of becoming

become much less overtly erotic. Today she draws the line much closer to the girls' psychological states than their capacity to arouse. The understated eroticism is no less powerful in its effect, but it turns the focus of attention onto the confusion in their young brains.

"I want the conversation to be about inner states or psychological space," Grossmann said, "not about the who and where." To achieve that, she isolates the figures on canvases with little or no background. Some of what they are wearing could imply fashion and style issues, she acknowledged, "but I am aiming for a more timeless conversation about women and their self-imposed notions of femininity. It's more about flesh than fashion."

In *Back to Front*, she used photos of the backs of legs



COURTESY OF GALERIE D'ESTE

Angela Grossmann's *Three Thistles* is one of her collage paintings featuring teenage boys and girls on the cusp of becoming adults.