

## DOWNTOWN

NO FINER PLACE FOR SURE

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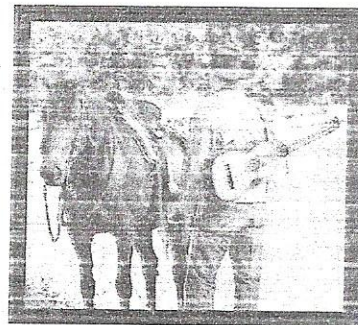
If you can be distracted away from Fashion Week long enough to explore downtown for other purposes this week, I suggest you try one of these three shows on for size.

The Musée d'Art Contemporain (182 Ste-Catherine W.), to start with, just opened its main fall exhibition last week: a solo exhibition of work by Vancouverite **Rodney Graham**. Graham's work has been like a rumour around these parts more than anything; the art crowd has been treated to a few of his pieces in group exhibitions, catching through whispers the comical possibilities

they held, but unfamiliar with his oeuvre. This first solo in Montreal flings open the doors on his charming, nudge-nudge-wink-wink body of work, spanning photography, sculpture, film and even painting. Not only that, but Graham regaled the crowds with his musical talents within his Rodney Graham Band during Pop Montreal. You could say he's a Renaissance man. Check the show out for a taste of that dry West Coast humour and a walk into the weird Wild West.

**François Morelli**, at both Galerie Joyce Yahouda and Optica in the Belgo Building (372 Ste-Catherine W), wins the season's prize of most engaging installation. I was most dazzled by his vintage-belt creatures in *Faire à sa tête* at Yahouda, simply because of its sensual appeal, and maybe because it appealed to my inner fashion whore. The gallery's main space is dominated by masks, called *Beltheads*, built entirely from intertwined belts of all shapes, sizes and hues, hanging from the ceiling like carcasses from meat hooks. Though lifeless most of the time (until every Saturday at 3 p.m., when the artist comes and animates them in a performance), each emanates its own individual personality. They're buttressed by two large framed drawings of masks, one to the left, one to the right, and on the wall across from them is a colourful drawing-in-progress of another snakelike belted creature. The rest of the space is devoted to Morelli's drawings and his performance piece *Transatlantic Walk 1945-1985*, shown for the first time in Montreal, while at Optica, *Home Wall Drawing: L'art de manger* is an installation that tracks a performance. During a few months in 2004, the artist proposed to create a stencil work for patrons in exchange for a home-cooked meal. The idea is great, but the resulting exhibition is a lot less seductive and accessible than the neighbouring show.

Over at VOX (1211 St-Laurent), the duo exhibition around themes of terrorism and cultural violence of work by **Alain Desclercq** and **Martin Beauséjour** is as sedate and intelligent as you would expect, but punctuated by a few pleasant surprises. Call me old fashioned (or bored by tech art), but the work I most enjoyed of Desclercq's was his photographic series, thanks to its simple insight. The series comprises portraits of middle-aged street dwellers wearing dog tags representing the Iraq war, making a just parallel between the life Vietnam vets returned to after the war and the life the vets of this war will have. It packs a punch. Otherwise, though, Beauséjour's work was the greatest discovery. His exhibition riffs on the manifesto the FLQ read on Radio-Canada during the October crisis in 1970, and in the main installation/room, furnished with white plastic objects the viewer is invited to sit/lie/crouch on, the comment is effective. In one corner of this whitewashed room, a TV shows a woman reading what at first seems like the news, but then turns out to be a translation of the manifesto into English. The experience is surreal, not just because of the content being transposed to English, the "language of the enemy," but because of the incredibly thick French accent the woman has. It's a very witty, trenchant political piece.



BACK TO YOU, COWBOY: STILL FROM RODNEY GRAHAM'S *HOW I BECAME A RAMBLIN' MAN*