

Words become pictures in art shows around Vancouver

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Anna Plesset: Headlines

At the Jeffrey Boone Gallery until October 3

Anna Plesset, an American artist who has just returned to the northeastern United States after six years in Vancouver, is showing an astonishing series of illusionistic paintings and drawings at the Jeffrey Boone Gallery. Collectively titled "Headlines: Sunday, August 19, 2007 - Friday, April 25, 2008", these small, subtle, painstakingly realistic works depict, yes, headlines cut out of newspapers, such as the New York Times and the Globe and Mail, between the given dates.

Plesset deploys her remarkable technical facility in the service of a rigorous conceptual agenda. According to Plesset's statement, her art also manifests her desire to exercise control over the uncontrollable events and bombardments of contemporary life. It's a way of marking, with meaning, the inexorable flow of time.

The artist sites her imagery, painted to scale and with a compelling exactitude of form and colour, in the middle of small squares of raw canvas. It's as if cut-out and sometimes crumpled and torn pieces of newspaper have been physically placed on this ground and are now casting shadows. As the artist intends, the trompe-l'oeil effect of her art, together with its intimate scale, draws viewers in for a closer look. This leads to a more critical consideration of the content of the headlines, which include "VIOLENT SEX FELON AVOIDING DEPORTATION" and "AFGHAN FORCES SUFFER SETBACK AS TALIBAN ADAPTS". Plesset uses painted illusion in a truly provocative way, to make us query what is real—and why.

Plesset is also represented in a small but impressive group show at gallery atsui. Titled *Between the Lines*, it too looks at contemporary art that employs written language in stimulating ways. Sascha Yamashita's *Attention*, executed in neon in an ironically jaunty font, conflates two recent instances in which innocent people died needlessly, one at the Vancouver International Airport and the other in a Winnipeg hospital ER. Emma Lehto uses both mixed-media installation and screen print to examine illegal drugs and drug cartels. The mounting of this engaging work in the Downtown Eastside cannot be incidental.

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