

few days a week. I'll try to live with Louise. I should have done that a long time ago. Living."

He leaves soon after. He stands very erect and waves goodbye.

I doubt I will ever see him again.

That night as I drive alone along Sherbrooke from the Ritz, snow falls heavily. In some places it sparkles like stars. In other places it is treacherous, slippery and difficult to see a few feet ahead on the road. One or two cars have spun out. A good six inches have fallen since the wedding began. I turn cautiously up Park Avenue past Fletcher's Field and see the snowy statue of a guardian angel to my left touching the sky. Whenever I look at her I feel safe. I drive to our flat in Outremont and park in the alley. Everywhere snow is falling and I feel a cold dread.

It is like the anxiety I have in dreams.

I get home and peer over my daughter fast asleep. My wife shifts when I come to bed, kisses me, and asks about the wedding.

"Did you see the sweet table?"

"No, I left early. How is Lexi?"

"Fine. Go to sleep. You have rounds tomorrow."

The snow blows against the window. A cool draft enters our bedroom. Most nights I welcome the cold, but now I feel emptiness. I spoon against my wife's warmth. Our lives stretch before us, but we cannot see the distance. It is nothingness that lies farthest ahead, but we do not know who will reach it first.

Ronald Ruskin

Psychiatrist
Toronto, Ont.

Creative convalescence

I enjoy convalescence. It is the part that makes the illness worth while.

— George Bernard Shaw

Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, was converted to the religious life while recovering from a battle wound. Convalescence has been put to interesting use by many thinkers, artists and writers. Some, like Robert Louis Stevenson, became famous for it.

Tell us about recovery times — yours, or your patients' — in *The Left Atrium*. We welcome prose submissions of up to 1000 words (annemarie.todkill@cma.ca).

Lifeworks

Art and technology at the Venice Biennale

The Venice Biennale is generally considered the world's most important international exhibition of contemporary art. Since its official inauguration in 1895, the Biennale has continued to expand, and this year's show — the 50th — was enormous. Entitled *Dreams and Conflicts: The Dictatorship of the Viewer*, the display included works by 380 artists from 63 different nations. The most recent Biennale occupied three main sites in Venice, with associated events and performances held in public spaces throughout the city. The Museo Correr hosted *Painting from Rauschenberg to Murakami*, an installation of paintings from 1964 to the present day. The large, military spaces of the Arsenale housed a wide range of works, including video projections, posters, sculptures and digital art. Further down the Grand Canal, the best-known location, the Giardini della Biennale (Gardens of the Biennale) featured about 33 national pavilions. Built on site by individ-



Patricia Piccinini, 2002. *Still Life with Stem Cells*. Silicone, acrylic, human hair, clothing, carpet.

ual nations, each pavilion highlighted an established artist selected to represent his or her country.

Jana Sterbak, a Czech-born artist who moved with her family to Toronto in 1968, created a video installation for the Canadian pavilion. Called *From Here to There*, the video was made by strapping a lightweight camera onto the back of an energetic Jack Russell terrier. Unsteady images convey a dog's-eye view of charging through domestic spaces, riding in a vaporetto in Venice, and encountering a porcupine along the snowy banks of the St. Lawrence River. This video marks something of a departure for Sterbak, internationally famous for work inspired by the human body. For example, *Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic* (1987), a dress sewn together from raw flank steak, was a metaphor for the culturally inscribed body. The work's meaty form refused to make a clear distinction between the categories of the natural and the cultural by conflating flesh with clothing. Though quite different, Sterbak's latest work continues to blur the boundaries between nature and culture, given that a high-tech dog participated in the production of aesthetically appealing images.

Another striking installation inspired by contemporary technology appeared in the Australian pavilion. Artist Patricia Piccinini drew on medical science to explore the potential of genetic engineering. Her hyper-real sculptures represent hybrid creatures and cloned children, complete with shiny silicone flesh and real human hair. *Still Life with Stem Cells* (2002) portrays a life-size young girl absorbed in play with corporeal lumps adorned with veins that appear to throb, as well as scars and mouth-like openings. Although viewers may find the "stem cells" repulsive, the girl responds

to them affectionately. Another work, *The Young Family* (2002-2003), depicts a strangely human "sow" nursing her human/pig babies. One "child" with a human face and long ears lies on its back, gazing up at the face of its tired mother. Like *Still Life with Stem Cells*, the scene is at once domestic and disturbing, familiar and startling.

Piccinini's productions are timely. They resonate with current fears and fantasies about gene splicing, cloning and reproductive technologies. Her fabrications resemble the creatures found in both recent films and novels, such as *Lord of the Rings* and Margaret Atwood's latest book, *Oryx and Crake* (2003). The futuristic life forms described by Atwood include the rakunk, a raccoon/skunk splice meant to create an attentive pet, and the pigeon, a transgenic pig designed to grow human-tissue organs for transplant. Both animals eventually escape into the wild, threatening humankind rather than serving it.

Unlike Atwood's rather bleak vision of genetic experimentation, however, Piccinini's creations remain domesticated (at least for now). She portrays the science-fiction future of genetic modification in a manner that is neither dystopian nor utopian. Her optimistic yet cautious pondering of genetic technologies is a welcome alternative to the extremes of technophilia and technophobia often highlighted in the media. The work of this Australian artist is nevertheless challenging. Like Sterbak's



Graham Bering

Patricia Piccinini, 2002-2003. *The Young Family.* Silicone, acrylic, human hair, leather, timber. 80 cm × 110 cm.

video, Piccinini's tactile sculptures ask us to imagine a fantastic future, one that may well force us to rethink the distinctions between humans and animals.

Though the Australian and Canadian pavilions were high points at this year's Biennale, they were by no means representative of the exhibition as a whole. Instead, the sheer diversity of contemporary art became visible in Venice, making it difficult to generalize about the future of art making.

Lianne McTavish

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The Venice Biennale opened to the public on June 15, and will run until Nov. 2, 2003.