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Emerging B. C. artists take the spotlight in major group show at VAG

Artists in the How Soon is Now exhibition at Vancouver Art Gallery, which has something for everyone.

An exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery furthers B. C.'s reputation as a hotbed of artistic creativity. Featuring the work of 34 B. C. artists, How Soon Is Now is a snapshot of the contemporary art scene. The works are mainly by younger, emerging artists, but there are also several pieces by older, more established ones.

Curator Kathleen Ritter said the art continues the province's tradition of excellence established by great artists such as Emily Carr, Stan Douglas and Jeff Wall.

"What is amazing about this place is the history of great artists that come from this region," she said in an interview at the gallery.

"That is translated into artists who are working in different materials and forms and still have that same material and conceptual rigour in their practice."

Ritter said the exhibition doesn't make a specific statement about contemporary art in B. C.

"I think it says that there are a lot of exciting new works with a lot of real energy and a lack of inhibitions, a real sense of experimentation, immediacy and risk."

Ritter started her research by talking to curators. From her initial set of artists, she visited about 120 studios in 2008.

"I approached it without a specific idea in mind of what the show would look like," she said.

"I decided to look at as much work as possible and see what was resonating out there with people, what ideas they were talking about, the things they were excited about, and what they were making. I took the cue from that rather than approaching it the other way around."

Although there are recurring motifs in the works, such as architecture and sound, there's no one overall theme. Instead, she described the works as collectively exploring and challenging how people experience art.

As a survey show, How Soon Is Now has something for everyone. Some works are mainly conceptual for those who like their art cerebral. Others marry craft and idea so well, their visual appeal stands on its own merit, making any concepts they embody a bonus.

Judging from the response so far, the VAG has hit a home run with How Soon Is Now, which takes its name from a song by the English alternative rock band The Smiths.

Opening night saw an incredible 3,500 people traipsing through the gallery. It was so crowded that someone accidentally stepped on the work used to market the exhibition: Kristi Malakoff's Target. Made from multi-coloured crepe party streamers, it has since been repaired and returned to its spot on the floor.