

Woodland made wonderland

At the Paperworks gallery on West Fourth, where Vancouver artist Ken Pattern recently opened an exhibition of pencil drawings, you walk into a thicket of trees neatly spaced on the walls.

They are mainly naked birch trees and, for a little while, nothing seems unusual in the forest, nothing too remarkable beyond the precision of observation and delicacy of rendering of the trees. The gray tones of pencil on the white paper carry the exact feeling of birch bark — the characteristic striations, the flaps of onion-skin thinness curling back, the elephantine wrinkles at the branch bases. The foreground sweeps away in a gentle curve of grass or snow and the background is a hilly chorus of pines in vague outline.

The comforts of the familiar end a few steps away. In a drawing called Full Dress Rehearsal spirals of processed lumber wind around the base and then flow into an otherwise normal tree. In Taking Leave, saplings grow out of knotholes in a wooden floor and throw a dense shadow, though the trees themselves have no leaves. In another, a tree has somehow got inside a man's shirt.

Some of the drawings are unnerving. For many people, a tree is a mystic symbol, an intense expression of faith in life, so it is disconcerting to find a tree rooted, not in the earth, but, as it were, in one of Rene Magritte's floating rocks.

In the mysterious mind-rooms of Magritte, with their capriciously unlawful physics; there is a casual menace in the shadows, the comedy of man intruding his rational faculties on a world of overwhelmingly random phenomena. There is nothing particularly sinister in the fantastic art of Pattern, though; the paradoxes are usually playful, sometimes meaningful, sometimes trite or laboriously comic — but then I'm always suspicious of humorists who talk about their humor (on the wall is a written statement by the artist about "two of my most dominant forces — humor and direction . . .").

Within variations on the tree theme there are some memorable absurdities. There are metaphors of being and becoming, such as Ascend — a tree that pulls itself up from the ground with human hands onto a ladder. There are enigmas on the nature of perceiving: In Mind I, there is a tree constructed of finished boards wrapped and nailed into a tree trunk. Leaning against it is a rooted man sprouting an ostensibly real tree for a head. Reminiscent of Magritte, there is a wonderful

tree hovering over the ground, branch and root systems reticulating gracefully into space. Not so wonderfully reminiscent of Magritte are some of the few acrylic paintings in the show, such as the cosmic apple of Apples, which seem to be there to defuse criticism of the apparent fact of Magritte as a direct influence.

Representative of the worst is a treeless drawing called Metamorphosis, a succession of four human-bodied eggheads in the process of cracking with a fifth figure sitting intact beside an egg-shell — something that would certainly appeal to the glib art directors of Psychology Today.

At the Equinox, one of the more interesting galleries in the city, there is a showing through July of works on paper by noted B. C. artists. There is also a wide selection of works by such internationals as Frank Stella, Rauschenberg, Alex Colville, Robert Young and many more.

There are some extraordinarily fine small watercolors by Myron Jones that take the

geometric condensation of shapes to the limit in his delicate yet daring rendering of West Coast scenes. The watercolors of William Roberts, three-quarters sky, masterfully suggest a sense of place through freedom of stroke.

Victoria artist Fleming Jorgensen is represented by two drawings of areas around Victoria. A particularly admirable one is Ford Rodd Hill 10, its stone steps conveyed with architectural depth combined with a blurry softness surprising for the medium and subject.

Myros Buriak's small pencil drawings hover with perfect poise on the edge of realistic representation; a blink sends them into abstraction.

There are also some pencil sketches of scenes around Duncan by the renowned E. J. Hughes. Crowded with detail and comments written in pencil, these are sketch prototypes of projected paintings. This seems to be the rationale behind their very stiff price figures.

—Lloyd Dykk