

# The Problem with Politics

Too, too, too much posse...

BY CAMERON SKENE

**A**s Scott Macleod, organizer of *Art for Love and Freedom* claims, "it's easy for an artist or a musician to crucify himself with politics."

Works of an overly political nature are always prey to cynicism by the aficionados of a pure art, free of the rhetorical squeals of rubber-soled suburban U2 clones in a complacent North America.

*Art for Love and Freedom*, although political in nature, is more personal in intent. With proceeds from the sale of works going to Amnesty International, and the National Association of Japanese Canadians (which recently became a more generalized human rights organization), the *Raza Group* of painters, consisting of GERAL PEDROS, FRANCIS CAPRANI, MACLEOD, and

Daniel Glassman, has mounted a studio exhibition of vigorous figurative paintings done cooperatively for a common purpose.

And for those who says art and politics don't mix, there's a lot to learn from *Raza*, whose surprisingly relevant approach to political subject matter in figurative painting makes it seem OK to be called "humanist" again.

*I Don't Like Prison They Don't Have My Kind of Bars*, a mural done cooperatively by the group, is a testament to the power of unfettered, snarling paint to convey the effect of the political in everyday life. In it, the face of a woman gives way to a seated drinker, to soldiers emerging out of a pattern of paint—all structured by patches of canvas, patterned material and media clippings.

Press photos are placed in areas that reinforce the narrative and attest to the position of media itself in the harsh political world—Martin Luther King under the eye



Scott Macleod's *Love and Guns*: political but painterly.

of the face, various bric-a-brac of political figures spread out like cards on the drinker's table, more of the same being trampled under the feet of emerging soldiers...

Says MacLeod, "we work with a garbage bag full of media clippings. It goes with the idea that all this stuff is being thrown at us, obscuring what's really happening."

Caprani, born in Dublin, is no stranger to the plain visual fact of a man with a gun, something Canadians seldom see. In *Bloody*

*Sunday* that stark visual truth takes cover behind a media barrage, with Time magazine covers, stencilled lettering to a pop song, and good ol' 666... As you try to ponder the media snafu, your eye inevitably returns to that striking visual fact of the man with the gun.

Underlying all the works is a clear concern with expressionist language in figuration, the raw, worked surface, laden with collage elements, the piercingly pure pigment and hard line that acts as

an appropriate, no-nonsense surrogate for political message.

In a bit of a twist, a series of small still-lives and portraits (according to MacLeod, they point towards *Raza*'s more recent direction) retain the hard edge but are more personal in their scope.

Glassman's *Man and Table* shows a drinker done in a seedy, wormy line worthy of Lautrec, propped up by the collage element of mass-produced paisley patterns and wicker caning.

It's the realization of personal experience in *Raza*'s figuration that keeps its political message from becoming just another media announcement of violence in a violent world. Apart from being good painters, *Raza*'s awareness of painting as an experiential medium allows for political concern unhampered by bland rhetoric.

*Art for Love and Freedom at Antidote to Jan 30*