

The AGO goes shopping at Art Toronto

Gallery buys paintings and photos by 'emerging artists' at annual showcase

ZOE MCKNIGHT
STAFF REPORTER

Anyone who rides the subway will find the work of Winnipeg artist Karel Funk familiar.

His hyperreal portraits of the backs of necks and ears are inspired by urban density and the sense of voyeurism that comes from being crammed onto a crowded bus or streetcar with strangers: "closer than you'd ever be to friends while socializing," Funk says.

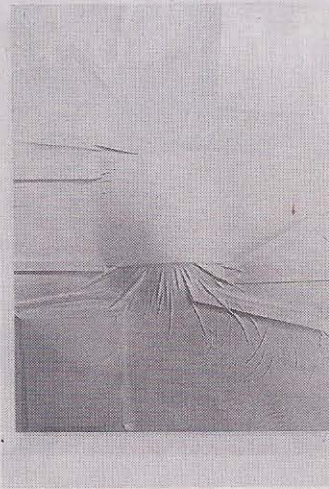
The imagery can eventually be viewed at a more comfortable distance at the Art Gallery of Ontario. Funk's *Untitled #59* was acquired by the AGO for \$50,000 during the recent Art Toronto fair.

It's one of several works the gallery bought by three artists who aren't currently in the AGO's collection.

It also bought *Shovelling Worlds*, by established Cape Dorset artist Shuvina Ashoona. The 52-year-old depicts the mystical combined with the everyday in northern life in coloured pencil.

Andrew Hunter, a curator of Canadian art at the gallery, said he was drawn to this piece, a man heaving a pile of small planet Earths among rocks and wood, by "its unique imagery and narrative, and the way it can engage with our audience around the issues of social and environmental change in the Arctic."

The AGO doesn't yet have a timeline for public display of the new art. Kitty Scott, the AGO's curator of modern and contemporary art, says including emerging artists in the permanent collection is a twofold process. "First you look at the art itself. . . . But you also read bios and press. You want to see where the artist went to school, what exhibitions they have been included in and who has written about them. Then you look at the artwork again."



Anthony Burnham's *This and That*

Anthony Burnham

Burnham has attended Art Toronto the past three years but this year stayed home in Montreal, where he received the email notifying him that *This and That* was purchased by the AGO for an estimated \$12,000.

"On the whole it's always great to get recognition; it puts forward the energy to make more. You're just proud to be embedded in such an important collection," said Burnham, 40.

His process mostly revolves around sculpture and construction, although a painting is the final output. Burnham has made a massive vacuumlike contraption to stretch cotton over abstract shapes, which are then traced with paint to make a two-dimensional image.

"It very much appears to be 3D. That's the whole magic of it," he said.

The paintings bridge photography and sculpture, he said, and the AGO purchased the first piece in a new project examining the tension between the two mediums.

"Anthony Burnham's illusionistic painting, a painting you really need to see in person, not in reproduction, taunts the limits of our visual capacities and asks us to look again," said Scott.



Karel Funk's *Untitled #59*, 2013

Karel Funk

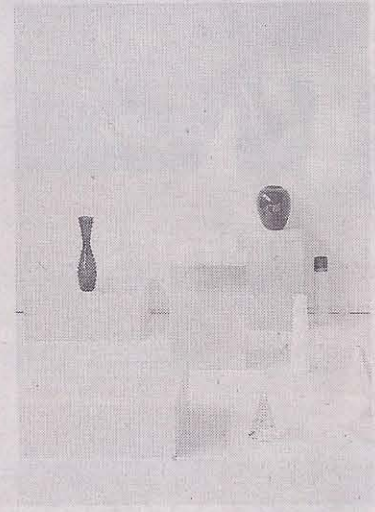
"I was just ecstatic. I could barely sleep," Funk said from his Manitoba home about the AGO sale. "It's humbling. If they take care of it, it will be there when I'm gone."

All paintings in his series are numbered and the 42-year-old painter always uses models. The social distance combined with physical proximity is something most city dwellers can relate to.

"Everybody accepts the moment when you have shoulders brushing shoulders and hair brushing your shoulder, or you can feel someone's breath on your neck. It's a reality we all experience and I wanted to see if I could get that relationship in a portrait," Funk said.

The Whitney Museum of American Art and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City have also purchased Funks, along with the National Gallery of Canada. The AGO has been aware of his work for over a decade, said Scott.

"Karel Funk has a long-standing commitment to portraiture," she said. "The deadpan realism of this painting is compelling. It seems to withhold the identity of the sitter (model), who actually turns away from the spectator."



Eight Cubes With Ceramics, 2013

Celia Perrin Sidarous

Photographer Perrin Sidarous, who is studying in Norway, saw the news on Facebook that the gallery had acquired two of her photographs, *Eight Cubes on Their Own* and *Eight Cubes With Ceramics*, for \$2,500.

She's been spending long days in the studio as part of an academic exchange between the Oslo National Academy of the Arts and Concordia University, where she is completing her master of fine arts.

"It's very thrilling," Perrin Sidarous said from Oslo. "Not that it's unbelievable; I've worked really hard. But the disconnect of being here makes it particularly surreal."

Perrin Sidarous creates original installations in studio and then photographs them before they are dismantled. She has an extensive CV, including a 2010 residency at the Banff Centre under Scott. But a work in the AGO can propel an artist's career, she said.

"It helps because the work is being seen, the work is being supported and the work is being recognized."

Scott said Perrin Sidarous "has a great palette and her photographs exude warmth," Scott said.

Perrin Sidarous won the Barbara Spohr Memorial Award in 2011.