

Making puppets of Picasso and Pollock

GALLERY GOING
GARY MICHAEL DAULT

Kamila Wozniakowska
at **Artcore Gallery**
\$600-\$30,000. Until Sept. 2,
55 Mill St., Toronto; 416-920-3820

This exhibition, *Peripheral Visions*, is the fifth exhibition at Toronto's Artcore Gallery for Montreal-based painter Kamila Wozniakowska, and it is arguably her most ambitious to date.

Wozniakowska is a virtuoso painter and a knowledgeable one to boot, and in her previous work she tended to make paintings that offered sets of tiny, highly theatrical characters, rather *commedia dell'arte* in flavour, cavorting with one another across canvases that seemed like baroque comic strips. You could always feel the satirical yet mysterious carnival spirit of Jacques Callot (ca. 1582-1635) rollicking somewhere behind these cunning little mystery plays.

Now, while the toy-theatre artifice is still there (she continues to enjoy playing puppetmaster to her tiny painted characters, which she lovingly and provocatively positions before varying backgrounds), the new paintings trade in a much more self-consciously art-historical milieu than before. Now, the paintings are about Picasso (*Most Prolific Artist Ever, Cavorting*), legendary American action painter Jackson Pollock (*New York Expressionist Kicking Dog*), and long-married painters Nancy Spero and Leon Golub (*Pair of Artists Trying New Configuration for Painting*), as well as a dizzyingly aggregate painting offered in sequential rows of contributing images called *As I Said*. This demandingly complex work incorporates images harvested from German renaissance painter Hans Memling, from Rubens, from Caravaggio, from English horse painter George Stubbs, from Audubon, and from Dutch still-life painting, all of these heterodox sources ending up in the foreground of a panoramic view of Kigali, Rwanda, where the painter apparently spends part of each year.



Kamila Wozniakowska's new work plays toy theatre with the giants of art history — like Jackson Pollock, losing his temper under a Constable sky.

What is also new for Wozniakowska is her mixing and combining of genres — principally acrylic painting and printmaking. In the Picasso work, for example, she offers a small painting of the maestro's head, around which swarm colourless grey images of all of his principal women. Then, in adjacent paintings, we see a painting of the loggia of the Villa Farnese in Florence, a painting taken from vintage porn, and then (combining all of them), digital prints of Picasso "cavorting" — making love to his partners on the floor of the Farnese.

For the Jackson Pollock piece,

Wozniakowska pulls together — or elides might be a better word (she says she admires Antonioni's *Blow-Up*, and dotes on jump cuts) — some free-floating images of Pollock himself, a famous scene from Hans Namuth's film of Pollock painting on glass, a dog lifted from George Stubbs, and a sky full of clouds by English painter John Constable. Then, turning again to printmaking, she combines them all, so that Pollock ends up standing in front of Constable's clouds, kicking the poor dog high into the air (a vaudeville-like emblem of Pollock's infamous irascibility).