

CATS

Art Gallery of Nova Scotia / Spring 2004

With the exhibit *Cats*, a warren of rooms at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia becomes a warm furry haven. The third floor rooms are painted in warm rich colours and there are lots of nice gold frames and butter-coloured mats. *Cats* includes a broad range of work, from old boys Eugene Delacroix and Paul Peel to contemporary painters Eric Fischl and Kenny Scharf; from the tiny portrait of a cat called Bliss by Mitchell Wiebe to Allan Harding MacKay's giant portrait of his family plus cats (and bird). Canadians include Christopher Pratt, Charlotte Wilson Hammond and Alex Colville. Folk artists include Maud Lewis, Walter Cook, Charlie Tanner and Donald Manzer.

So really it's a nice soft survey; pussycat lovers who haven't been to the gallery in ages will be charmed. You don't have to like cats, but of course it helps. Non-believers can focus on the paint and graphite. Alex Colville's "Black Cat" is no treasured family member. It's a symbol of the artistic, the right brain, the chaos of passion, as it reaches out a paw and toys with a triangular drafting scale. That darn cat is going to knock that ruler clear off the table if Colville (it's a self-portrait) doesn't stop it. Will he?

I wasn't prepared to like this show as much as I do. I wanted to call it kitty litter. The idea of coinciding an art show with the run of a play at Neptune (especially a 23-year-old chestnut like *Cats*) doesn't sit quite right. Even AGNS director Jeffrey Spaulding said he realizes the thesis for the show might be initially suspect. But the exhibit is good. If only the AGNS and Neptune had been collaborating last year when the theatre had a run of *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*.

Jane Kansas

