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MAGNETIC FORCE

THE MAGNETIC NORTH SHOW A MUST-SEE FOR FANS OF VIDEO ART

BY CAMERON BAILEY

We may be forever doomed to a stripling feature film industry, but Canada's art video rocks. Blessed with public dollars, media savvy and plentiful tech, we've been growing pixel visionaries since the 70s. The downside of such bounty is that there's always way too much stuff to watch. That's where Magnetic North comes in. The Power Plant's new video show culls gems from 30 years of Canadian artists' video, organizing everyone from John Greyson to Stan Douglas to Zacharias Kunuk into six programs. Jenny Lion originally curated the show for the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and Winnipeg's Video Pool, and it deserves to tour the nation in perpetuity.

The first program, titled *Seen On The Body*, includes Lisa Steele's groundbreaking 1974 tape, *Birthday Suit -- With Scars And Defects*. In it, Steele celebrates her 26th birthday by touring her body with a video camera, stopping to note landmark scars along the way. The program ends with a compressed run through Steve Reinke's *The Hundred Videos*, recently named NOW's top local video or film of the past two decades.

Magnetic North hits most of the high points, including work by role player (the late) Colin Campbell, Montreal pioneers Robert Morin and Lorraine Dufour and new art star Thirza

Cuthand. Kunuk, who recently won the Camera d'Or in Cannes for his feature debut, *Atanarjuat*, is represented here by an episode of his genre-bending Inuit soap, *Nunavut*. And pieces like Douglas's bone-dry *Television Spots* or Jana Sterbak and Ana Torfs's *Conditions* bridge the brief corridor between work meant for your television set and gallery fodder.

It all makes for a nice eye buzz, but it's not all there is. The show doesn't pretend to be comprehensive, nor is it any kind of greatest-hits package. Richard Fung, to name only one first-rank artist, is not included at all.

Magnetic North does succeed, though, in serving up the themes and formal approaches that Canadian artists have pursued in video over the past three decades. Some undermine broadcast TV, while others play with handycam intimacy. Some works, like Allan Harding MacKay's *Somalia Yellow*, are pointedly political. Others, like Cuthand's *Untouchable* or Donna James's *Maigre Dog*, are deeply personal. Most exploit video's elastic time scales, and some, like Greyson's *The Jungle Boy*, are even funny. All in all, a show not to be missed.