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## **B.C. ARTISTS RECEIVE \$10,000 CASH AWARDS**

Each Spring, the Vancouver art community eagerly awaits the announcement of the annual VIVA awards for achievement in the visual arts. On **Tuesday, March 21 at 8 pm** at Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design, this year's Selection Committee will announce that B.C. artists **JERRY PETHICK** and **HARUKO OKANO** have been chosen for the prestigious cash awards.

The VIVA Awards were established in 1987 by the Jack and Doris Shadbolt Foundation for the Visual Arts. Annual awards of \$10,000 are given to 2 mid-career artists who have demonstrated strong creative potential and a long-term commitment to their work.

A new jury is appointed each year by VIVA's trustees to conduct a province-wide search for the candidates and to select the winners. The names of each year's selection panel and the recipients are a closely-guarded secret until the last minute. Candidates for these awards must be working with visual arts media. The committee does not accept nominations for applications. Instead, the recipients are selected by a majority vote for their perceived creative potential and accomplishment. Following the selection, there is no criteria or stipulation for how the money may be used by the artists.

The well-known philanthropists and community arts supporters Doris Shadbolt and her late husband Jack Shadbolt have been reluctant to have their names prominently displayed in the title of the foundation. For both, the awards have been a way of giving back to the art community the support they have received. Jack Shadbolt was a significant artist, teacher and arts advocate, while Doris has been equally successful as a writer, historian, curator and critic.

The work of this year's VIVA winners represents the extent to which contemporary B.C. artwork has evolved from Emily Carr's heritage of traditional, landscape-based painting. Over the past 20 years, a new generation of artists has contributed to Canada's international profile with forms of art that are urban, often documentary, and politically-oriented to social issues. Both Jerry Pethick and Haruko Okana are artists who work on this edge. They have also emerged from the artistic netherworlds of alternate galleries and public spaces to acclaim in public galleries.

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## RECIPIENTS OF THE 2000 VIVA AWARDS

### JERRY PETHICK

Jerry Pethick is best known for his multi-media assemblages investigating space, light and perception. Using arrays built of photographs, holographs, video and digital imaging, recycled or commonplace materials (a boat, blankets, a milk crate), and panels of 30 or 40 identical reflective lenses, he examines the nature of human perception. The result is part machinic surrealist (think Duchamp) part impressionistic (think Pissarro) wholly postmodern. The inter-relatedness of the component parts of his art defy stable meaning, but signal instead strange surrealistic harmonies between disparate elements, or signal nothing -- nothing but the incongruence between perception and reality.

For Pethick, reality is a void space filled by perception, and perception is always already discontinuous and subjective. Pethick has said that "without context, the orderings of time and space have ultimate freedom". By distorting context (i.e. the photograph, the viewer, as seen distorted in the funhouse mirrored lenses and holographs so integral to his art, i.e. by placing castaways or everyday objects in art), Pethick "frees" space. He frees space from its ordering hegemonies: culture, capitalism, memory, machines and technology, urban congestion, human beings, to name his chief targets. He also "frees" space by dematerializing it, using light, transparent, reflective materials, juxtaposed against weighty materials and images, and contrasting 2 dimensions against 3. In his own words, he aims to "make nothing but the buzzing of wings and the spilling of air". His true work, "a playground for the imagination", is physically absent, an avalanche poised, the work invisible".

Jerry Pethick was born in London, Ontario and trained in art and sculpture in London, England at the Royal College of Art and at the Chelsea School of Art. He has exhibited in Vancouver, Toronto, Seattle, and New York, and has lectured widely across America. His multimedia works are part of 9 large public gallery collections worldwide, including the Vancouver Art Gallery. Pethick's work has been recognized previously through 7 Canada Council awards and bursaries, and 5 other awards from B.C., British, and American bodies. In 1998, he was awarded the National Gallery of Canada's prestigious Claudia De Hueck Fellowship in Art & Science. He lives on Hornby Island.

### HARUKO OKANO

Vancouver artist Haruko Okana was educated in Commercial & Fine Arts at Toronto's Central Technical School, graduating in 1972 with a 3-year honours Diploma. She has also studied print production, drawing, Tibetan and Buddhist iconography, and page Japanese tattooing or irezumi, evident in the crisp graphical precision of form and line that marks her work.

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Okana's multi-media works merge a stunning aesthetic with political commentary. She delivers simultaneously beautifully shocking and shockingly beautiful astute explorations of sexuality, gender, and race, and more epically, what it feels to be human. Okana's early work is a narratively-styled meditation on personal and cultural history, which explores and reclaims her Japanese-Canadian cultural heritage. *Beneath the Shadow of a Mountain*, a multimedia sculpture, outlines the shape of a grown woman with arms shaped in loose embrace, with a colour-hued landscape of a coastal line, Japan or B.C. perhaps, Japanese characters in the sky with origami birds below a black and white photo of an ancestor, mother, and a small bonneted toddler below reaching out her hands towards memory. The mountain is variably Gold Mountain, the formidability of heritage, memory, displacement.

More recently, Okano has moved from the literal to the evocative. Her 1997's *Transvisceral Borders* physically articulates her main themes and reverses some of art's stock characters. The female as flower metaphor is upended and inverted: she offers up instead a male genitalia flower, a fan-like frond of thin fungus with the appearance of human skin, sheltering or displaying a pussy willow like solid growth from within... yet even as we chuckle, we wonder who is to say man isn't flower also. Match this with Okano's female genitalia flower, a gash of red yarn, fish hooks, and real fish within, for a sensory experience in an art bold enough to smell... bold enough to purge the stereotyped, to force every sense. *Borders* does force every sense as well as force nature; the art grows and decays before our eyes. The viewer must commit repeat visits to watch as Okano's work matures or vanishes over 7-10 days. Witness *Leak*, a piece involving 3 condoms, one perforated and leaking otop seeds that germinate and grow as the exhibit advances. Witness other works using thin fungus layers like skin, stretched taut over mannequin torsos, and tattooed in the traditional Japanese irezumi. The tattooing only accentuating the taut firmness of young skin, only accentuates the gradual browning and wilting of aging skin, as the fungal layer decays slowly each day. *Borders* is a disappearing act, yet its spirit, the commonplace state of yearning to exceed physical borders, to make contact across beings trapped in skin, circumstance, accident, place, misunderstanding, remains with us, as we realize, in Okano's words "how thin the distance is between assumed polar differences".

Haruko Okano's work has been exhibited in Vancouver, Victoria, Banff, Seattle, and internationally as part of collaborative touring exhibits. For her visual art, she has garnered 7 Canada Council grants, and over 12 other awards. Okana continues to work (and win awards) in a wide range of other media including performance arts, literary arts, and more recently curatorial arts. She is a tireless community activist and arts educator, and has devoted countless hours to mentoring emerging artists.