



SIMRYN GILL WASHINGTON

and excitement brought about by the freezer's arrival in the Arctic community.

Nevertheless, a dimension of Pootoogook's technique remains problematic. Her outlines, bold color treatment, and white environments do not vary, except when she depicts outdoor scenes such as in *Family Gathering* and *Whale Meat*, 2003-2004. In these instances, her ability to layer and construct a complex composition is hinted at. To date, it still remains to be fully realized in her work.

The disarming charm of Pootoogook's style can also contradict her subject matter. In *Man Pulling Woman*, 2003-2004, *Hanging*, 2003-2004, and *Man Crawling and Crying*, 2003-2004, a disconcerting incongruity intercedes between her gently realized figures and the scenes of family violence, attempted suicide, and impending death. In these pieces, action and events are implied. They occur beyond Pootoogook's framed scenes—as if her gaze could literally cut through to the heart of these unfolding events. Her visual vocabulary seems to emerge in these scenes as emanating dark lines and stars encircle violent and suicidal men while women and children are protected by bright lines and stars. One hopes that it will gain fluency with experience. In *Bra*, 2006, and *Woman at Her Mirror (Playboy Pose)*, 2003, red is used as erotic accent, signifying a lexicon of color in development.

Pootoogook's evaluative gaze sizes up the community in which she lives, by way of its inhabitants' intimate lives—mundane and violent. In this, she adopts the artist's traditional role, challenging her community's worldview.

—J. Lynn Fraser

Artists who have the ability to express complex ideas in succinct and eloquently humorous forms have always impressed me. Take Simryn Gill's *Road Kill*, 2000, or *Self-Seeds*, 1998. By simply adding toy car wheels to flattened roadside debris and seed pods, Gill redefines notions of mobility. These exciting new traffic patterns provide a fresh perspective on the intersection of nature and contemporary society. Widely shown in Asia, Australia, and Europe, Gill's work is now also garnering the attention it deserves in North America. Presented in cooperation with Australia's Queensland Art Gallery, *Perspectives: Simryn Gill* [Arthur M. Sackler Gallery; September 2, 2006—April 29, 2007] marks her first major exhibition in the United States.

The exhibition stands as an important mini-survey of her work over the last fourteen years. Visitors who access the exhibition through the Sackler's entrance pavilion first encounter *Forking Tongues*, 1992, her earliest piece. There, a large double spiral made of cutlery and dried chili peppers lies on a broad neutral platform, before a large picture window that reveals a garden. Visually arresting, each of the contrasting surfaces—polished silver and supple leathery reds and browns—reflects light in its own way. By suggesting both a coiled snake and the snail shell, the giant spiral invokes persistent spatiotemporal invasion. The inherent duality of the materials—hot and cold; organic vs. industrial—and their arrangement in parallel lines refer to a simultaneous progression and imply a sense of balance. The path's obliqueness calls attention to the migration of culinary traditions. It also illustrates the commutative nature of this exchange: the trade follows a two-way route.

Nearby galleries feature a selection of eight black and white photographs from *Forest*, 1996—printed 1998, as well as *Pearls*, 2006, a series that has never been exhibited before. In both of these series, Gill's striking images feature manipulated books and usher in new meanings. *Forest* documents temporary installations made in vari-

ous places including the family garden, a mangrove swamp, and a Chinese merchant's mansion. Made by cutting pages from such books as *Robinson Crusoe*, a Chinese cookbook, and *Heart of Darkness* into shapes that mimic leaves, vines or stunted growths, these installations blend so well with the settings that their presence may easily be overlooked. While the large images invite close reading, the fragmented texts defy identification and literally make no sense. In this project Gill literally returns the carrier of ideas to its vegetative source and, in a parallel to *Forking Tongues*, reveals how intellectually based forces of change are also subject to alteration. In *Pearls* the artist only uses books that hold deep personal significance for their owners. Guided by each book's content and material character, the artist tore the pages into strips of various dimensions to form beads. She then used those to create oversize strands of jewelry, literally turning valued literary works into precious objects.

A Malaysian citizen of Indian heritage born in Singapore, Gill's examination of transnational phenomena almost seems to be a factor of her personal history. On the surface, this survey reminds me of Byron Kim's 1996 Hirshhorn Museum exhibition *Grey-Green*, where the Korean-American painter explored the color of Koryo dynasty ceramics through a series of monochrome paintings. Unlike Kim, whose probe maintained a narrow focus, Gill addresses a broad range of issues in delightfully eccentric ways. The work's importance derives from her shrewd presentation of perspectives that challenge our assumptions about culture and cultivation, about the borders of the natural and the legacies of policies such as colonialism. Through related processes of restructuring and intervention, Gill reflects the unpredictability of cultural influences, focusing on variable modes of interpretation and use of foreign materials and ideas.

—John Gayer

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Annie Pootoogook, *Pitseolak Drawing With Two Girls on the Bed*, 2006, pencil crayon, 50.8 x 66cm (private collection; image courtesy of Feheley Fine Arts, Toronto); Simryn Gill, *Forking Tongues*, 1992, installation: silver plate cutlery and dried chili peppers, 600 x 600 cm [© Simryn Gill; collection of the Queensland Art Gallery, purchased 2001, Queensland Art Gallery Foundation Grant; image courtesy of the artist and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Washington]