

# Review

BOOKS - ART - TRENDS - PLEASURES

ARTIST CHRISTIE FRIEDLS  
with her piece, *All That Is Solid  
Between Rainbow Avenue  
And Karma Street*.

## Future in plastics

Artists turning PVC pipe and styrofoam into sculpture with meaning

By JANE VAN DER VOORT  
Special to The Sun

An assortment of white PVC pipe, at the hands of artist Christie Friedls, has grown into a graceful thatch of bamboo. Around the corner in the Art Gallery of Ontario exhibit, Shirley Tse stands over a small city built from styrofoam slabs.

It's an offbeat talent the seven artists of the Gallery's new Provisional Worlds exhibit share, even for artists. Their creative vision comes to life in soft-drink containers, clothes hangers, typewriter ribbon and myriad everyday items that are made just to be thrown away.

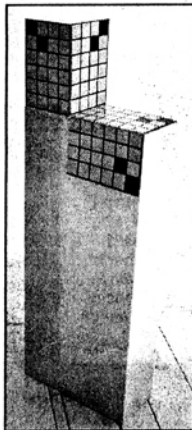
It's kind of a "slow down, you're moving too fast" exhibit that has placed on a pedestal the mundane items of our daily lives. But nobody's throwing those things away here — instead, they stand under spotlights as reminders of how quickly life advances and how much we look at, but don't see.

"Visitors to this exhibition will be struck by the familiarity of the objects and materials they will encounter," says AGO contemporary art curator Jessica Bradley. The 24 pieces on exhibit include a range of sculpture, photography and video presentations. Some of the pieces are visually stunning. Others are simply stunning and appear to be inspired by post-dinner hijinks around the table. Yet that attitude will help Gallery visitors get the message.

"These artists look at the world with hu-

mour and inventiveness. They use a playful modest means and an attentive eye to detail," says Bradley, "while taking stock of the social and economic implications of a culture of surplus and convenience."

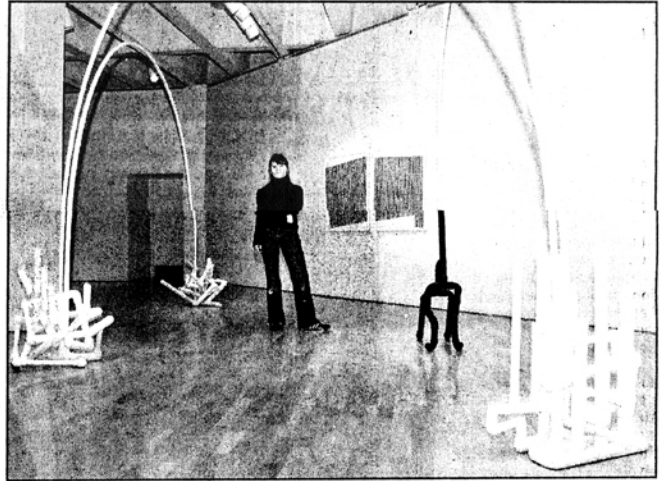
Convenience pretty much describes the modern-day conduit of choice, PVC pipe. Its constant, if unseen, presence has captivated California artist Christie Friedls, 38. She was astounded when she read that enough PVC pipe is laid each day to go around the globe three times.



Skyline, by Sara MacKillop.

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"It reminds me of how bamboo grows in my yard," she says, looking over her multi-arched creation in PVC tube entitled *All That Is Solid Between Rainbow Avenue And Karma Street*. "That's the world I make art in, a world that's harnessed by this conduit ... Underneath the earth's



surface is this vast network of tube."

For Friedls, the mobile and mostly unseen culture of capitalism perfectly reflects that invisible chaos of nature. She describes it as a relationship of equivalencies.

Also on display are Friedls' powerful silk screens of giant barcodes. "They are agitating to look at and the longer you look at them, the more mesmerizing they become as they cause conceptual problems," says Friedls. Like the PVC pipe piece, the codes

in sweatshop factories. "I moved to the U.S. and my friends said 'Oh, Nike, they're bad!' But I say thank God for Nike, you know? Otherwise, I would have starved."

This alternate perspective helps define the vision that Tse, also from California, portrays in her work. She brings to Provisional Worlds her *Polyworks, 2000*, a 40-piece sculpture of styrofoam packaging that is laced with colourful bits of drinking straws and bubble wrap. Standing, crouching and leaning are all necessary to see its hidden secrets.

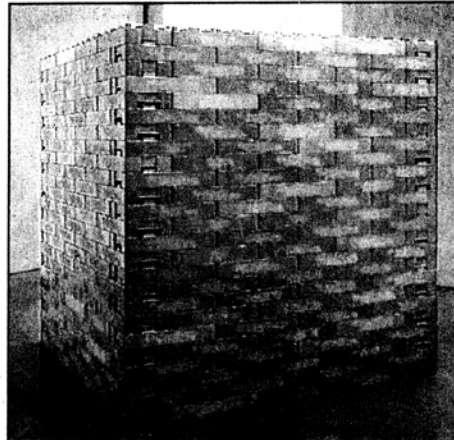
Yet she believes her contemporary artwork is not mysterious or esoteric. "It's just not obvious to you because it does not belong to one person. You need to understand many things to realize the meanings."

"For instance, the nipples are for cost-efficiency, not because they have a hidden meaning," says Tse, pointing at a section of styrofoam where fractions of pennies were saved by creating dimples instead of a solid surface of styrofoam.

As well, Tse offers two large hanging sculptures in plastic. They feature multi-sized circular cut-outs that throw intriguing shadows, with each removed circle re-attached in a different place. Plastic is one of her favourite mediums for its many characteristics. And by re-attaching the removed pieces, Tse lends a voice to what she calls its "multiplicity."

In selecting multiple-use, expendable items in the creation of art, the Provisional Worlds artists are, in the truest sense, recycling. They have recycled not only materials but also our understanding of those commodities we so carelessly depend upon.

Provisional Worlds, on exhibit at the Art Gallery of Ontario, 317 Dundas St. W., Toronto, until March 2, 2003. Call 416-979-6648 or visit [www.ago.net](http://www.ago.net).



Enjoy, by Tony Feher.

contain hidden information.

"It sets up this system of an unending chain of desire for what capital provides," says Friedls.

It is precisely that chain that has guided Shirley Tse's life. She was poor growing up in Hong Kong and earned money working