

ARTS

GALLERIES

Spinning everyday items

BY MURRAY WHYTE

Kim Adams is fiddling with a boxcar. He rolls it over in his hand, fixes it on top of a stack of the same and looks at it quizzically before removing it and handing it off to one of his assistants, who dutifully places it on a table amongst other boxcars, model train engines, tiny figurines, Ferris wheels.

Somehow, some way, all minutiae scattered on the brown-paper-wrapped tabletops at the Power Plant gallery will make their way into one piece of art or another, as Mr. Adams puts the finishing touches on the largest survey of his work ever mounted.

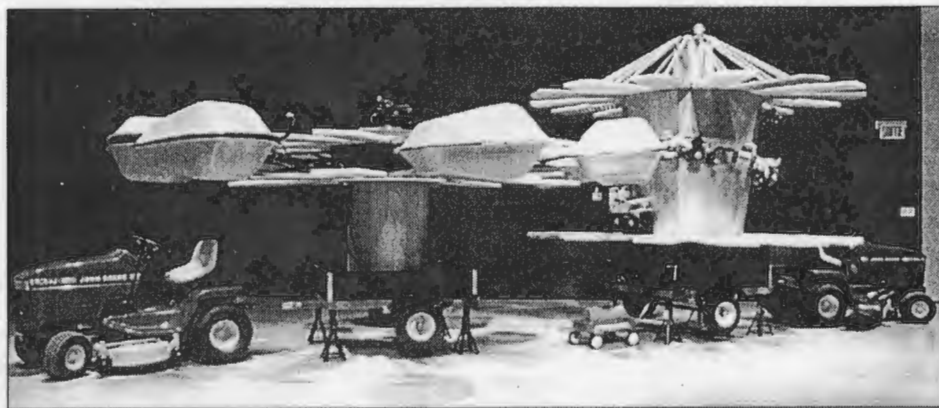
Maybe the Power Plant didn't know what it was in for.

"They told me it was a survey, so I said, 'Great, I'll bring everything,'" the Hamilton area artist says, chuckling gleefully.

Everything, in this case, is a whole lot. Throughout his 25-year career, Mr. Adams has always been a builder and collector, a pack rat of the everyday objects most of us take for granted, which he sends spinning into forms that only his imagination could conjure.

When he's done with them, they're decidedly not everyday. Mr. Adams describes himself as a "kit-basher" — someone who takes a ready-made, do-it-yourself package, throws out the instructions, and *really* does it himself. And while he often works with tabletop models, Mr. Adams' kit-bashing fixation doesn't stop at the small scale.

So what does he want to talk about first, big or small? "Big!" Mr. Adams says, lumbering happily into the Power Plant's main gallery where his mega-models sit, transforming the austere, white-walled chamber into something more like a makeshift amusement park. There's that kit-bashing again: *Decoy Homes (The Moon)* (1986-87), sits against one wall, its double stack of brown, textured aluminum toolsheds illuminated by a translucent cylinder perched atop a pole ("That's the moon, based on the Kentucky Fried Chicken bucket," he says).



PHOTOS COURTESY THE POWER PLANT

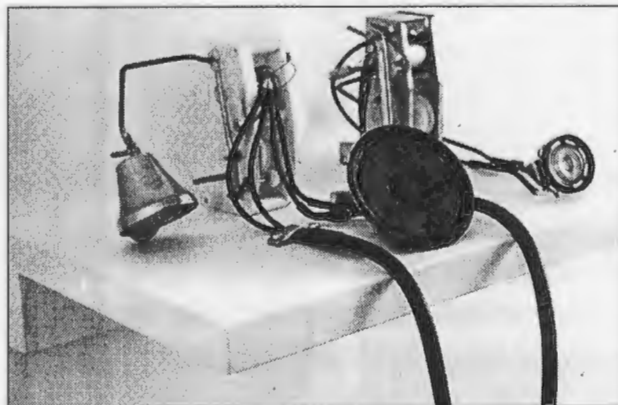
A new exhibit at the Power Plant includes works by Kim Adams (above) and Marla Hlady.

Pepper Grinder (1990), with its ironing board petals splayed out into a mechanical flower adorned with old Tonka trucks, is being pulled in two directions by twin John Deere lawn tractors; an entire wall of massive shelving reads almost like a catalogue of Mr. Adams' various obsessions: the roofs of two Austin Minis welded together in a shell and set on a metal track, part of a van, lawn chairs, a blue plastic shed, a septic tank (never used), adorned with multi-coloured plastic horns.

Mr. Adams describes it all as play — either playing with form or just literally playing — and it's not a bad way to see it: His work is a fitting choice for the Power Plant's summer show, given the carnival atmosphere which its disarmingly attractive colours, shapes, lights and moving parts always create. But it's more than that. Mr. Adams takes the banal and transforms it into something better — not necessarily useful, but, well, fun.

When Mr. Adams takes our banal, mass-produced stuff and imagines it as something new, he's not just questioning the objects but our habit of mass consumption itself. When Kim Adams buys a toolshed or a lawn chair or a bucket of chicken, it's forever — it's art.

Marla Hlady makes a fitting companion to some of Mr. Adams' profound quirkiness. Her three pieces, tucked neatly into the gallery's front rooms, seem to



share some of his sensibilities. A room filled with mechanisms cored from stuffed toys, all barking and squawking without their furry shells, reveals our preoccupation with the veil we routinely put between ourselves and the moving parts. We don't care how it works, only that it does.

Ms. Hlady cares a lot. In her other two pieces, her efforts are channeled into either mechanising the effects of music or subjecting music itself to a mechanical process.

For *She Moves Through the Fair*, Ms. Hlady projects the melancholy English folk song of the same name through a set of eight copper pipes, each assigned its own microphone, which then broadcast the music back to a set of speakers on the wall. The result, an eerie, distant whisper

that seeps from the speakers, is deeply frustrating, but surely that's the point — a raw human experience so heavily mediated by a machine that it's almost lost in the translation.

We love our machines, whether we understand them or not; perhaps Ms. Hlady is warning us not to love them too much.

The works of Kim Adams and Marla Hlady are on display at the Power Plant to Sept. 3. Mr. Adams gives an Artist's Talk on Wednesday at 6:30 p.m. Ms. Hlady speaks July 4 at 6:30 p.m. Admission to both is free.

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JOHN BENTLEY MAYS
Will return