

# Julie Voyce

Art Gallery of Mississauga

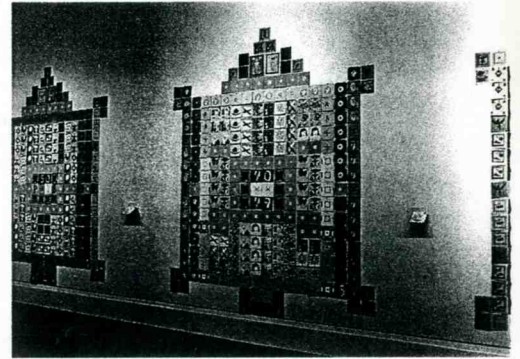
With her most recent exhibition, Julie Voyce's longstanding preoccupation with often caustic, warts-and-all renderings of the process of aging has extended into a collaborative realm. In preparation for this work, Voyce asked seventy-nine of her friends and acquaintances both young and old: what do (did) you want when you are (were) 50? Voyce screen-printed each of their responses onto one side of ceramic-tile-sized paper (each 5 x 5 in); while on the reverse, she offered sidelong illustrations of her respondents' desires. The tiles hang, image-side out, in large, symmetrically patterned configurations which group the respondents according to their ages in ten-year blocks. The written sides, turned towards the wall, were only discovered by thumbing through accompanying spiral bound books of "tiles" on display beside the wall pieces (making cross-referencing difficult).

There is a votive quality to these arrangements owing in part to their source in the folksy tiled shrines that the artist came across while travelling in and about Naples; and the cursiveness of Pompeiian wallpainting informs the motifs on her decorative border tiles. But the ultimate reference here, buttressed as much by the respondents' quips as by Voyce's own Punch-and-Judy humour, are souvenir joke panels – wall plaques that come with rusticated saw-tooth edges and are stylistically set forever in the 1950s. Voyce's tiles, like such plaques, are realized in a buoyant range of saturated pastels with the necessary economy of detail imposed by the use of very coarse silkscreen. Additionally, both share ersatz caricature and more-than-occasional facetious raillery. Time flies, but it wears a duplicitous smirk while doing so.

If Voyce's overall mode of presentation woos pop cultural anonymity, the constituent parts do not. Responses to Voyce's question range from dread, vanity and guarded optimism through to bravado: Jonah Brotman, aged 10, doesn't want to take care of his parents; Maria Hugo, aged 34, wants "a nice, tight, round bum;" Kym Pruesse, aged 34, "would like to have met myself, in some way kinda liked me and then leave;" Sheila Butler, age 57, says she has always gotten what she wanted. And the artist includes herself as wanting "365 great bra-and-panty sets." In her illustrations, Voyce is court jester to the respondents' prompts; her images are populated with grinning heads, lips, crescent moons, suns, big-headed teddy bears and campily-attired person-ages. Beyond the overwhelmingly saccharine cast of these figures, their age wrinkles, bustiers, stiletto heels and big-dollar dreams begin to chafe. This is not bathos, but a calculated parody of the varnishes and subterfuges inspired by the desire for youth.

Another component of the exhibition, containing Voyce's watercolours, is set off from the "50 project" in its own baby-blue gallery. These images don't rely on textual cues. Their meaning is far more allusive and reflects Voyce's penchant for playfully exorcising her own demons while lampooning any complaisant social behaviour she runs into in the process. Here, the vocabulary is somewhere between John Tenniel and Robert Crumb – children's illustration with attitude. In "Solo Show," Voyce continues to use the friendliest of formats to contain uncomfortably familiar sensations as our subjectivity is bound, poked and dissolved.

John Armstrong



Julie Voyce – Above: *What do you want when your [sic] 50?* (1993–96), view of installation, laminated silkscreen prints, six stations: each 363 x 257 cm / Left: *What do you want when your [sic] 50?* (detail, 1993–96), 30 to 39 age station  
Photos by Stuart Reid, courtesy of Art Gallery of Mississauga

