

Flesh and metal

Skin cells, steel plates and being human

ARTS PREVIEW

THICK SKIN

Marjan Eggermont
Runs until January 20
Herringer Kiss Gallery
(101 1111-11th Ave S.W.)

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Steel plates and human skin might not have much in common — that is, until Marjan Eggermont creates works of art by fusing together these seemingly disparate elements.

Her exhibition entitled *Thick Skin* is now showing at the new space of the Herringer Kiss Gallery. Using steel plates with photo-stencilled images on them, Eggermont goes about reducing the complex business of being human to images of skin cells that provoke questions about what it means to be a member of a group that now numbers 6.3 billion (according to recent United Nations estimates).

Eggermont became interested in skin as a graduate student at the University of Calgary in 1996, when she was working on a series of figure studies as part of her course work for a master's degree in print-making.

"I became interested in the surface of the body," she says.

It was also at this time that the Calgary-based artist began to work with steel rather than paper and ink to create works of art.

"Sometimes I think it was pure laziness," she says of her move to metal. "I was tired of auditioning 20 prints at a time. I was always interested in sculpture and the plates because they have weight to them."

One of the pieces in this show that demonstrates Eggermont's facility with the medium of steel is *Elbow City*. Comprised of nine square plates arranged in rows of three, the work presents magnified images of skin from an elbow that have then been



Thick Skin — Corner Stone of Ourselves is one of the steel etchings in Marjan Eggermont's exhibition at the Herringer Kiss Gallery

photo-stencilled on to the square plates in a range of colours. The technique gives the piece the luminous quality of a well-printed photograph with the additional substance of a steel sculpture.

The titles given to each piece in this exhibition are humorous — witness *Elbow City* — and point to a playful side of this artist who has become well-known in Calgary for her more serious works concerning poverty and homelessness.

Eggermont was recently named one of this city's 20 most influential artists by the Artwalk Society, and with good reason. Not only has she been working as a dedicated visual artist since moving here from the Netherlands 18 years ago, but she continues to search for ways to introduce art to a diverse range of people.

That self-appointed mandate continues for Eggermont at the U of

C, where she now enjoys a cross-disciplinary appointment that sees her spending one-third of her time in the art department and the rest of her time with the engineering faculty. In the latter, she teaches 600 first-year engineering students how to draw in a mandatory course euphemistically titled Engineering Design and Communication.

According to Eggermont, the drawing course was introduced to reawaken in students skills that are being lost in an age when education is increasingly dominated by computers.

"Design skills were fading fast," she says. "The students need to learn to visualize."

In other words, she wants to bring back some basic human skills to complement the use of machines. A fitting aim for an artist who explores the elements of being human by creating art made out of steel.