

# Haughty and naughty in a sterile environment

## Montreal artist's digital print photo-collages feature mannequins in menacing, ambiguous narratives

BY PAUL GESSELL

Think of Melanie Garcia's delightfully creepy art as the ultimate in safe sex.

The Montreal artist's digital print photo-collages, currently on view at Helsinki bar in the Byward Market, show naked people in haughty — and naughty — poses lounging about decorator-perfect interiors.

But wait. These are not real people. They are store manne-

quins, impossibly beautiful and completely unattainable. They are totally disconnected from reality. They don't even have genitals. They are, we fear, the symbols of a sterile future that awaits us.

"They are trying to be like us," says Garcia. "They want to be like us. But they're not."

Garcia's characters, collectively entitled *Cold Buffet*, are caught in ambiguous, menacing narratives similar to those found in Alex Colville paint-

ings. We know something has happened, or is about to happen, but we are not sure what.

The viewer is forced to fill in the blanks of the narrative.

Garcia, however, pushes the envelope farther than Colville has dared in his paintings. In Garcia's unabashedly voyeuristic work, both murder and sex are in the air yet neither murder nor sex can ever occur.

The collages of *Cold Buffet* were created by "borrowing" found images from interior design magazines and then superimposing the images of the mannequins from catalogues of store mannequins.

Garcia is a one-woman Renaissance, dabbling in everything from art to filmmaking, interior design and fashion. All

these elements are united in *Cold Buffet*, which was shown in Montreal before coming to Ottawa. The exhibition travels next year to a Paris gallery, thanks to Gatineau freelance curator Guy Bérubé who co-curated this show with Tony Martins of the Ottawa online art magazine *Guerilla*.

The series of six large-format photographs began as a project that was supposed to be "soft, touchy and emotional," says Garcia. But things just weren't clicking. She switched gears completely to "cold, sterile and unemotional." The result: *Cold Buffet*. Garcia would be wise to stick with "cold, sterile and unemotional."

The exhibition continues until July 28.



The collages of Melanie Garcia's exhibition 'Cold Buffet' are now on view at the Helsinki bar and restaurant in the Byward Market. Garcia created the works by 'borrowing' images from interior design magazines and superimposing mannequins from catalogues.