

## Beauty, destruction and surveillance

*Thought-provoking exhibitions brightened a bleak January*

**Melanie Porco**

**L**ife greets you at the door, but death sees you out... That was the predominant theme at the Gallery at Victoria Hall this past month as Westmounters were treated to the fascinating exhibition 'Ash and Roses' by local artist Dana Velan.

It was one of two local exhibitions that provided a warm respite from an especially cold winter.

Using oil sticks on mylar, the Czechoslovakian-born Velan mounted a 20-piece exhibition that rendered roses as "beautiful, fragile, and innocent."

As viewers walked through the gallery, they were repeatedly confronted by images of fire ravaging the flowers. "We only see beauty in things society deems as beautiful, but we have to find beauty in everything," Velan said. "I find beauty in destruction... Something always comes out of death. The cycle of life is rebirth."

Although a Montrealer since 1968, symbols of Velan's native Czechoslovakia are hidden throughout her work. "These are pieces of barbed wire," she said, pointing to black markings on the show's first piece. "There used to be a barbed wire around my country; it was communist then, but in 1989 it went through some changes (government and social). They took it down and pieces of the wire were

scattered all over the ground. It was a sign of freedom, a rebirth."

Not only could 'Ash and Roses' be seen on the walls, but white roses sat on the table at the entrance while a black box of ashes and burned roses awaited viewers at the end—a fitting touch to a fascinating show.