

ARTS

Vacant storefront home to video art

By Sarah Elizabeth Brown

A large, yellow envelope arrives in the mail, unmarked. Inside is a videotape, also unmarked.

You put the tape in the VCR and after a few seconds of static, you see images of someone walking through a dark forest, interspersed with clips of Bank Street.

The scene switches again, this time to a barely distinguishable face, then back to the forest. The video alternates between colour and black and white. The audio is simple: crunching leaves, cars driving down the street, a person breathing and occasional humming.

By Nov. 21, 1,000 homes in Centretown, Sandy Hill, the Glebe, Lowertown, Rockcliffe, and New Edinburgh will receive such a video in the mail.

And if they follow the map set out in the contents of the videotape, they'll find themselves standing outside 245 Bank St. seeing through the window the same images on a screen inside an empty store,

only in reverse. The video's sound is heard outside the store through a speaker.

It's all part of the Ottawa Art Gallery's interactive art series *In All The Wrong Places*. This particular work, *The Magnetic Trail*, is by Ottawa photographer/video artist Chantal Gervais.

"That video would give (viewers) some clue to get to the piece on Bank Street," says Gervais, 34. "This way the viewer is part of the piece."

Her piece puts people who wouldn't normally go to an art gallery in the centre of the artwork. The video at 245 Bank St. started playing Oct. 21, where it will continue to run 24 hours a day until Nov. 21.

The 1,000 videotapes are being dropped in downtown-area mailboxes at random. "A lot of people have really enjoyed the mystery of it all," says Gervais.

Ottawa Art Gallery curator Sylvie Fortin approached Gervais to do something for *In All The Wrong Places* because she wanted to showcase young Ottawa-area and international talent in the 12-part series.



Elisé Saraceni/Centretown News

Jim Reilly peers through the window of a vacant store on Bank Street, watching video images flash on a projector screen.

Originally from Val-d'Or, Quebec, Gervais studied art in Sherbrooke and Montreal before graduating with a degree in art from the University of Ottawa in 1993. She has since had shows in Gatineau, Montreal, Toronto, and Ottawa

"We wanted to feature types

of projects that couldn't be featured within the four walls of the gallery," she says. "The real work is on Bank Street, in your mailbox, in the rumors surrounding the work."

Fortin says reaction to *The Magnetic Trail* has varied.

"Some people are pissed off,

some people drop off thank-you notes," she says, adding she's had only five or six people react negatively.

On the second day the video was displayed at 245 Bank, someone scrawled on the window with chalk, "It's not nice to scare little girls like that."

Project: "In All the Wrong Places" Ottawa Art Gallery, 1999. work: (The Magnetic Trail)