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## EXHIBIT A CROSS-POLLINATION

**Pearl Van Geest's *Eat Me*  
Reviewed by  
Gary Michael Dault**

To July 29 at Katharine Mulherin  
Contemporary Art Projects,  
1086 Queen St. W., 416-537-8827.

Right now, it's lily time in the garden. Most of us are content to look and marvel. But for Guelph-based painter Pearl Van Geest, the relationship is more intimately engaging, more carnal than that.

The painting shown here is titled *Eat Me* (also the title of an exhibition of Van Geest's work now at Katharine Mulherin Contemporary Art Projects). For Van Geest, this fleshy, pink-gold phantasmagoria of woman and blossom is more than just a sensuous image; it's about "a yearning to merge with the natural world."

Van Geest and I meet at a coffee shop across the street from the gallery. I'm supposed to be interviewing her, but instead, she comes up with a dozen questions she wants to put to me: "We're made of the same substances as the rest of nature, are

we not? And so where do we end and [where does] 'the world' begin? How are we to merge fully with the natural world? How can we lose ourselves in it? Can the woman become the flower — and vice versa? Is such a consummation possible?" I could have responded, I suppose, by returning all of her own questions. After all, she is the woman in the painting.

The first paintings I knew of Van Geest's were covered with kisses — she made them by slathering pigment on her lips and kissing the canvas all over. Wasn't that dangerous? I ask, thinking about what goes into paint. "Yes, it was," she replies, "and so I started experimenting with various lipsticks as a medium. I grew up with abstract expressionism and process painting, where you could always clearly see the hand of the artist at work." And so, in order to make her own way, she substituted lips for hand: kisses sweeter than wine or, for that matter, oil paint.

The *Eat Me* paintings have momentarily intervened. "I wanted to immerse myself more fully in my art," Van Geest says. To that end, she immersed herself in lilies during a recent sojourn in Mexico City, where she bought bundles of them

and had a friend photograph her with them so she could paint from the photos. "Flowers are so overtly sexual," she says, reminding me about their stamens being male and their pistils female, "and I really wanted to give myself up to them. At one point, I had pollen smeared all over my face," she recalls gleefully, "but I couldn't make paintings of myself looking like that — they just looked messy."

Van Geest smiles as she thinks back to this sybaritic time among the lily blossoms. "If I'd worked with foxgloves, I suppose I'd have become very ill," she notes rather dreamily (foxgloves being more or less toxic). "But I'd sort of like to work with poisonous flowers," she says. "It'd be very edgy. You know... love and death. Orgasm as the little death and all that."

I take a steadying swig of coffee. "I don't want to be grouped as a new age-y, tree-hugging sort of person," Van Geest says. "But I do want my paintings to possess and maintain the direct eroticism of kisses." I tell her I understand. "I guess what I'm looking for is a route to transcendence," she says. "And to that end, I'm on a sort of skeptical spiritual quest. I want to know," she says, "whether or not we actually possess what we sense." Meaning: Do we acquire what we enjoy through our senses? It's a lovely — and important — question.