Jim Dine: Concealed in View
Galerie de Bellefeuille, www.debellefeuille.com, To October 7, 2009

Dorota Kozinska
Jim Dine is 74 and an icon on the international art scene. Instantly recognizable by the repeated use of symbolic elements in his work, he continues to confound the critics, a pop artist in the robe of an abstract expressionist.

The reference to 'the robe' is oddly apt, as it is one of Dine's favourite subjects, duplicated in variation upon variation. It is as much a symbolic connection between the two genres, as a stand-in for the artist himself.

Endlessly versatile, Dine made his name in the 1960s, during the Pop Art movement in New York. He has experimented with numerous styles, setting himself apart from the cold plasticity of Pop Art by the use of personalized objects, thus injecting an element of intimacy into his work. He keeps reinventing everyday garment becomes a metaphor for life as experienced by the painter. With a tip of the hat to the host, Ob Robe, Ob Canada introduced the series. Other works, both prints and paintings, such as Woodcut in Paris and Tokyo, Bill Clinton, and July on the Palouse offered more variations on the bathrobe theme; a vestment at once transparent and mysterious, a simile of a self-portrait wrapped in a social commentary.

This eclectic collection of Dine's imagery, which also included prints and sculptures of Venus de Milo, was almost overwhelming had it not been for a couple of earlier works of stunning craftsmanship and quiet plasticity.

Off the main gallery space, in a small corridor, Dine's Great Horned Owl, a dark rock, is part of the exhibition, vying for attention with a roughly moulded, marching Pinocchio.

Another of Dine's favourite subjects, this small acrylic on patinated cast bronze figure is a model for the Borås monument, a nine meter high bronze statue, named Walking to Borås and inaugurated last year in the Swedish city by that name.

A large lithograph of the iconic wooden puppet, The Red Feather, and a wonderful woodcut with hand colouring, Jim's Hand Painted One, showed Dine's true mantle and versatility. Each image was defined by the medium, their composition, the figure's stance, remaining identical. The woodcut's rich surface texture and deep palette were in contrast to the more loosely drawn and coloured lithograph done several years earlier.

Dine's signature bathrobes took a major part of the exhibition, partly due to their large format. Ostensibly a stand-in for the artist, this everyday garment becomes a metaphor for life as experienced by the painter. With a tip of the hat to the host, Ob Robe, Ob Canada introduced the series. Other works, both prints and paintings, such as Woodcut in Paris and Tokyo, Bill Clinton, and July on the Palouse offered more variations on the bathrobe theme; a vestment at one transparent