

Student show reopens Barnicke

BY KELLY RANKIN

It was an evening of firsts at Hart House.

Natural History is the first exhibition to appear in the recently renovated Justina M. Barnicke Gallery and it is also the gallery's first exhibition curated by a student from the first cohort in the master of visual studies in curatorial studies program.

Visitors to the Barnicke are now greeted by a bright and inviting entrance. New glass doors replace the old, heavy fortress-like doors, allowing visitors to see directly into the gallery. However, according to **Barbara Fischer**, gallery executive director and chief curator, these were minor changes compared with the motivation behind the renovation.

Fischer explained that the purpose for the renovation was to shore up the ceiling structure and insulate it against the sound and vibrations emanating from the Hart House gym above. She also noted that other improvements include more work space for students and better wheelchair access.

Once inside the new-look gallery visitors find **Jennifer**

Rudder's thesis project, Natural History. Rudder, a 25-year veteran of the art world, said that when she heard Fischer had started the new master's program here at U of T, she realized there was nowhere else she wanted to be. The new master's allowed her to pursue a multi-disciplinary program, taking courses in visual arts, art

Rudder then decided to look into the process of taxidermy, the history of natural museums and zoos and the idea of capturing animals and humans for anthropological display.

For most people the thought of visiting a natural history museum conjures up memories of childhood school trips where the question of how the animals

came to be on display rarely comes up. By virtue of being on display in a museum the act of capturing, killing and taxidermy becomes sanctioned. As Rudder said, "I never thought of the animals as dead."

The show also explores themes of colonialism and race by delving into the history of anthropological display of human beings. The two most well-known examples are Ota Benga, a Congolese Pygmy, and

Apache Chief Geronimo, put on display at the 1904 St. Louis Purchase Universal Exhibition.

Works such as Crystal Mowry's *diorama*, and Gould's diptych, *Benga Meets Geronimo* and *Geronimo in St. Louis meets the Pygmy*, 2007, reference Benga's experiences.

The exhibition runs until May 29, 2010. For details visit www.jmbgallery.ca.



Trevor Gould's *Model of a Nubian Giraffe with Landscape*.

history and anthropology.

The idea for Natural History came from her desire to work with Trevor Gould's sculpture of a giraffe, *Model of Nubian Giraffe with Landscape* (After Jacques-Laurent Agasse, 1827). Rudder was also inspired by a trip to New York's Museum of Natural History, noting that, "The whole idea of capturing animals and taxidermy really knocked me over."