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"Beaver Tales: Canadian Art and Design"

BY DAVID BALZER October 01, 2008 21:10

"Beaver Tales: Canadian Art and Design" runs to Dec. 6.
Tue-Fri noon-5pm; Sat
noon-4pm. University of
Toronto Art Centre, 15 King's
College. 416-978-1838.
www.utac.utoronto.ca.

"Beaver Tales: Canadian Art and Design" aims to show, and to define, Canadian design through the historic manifestations of what most people now see as thin, nationalist clichés. It accomplishes this not by skirting quite open about the simplicity, the homeliness of our traditions — but by suggesting that there has been a reasonably successful effort to make a generic natural symbology our very own.

The exhibit is divided into six sections: "Geese," "Evergreens," "Trilliums," "Antlered Animals," "Beavers" and "The Antler." Curators Rachel Gottlieb and Martha Kelleher want to demonstrate that these entities have, in the past and design lexicon both as motifs and as forms in and of themselves. Thus in "Antlered Animals" we get a fun-1 mid-19th-century chiffonier topped with a carved moose, which stands near Todd Falkowsky's Antler Coat I

the antler is the design.

Such juxtapositions are fascinating, but don't necessarily come off as absolute. Some of the most memorable pieces in "Beaver Tales" have also been seen elsewhere: Thoreau McDonald's shamelessly Arts-and-Crafts suite of furniture for friend Doris Huestis Mills; or the wonderful early-to-mid-20th-century Elizabeth Wilkes Hoey's Trillium pattern from the '50s (pictured), which reflect trends in, among other things, the American market. One might say that hybridity is found in most venerated design traditions. One might also point out that, as a nation, we have always made a point of keenly and directly serving people's business.

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