Mystic Middle Eastern opus

Craig Thompson, best-known for his award-winning 2000 epic Blunderbuss, took seven years to complete the 672 pages of his new graphic novel Halidah, an epic story about the enduring relationship between two former child slaves in a timeless Arab world.

"After drawing Blunderbuss, I was really sick of drawing myself," Thompson says of his move away from autobiography and the impetus for his impressive span. Like his past work, Halidah revisits motifs of love, spirituality and tormented upbringings with a deftly crafted narrative in both story and graphics that demonstrates the author's fascination with Arabic calligraphy and mysticism.

"I wanted to create something outside of myself, something larger than myself, and I was considering two trajectories: either a fantastical epic, that might be difficult to convey, or something more journalistic, like a war book, with sort of a social-political edge, and what ultimately happened was Halidah sort in the middle."

Thompson, whose launch has mostly been packed and paying events, will show slides, talk about his work, and sign books for free at the Denver & Quarterly bookstore (3104 N. Broadway) this Friday, Sept. 23, 7 p.m.

— YANYA LEE

Honouring Ana Mendieta

"First name the book Who is Ana Mendieta?" says curator and author Christine Redfern of the exhibit Andina, which is at the MAC (388 Bio-Catherine St.) until Oct. 1 and takes inspiration from the work of the Cuban-American artist.

"The book is a collaborative project with Caro Caro — technically, I wrote the story and she did the drawings, but we had a hand in both." The book tells of Mendieta's journey from a young Cuban refugee to renowned performance and multimedia artist. "When looking at others in the art world their contributions are pretty obvious, but their names don't get passed on through generations," Redfern says. "The thing that made the biggest impression on me was how much Mendieta did with new media. She was working with the cutting-edge mediums of the time, and she was predacious." The exhibit honours this aspect of her work, with selected works by the artist as well as videos by Karlco Fugisio, Elena Willis and Jason Sanchez and an interactive space by Philippe Laurençon.

The book launches, with free drinks, on Saturday, Sept. 24, 2 p.m. Outside the Art Spagnolus talk, Redfern will also moderate a round table discussion on Sept. 28, 10 a.m. "It's better people, so they don't talk too long," she jokes.

— SACHA JACKSON

Virtual unreality

RealTime LiveReal, which runs at the AAC (388 Bio-Catherine St.) until Oct. 6, doesn't exist without its viewers. A screen showing a static image comes to life only when an individual enters the interaction area. Fitted with an O3 glasses for better depth, the participant interacts with the virtual space, while the artwork reverts to the participant's location, movements and speed.

A similar technology to video game players, but not a familiar experience, Artistic collective Workspaces unlimited uses elements of gaming technology to construct virtual reality with the real space of the viewer. Participants navigate the virtual space, interacting with the artwork, with the space around them and with their own bodies. Becoming part of the work, both for themselves and for the viewers watching from the periphery of the room.

Although the piece could easily be brushed aside as a novelty, it slowly simmered in my mind. Shortly after I left. The themes of real versus virtual reality to today's digital age, as do the experiences of being fully integrated into an art piece, to be both a viewer and viewer in the same piece. There's potential here to make us question how we experience both space and art.

— CHRISTINA GUINN

India, Paris, NYC, MTL

When you get stuck in Paris on your way to India, the only natural thing to do is write a play about it, which is exactly what happened to New York-based writer Damien McRae. His new play, India Inn, tells the story of a wealthy gallery owner from New York City who decides to travel to India to help the "girl who got away" find her true self. When he's not allowed to arrive, he tries to follow his own path to transformation in the French capital.

Although McRae has been living in the Big Apple for 15 years, he thought Montreal was the perfect place to present his play.

"There's a lot of commentary in the play on New York, its art world and American culture, as well as a lot of commentary on Paris. I thought Montreal was a good place, because there's a strong connection to both places and it's a good spot to step back from both."

The play runs at Théâtre Théâtre (2516 Ruelle Théâtre) until Saturday, Sept. 24, every evening at 8 p.m. $10 in advance, $15 at the door. For more info, see http://indiainn.com.

— ROXANE HUDON

IS IT ART?

DIY SNEAKERITE: It's rare that anything other than beer and cheese snacks land on our desks at the Rover, but we recently had the chance to try Urusha, a DIY BYO shoe-making kit. The kit contains mostly recyclable materials. The three shoe designer Garay, Delanux, Urusha are for men only and have an unusual concept: instead of scoring ready-to-wear or purchasing the sole ($34.99) and upper ($18.99—$45.99) separately, allowing you to mix-and-match styles. To put the two parts together, however, you'll have to bring a pair of scissors to the bottom of the upper around grooves on the sole. Which can be tough on your fingers if you forget to use the special shoe hidden in the sole. Nevertheless, main floor staff are usually comfortable and perfectly stylish for their purposes. www.urusha.com

ARTSHOLE

CULTURE CLASHING A group of artists working and studying at Concordia's theatre program have created L'Internationale, a bilingual play that looks at our multicultural world. It's based on a novella by the late French writer Jules Renard. The show opens at the Centre d'Arts concordia on Tuesday, Oct. 2, 7.30 p.m. in the Centre d'Arts concordia. A volunteer contribution of $25—$40 is suggested. IT TAKES TWO: Two artists explore the urban landscape and its immediate surroundings at Galerie Les Territoires (273 Rue St. Catherine W., 6th floor). David Massau's A l'heure de la ville and Caroline Kallo's Terra Incognita: Stories of Cora ria are premieres at a vernissage tonight, Thursday, Sept. 22 at 6 p.m. Both shows run until Oct. 18.