

riffing joni

“ I was in a café smoking,
somewhere, and a girl
came up to me and said,
‘I’m a manic depressive.
I love your music, but I hate
pictures of you. Every time
I see you, you’re smiling
and it makes me mad! ”

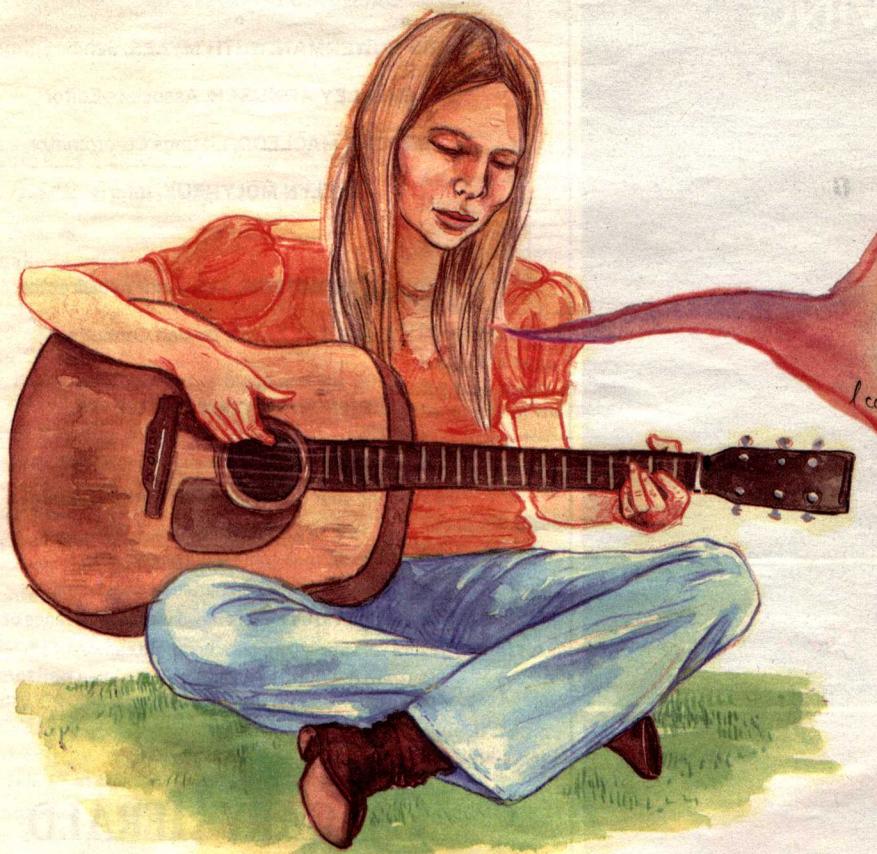
-joni mitchell, 1997



swerve

02.02.07

"The fragile scarecrow image of her that comes through on TV in no way prepares one for the mature, sexy realities of Miss Mitchell in the flesh"



ON THE COVER

22 ...JONI RIFFS

Joni Mitchell is here, there and everywhere right now—which makes this the perfect time to submerge ourselves in our prairie muse.

BY SHELLEY YOUNGBLUT, SHELLEY ARNUSCH AND JACQUIE MOORE

COVER BY JACK ROBINSON/HULTON ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES (TAKEN NOV. 28, 1968 FOR VOGUE)

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40 BELOW 0 (1995), THE PRAIRIES

PAINTED BY JONI MITCHELL

They say it's impossible to separate the art from the artist, but humour us for a moment. Let's pretend that Joni Mitchell, the painter, is just that. A painter. A SAIT art student who spent her college years (okay, year—she attended in 1964 then dropped out) hanging out in an art studio rather than at open-mic night at The Depression pub (formerly located on 1st Street S.E.). Say that, instead of spending \$32, as legend has it, on a ukulele back in 1960, she bought herself a new set of paints. Imagine her career as a visual artist hadn't been, as she's famously said, "derailed by circumstance" (i.e., the world falling in love with Joni Mitchell the musician).

You can't help but wonder if Joni—had she channelled all her creative energy onto the canvas rather than sharing it with music—could have made it rockstar-big as a visual artist (in fact, scant few, if any, contemporary Canadian painters are household names, but never mind that). Would people flock to her art exhibits and speculate about when her next painting might come out? Would young artists revere her, and established artists clamour to collaborate with her? Could *Forty Below 0* have been her "Big Yellow Taxi"?

We asked Yves Trepanier, co-owner of TrepanierBaer Gallery, to

give us an unbiased critique of Joni's artwork. Does he think this painting, divorced from its famous creator, can stand on its own?

"I think it's a perfectly reasonable painting," he answered. "It's not cutting-edge, but it has connections to the great landscape tradition of Canadian art, to the Group of Seven. This could be a Carmichael or an A.Y. Jackson. It captures the isolationist feeling of a prairie winter. There's nice mottling in the snow, the sky has a nice sense of light, typical of a midwinter prairie sky. She's definitely captured something here." The painting, Trepanier decreed, "absolutely has artistic merit" that transcends its celebrity painter.

So there you go: Had her career as an artist not been derailed by her pesky musical talent, Joni could just as easily have become the reigning Queen of Oil Paint rather than the Queen of Folk. Remember, you heard it here first from a completely non-partisan, entirely dispassionate art critic. (Oh, and Trepanier would just like to add that his all-time favourite Joni Mitchell album is *Blue*.) **S**

(TrepanierBaer is currently exhibiting Coloured Pictures by Ron Moppett, who, incidentally, attended SAIT with Joni. See Listings, Page 12.)