

English Reports

Dorota Kozinska, John K. Grande, Brian Grison, David Garneau, Virgil Hammock et Sophie Pilipczuk

Volume 52, numéro 210, printemps 2008

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/52458ac>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

La Société La Vie des Arts

ISSN

0042-5435 (imprimé)

1923-3183 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce document

Kozinska, D., Grande, J. K., Grison, B., Garneau, D., Hammock, V. & Pilipczuk, S. (2008). English Reports. *Vie des arts*, 52(210), 88–95.

NEW YORK, NY

ROMANY EVELEIGH

TEAROUTS AND RECENT
PAINTINGS

Janos Gat Gallery
195 Bowery # 3
New York, NY 10002
Tel.: 212 327-0441
www.janosgatgallery.com
January 31 – March 1, 2008

To view the works of Canadian artist Romany Eveleigh is a rare treat. Once based in Montreal, she now divides her time between Rome and New York, and it is in the latter that she is showing her latest paintings. Her abstract canvases are invested with a profound emotional and personal component, and their execution is of a calibre not often seen in contemporary abstraction.

Her long career, which began with studies at London's Slade School of Fine Arts in the 50s, produced an impressive body of work distinguished by its quiet originality and subtle yet powerful conceptual aesthetic.

Considered by critics and art historians in the same league with Rothko, Newman and Motherwell, she is undeniably unique in her approach to abstract painting.

Unlike Rothko, whose colours can provoke an unexpected, and at times profound emotional reaction in the viewer, in the works of Eveleigh the emotion is an integral ingredient in the paint and the gesture with which it is placed on canvas.

Although it is her large-scale oils that are most powerful and unforgettable, the smaller works she has always produced, series of mostly drawings and collages, carry within them the same fragile, subtle aesthetic. Some of these works, called *Tearouts*, form part of this exhibition and offer a brief visual lexicon that may help in understanding her large-scale paintings.

Or maybe not... For these silent expanses of muted colour are meant for meditation and reflection, for soul-searching, and for respite not for an intellectual analysis. There is nothing mechanical or premeditated in their execution, and the reading of these works ought to be equally intuitive and unfettered.



Untitled (2006)
Oil on canvas

Unbearably minimalist in their visual expression, they are but the beginning of a journey, an inner voyage of awareness as it comes to life.

"What is consistently reductive and sparse about my paintings or drawings," Eveleigh herself explains, "is not a sought-after end but a sought-for-beginning."

The choice of a square or near-square frame support is the starting point, a simple structure upon which she begins creating what one critic called 'landscapes of cognition'.

Eveleigh's recent paintings, such as *OM* and *To* (2007) have lost some of the tonal intensity of her earlier work, combining pale, translucent spaces that merge without changing their intrinsic whisper, quietly spreading beyond the frame, or perhaps passing through it ...

They are inspiration, feeling translated into a work of art without

haste or preconceived notion. While most abstract painters aim at abstracting the object by deconstructing it, Eveleigh's paintings begin at the end, as it were, and while offering a hint of formal reality, they are at the threshold of an entirely different realm. Author Aldous Huxley called it the 'antipodes of the mind', a place beyond language, outside the system of conceptual thought, the domain of artists and visionaries.

Eveleigh's art is a perfect illustration of this philosophy, as it takes us out of our perceived and defined reality and into a plane where colour and emotion converse in unison, subverting our understanding of time and space.

At first glance we are faced with a quiet field of colour, a breathing translucent film that seems to emanate from the canvas. This visual silence is broken by an introduction

of a delicate line, more like a fissure that rends the space, transforming it into a living entity, implying movement.

In an untitled work from 2006, a dark, earthy plane is broken by two white lines that slip into the canvas from each side, adding a three-dimensional element to the tableau without disturbing its quiet elegance, this rich stillness that seems to breathe while remaining static.

Dorota Kozinska

VANCOUVER, BC

TRUTHBEAUTY
PICTORIALISM AND THE
PHOTOGRAPH AS ART,
1845 – 1945

Vancouver Art Gallery
750 Hornby St.
Vancouver, BC
Tel.: 604 662-4719
www.vanartgallery.bc.ca
February 2 to April 27, 2008



Julia Margaret Cameron
*Wist Ye Not that Your Father and I
Sought Thee Sorrowing*
ca 1865
25.2 x 28.8 cm
Albumen photo
George Eastman House Collection
Gift of Eastman Kodak

TruthBeauty is a show that expands our understanding of how the Pictorialist tendency in photography encouraged a public to see photography increasingly as high art, and as more than mere visual document. With over 150 of the greatest by renowned artist/photographers as Julia Margaret Cameron, Baron Adolph de Meyer, Alfred Stieglitz and Edward Steichen, we are made aware of how Pictorialist artists sought to elevate photography—still seen in the 19th century as merely a mechanical tool of documentation—into the realm of fine art. The photograph is used to interpret the everyday, but not as document. Canada's John Vanderpant for instance captures *Union Station* in 1930 with that same out-of-focus expressive nostalgia that Angela Grauerholz recreates in contemporary photography. A woman with hat walking towards a huge column structure and that is it. The chief components are light and space. A similar minimal scene Johan Hagemeyer's *Gasoline Tanks* from 1925 where a simple trolley with two wheels stands in front of cylindrical forms of early, much smaller scaled gas tanks that the 21st century. Alvin Langdon Coburn's *Fifth Avenue from the St. Regis* (ca. 1905) is atmosphere personified, an encapsulated vista of New York modernity and architecture. Coburn's studies of Palm trees at the California Mission in 1911 from a gelatin on nitrocellulose roll film negative show the evolution not only of an aesthetic of photography, but equally of the processes that photography involves. Other processes used included albumen, bromoil, carbon, gum dichromate, pigment, salted paper, and platinum for printing.

Some photos are more prescribed in their aesthetic, even pastoral and romantic with a small—as with Charles H. White's photo of a fully robed woman in a forest looking on, or Robert Demachy's *In the Fields, Plumarch. A Breton Landscape* (ca. 1910) where the scenes are effects are worthy of the painter Daubigny they are so old fashioned and painterly in their textural effects of light and composition. The same goes for Hugo Henneberg, Gertrude Kasebier or George Einbeck. The latter's photo of swans looks like an old aquatint it is so stylized.

The Japanese contributors to the Pictorial photo tradition are numerous and include Ryutaro Kono (1892-1968), Maroni Kumazawa (1895-1958), Suizan Kurokawa (1882-1944) and Roso Fukuhara (1892-1946) among others. These Japanese works encapsulate another beauty than the West's but with an aura that could only be called romantic and minimal, using an economy of forms, light and composition. Josef Sudek (known as the "Poet of Prague") in *From the Window of My Studio* (1944-1953) with its condensation and leaf imagery, and atmosphere of light, conjures up a contemplative mood with simplicity. There is even a photo of the oldest preserved nude in print by Frantisek Drikol (1907-1909), and looks almost Egyptian in its formal simplicity and sculptural beauty. And of course there are the Steiglitz's of New York are as beautiful as photos can get, and breathe history with an optimism, that hints at where pictorialism would lead—

towards a modernity, and still further into more experimental styles.

This future direction away from, and out of, the pictorial and towards modernism can be seen in Edward Weston's photos, or the Ansel Adams of a summit a Mount Resplendent in the Canadian Rockies (1928). As Alison Nordstrom, curator of TruthBeauty concludes in the excellent exhibition catalogue, "Pictorialism was, ultimately, not so much a style or a look as it was a philosophy. The idea of the photograph as a work of art and the print as a carefully hand-crafted unique object equal to a painting or a sculpture was established in the pictorialist years and has persisted through photography's Modernist and Post-Modernist turns. Today we inhabit a world still in need of beauty and truth and still perplexed by the complex relationships between art and the real that photography embodies." Truly beautiful!

John K. Grande

VICTORIA, BC

ROY GREEN

THE CONFERENCE OF THE BIRDS

Community Arts Council of Greater
Victoria Art Gallery
66-1001 Douglas Street,
Victoria,
British Columbia, W8W 2C5
Tel.: 250 381-2787 or
250 383-9155
info@cacgv.ca
http://www.cacgv.ca
January 2008

The title of Roy Green's new body of twenty-two paintings, *The Conference of the Birds*, refers to

an epic poem with the same title written in 1177 by the Persian/Sufi poet, Farid ud-Din Attar. Green discovered Attar while studying with Allen Ginsberg at the Naropa Institute in the 1980s. There is no direct reference to the poem in Green's paintings, but there are parallels between his paintings and Attar's parable of enlightenment.

In Attar's poem forty birds travel together in search of their king. They fly through several valleys that represent different emotional, psychological, spiritual or intellectual trials. Eventually, thirty of the birds arrive at the king's palace. However, after a long wait they realize that they themselves are, collectively and individually, the king.

The experiences of the birds are metaphors for lessons in wisdom. Green turns the language of birds into the language of paint as a meditation on human fate without the guidance of birds. The malleable and mysterious language of paint and images equates the magic of parables.

The three largest paintings in the exhibition, composed much like medieval Persian illustration, could be improvisations on Attar's poem, while the smaller works are portraits of individual birds accompanied by their iconographic characteristics. However, instead of portraying Attar's birds, Green's models are illustrations from two 1950s children's books, *Birds* and *The American South-East from the Golden Nature Guides*.

Head Over Heels personifies Green's project. Birds communicate with humans through the upside down male face that floats near the center of the painting. From the lower-left corner a large, long, black-and-white bird's beak reaches up to touch the side of the



Harbinger (2007)
Acrylic on canvas
16 x 20 inches

face. To its right, a white bird with black wingtips flies away, its tail feathers touching the face. However, as well as its eyes being closed, the face lacks ears. It is incapable of learning from these birds; instead it seems to float in a state of ignorant bliss. Perhaps suggesting the emptiness of the head, above the face a cartoonish pink cloud opens like a window into the upper branches of a leafless birch tree.

In a green landscape across the base of the painting a small man wearing only blue pants lies on his back in a formal burial posture. A large bird that could be an oystercatcher, except that its back and wings are white with large black circular spots, looms over him. Toward the lower right, a small ghost-like bird stands like a human—is this bird the soul (or the *ka*) of the recumbent man? Further to the right, the long neck and head of a flamingo enters the picture and bends in supplication toward the ground.

The characters in this allegorical setting act out their roles against a pink and blue sky scattered with large, cartoon raindrops. The sky is broadly smudged over with white, barely erasing evidence of several earlier images. As Green describes his process, "the things in his paintings come and go."

Though modeled on a recognizable bird, the much smaller painting, *Harbinger*, is, as Green acknowledges, "more abstract than real." More spontaneous than *Head over Heels*, Green's attention is held by the linear quality of the bird's contour and markings, possible glyphs of secret messages. The bird is white, pale blue-green and red brown with black line, and the background is a smear of many natural colours, mostly earthy red.

Rather than directly allegorical, Green claims that these works "are more concerned with the pleasures and possibilities of painting." The act of painting, like birds speaking to humans, is a metaphor of the path to enlightenment.

Brian Grison



Northern (production still) 2005
35mm film with sound transferred
to High Definition Video 8:00.
Image courtesy the artist and
John Connelly Presents, NY

REGINA, SASK.

ALTHEA THAUBERGER

NORTHERN

Dunlop Art Gallery

2311 12th Avenue

Regina

Saskatchewan

Canada S4P 3Z5

www.dunlopартgallery.org

January 18 to March 9, 2008

Althea Thauberger's *Northern* is set in Kannanaskis Country in the Rocky Mountains of Southwest Alberta. This is not the protected wilderness park of recent memory, the untouched backdrop for Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven*, but a landscape recently eviscerated by clear-cut logging. The video opens with a long shot of the mountainscape. Eventually, a helicopter descends on the remote site. A young woman, a tree-planter's crew boss, exits the aircraft and runs toward the viewer. The camera looks up at her and pans to a steep, torn up slope fringed by a lush tree line and a blue sky. Like First World War soldiers, the bodies of a dozen young people lie roiled in the soil among twisted roots and abandoned tree limbs. They seem asleep or dead. The woman shakes each and calls them by name. The dollied camera tracks her actions as she fights her way across the dirt and scree from left to right with a smooth urgency. Each person rouses and joins the building, writhing course of scrambling people that cuts across the slope. The torrent resembles a slow-

motion flash flood and hastened erosion caused by the loss of soil-anchoring trees. The current ends in a tableau vivant reminiscent of Géricault's "Raft of the Medusa" or Gustave Doré's illustrations for Dante's *Inferno*.

The projected video is an eight-minute, single-take, shot on 35mm film transferred to high definition video, so the colours are gorgeous; the image is sharp and the tracking smooth. The performers are not actors but actual tree planters who give the scene an awkward immediacy that feels sincere. Their amateurism contrasts sharply with the professional camera work, the careful planning and artificial, theatrical action. The camera creates a visual analogy between the tired young people, their fit bodies soiled by mud and labour, and the exhausted landscape that surrounds them. The viewer may wonder why they are spending their youth in such toil and why the beautiful park is being stripped. Are they only there for the money; are they motivated by environmental concerns? Is their youth, energy and idealism being exploited by their elders?

The scene resembles the Christian call: the crew boss arrives from the heavens, calls twelve disciples to awake, rise and follow. The men and women are dressed in layers of rough, no-logo clothes the colours of the ruined earth. The women are without make-up and most of the men have long hair and beards. The neo-hippy look suggests a related philosophy. A viewer not swept up

in the same mode, might see these people as deluded romantics sweating for their corporate bosses. However, their earnestness, camaraderie, unconventional life-style and possibly noble purposes are very attractive. The tree planters may represent Nature springing to life, surviving, and *Northern* might be an optimistic wish. However, the youth might simply be flotsam rushed along by forces larger than themselves.

As in many of Thauberger's video projects—especially *not afraid to die* (2001), *Songstress* (2002) and *A Memory Lasts Forever* (2004)—the subjects are young people set in a very Canadian forest landscape. While the awkwardness of the amateur performers may have the audience squirm in empathetic embarrassment, even feel that the artist is exploiting her subjects, the youth in *Northern* seem less manipulated. Perhaps this is because they are not weak performers of a conventional genre (opera, music video) but are helping to craft something more enigmatic. Or, it might be because Thauberger was herself a tree-planter for a decade and so is less kitschy and ironic. In any case, *Northern* is deeply poignant because like some of the Romantic painters of old, her composition collides idealism with exploitation.

David Garneau

OTTAWA

VICTORIA BLOCK

RECENT WORKS

Galerie St-Laurent + Hill
333 Cumberland
Ottawa
Tel.: 613 789-7145
www.galeriestlaurentplushill.com
Gulf Coast Museum of Art
12211 Walsingham Road
Largo Florida 33778
www.gulfcoastmuseum.org
August 9 to September 28, 2008

rations in a small, intimate exhibition of her recent paintings at Galerie St-Laurent + Hill in downtown Ottawa.

Limited to some degree by the confines of the elegant but tight gallery space, it focused on the already familiar scenes with little in the way of pictorial development.

Alternating between large and small format, Block presents works that invite the touch, as much by their fragrant, tactile subject matter—one can almost smell the aroma of sun-soaked grass and field flowers—as by the textured surfaces.



Field
Oil and mixed media on canvas
38" x 60"
Courtesy: Galerie St-Laurent + Hill

Montreal-based artist Victoria Block has found her niche, her creative comfort zone in a particular kind of a landscape. Her paintings continue to be variations on a theme of woods, fields of flowers and glistening pools of water.

She has altered her style, however, switching from delicate, sensuous pastels to heavily textured mixed media works that drastically changed the tone and feel of her art.

The once translucent, light infused spaces are now dense with flora, the oils and sand gesso replacing the gentle touch of pastels. Block manages to retain some of their effect in her application of colour, but especially of light.

It is primarily of these two elements that her works are composed, the brushstrokes hidden in the texture, most of the surface worked and reworked by hands.

She continues to explore this new *parcours* in her artistic explo-

Dense with patches of ochre, yellow, and green, the colours melding into an organic tapestry, Block's paintings are as accessible as they are technically accomplished.

They work on several levels, from pure abstraction when viewed up close, to a sweeping vista when viewed from a distance.

Difficult to discuss separately, they seem to form one giant tableau, broken up into self-contained fragments yet still embossed with the same recognizable visual code.

As such, they seem to work in any hanging configuration, from side by side, to one above the other, with the exception of the large format canvas *Woods* that at 70 x 59 inches needed no company.

Four untitled horizontal works stacked vertically, repeat the dialogue between an expanse of sky and dense vegetation, continuing, echoing the horizontal refrain.

The deep blue of the sky provided marvellous contrast to the sunlit lower half of the paintings, each illuminated by its particular aura, alike but separate.

But just as the unavoidable sameness of the composition begun its insidious tug, Block injects a different note, albeit subtle.

In a work titled *Field*, she breaks away from the textured surface, rendering the sky in a fine, translucent layer of colour that breathes air into the painting, for the first time incorporating movement into the composition.

As she aims for larger and larger formats, this could prove to be a necessary, if not indispensable, pictorial element.

Block will be showing these works, as well as her painted ceramic forms and several ceramic artist books at the Gulf Coast Museum of Art in Florida this summer, in a large exhibition called *Narration*. Thus the Ottawa exhibition serves as a juicy appetizer to a larger feast of Block's irresistible creations.

Dorota Kozinska

MONTREAL

CUBA!

ART AND HISTORY FROM 1868 TO TODAY

Montreal Museum of Fine Arts
Jean-Noël Desmarais Pavilion
1380 Sherbooke St West
Tel.: 514 285-1600
www.mbam.qc.ca

January 31 to June 8, 2008



Jorge Arche
Retrato de Mary (Portrait of Mary)
1938
Oil on canvas
Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes
Havana

For those who could not make it to Cuba this winter, Cuba has come to them. And not just with a small suitcase but with a whole grand trainload packed with 140 years of art and history. More than a holiday treat, this mega exhibition is a cultural lesson served as an art show.

The train analogy is not entirely puerile. This major exhibition is indeed a voyage into another culture, one of a kind show organised painstakingly and resolutely by the MMFA, with dedicated collaboration of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes and the Fototeca de Cuba. It involved international collectors and museums, including the MoMA.

Marked by its volatile history, Cuba, one of the most popular tourist destinations, is so much more than rum, cigars and Fidel Castro.

Discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1492 and colonized by the Spanish from 1511 on, this island nation did not gain its independence until the early twentieth century. The 1968 revolution effectively broke its history and culture into 'before' and 'since', and this exhibition offers a unique look at the chain of events that led to the upheaval, and what contemporary Cuba is really about.

All this through the medium of art, from photography, video projections, sculpture to visual art that itself struggled to be and that is still relatively unknown abroad.

To tackle the enormous task of presenting such an elaborate and comprehensive picture, the exhibition is divided into five sections, which no doubt aids in absorbing myriad data, both written and visual.

The words "nation" and "revolution" feature often in their titles, and the political tremor is tangible in many of the works.

Rather than artistic criticism therefore, what this didactic exhibition calls for is an introduction and encouragement, for it is a unique opportunity to learn so much more than just the name of a painter or title of a work of art.

And just in case learning was not on the agenda, *Cuba!* offers enough in the way of visual entertainment to make it worth the while.

From photographs of famous personalities, both political and cultural, black-and-white images of heroes long gone but not forgotten, to the carnival of colour and form of folk art and contemporary painting... there's a lot to take in.

Cuban artists, with their Spanish and African roots, their Catholic and traditional spirituality, influenced by Baroque and academic legacies, seemed to flail for a while, unable to find their voice outside the confines of their country.

Many of the works are clearly derivative, particularly those of the prolific painter Wilfredo Lam, this, however, is not unusual. Rather than criticize, one is more prone to commiserate, for the lot of these artists was often far from idyllic.

Despite a certain lack of sophistication, the creative spirit eventually burst forth in works of art of great originality and expression.

Fidelio Ponce de León's (Alfredo Puentes Pons) *The Faces of Christ*, Belkis Ayón's beautiful prints, *The Sentence No. 1* and *The Sentence No. 2*, Angel Acosta León's wonderfully manic *Cafeteria*—all these works and many more are a glimpse into a culture so very different to ours, one rich in narrative and unique forms of visual expression.

The focal point of the exhibition is a giant (501 x 1,083 cm) mural commemorating the Salon de Mai 1976, the first such artistic presentation ever in the Americas at the time, an event laden with political and social weight.

This colossal collective graffiti takes up the entire wall of the Museum's downstairs gallery space and presents a dizzying assortment of smaller and larger images and words, banners and flags, all painted onto 6 enormous panels by a phalange of Cuban and international artists. Interspersed with portraits of Castro and psychedelic madonnas are scribbled messages evoking love and defiance, misery and hope. Incongruous with the mural's cartoonish style, they are a poignant reminder of the complexity of the Cuban spirit.

What is equally interesting is the accompanying display of photographs and written material such as newspaper articles documenting the execution of the mural. Despite the endeavour's political and social connotations, what they show are young artists, creative, engaged men and women, more at play than protest. And this could well serve as the motto of *Cuba!*.

Dorota Kozinska

GATINEAU, QC

SIX ARTISTS, SIX RIVERS, THREE COUNTRIES

Centre d'exposition l'Imagier
9 Front Street
Gatineau (Quebec)
Canada, J9H 4W8
Tel.: 819 684-1445
www.limagier.qc.ca

Rivers cover the world and are its life system, conduits for water. Rivers likewise connect peoples, across territories and were transport for the early explorers. The rivers theme in this highly interesting, seldom seen collaboration between six artists from Chile, Argentina, and Canada contextualizes the river. The works on view are in a variety of media and each stems from a different approach and place. Teresa Gazitua's *Time Line* (2005) book project is unusually attuned to nature, its diurnal rhythms and the river's place in a cosmology of place. Site specific, this work is a response to the formal and material character of river elements—stone, diminishing into sand at Pirque near Santiago where



Matilde Marin

Courtesy: Centre d'exposition l'Imagier

the artist lives. Erosion becomes a metaphor for nature's endless physical transformation, largely unobserved over time, a near invisible erosion of place....

As we evolve as a society, we begin to envision private space and the notion of diurnal time, even the rhythm of the day as distant, abstract, realities that have become decontextualized by habits of consumerism, of industry, and the media. The result is we find ourselves increasingly unaware of nature's processes, the same ones we rely upon for our survival. And so Teresa Gazitua's fine time lines, that traverse pages in images, inevitably cause us to consider the line of time we ourselves are engaged in. The transparent plastic appliqué images contextualize the work placing it in our time, alongside the more traditional print technique of etching that Gazitua excels in.

Sylvia Rivas' *The River* video triptych is installed into a white construction—like module. We read these consecutive images as a collective simultaneous vision. The two monitors on either side combine images of aquamarine coloured water reflecting. Close-up and slightly surreal, they introduce us to the central monitor whose images of hands and a body seem sacred, our own bodies being made of water too. Other photo images on metallic paper by Matilde Marin reveal snap shots of the Rivadavia River in Patagonia, southern Argentina (2006). Jose Mansilla-Miranda's symbolic language of painting involves topographies, surfaces that are like maps onto which symbols are transplanted. These relativistic iconic maps build a

narrative history, and this nature-based idiom captures the river theme in real time, addressing issues of colonialism, exploitation and the human body. A flag motif, for instance, an outline of a man's body and canoe, a chevalier on horse, a military fighter jet, a compass, a raven, an ear... all these collective images tell a story about the rivers that run through this diachronical land map built out of a synthetic image structure. Mansilla-Miranda comments, "This work titled *Terra Sacra—The Prophet* is the first of a series of works that comprise a voyage of initiation. The Lego knight, the raven, all the elements in this painting will move and exist in new configurations and juxtapositions—a synthetic narrative—as this journey progresses in future works from this series."

Mario Fonseca's *I Die—You Die—She Dies* is a six-part photo and mixed media construction. We see an image of a swan, then a pulp and paper factory spewing pollution and an image of protesters holding a sign that reads Hoyu Se Mueren los Cisnes... Quien morira despues! The lower triptych of works mirrors the upper triptych, but these images, though identical are worn, polluted, damaged by environmental effects and despoliation. As goes the environment so goes over future, and Mario Fonseca's art piece addresses the most fundamental of concerns about the environment. Do multinational corporations consider this, and are government being manipulated or are they truly governing the resources the body politic has entrusted them with? Celine Boucher's

closer to home images of Ottawa's Rideau Canal and the rivière des Outaouais and the Champlain Bridge are fleeting. An image sited in a pine window frame makes us think of the photo as window on the world, we look into the image to see a red car passing, people walking alongside the water thus links are established between people and the water theme.

We can draw a map of where we come from, but there is still no map of where we are going. Six Artists, Six Rivers, Three Countries provided a rare exchange for these artists whose concerns over pollution, despoliation, and visions of natural and human history, juxtaposed as they were, brought home the universality of the environmental, historical and political challenges now facing us over water and river resources.

John K. Grande

SACKVILLE, NB

MICHEL LAMBETH

(RE)PRODUCING IDENTITY

Owens Art Gallery
Mount Allison University
61 York Street
Sackville, NB
E4L 1E1
Tel.: 506 364-2574
www.owens@mta.ca
owens@mta.ca

11 January to 3 February 2008

This is an extremely interesting photography exhibition from a number of points of view. Michel Lambeth was, he died in 1977, a very competent Canadian photojournalist during which could be called the golden age of the craft, which spanned from the 1940's until the mid-1970's. Lambeth was born, raised and worked in Toronto. His work was widely published in such places as *Star Weekly*. He had, as witnessed by the photographs in this exhibition, a very good eye. In particular, I am very impressed by his images from the 1950's taken in the St. Lawrence Market and the Royal Ontario Museum. His humanity shines through this work. I was however, less impressed by the quality of the prints that were so darkly printed as to be un-viewable particularly they were not helped by the gallery's 'archival' lighting. Art galleries seem to think that if prints or photographs are hit by direct light that they will immediately fade into nothingness. Temporary exhibitions, such as this one, are up for a month or two and the work generally returns to dark storage. Damage from being actually "seen" by the public during a brief exhibition is minimal to non-existent.

Perhaps the darkness of the prints was deliberately intended to prove the point of the little printed text by curator Debra Antoncic that accompanies the exhibition. According to Ms Antoncic Lambeth's photographs were part of a dark

plot selling a rosy multiculturalism to the Canadian public and hence the title of the exhibition *(Re) Producing Identity*. It is objectionable to use dead artists to prove dubious sociological viewpoints. I quote Ms Antoncic: "Part of the visual culture of the day, photographs taken by Michel Lambeth and his contemporaries supported this idealized view of successful integration and happy co-existence between immigrants and Canadians." Says who? I certainly did not see this in the photographs in the exhibition. Lambeth was a professional who took photographs, good photographs, on assignment. I doubt that he even printed his own work, which was likely done by the publisher or a lab. They would have had to have better contrast (values from black to white) than the photographs in the exhibition to be successfully printed in a commercial magazine such as the *Star Weekly* let alone a newspaper. There are portraits of black men printed so darkly in the exhibition as to rob them of their identity and hence their humanity. When you work as a photojournalist you usually try to identify the people in your photographs for publication yet hardly anyone is named in the photographs in the exhibition. Even the photograph printed on the booklet by Ms Antoncic is printed backwards either that or the one in the exhibition is backwards. Either way the picture on the booklet although smaller has better contrast than print in exhibition and it looks the better for it.

It is beginning to sound as if I did not like this exhibition, but that is not true. Michel Lambeth was a very good photographer. His vision, indeed, his humanity, is present in every photograph in the exhibition. I tend to forget at times how powerful black and white images can be. Photographs such as these by Lambeth stop time in its tracks. Artists live in their time and their art reflects their time. It is not fair or useful to take current ideas, such as post-modern musings, and inflict them on the art and artists of half a century ago. Art history is history and it cannot always be to our liking. History is often messy, but we sure as hell need to know if we are going to have any future. This exhibition was organized by the Art

Gallery of Hamilton and the photographs are from their collection. It is too bad that there was not a complete catalogue of the exhibition (with better contrast in photographs), as this work deserves to be seen.

Virgil Hammock

HALIFAX, NS

PICTURED

IMAGE & OBJECT IN CANADIAN SCULPTURE

Art Gallery of Nova Scotia
1723 Hollis Street
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3C8
Tel: 902 424-7542

December 8, 2007
to March 2, 2008

Ray Cronin's official title has seen a few changes since this exhibition's inception over a year ago: from Curator to Head Curator he has most recently, with Jeffery Spalding's departure to Calgary, become Acting Director of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia.

"Douglas Crimp's article *Pictures* written in the early 1980's was an inspiration," Cronin explains over the phone. "I am interested in sculptural problems of representation. With Modernism it is internal. The logic is internal. Sculpture does not stand for anything else than itself. Richard Serra's work exemplifies that- but can it (sculpture) point to something else? With Post Modernism and in this case the sculptors of the Halifax school, imagery is used to present ideas symbolically."

Pictured features over 50 artworks by 12 Canadian artists (Jane Buyers, Thierry Delva, David Diviney, Dennis Gill, Alexander Graham, John Greer, David R. Harper, Steve Higgins, Cal Lane, Glen MacKinnon, Vanessa Paschakarnis, and Colleen Wolstenholme), whose training and/or practice connects them to the East Coast.

Colleen Wolstenholme's *Shrouded Figure*, a cast concrete representation of a woman wearing a burka, greets visitors on the way into the exhibition and frankly



Grey Cup Parade
Toronto, 1957
Gelatin silver print
Courtesy: Owens Art
Gallery
Mount Allison
University



Colleen Wolstenholme
Shrouded Figure
Cast concrete
Photo: Steve Farmer

demands attention. There is a long history in western sculpture of using drapery as a means revealing rather than hiding the nude female figures: representations of Aphrodite in the classical era for example. The burka depicted is specific to a region in southern Afghanistan and the sculpture is not quite life-size, reaching just above my waist. This makes me uncomfortable. A bit of research reveals the artist's intent: civilians die regularly in this highly volatile area and payments are made to compensate families. Women are considered locally to be worth 3/4ths of a man, hence the size of the sculpture. Looking at the oil painting of close-up of fishnet stockings one of 4 in the *Camouflesh* series, also by the same artist, it becomes apparent she is examining power structures both at home and abroad that affect women globally.

The room is pleasantly full. There is a sense of walking into a strange menagerie: Gills snakes, Harper's circle of beavers and embroidered pelts, Grahams galvanized steel lobster traps—monumental and empty, even Greer's giant thorns have a certain fanglike presence. Higgins's submarines are like a strange school of fish.

Thierry Delva's piece titled *David and Goliath* in the far right corner catches my eye. It is comprised of a table made of steel and black lacquered wood with an inset television displaying a looped video of an ultrasound of the artist's heart. On the table stands a new steel refrigerator. A silhouette of Michael Angelo's David has been cut directly

into its door rendering it useless as well as displaying its white molded interior. Delva seems to challenge the viewer to examine preconceived notions of what is sculpture. On the wall 15 electrocardiograms titled *Drawings from the Heart*; Delva thinks about a person for 15 or 20 seconds while the machine records its data. He has chosen the top 15 stars from People Magazine's 2007 sexiest people list. It is a refreshing twist on the notion of a heartthrob.

Cal Lane continues her exploration of lace and metal this time applying her signature process to oil cans transforming the object in a way that makes it beautiful, and made me consider the frailty of a global system based on a non-renewable resource.

Leaving the exhibition, I realise that the works are not copies of specific things. Delva's David isn't an exact replica but instead the popular image we have of it, Gills snakes aren't specific snakes, more a notion of slithering. They are conveyors of the idea of the thing and by being one step removed, invest new meaning into them.

Sophie Pilipchuk

LONDON, UK

MATTHEW SMALL

THIS IS ENGLAND

Leonard Street Gallery
73 A Leonard St
London
EC2A 4QS
Tel.: + 44 (0) 207 033 99 77
www.tlsg.co.uk
info@tlsg.co.uk

Matthew Small is following in the proud and irreverent tradition of urban artists very few of whom end up showing their works in art galleries. Some, like Jean-Paul Basquiat made that transition only to fall for the trappings of idolatry, hypocrisy and drugs that come with fame; others, like the quasi-incognito character Banksy, continue to eschew commercial spaces for the endless canvas of street walls, building façades and sidewalks, their fame as elusive as their persona.

Matt Small may be showing in galleries, his art, nevertheless, is intrinsically linked with the street. His paintings are done on found material: fragments of sheet metal, boiler covers, filing cabinets, pieces of cardboard, and even a discarded Ikea cabinet has been disassembled and used by the artist to create a series of faces from a nearby estate.

Many of his paints are also gathered locally: household gloss, poster paints, all applied in a unique way, in a style unlike any other, at once raw and sophisticated, indisputably contemporary if not futuristic.

With every element of the paintings being a found object (subject, material and image), Small portrays people as truly products of their environment.

The street is also where he finds his models, wandering the urban landscape of his native Kent with a video camera, capturing the many faces of the people that call it home. A BP portrait prize nominee, Small has a thoroughly personal approach to portrait painting; what he seeks are not the famous, you will not find a Marilyn Monroe in any of his works. Instead he focuses on the anonymous faces of urban youth, disaffected and defiant.

Small's style lends itself ideally to the nature of his subject matter. The faces, with their unblinking gaze and silent yet powerful demeanor, are constructed in the most unusual way, painted, as it were, from the inside out. The viewer is first drawn to the thick, textured swirl of colours that meld, overlap, merge with each other, seeping, flowing out it seems from somewhere beyond the image, coagulating, almost organically taking the shape of a face, its features so suddenly real, that it takes one aback.

In some portraits, like that of *Dean* or *Barry*, Small quiets the palette, opting instead for monochromatic greys, and with a great economy of both colour and gesture, produces emotionally charged faces, at once rebellious and vulnerable.



Big Z (2007)
76 cm x 91 cm
Mixed paints on found metal

In others, like *Asian Boy with Cap*, he goes for a more complex composition, splitting the sitter's profile and canvas, framing the image in muted rectangular patches in sharp contrast with the heavily textured face.

But it is Small's signature paintings on metal and concrete that are a true *tour de force*. Portraits of *Moses, Terry* or *Big Z* literally jump off the walls of the gallery, pushed out with an unseen force yet held in check by the dense layer of paint that oozes, bleeds, seeps out of tiny crevices, melds and shape-shifts imperceptibly.

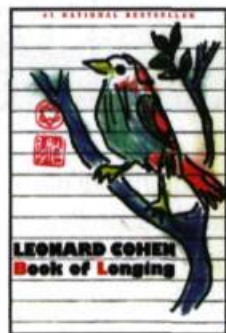
The gestural, almost violent and relentless application of paint is in perfect tandem with the facial expressions of the models, defiant, unfazed by the artist's gaze, excised from the detritus of their surroundings. For a moment, from under his frenetic brushstrokes, they emerge almost beautiful, shining bright and strong. In Small's portraits they are urban heroes; invisible to passersby, here they hold court with dignity, no matter how long ago forsaken.

Dorota Kozinska

BOOKS

BOOK OF LONGING

By Leonard Cohen
McClelland & Stewart
Drawings and decorations:
Leonard Cohen
\$21.00



Leonard Cohen needs no introduction. This Montreal-born poet and singer is an international icon, with a career that began in 1956 with the publication of *Let Us Compare Mythologies*.

Half a century later, with eleven books and seventeen albums under his belt, Cohen is "beginning to ache in the places he used to play", to quote from one of his compositions.

His latest publication, mournfully titled *Book of Longing*, is a selection of poems never before published in book form, in which he poignantly traces the passage of time and the merciless encroaching of old age.

What sets this book apart are the drawings and page decorations by Cohen, adding a new visual element to his poetry.

It is far from unusual for writers to seek expression in drawing and painting, and many have been quite accomplished at both disciplines.

Friedrich Dürrenmatt (1921-1990), the German-Swiss writer and playwright, was also a self-taught painter, who wrote in his testament:

"My pictures and drawings belong to my *œuvre*. They should stay together, should be exhibited and made accessible to the public". And so they were.

Russian filmmaker Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein was a very good and highly original draughtsman, producing numerous drawings throughout his lifetime, parallel with his cinematic career.

Cohen's drawings are no more than visual notations, often funny and whimsical but always with a note of melancholy so familiar to his writing.

These are not pages that combine text with illustration, intertwined as in the works of William Blake. Cohen merely enhances the words, extends them as it were into a visual field, a realm in which he is clearly a novice.

His tentative line sketches revolve around and echo the artist's main themes of self, women and nature. Self-effacing portraits, in which he depicts himself as a sad, old man, are sometimes accompanied by written notes, philosophical reflections on what it means to age.

"We become frail and people see us naked who are forbidden to see us naked," runs without punctuation next to one drawing.

The vulnerability of these visual annotations is in contrast with Cohen's terse, often cynical voice. They bring forth, illustrate as it were, his basic humanity and

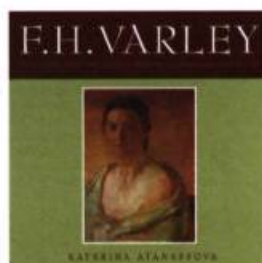
humility, and are at times painfully expressive in their linear simplicity.

Women with sensuous shoulders, tiny birds on tree branches, Oriental decorations... they punctuate the pages, offering, allowing an intimate, albeit reserved, peek into a hidden corner of the artist's psyche.

Dorota Kozinska

F.H. VARLEY PORTRAITS INTO THE LIGHT

by Katerina Atanassova
Toronto, Dundurn Press, 2007
291 pages
Illustrated with index
\$60.00



Frederick Varley was that Group of Seven artist who likewise painted portraits, partially out of necessity, but how he painted them. Varley may indeed be Canada's most accomplished portraitist of the 20th century, aside from a few others like Paraskeva Clark, and Miller Brittain, for he contextualized his subject like Augustus John, tweaking them with a spiritual texture and aura. There was nothing wooden about Varley, who likewise painted memorable scenes of the West Coast. They still resonate now. In the words of Lily Kolten, Director of Canada's National Portrait Gallery, an institution that collaborated with Markham's Varley Art Gallery for the publication of this book, Varley was an artist who historically stood "between the tender insight of Ozias Leduc in the nineteenth century and the unique expressionism of Harold Town in the modern era." The expansive vistas Varley captured on the west coast where he spent time, and where nature was just outside the city/town at the time, had a Dharma Bums spiritual solace worthy of a Jack Kerouac on the road type. Varley was a northerner who loved the social as much as nature as

Varley Art Museum curator and writer Katerina Atanassova makes clear.

We sense the same spirit of mysticism in Varley's portraits—the subject of this book F.H. Varley *Portraits into the Light* as in *Night Ferry*, *Vancouver* or the portrait *Dharana* (ca. 1932) which is positively New Age before new age. Varley builds this mystical link between the portrait and the landscape for good reason just as Edwin Holgate did with his females in the landscape, whose bodies were as sculpted and undulating as the birch and beech trees that surrounded them. The society portraits Varley painted are well represented in this book including Chester and Alice Massey, Sir George Parkin (Vincent Massey's father-in-law), and all this outlines the difficult terrain, a landscape of commissions that Varley negotiated with great capacity, while painting the more personal portraits of strength and vigour of women such as Vera, or Joan (Fairley). The Varley relation to another Canadian portraitist, namely Barker Fairley, the scholar who edited *The Rebel*, a precursor to *Canadian Forum*, that published early group of Seven imagery are well documented here. In an interview with Laurence Sabbath in Montreal we are told, Varley mentioned that Fairley actually paid him for the portrait he had done of him, and this when times were tough.

Varley portrait sketches fare as well as the oils and look lively, as we see in one depicting Kathleen Calhoun (1924) in this book. Some are more complete and others less, but the transcendent spirit Varley communicates (as Jock MacDonald did) is ever present. Highly informative, this book documents Varley's portrait work as no book ever has, and includes his northern visit, a journey that produced a published collaboration with Edmund Carpenter and Robert Flaherty titled *Eskimo* (1959). This book fills a major gap in our knowledge of Varley's output, namely the social side of this painter. While Varley is usually recognized for his landscapes, his portraits continue to be re-evaluated as they are exceedingly accomplished, hence this worthy tribute.

John K. Grande.