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NEW YORK

EDVARD MUNCH:
THE MODERN LIFE
OF THE SOULMuseum of Modern Art
February 19th – May 8th

Self-Portrait with Cigarette, 1895
Oil on canvas
43 1/2 x 33 11/16" (110.5 x 85.5 cm)
The National Museum of Art,
Architecture, and Design/National
Gallery, Oslo. (c) 2006 The Munch
Museum/The Munch-Ellingsen
Group/Artists Rights Society (ARS),
New York

Nature looms large in Edvard Munch's cosmology of life. Angst-ridden and tinged with a real life tragic sense, the symbolist nerves of his paintbrush go beyond any simple expressionist tendencies in his art. And in no show has the symbolist edge to Munch's art ever been so easily and clearly evident as in *The Modern Life of the Soul*. One sense the links to James Ensor, to Maurice Denis, even Jan Toorop. This is the first major show of Munch's work in New York in almost 30 years, this is a thematic exhibition that has great depth. Munch was a source for many, and his Scandinavian isolation, his marginal stance as a Norwegian in Paris, or Berlin, or in Norway, was very comparable to that of Canadian artists like Emily Carr. Munch played a painterly role in exposing the internal matrices of society as they exist in the human psyche. It is these

existential tendrils that continuously creep up on and engulf Munch's muse, who is largely unobtainable, or perplexing, or tempting, or engulfing, fatalistic. Baselitz, Immendorf, Penck, all the German neo-Expressionists in fact, owe some psychic and painterly textural debt to Edvard Munch.

Women were a state of mind for Munch, and if they were a reality, usually trouble. He established new grounds for the social condition as a subject for art, just as Strindberg and Ibsen did with theatre and writing in general. The social was psychological à la Sigmund Freud. We sense that the men and women in his paintings are swept away by life. They have no distance and distance is all that saves them sometimes. They are controlled by fate, unseen forces, and happenstance. Munch's *The Scream* is still as potent an image of what modernization and technological change can do to the human psyche as any tract on social anomie by Max Weber, or Karl Marx. While the painting was stolen, and is still being sought after, this show includes two 1895 lithographs based on the image, one heightened with watercolour by Munch. *The Scream* defines a certain sense of madness and anomie that is so 20th century. The painting equally establishes a painterly paradigm whereby these sentiments become legitimate terrain for future modernist painters to deal with as a subject. As the chief curator and organizer of this exhibition Kynaston McShine comments, "Edvard Munch is the modern poet and philosopher in painting. At the same time, he is passionately emotional, perhaps more so than any other modern artist... His exploration of human experience reflects an existential agitation... It is Munch's great triumph that in so many works he is able to pictorialize an extraordinary range of intense human passion and in so doing delineate for the viewer the life of the modern soul."

The state(s) of mind that engages us all is part of an ongoing force called progress. In Munch's Victorian Norway, and the City of Kristiania (Oslo) in particular, classes were contained, and religion played a role in containing people at all levels of

society. The social conditions(s) for working people were not good, particularly the new urban working class, emasculated in Munch famous paintings of workers on their way home. Unlike Kathe Kollwitz, Munch captured the social anomie, the unconscious fears and trepidations. We sense these in *Angst* (1894) or *Evening on Karl Johan Street* (1892). From summer nights under a moonlit sky to end of day workers returning home, all Munch's paintings speak of life. Life is a stage, and a stage in a cycle of life where people are constricted and conditioned by their social roles, and eventually overcome, to eventually deal with their own mortality.

Fate, fashion, and destiny are unforgiving, and equally testify to the human condition. What of the social order. Everyone has been constricted, and cannot move beyond the confines of their particular existence. The suffering is largely unexpressed, and accepted. Two paintings that speak of this best are *Self Portrait, Between Clock and Bed* (1940-42) where we see the aging Munch manoeuvring his way between clock and bed, facing his life. Other works likewise "place" each figure as if they were actors in a play, and they have no choice as to their place. *Death in the Sick Room* (1893) offers little hope. A sickly green colour and palour invades the scene. It is like a Strindberg play, and relates to Ingmar Bergman's later films in the same way. The faces become structures, the clothes a form of entrapment, shrouds of the body. Basically nothing has changed. The metaphysics of life and art, and the cycle of life, are intertwined with technology ...

We lose our sense of self, anomie as designed by technology is a state akin to that Munch identified with. And yet Munch studied with the landscape painter Christian Krohg, and like Canada, Norway was plagued by the landscape idiom in painting. Like the Canadian painter Emily Carr, who painted landscapes, or figures within a landscape and caught the spiritual and psychic power of nature, Munch communicated a strong sentiment of links to nature. Nature became a backdrop for the human condition whether the theme was jealousy, melancholy, the stages of life, or the dance of life. And for Munch what was a spiritual burden came from his family's seafaring and religious background. He considered this legacy as being like "Two forces like priests and seafaring folk are no laughing matter!"

Born at Løten in Hedmark, Norway December 12, 1863 Munch encountered much sickness in the family, and death. When the family moved to Grünerløkka a Kristiania suburb, after his mother died, his Aunt Karen taught Munch to draw, and to cut silhouettes out of paper and make landscapes out of moss and straw. It is Munch's incredible sensitivity to the world and life in general that makes his art a true success. He expressed his life's experience with a simplicity and a sincerity, colouring it all intensely. Even his Self Portraits which recur throughout this exhibition are endearing for their penetrating gaze on the artist's life. We see an early realist portrait from 1886 where the artist has an intense gaze, a powerful lithograph *Self Portrait (with Skeleton Arm)* from 1896, *Self Portrait with Cigarette* (1895) which has



Ashes, 1894
Oil on canvas
47 7/16 x 55 1/2" (120.5 x 141 cm)
The National Museum of Art, Architecture,
and Design/National Gallery, Oslo. (c) 2006
The Munch Museum/The Munch-Ellingsen
Group/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

a depth and darkness as if the artist were standing on the edge of a nightmare, the unforgettable *Self Portrait in Hell* (1903) and of course *Self Portrait Between Clock and Bed* (1940-42)... A greater unity, simplicity, and more resolved vision accompanied many of the later works including the murals he made for the University of Oslo (not in this New York show). Many of the portraits are here, including ONE of Polish poet and writer *Stanislaw Przybyszewski* (1893-94), *Julius Meier-Graefe* (ca. 1895), *Dagny Juel Przybyszewska* (1893), *Professor Daniel Jacobsen* (1908) and even German philosopher *Friedrich Nietzsche* (1906) in a seldom seen and very large charcoal, pastel and tempera on paper sketch.

Munch's incredible facility with the woodcut medium, and his truly daring innovations with the medium are fascinating. Many capture not only the subject but the woodgrain material. The wood and the subject cross-over to become poignant, extremely modern expressions of emergent modernism. Munch innovated with jigsaw cut out sections in a single composition so that he could print in one go and entire woodcut. Each section of the jigsaw could be coloured and fit together before printing... Interestingly many of the lithographs, etchings and woodcuts in the present show which includes over 130 works covering the period 1880 to the year of his death, 1944, have been painted on by Munch. Some of the prints are experimental and single copies. Still others variations on a theme hand touched by Munch. An amazingly contemporary and seldom seen woodcut titled *Kiss in the Field* (1943) carved shortly before Munch died, is a truly sincere evocation of youthful affection and love. Coloured brown the two figures are subtly carved in outline, as is the sky and shoreline silhouette. Otherwise, though, the wood grain engulfs the composition. For all the human drama, in art as in life, nature ultimately takes over. It is Munch's incredible sensitivity to the world and the theatre of life that makes his art a true success. His life's experience was expressed so effectively. For those who have the chance this show provides a rare opportunity to see a large selection of Munch's art in North America.

John K. Grande

GOYA'S LAST WORKS THE FRICK COLLECTION

1 East 70th St.
to May 14th
www.frick.org
Tel.: (212) 288-0700



Set in the magnificent ambiance of the Frick Collection this seldom seen showing of Goya's last works is both fascinating and provides viewers with the chance to see seldom seen carbon black and watercolour or ink on ivory miniatures by then 78 year old Francisco de Goya (1746-1828). Usually used for painting miniature portraits, the ivory flats were adapted by Goya for freestyle sketch-like works. Goya's process involved blackening the ivory, to then drop water on their surface, and then reshape the smears into faces, torsos, figural compositions. These bright illuminating sketches, often with a feeling of incompleteness are very lively and quite unique amid Goya's oeuvre for the light projects from beneath the depiction. They reveal Goya's acute eye for detail and capture the social event in a lively manner. These include *Reclining Nude, Monk and Old Woman, Two Children Looking at a Book, Maja and Celstina and Man Looking for Fleas in his Shirt* (all dated 1824-25).

Also included in the show are the Bordeaux series of lithographs by Goya of the bullfight theme, done shortly after Aloys Senefelder invented Lithography between 1796 and 1799 to circulate his musical scores and texts of his plays. Though the *Bordeaux lithographs* works are more graphic than Goya's paintings of the same theme. Executed in 1825, they communicate the immediacy of the event and the crowd through Goya's superb draughtsmanship. The

scenes of daily life, are incredible for the veracity of Goya's penetrating social analysis, all done with a pencil on paper. A poor old man carries a woman seated in a box on his back in one such image, and we see both

sets of eyes staring out at us – the poor man and the wealthy woman). Another has a beggar in Bordeaux (probably a disabled war veteran) wheeling around in a vehicle by hand, a precursor of the wheelchair. The image counters with an affirmative and hopeful resilience of the humanity at its best. And there is a roller skater out of balance his arms extended outwards and leg raised... always such sensitive lines, compositions, an eye for what matters, what we identify

with. Another captures a man with a whip about to enact pain on his wife... And then there are the self portraits... These include *Self-Portrait in Three-Cornered Hat* (1780-92) where Goya looms large, a robust fashionable character with hat and shiny buttons and the later *Self-Portrait after Illness* (1792-3) a fine gray wash of a more feeble man, who questions his situation and looks out at the viewer with dishevelled hair, and anxious face...

Goya's Last Works captures the final four years artistic output of Goya's life. This show and these works reveal that, despite an infirm condition and a self-imposed exile in Bordeaux, France, Francisco de Goya was still producing some very vital, intriguing art, and not for posterity. With an endless curiosity about life, he faced death through art.

John K. Grande

FREDERICTON

ART IN DISPUTE

July 1st, 2005 - March 5, 2006
Beaverbrook Art Gallery
703 Queen St.
Tel.: (506) 458-2028
www.beaverbrookartgallery.org

Art in dispute is very likely the most important exhibition the Beaverbrook Art Gallery has ever mounted, though all the works in the



show are from its own collection. There is the rub! The gallery is in dispute over these works with the Beaverbrook Foundation (United Kingdom) and the Beaverbrook Canadian Foundation. Numbering over two hundred, the works in this exhibition are the very heart of the gallery collection. To take these works away would be like a heart attack. If not fatal, it would be a very serious loss to the institution and its reputation as a major gallery. The issue is money, though the two foundations would argue that it is stewardship of the collection. The stakes are very high as the art whose ownership is being questioned is collectively worth many millions of dollars, and includes such renowned artists as Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510) and Lucian Freud.

It is necessary to go back to the history of the Beaverbrook Art Gallery to try to understand the nature of the dispute. The gallery was build and paid for by Lord Beaverbrook to exhibit his collection. When the gallery opened in 1959 it did just that and, indeed, it even housed an apartment for Lord Beaverbrook who took a very personal hand in the affairs of "his" gallery. Of course, over the course of next nearly fifty years, the role of the gallery has changed. It is now considered New Brunswick's provincial art gallery and its collection is considerably larger and more diverse than at the beginning. The gallery mounts numerous exhibitions each year, being a showcase for regional, national and international art. The gallery still differs from other provincial art galleries in that it is for the most part privately funded.

Matters were not helped when at the beginning of the present dispute over ownership, the foundation

implied that Fredericton was not an important enough city to house some of the art works in question. Civic pride quickly lined up to back the gallery's bid to hold on to the works. *The Telegraph Journal* (owned by the powerful Irving family) is a sponsor of the exhibition and as publisher, James C. Irving stated; "This newspaper feels strongly about where these paintings belong. They may be the envy of art collectors around the world, but they are an asset of New Brunswickers." In reality if the 211 works in question were removed from the gallery and returned to the United Kingdom it would be very unlikely that they would find a new home in public collections unless the galleries were to find the funds to buy them. The most likely place they would end up would be on an auction floor. Their unity as a collection would be lost forever.

This collection does reflect the personal taste of Lord Beaverbrook which was very traditional. He did not like abstract or non-objective art. That not to say that he did not support modern artists. There are a large number of works by Graham Sutherland. Other modernists include Lucien Freud, Salvador Dali, Jean Cocteau, Jacob Epstein, Paul Nash, Ben Nicholson and Henry Moore to name a few artists who were contemporary to Lord Beaverbrook and in his collection, but in the main the works are historical and British. Beaverbrook curator, Rachel Brodie Venart, choose to present *Art in Dispute* in Salon style showing all the works in one room with painting hung from floor to ceiling. This work very well given the traditional emphasis of many of the paintings in this exhibition. Lord Beaverbrook stated during his lifetime that he was in favour of all the works in the collection being shown in their entirety all the time. He would have been very happy with this exhibition, but less so with the reasons behind its presentation.

It's hard to second guess the reasoning of the dead, but I have no doubt that Lord Beaverbrook meant Fredericton to be the home of his collection forever. He saw his heirs as custodians of this desire and did not expect his collection to fall into their hands to do with as they might please. But the devil is in the details and that's why this matter is in the courts. Collections like this were always tied to

a great many problems such as tax matters. Certainly things were different in 1959 than they are now. Lord Beaverbrook did have a hands-on attitude about "his" gallery. Gifts of art to the Crown with their generous tax advantages did not exist then. At that time the gallery was a private gallery. Beaverbrook loved Canada and his home province. He wanted to leave something of quality to New Brunswick and his collection and a building to house it was that gift.

Art in dispute has been on display for nearly a year. It is the most popular exhibition that the gallery has ever mounted and as I said earlier its most important exhibition. I hope that it was not the last chance for Canadian viewers to see these works as a collection in the gallery that was built to house it. Now it is up to the courts and they could in their wisdom rule against the gallery. If that is the case Canada and New Brunswick will be a poorer place. It is good when a gallery in a small city like Fredericton can be home to a collection of important international and historic art. The Beaverbrook Art Gallery is fighting hard to hold on to its birth right. It is a fight in which all Canadians have a stake.

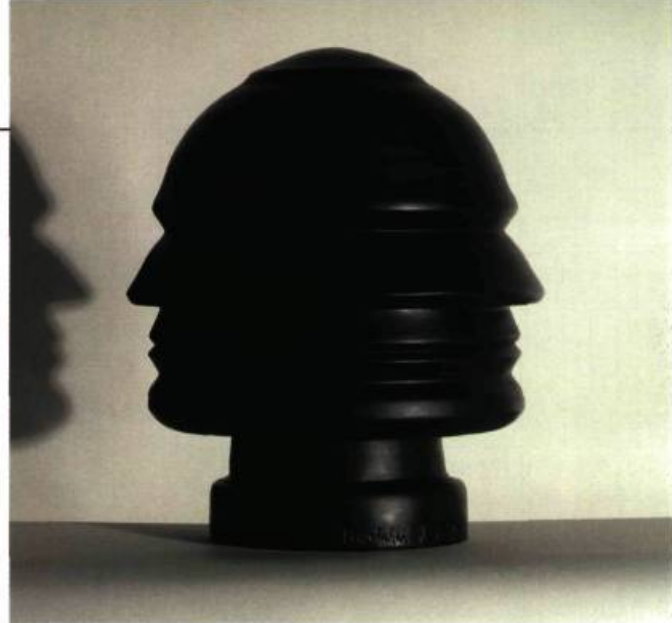
Virgil Hammock

MONTREAL

IL MODO ITALIANO: ITALIAN DESIGN AND AVANT-GARDE IN THE 20th CENTURY

May 4 - August 27, 2006
Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

Il Modo Italiano is an ambitious and compelling overview of the currents of Italian art and design through the 20th century, segmented into aesthetic eras: *Boundless Optimism*, *Violence and Speed*, *Monumentality and Rationalism*, among others that, delineate distinct segments of time and their cultural production. Each era is accompanied by a lengthy wall didactic taking into account the political and economic cauldron in which it brewed. *Boundless Optimism* starts the exhibition off with the Art-Nouveau-influenced *Stile Florale* works that reflect the comparatively late accumulation of industrial wealth



Renato Bertelli
Lastra a Signa, Firenze, 1900 - Lastra a
Signa 1971
Testa di Mussolini (Profilo continuo)
[Head of Mussolini (Continuous Profile)],
1933
Patinated terracotta
H. 34 cm; D. 27 cm
Mark - Museo d'Arte Moderna e
Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto

in Italy. Labor-intensive Symbolist paintings and intricately worked floral designs on furniture evidence the crushing lushness of the previous century, but with a typical Italian willingness to push the matter, as if barking at the art-historical *barista* were enough to make him stop and take notice.

Pointing the way to the futurists, Carlo Bugatti's pieces stand out as a conceptual assertion in the midst of a bourgeois aesthetic dialogue of tasteful affluence. It is an assertion, mind you, in exquisite materials - a writing table and chair (that was part of an entire "Snail Room" during an early-century international design exposition in Torino) is covered completely in parchment, decorated by hand: the tattoo-like decoration lends an aged, pearl-like effect to the swirling forms. Encountering Futurism in *Violence and Speed* is like a breath of fresh air after a lumbering, ponderous period of affluent dandyism. Confronting the viewer upon entering is Umberto Boccioni's iconic *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (1913), a bronze figure running through 4-dimensional space, tufts of sloped wriggling meat tail the muscular movements of the runner, like wet stop-action photography.

An abrupt break from the past, manifested aesthetically, socially and politically, is evidenced by a futurist visionary rigor and an exhilarating nascent fascism whose ideas had echoes throughout the rest of the 20th century. The exhibition is a rare chance to see perspective drawings from the architectural visionary Antonio Sant'Elia, whose fanciful but strangely prescient architectural imaginings from 1914 speak to a future of gigantism, intricate mass

transport and mechanized living. Along with paintings, furniture and textiles from the proto-cubist Giacomo Balla, throbbing cityscapes from Carlo Carrà and paintings from Giorgio de Chirico (four of which are thankfully included in this exhibition), this period of time in Italy sets the tone for subsequent aesthetic heroism and intrepid investigation: this was also a time of cool fascism, void of Teutonic ankle-slapping lederhosen and neo-classical monstrosities. It was Bauhaus that inspired the *Casa del Fascio* in Italy.

Renato Bertelli's *Head of Mussolini* (1933) is a fast-crafted, machined-looking sculpture of a continuous profile, a black cartoon-like head of a dictator that seems to spin at the speed of a top. The density and blackness adds a gravity that speaks to the common face of dictators: a mélange of the comical and menacing, like a Chaplin moustache on Hitler, funny uniforms with death-heads on the epaulettes, or W's fratboy smirk.

After war and reconstruction, a vibrant avant-garde tradition is evidenced by a dense collection of good work: the duchampian Piero Manzoni with his *Merda d'artista* (Artist's Shit) No. 68 ("freshly produced and tinned in May 1961") rests among flashy Olivetti typewriters, plastic TV's and a pint-sized Fiat Nuova 500 from 1957. A couple of Lucio Fontana's "Spatial Concept"

paintings (one color, one slashed canvas surface), while included, feel oddly flat and gimmicky in an exhibition that evidences such exuberance in all other fields. In the post-modern arena of the exhibition, more effective work, such as *Untitled* (1989) by Arte Povera artist Jannis Kounellis refreshes the viewer and brings him into a more familiar era. Large iron sheets sporting pyrite rocks wrapped in lead humanize the previous eras of mechanized exuberance in the exhibition. Outlandish furniture, like the excellent *Proust's Armchair* (1978) by Alessandro Mendini revitalize old forms. And works by the three 'C's' – Enzo Cucchi, Sandro Chia and Roberta Clemente (and notably, with an absent wall-label, Mimmo Paladino) remind one that the mine of creative endeavor in Italy is inexhaustible.

Cameron Skene

MARTIAL LEBRAS: MOISE SELON MARTIAL

Until September 2006
Les Impatients
100 rue Sherbrooke est
www.impatients.ca



Art Brut, or outsider art as it is often called, is not vastly popular or appreciated, as it was in the days of Dubuffet, although even then its appearance was fraught with controversy. Referring to art produced by children, loners and those with mental problems, it has a unique feel, at once gay and poignant. It can take many forms, from colourful doodles to complicated compositions, from abstract shapes to realistic depictions. But always, it is permeated with a childlike simplicity and abandon. All this is true of the work of Martial Lebras, a self-styled artist and patient at the centre for therapeutic arts,

which houses the Les Impatients gallery. A regular participant in the art workshops offered by the centre, he has produced an impressive body of work, including the series illustrating the life of Moses now being shown. The project, begun in 1998, has taken the Brittany-born Lebras close to four years to complete, and resulted in some 60 works on paper, 30 of which are now on display.

Inspired as much by the Bible as by Cecil B. De Mille's 1956 film *The Ten Commandments*, these colourful illustrations will bring a smile to any viewer. Imbued both with humour and piety, they begin with a delicate crayon drawing of the child Moses being floated down the Nile in a basket, as the Pharaoh's family bathes nearby. As the tale progresses, so does Lebras's self-assurance, visible in the choice of gouache as medium, its fluidity adapted to his irreverent style, and the strong colours that mark the works. A deeply religious man, whose family adopted the Book of Mormon as their beacon, he approaches his drawings with touching dedication, and equally moving attention to the historical sequence of events.

This exhibition has all the prerequisite images; the plagues that fell on the Egyptians, sent by an angry God, the conversation with God on Mt. Sinai and the appearance of the stone tables with the commandments. There is Moses descending the mountain, his white beard luminous against the dark night sky, while a carnival takes place below him, and Moses waving a joyful good-bye before ascending to heavens. This Moses is no muscular Charlton Heston, but a simplified figure in a long robe, marked by a flowing white beard and wild grey hair. We keep looking for him in all the images, though he appears in only a few. One scene depicts hail bombarding the city (one of the plagues), that covers rectangular structures and grinning sphinxes in white dots. In another Miriam shows off her most beautiful dress to her husband. Moses is not there at the death of the pharaoh, a dark, ominous drawing with black and white skulls that decorate the roof of the catafalque, and where Anubis, the jackal-headed funerary deity of ancient Egypt stands sentinel over the body of Ramses. This complicated scene has a range of symbols

yet does not lose the main character of the deceased pharaoh in all the visual complexity. Lebras exhibits a sense of abandon and artistic license in the scene depicting Moses leading the Jews out of Egypt. This drawing is teeming with people led by Moses holding a staff, a tiny figure barely visible in the bottom of the composition. Some are in chariots, others on camel, but most are on foot, and all are flooding out. The slanted, near cinematic perspective adds a sense of great urgency. Most moving, is the lonely image of Moses traversing the desert, a bent, crooked figure seen from the back, his arms limp by his side, a searing orange sun glowing enormous above him, the yellow desert dotted with cacti stretching endlessly ahead. This is a mightily tragic drawing, painful and dramatic despite its simplified, even simplistic, execution. And therein lies the magic of Art Brut!

Dorota Kosinska

ZAO WOU-KI: PRINTS FROM 1956 TO 1994 & INTERNATIONAL PRINTS

Galerie Simon Blais
May 3rd-June 3rd
5420 boul. Saint-Laurent
Tel.: (514) 849-1165
www.galeriesimonblais.com

Since 1979, Galerie Simon Blais has strived to promote the art of the print and in this current exhibition, the efforts to support it are well displayed. A selection of past masters including Guido Molinari, Sam Francis, Pierre Soulages, Yves Gaultier, Jean McEwen, are presented as well as a new selection of artists of a more recent era, such as Ludmila Armata and Marc Seguin.



Zao Wou-Ki is the principle artist in this group exhibition. One of a handful of truly foreign expatriates, who settled in Paris after World War Two, he made an international reputation almost from the beginning. In his essay from 1922 on Chinese art, the historian Elie Faure remarked "the essence of Chinese painting is that it moves from the abstract to the concrete, whereas Western art starts from the concrete and moves into the abstract". This anecdote illustrates the uniquely Oriental vision that Wou-Ki imprinted on his work. Known mostly for his calligraphically colourist oils, this selection of 19 small prints carries on many of the same techniques, but here, the delicacy of the medium results in a more sensitive approach to the lines and the surface of the paper. For instance, in *Petit Jardin*. (1956) Wou-Ki etches a micro world of tiny plant forms into an over-all green wash. The forms move ecstatically in an energy field reminiscent of Miro-like abstraction. In yet another work *Sans Titre* (1975) the maturity of Wou-Ki's absorption of Western painterly influences is apparent. Almost like weather patterns, the inks are pushed into a mass of gesture, line and waves. The overall result achieves a thematic harmony.

In a space designated as a showroom for the strictly black and white print, Simon Blais offers the eye a banquet of works done in this austere palette. The most eye grabbing is a recent diptych titled *Extension 1* and *Extension 2* by the American sculptor Richard Serra, that reveals his still contentious trademark approach and delivers it well. Quite simply, their bold and decisive curves overpower the paper like a truck tire skidding at a stoplight. Juxtaposed right beside Serra's diptych is a very primal and gestural recent large scale etching by Ludmila Armata titled *Exoneration*. Here, a tree root shaped form flexes its mighty growth up to the sky, alluding to the poetic power of form over space. Armata's sense of the spatial relationship between positive and negative is highlighted here within a simple gesture.

A work by contemporary Marc Seguin (*Forêt*, 2004) is a simple collage of a white cube shaped house in an expanded field of trees etched and shown in black. The result is a paean to loneliness and a dislocation of

identity. An early Yves Gautier pictorially resembles a Paul Klee in that it uses the figure as a construct for an idea. The title, *Pièce Concertante* (1959) predates the painter's exodus into pure abstraction.

Of the many others included in the show, Violaine Gaudreau's *Vibration* (2001) has an obelisk shape balancing on a point in space, with the luscious blue-blacks weaving in and around the prominent form. It is strong work, and brings to mind the *Broken Obelisk* sculpture by Barnett Newman. In fact, many of these works were done in the creative heydays of the 1960s, and the art of the print, because of its reliance on drawing, continues to reaffirm many of these forgotten masters of the past, and provides a new entrance through which future masters may conceivably build their visions.

Isak Elliott Augustine

MAY DAY MONTREAL TO MAY DAY LONDON, ENGLAND



Photo credit: Joyce Ryckman and Nancy Petry, 2006

Montreal artists and members of the public celebrated May Day from Ile Ste-Hélène with a spectacular display of Tibetan prayer flags. The many coloured flags were unfurled in a gesture of solidarity with artists around the world, and to celebrate the opening of the international London Biennale. Artists in cities around the world simultaneously celebrated the May 1st event. Noted among the Montreal crowd were Nancy Petry and Joyce Ryckman, artists who have participated in the London Biennale since 2000. Filmmaker Co Hoedeman was likewise present recording a video of the event for production in the near future. Eros arrows, though invisible to the human eye, could be remote sensed

as they passed onwards over the Jacques Cartier bridge, down the St. Laurence River to the Atlantic Ocean where its merged with yet more spiritas. Directed towards Picadilly Circus where the famed Eros Statue / Fountain still stands, the invisible eros arrows presumably made it back to London, the point of origin of the event. Originally proposed by David Medalla in 1998 and now totaling over 300 artists, the Biennale organisation is not restricted to London, and plays an active part in international events such as Changing Channels season (2003) in Berlin. The May Day flagging event was inspired by the candy coloured point flags found on Maypoles and the bannered flags draped from windows and carried for celebratory May Day marches. All participating London Biennale artists were invited to bring a flag on May 1 for the opening event of The London Biennale 2006. During the London Biennial 2006 event, artists flew flags over and around London, Liverpool, Berlin, San Francisco, Sydney, Australia and many other destinations.

All of this will culminate in a hoisting of the flags on London Bridge August 31, 2006 – the official night of the closing of The 2006 London Biennale. Al Kufa Gallery in London will exhibit the Flagging Down May Day project, flags made by artists exhibited along side their proposals, images and documents of photographs on bridges on May 1 2006 around the world in all cities and locations.

John K. Grande

BRENT MCINTOSH: LANDSCAPES

To June
Galerie de Bellefeuille
1367 avenue Greene
Tel.: (514) 933-4406
www.galeriedebellefeuille.com



Landscape is one of the oldest subjects in art, and it is also close to the soul of all Canadians. From the Group of Seven's stark, stylized depictions of our country's windswept vistas to contemporary artists, landscape has played muse for our artists and each has established a different and ever-changing rapport with its persona. For Ontario painter, Brent McIntosh, the rich tapestry of the Collingwood area of Georgian Bay offers endless inspiration, seeping into his psyche as well as his brushstroke. His paintings are dense in both colour and texture, the foliage painted with assured gestures that seem to know the shapes and forms without even looking at them. The dabs of colour recall Seurat's pointillist technique, yet they are uniquely applied, their rhythm that of McIntosh, no other. Up close, they dissolve into an abstraction of hues, an enigmatic plastic universe that is as mesmerizing as the landscape that takes shape as we back away from the canvas. We are instantly transported into a thick forest, where giant trees throw wide, staccato shadows onto a leafy carpet, and where patches of sunlight glitter like small golden pools. *Bruce Trail* picks up the theme, but here the actors are slim saplings, lining up a winding path lit by a white light throwing feathery accents onto the darkened trail. Trail is just that. An overgrown passage that lures the viewer into luminescent, sepia wood so permeated with light as to sear the eye, blinding in its visual exuberance. When water makes its appearance in this great drama of nature, the paintings become ever so sensuous, tactile,

fragrant. McIntosh doesn't stray from vibrant fuchsia and ochre yellow to create the dense shrubbery and rolling hills carpeted with flowers. Their reflection on the quiet blue stream recalls both Turner and Monet, the light and the patches of colour that dance together on the edge of the banks.

Stream and *Stream 2* are Impressionistic tableaux that verge on being abstracts. An expanse of water becomes the central point of these works, and overwhelms the composition in *Stream 2*. Colours jostle and converge, forming eddies and pools of light, forever moving... They carry our eye beyond the horizon, only to draw it back to the stream's mouth, beginning the journey anew. McIntosh's landscapes are rich and sculptural, opulent images that are at once contemporary and timeless. His palette is toned down despite its richness, and the strength of his art lies primarily in the brushstrokes, which, considering the large format of the paintings, originate from an upright stance, the artist's entire body engaged in the action.

Dorota Kozinska

ST. JÉRÔME

GUY MONTPETIT: ANIMATIONS SENSIBLES

Musée d'art contemporain des Laurentides
101, place Curé-Labelle
March 12 – May 7
www.museelaurentides.ca
Tel.: (450) 432-7171



This fresh and comprehensive exposition of Montreal Pop plastic artist Guy Montpetit curated by long time Vie des Arts contributor Jules Arbec for the simple fact that it brings to our attention an inspired epoch in Quebec art is pure and simple fun. There are prints created at the Atelier Albert Dumouchel, and vivid earthy painterly compositions that include

Du Côté de l'ouest canadien (1961-62) is all it promises to be, a cornucopia of growth, semi-abstract in oranges, greens, yellows – a forest interior. Quebec audiences can revisit the Pop and conceptual art era as created by Guy Montpetit (who now lives in the Laurentians) particularly through the interestingly selected displays of notebooks, sketchpads, photos, and all the assorted paraphernalia to be found in an artist's atelier, or the maquette-like sketch of Montpetit's *Mural project for Radio Canada* (1972).

Then there are the pure Pop constructions with vivid colours, near sculptural forms, all this weaving its way pseudo-mechanically throughout Montpetit's important yet somewhat neglected Canadian Pop works. Indeed to witness a triptych of paintings from the *Le Temps de Vivre* series is to recall the universal atmosphere that Pop and conceptual generated in Canadian and Quebec art, whether Ed Zelenak's fibreglass forms, Dennis Burton's sexually charged Pop formalism, Greg Curnoe's cartoon-like illustrations or the geometric allusions, the compositional symmetries and matrices of Guy Montpetit. *Ser Machine* (1970) brings back all that aura of the liberated Jane Birken/Serge Gainsbourg *Je l'aime... moi non plus* era. Montpetit's show proves the phenomena could as readily be home grown in Quebec as imported from France or New York. Most interesting are the photos from the *États généraux de la culture Québécoise* artists' meetings where we see the young idealistic Montpetit rubbing shoulders with Armand Vaillancourt and Tony Urquhart... All this solidarity was likewise present in the *Corridor* (1976) event where a document records Montpetit's re-installed sculpture on the steps of the old Montreal Museum of Fine Arts building on Sherbrooke St. west. Another document presents a Guy Montpetit *Garderie* project for a play space on Iles de Soeurs that unfortunately was eaten by ants and is no longer. The Musée de l'art contemporain des Laurentides should be congratulated for presenting this important 1960s Quebec artist's work.

John K. Grande

TORONTO

JOHN MARRIOTT: EASY TO ASSEMBLE

May 10 – September 15
Toronto Sculpture Garden
115 King St. East
www.torontosculpturegarden.com



To demonstrate a concept may be easy in theoretical space but to do so in real three-dimensional space is an altogether different thing. John Marriott's *Easy to Assemble* reconstructs or is it de-constructs a basic idiom of suburban life. What makes all this labour edifying is that it make us aware of how important concepts and diagrams and constructs are to the as yet uncopyrighted *Real World* environments that are developing and springing up all around us. One begins to think of reality as a manipulable maquette after seeing Marriott's Toronto Sculpture Garden piece. Unfurling its sectional walls into space, upwards, and in temporally, John Marriott plays on function with form(s) from the everyday. As a structure, the garden tool shed is a seemingly innocent accessory to it all, something that came into importance as an adjunct to the suburban lawn, and has grown in utility as the tools we use have increased exponentially in numbers.

Easy to Assemble looks as if it were to be assembled, but its sectional strata have all flown, or exploded out of their natural order. Now this whole exercise looks like a manual display of what happens in a Pre-Fab world when conceptions over-ride the potential of a space. *Easy to Assemble* looks more poetic than empirical but sticks to a standardized look, even though invisible to us all, and under the surface it is made out of welded steel 4 inch steel tube. With a wooden cladding in homely, very suburban colours it all looks effortless as assemblage.

Familiar, personal and private, this suburban backyard trinket available at any Home Hardware or Reno Depot, now looks displaced in downtown Toronto at the Sculpture Garden.

John Marriott has stated he admires the works of Vito Acconci and Dennis Oppenheim, but this place is urban grassy and green, not conquered by the wrecker's ball, or developer's dream, and as such it allows such an inflexion of space, and the adhesion of a temporary and temporal thought object like Marriott's. *Easy to Assemble* is a graphic alliteration on how form usually follows function.

The artist as non-pragmatic pragmatist betrays the illusion, giving it all a surrealist twist. As Marriott states: "... This sculpture nods in solidarity to those who have struggled to follow the confusing instructions and diagrams that accompany build-it-yourself pre-fabricated sheds. This envisioning of assemblage harkens to chance, daring us to imagine that this sculpture might be the result of someone who misread the shed's assembly instructions – or chose to ignore them and create the unexpected from something seemingly pre-determined."

As a 3-D exercise that looks put together as if from a kit, it has a directional or rational menu of potential directions it could go as assemblage, but Marriott has defied it all by building upwards with motifs that while maquette-like and miniaturized as compared with the scale of downtown Toronto nevertheless display a graphic sense. This personification of de-constructing, has its own common person's structural syntax that is... revealed, to then be re-veiled again. Its structure is familiar, but has been turned outwards, for just a brief series of moments in time... It suggests structural flux, expansion, the uncontrollability of all this instant architecture, and development, as if forces external to our own being were designing our reason. We read *Easy to Assemble* one way, only to discover it literally exists in another form, not as a container, or object/structure that could hold garden implements, but instead as a form whose geometries move outwards into space. The suggestion is of a vacuum, of an

emptiness, an absence of context, and as a synthetic visual and three dimensional world where the borders between objects, visual sensations and concepts are largely and endlessly in a state of flux, undefined, manipulated, imperceptibly affecting our unconscious and the way it associates form and function, or the manifest purpose of structure(s). In a word, Marriott's sculptural art suggests form no longer follows function, just as our "global" economy has outscaled its own resources, expanding beyond rational or economic scale(s).

John K. Grande

JEANIE RIDDLE: EVERYTHING PAINTED WHITE WITH COLOR

YYZ

May 5 - June 17
401 Richmond St
www.yyzartistsoutlet.org



Jeanie Riddle's sculpture/assemblage is presented at YYZ as a single entity, albeit one that plays on and with popular notions of design, advertising, and the commensurate commercialization of the art object/image. The work exists as a comment, (an instinctive comment) on the way formal compositional gestures can have a relation to performance actions, while establishing a dialogue with the viewer vis-à-vis their own perception and contemplation of material, its value, its component and ideational capacities

The faux wood finish (MatTac appliqué), the illusionistic way Riddle assembles her object/representation, which is in effect a demonstration, whereby what looks

like a wall of wood is actually a surface covering or optical barrier, even the quiet gathering of pedestal boxes as if in a Tony Cragg piece uses the various found or bought objects and recontextualized elements to present an art piece that is largely about the deflation of meaning, of integral purpose and function. All the object elements are actors themselves in the assemblage and become a part of the art. There are the curious Dollar Store multiples a minimalist-like row of Whiffle balls stuffed with synthetic grass, very cube-like and spiky bright coloured rubber objects that have no visible function other than as objects of curiosity. All these items and objects, brought together as they are, suggest that we live in a culture where value exists as an abstract entity, that value, even aesthetic value is denaturalized and strangely foreign as are elements of culture to this cultural set up or assemblage scenario. Yet these elements are pseudo-formal, serially installed with a correctness that kindles memories of the Minimalist era that speak of the illusory character of perception (There is more or less than meets the eye).

Riddle's YYZ installation has a more edgy and less embroidered feel to it than her recent Optica Gallery show in Montreal did. Solidity becomes pliable, lines of green masking tape on the floor of the reserve side of Riddle's wall act as a separator between what we see and what we cannot see, and both sides are illusory, in that they defy categorization, quantification, make us question what category we might slot this whole assemblage into. The wall acts as a buffer or firewall to our unconscious. There are paint colour samples, like the ones from your local Home Hardware or Reno Depot. The paint chip samples have been gathered *en masse*, are no longer samples but objects with no perceivable function, and though these are colour samples the way they are presented they have no colour at all. They are all white, seen on the reverse side. This, and other elements provide a clue to the very matter-like material quality of Riddle's experiential musing as does the reversed contact paper segment that lies innocuously on the floor at YYZ. There is even a solidified spill of paint wrapped in Mat'fac, an afterthought,

post-conceptual, a concept piece (or fragment thereof) seeking its own disposability by way of packaging and the allusions to packaging, even advertising are there, but this whole work is ironically made of recycled, reused, redefined materials. All this brought together to defy the site, to defy the architecture that is or was the modernist, and even the postModern context or non-space.

Riddle seeks to negate the very purpose, even the readability of object categories, and succeeds to a degree. The synthetic, arranged, salon-like atmosphere that these Pop colours, signify a realignment, even a re-serializing of potential meanings or readings of these objects, which are no longer functioning as objects. As she states: "It is in the process of assembling, and of making, that I arrive at a formal composition. Trained as a painter, I was always interested in the way everything comes together through the formal compositional gesture. I am now doing this with objects instead of painting." Surreal, denaturalized, but comfortably so, the show bespeaks its title *Everything Painted White with Color*.

John K. Grande

REGINA

DOMINIQUE BLAIN: POETIC MEETS POLITICAL

April 1 - July 9
Mackenzie Art Gallery
T. C. Douglas Building
3475 Albert Street
Tel.: (306) 584-4250
www.mackenzieartgallery.ca

Dominique Blain is a conceptual artist who struggles with the consequences of our increasing global consciousness: How should we, the relatively privileged, live knowing that great suffering exists beyond our comfortable homes; misery caused in part by our historical relationships, and by our present consumer choices? Blain condenses complex themes—such as the oppression of women, the legacy of war, colonialism, white privilege, and the mad creativity of landmine design—into aesthetic objects that at once call up and critique these issues.

Japan Apologizes is a deep green and white changot - the traditional

Korean clothing of the female nobility—suspended from the ceiling. The arms are splayed and the gown is spread open to reveal a white interior with the phrase "Japan Apologizes" patterned over the creamy fabric. The changot stands in for the euphemistically named "comfort women," Koreans who were enslaved and subjected to serial rape by Japanese soldiers during World War II. The very late and halfhearted apology is registered here as a repetitive and indelible mark, a pattern that echoes rather than replaces previous abuses.

The suffering of these women is impossible to capture and convey, so Blain does not try. She instead creates an object that absorbs and reflects meanings by suggesting rather than illustrating. By evoking rather than explaining, this work is more available for a complex range of meanings and feelings than histories are. Conceptual sculpture has a special evocative magic. Unlike paintings and photographs that exist in fictional space, sculptures—especially those made from found objects—seem more real. And when real things are imbued with conceptual meaning they can generate a haptic affect that is different, more visceral, than that produced by images and words alone.

However, when conceptual artists work with emotional content their intellectual strategies can appear remote, calculated and clever when an intimate, expressive and emotional response seems more suitable. I was often uneasy with this exhibition. The cool and precise beauty of these

elegantly crafted and vitrined objects, these frozen thoughts, often seemed at odds with their heated content. Some works, such as the baby shoes with soles imprinted with facts about landmines, seem nakedly manipulative. Other works stuck me as truly brilliant inventions only later to leave a bad taste in my mind.

Rug is a hand made textile by the Jackciss Cooperative of Dera Ghazi Khan, Pakistan. Like much of Blain's work, initial appearances are deceiving. The rug's abstract patterns turn out to represent small landmines—treacherously designed to attract children. It is shocking and informative piece. But I can't help but wish that members of the Jackciss Cooperative had conceived the rug. I am concerned about the work's secondary message. The executive labour was done in Canada, but the manufacture was farmed out to cheap labour in Pakistan. The artist/contractor never met the artisans. The product was then shipped back for circulation and eventual sale in richer nations. The narrative feels too close to the global capitalist narratives Blain critiques in many of her other works (especially *Duty Free*).

Perhaps I am suffering under an archaic phenomenology that perceives "authentic" expressions coming first from the people who directly experience an event. The expressions of a landmine victim feel more powerful to me than expression of other people on the same subject. Similarly, I feel that an expressive object made by the same people who had the concept

is more resonant than if the conceiver subcontracts the labour to others. In our age of dead authors these sorts of things are not supposed to matter. And when the display system is merely semiotic, that is probably so. But when magic and affect are involved, I think it does matter, it does affect the affect.

This said, I have returned to this impressive exhibition many times. I am grateful that these things exist, that Blain has so effectively stirred my conscience. These works are impossible devices than inhabit their anxiety, and infect all who come close.

David Garneau





VANCOUVER

TAKAO TANABE

Vancouver Art Gallery
January 21 – April 17
750 Hornby St.
www.vanartgallery.bc.ca
Tel.: (604) 662-4719

Landscape dominates our historic and contemporary imagination. Painters have covered this terrain for centuries. Now we have photographers like Ed Burtynsky, Roy Arden, and Isabelle Hayeur dealing with a landscape in transformation or re-configured by the artist. Takao Tanabe, who exhibited with Montreal's Dominion Gallery during Max Stern's era, is one of Canada's most successful proponents of the landscape genre but as this exhibition proves, he had his roots in a more abstract language of painting. Born in Prince Rupert, British Columbia in 1926 Tanabe is the proto-typical western painter. He studied at the Winnipeg School of Art between the years 1946 and 1949 with Hans Hofmann in New York (1951), at the Central School of Arts and Crafts in London, England (1954), and in the early 1960s at Tokyo University of Fine Arts. Examples of transitional explorations merging painting with calligraphy influenced by Tanabe's travel in Japan in this show include an *Untitled* fluid black and white casein on paper work from 1958. From working as a graphic designer in Vancouver during the years 1956 to 1959 Tanabe went on to teaching at the Vancouver School of Art in 1962... and at Banff later on.

Tanabe has this unflinching interest in paintings a sensation of the vista, those particularized, near Zen environments (usually horizontal) that play on and with the sensation and perception of being there.

Land and art as a property for higher thoughts, conceptions... We are able to explore the details in these paintings, stone by stone, wave by wave, detail by detail. There is a near ritualistic repetitive methodology to Tanabe's painting. They could be caricatures of what a landscape should potentially represent and hence largely conservative and corporate, but equally they could be reflections of the land we identify with.

More interesting than the purist paradigmatic landscapes from which Tanabe has undoubtedly made a lot of bread, are the more ingenuous experiments with abstraction and fluid painterly effect. These abstractions are, to my mind, much neglected as a genre in Canadian West coast painting, a phenomenon largely overlooked by collectors and historians alike who will go for conceptual art, or sculpture, or realism, or Native and ignore all else. It may have simply been that audience and collector response was too weak among Canada's west coast abstractionists for them to proceed along these lines. This facility with abstraction can be seen in the paintings *Fragment 35* (1953) or *Meeting* (1963). We can see Tanabe was already there, an accomplished abstract painter with his own vernacular and superb style (as did Donald Jarvis). Tanabe's style likewise has something of the illusionist *landscape as metaphor* characteristic we see on Toni Onley or Gordon Smith's painting. Tanabe has moved more meticulously, almost obsessively into painterly method and the effects can be rewarding as in *Rivers 1/01 Jordan River* (2001) where the various patternings of water surface, stone and cloudy sky merge into a very West Coast visual and painterly meditation on beingness. The same goes for *Johnstone Strait 1/96* (1996). Still others are even more

sublime and sophisticated interplays between natural light, and the physics of nature's universe.

One of the most successful is *Dawn* (2003) an acrylic painted coastal scene that looks like a virtual light factory, a cosmos in flux, with no trace of human presence. Another sublime, daunting, haunting piece is *Queen Charlotte Islands 9/95;*

Marble Island (1995) where the sheer power of sea water is emphasized because it occupies more than a third of the composition's surface. The light reflections are equally eerie! This worthy tribute to Takao Tanabe's powerful landscape interpretations continues a Canadian tradition.

As Tanabe's first teacher, Joe Plaskett has stated, "He knows his strength, and in each phase of his work he discovers a way to get closer to what he knows he can do. His character is at once straightforward and yet complex. So his art shows mastery, and behind it is mystery."

John K. Grande

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