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HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA

IMPRESSIONIST MASTERWORKS
FROM THE NATIONAL GALLERY
OF CANADA

October 12, 2001–January 6, 2002

CHOOSING THEIR OWN PATH:
CANADIAN WOMEN
IMPRESSIONISTS

October 12, 2001–January 13, 2002

ERNEST LAWSON—PAINTING AND
THE LANDSCAPE

12 October 2001–13 January 2002

1723 Hollis Street, P.O.
Box 2262, Halifax, N. S. B3J 3C8

Info: 902-424-3002.

Tel.: 902-424-7542

Fax: 902-424-7359

Never before has there been an exhibition of this many quality Impressionist pictures in Atlantic Canada. Mind you, in conventional terms, this is not a large exhibition. It consists of thirteen carefully chosen works from the collection of the National Gallery of Canada. Of these, nine are landscapes. *Impressionist Masterworks* includes works by Boudin, Cézanne, Degas, Gauguin, van Gogh, Monet, Pissarro, Renoir and Sisley. All of the paintings are of high quality and a few are outstanding examples of Impressionist art. The outstanding pictures are, to my mind, the two Monets, the Degas and, perhaps, the Renoir.

I should qualify my choices and explain what I mean by high quality and outstanding. The latter question first: there are few outstanding pictures in any period of art history and, for that matter, not that many of high quality. The term masterpiece or masterwork is used too loosely, and too often in conjunction with any work by a famous artist. Even Cézanne and van Gogh could have their off days. No artist creates a masterpiece each and every time. A good work by an outstanding artist can be very good indeed and all the paintings in this exhibition, excluding those I believe to be outstanding, are certainly in that category and well worth seeing. An example of a good painting by an outstanding artist is Gauguin's *The Quarries of Le Chou near Pontoise* (1882), a relatively early picture by the artist. Painted under the influence of Pissarro, it is not at all typical of Gauguin's later works which have a unique style all their own. That being said, this is still a good painting which illustrates Gauguin's talent as a promising artist who had yet to reach his apex.

The two Monets, *A Stormy Sea* (1881), and *Waterloo Bridge: The*



Sun in Fog (1903), are great pictures by any standard. *Waterloo Bridge* is breathtakingly beautiful. A friend of mine, who was at the exhibition with me, commented: "It was worth twelve bucks (the admission price to the exhibition) just to see the Monet's *Waterloo Bridge*." and I would agree with her. *Waterloo Bridge* is close in feeling to his seminal painting *Impression, Fog* (Le Havre) (1872), whose very title later become synonymous with the term Impressionism. It is interesting that *Waterloo Bridge* was purchased by the National Gallery in 1914 just eleven years after it was completed, and a good indication how astute Eric Brown, the director of the NGC at the time, was in his taste. There is no way that today's National Gallery could afford a major Monet, if one of the quality of *Waterloo Bridge* was to come to market. Monet's *A Stormy Sea* is a different matter altogether, and a work I personally find interesting because it really does not have any central focus in regard to subject matter. It is a painting of surf along the Normandy coast. The painting is dominated by a series of waves that neatly divide the canvas horizontally. Both Monets in the exhibition are strikingly modern in their appearance and a foretaste of what was to happen in art to come.

Degas' *At the Café Concert* is also a very modern picture and a very good example this artist's work. Degas' world of café society is very different from that Monet, but what brings them together is the way they both forever changed the nature of painting. Some viewers might find *At the Café Concert* looks unfinished, but it is very much a completed picture that holds together very well. Degas lets our eyes work to complete the picture in our minds instead of relying on minute details to catch our attention. I doubt that there are many painters who do not admire the pure bravado of Degas' brushwork. There are many lessons on that subject to be learned from looking at this painting. Renoir's *Claude and Renée* is a

Claude Monet
Waterloo Bridge: The Sun in Fog, 1903
Oil on canvas, 73.7 x 100.3 cm
Collection: The National Gallery of Canada
Photo: The National Gallery of Canada.

very beautiful study in restraint with its muted palette and starkly contrasts Degas' brightly coloured night club scene. The subjects of Renoir's painting are his son and the child's nurse. It is a quiet picture that reflects artist's love of family life and is a painting that reflects the predominantly bourgeois values of Impressionism. Let's face it, Impressionism is a comfortable art, and we all need comfort from time to time.

The Art Gallery of Nova Scotia has wisely paired *Impressionist Masterworks* with two other exhibitions of their own: *Choosing Their Own Path: Canadian Women Impressionists* and *Ernest Lawson: Painting and the Landscape*. These two exhibitions provide a local context for the National Gallery exhibition. Impressionism was a natural influence on Maritime art, but it took its time in gaining a foothold on the east coast. Most of the women artists represented in *Choosing Their Own Path* were born in Atlantic Canada and a majority of them lived in the Halifax area. All of the women in the exhibition, with the exception of Emily Carr, had a direct connection to the Maritimes. Their training was varied. Some studied in Europe and others in Canada and the United States, but one thing they all shared in common was that they were influenced by Impressionism. The Nova Scotia born American Impressionist Ernest Lawson worked in France alongside Alfred Sisley in the last decade of the 19th century. He spent almost all of his life in the United States, but he did return a couple of times to Nova Scotia. There are a number of paintings in the Lawson exhibition that were done during a 1924 visit to the province. They are very interesting and very powerful. One in particular, a small painting of Peggy's Cove, shows the influence of the French sources that influenced

Lawson's art. *Impressionist Masterworks* will make one more stop on its national tour at the Musée du Québec. The exhibition will be on view in Québec City from February 7th to May 5th, 2002. Hopefully readers of *Vie des Arts* in the Québec City area will take advantage of this opportunity to see these important Impressionist paintings.

Virgil Hammock

HULL, QUEBEC

THE LANDS WITHIN ME:

EXPRESSIONS BY CANADIAN
ARTISTS OF ARAB ORIGIN

Canadian Museum of Civilization

October 19, 2001–March 9, 2003

100 Laurier Street
Hull, Qc J8X 4H2

Tel.: (819) 776-7000
1-800-555-5621

www.civilisations.ca

A wide ranging show of Arab Canadian art that has attracted controversy when it was temporarily suspended due to the September 11th tragedy in New York City. *The Lands within Me* presents the works of 26 artists from across Canada. These works by artists originating from Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia evidence a wide range of approaches to creative expression. While the exhibition's organizers express that the immigrant experience is at the core of this show's purpose, the métissage or cultural mixing evidenced can range from a tentative beaux arts style not unique to Arab or Canadian art, to some very specific and exquisite stylistic fusions. Expressing their identity through words, images or objects, these artists present a diversity of Arab points of view on life in Canada, while equally reflecting their homeland origins.

Nicolas Zeitouni's ink and gold leaf on paper works are exotic, colourful and delicate like batiks. Joseph Moukhtar's *Montreal, St. Denis in Winter* (1995) transforms this bustling downtown Montreal quartier into a souk with curvilinear balconies while *Quebec, the Fifth Season* (1996) gives the Chateau Frontenac onion-shaped turrets. Abd Hanafi's *Rue St. Denis, Montréal* (1991) likewise creates a bazar-like atmosphere of colourful crowds of people whose joyful expressions remind us of Tobiasse's paintings. More mystical and spirited are Ishrak Sahar's textured mixed media



Joseph Moukhtar
La cinquième saison, 1996
Québec
Canadian museum of Civilization

on wood works *Shadow* (1995), *Voice* (1996) and *Djamadji* (children's bangle) (1997). These colourful compositions delight in hieratic decorative motifs that become sacred reflections on life. Mirella Aprahamian's *Vendémiaire II* conjures up the atmosphere of a fruit stall using delicate lines and bright oil pastel textures that recall British painter David Hockney's decorative work.

The Lebanese Canadian artist Camille Zakharia has created an unforgettable photo collage of a woman on a magic carpet flying over the earth. A wall of stones, houses and trees can be seen silhouetted on the horizon behind her. Zakharia's photo collage is like a prosaic mosaic about one woman's feelings of living in two places at once: her homeland and her adopted nation. Laïla Binbrek's installation expresses the same sense of perpetual uncertainty over identity with *Mirror, Mirror* (2000). Two boudoir dressers face each other laden with domestic objects: make-up, cosmetics, candles, bowls. A pair of embroidered slippers under one dresser symbolizes, strangely, this journey from emigrant to immigrant. The two ovals mounted on the dressers no longer have mirrors. You can see through these openings to the other side. Mirella Aprahamian's painted chest of drawers has landscape and garden images whose perspective is almost mediaeval: a garland of dried yellow flowers falls out of the only open drawer. Aldin Rashid's beautiful allegorical, sublime and delicate bird image uses the Nisaburi-Kufic style of calligraphy quoting the Koran as its source. Nihal Mazloum makes very contemporary jewelry combining sacred motifs with a refined taste for decorum. Liliane Karnouk modernizes and adapts traditional Arabic geometrical pattern motifs in her freestanding fold-

ing screen and coffee table. Jamelie Hassan's all too literal *The Space of the Alphabet II* is a complex post-Modern installation that has alphabet tiles set into the walls, two videos (one with a girl reciting the alphabet) and a bookshelf built by Ron Bener full of eclectic artifacts: plaster books, the colonial book *Topsy Turvy Land: an Arabia Pictured for Children*, an Arab water bottle, photo of a girl and postcard. Bernice Sorge's *A Place for Rose* (2000-2001) references the artist's mother's homeland of Damascus in Syria. There is a dream/reality hinge to this piece. Sorge relates the tale (spoken from headphones) of her mother's inherited beads, kept in a trunk, many years later restrung and given to her sister on her wedding day. Her large leaf patterns on a red and black background fuse the modern and traditional in an incurably natural way.

Seeing Karim Rhoem's gelatin silver photo portraits of Inuit families Akeagok and Ajuittuuq from the Northwest Territories in their skins and traditional attire alongside a portrait of a 76 year old woman in his native Tangiers, Morocco is pure irony. Images from one ancient culture to another, bypassing Canadian culture altogether. Algerian Canadian Ali Kichou's *The Orphan Cow* (2000) is a non-traditional tableau of raised relief burlap patterns, Day Glo details and Gold. Challenging conventional techniques, Kichou's work breaks with tradition and has a strong cutting edge aesthetic. Sami Zubi's *Jerusalem: A Gate of Hope* (2000-2001) references the gates that were once an entrance to the old walled city of Jerusalem and now "contain people instead of protecting in a conflict that appears insurmountable". A huge frame/container has acrylic resin blocks seemingly frozen at random into a wide plastic sheet, but there are echos of traditional motifs. Zubi's powerful, poignant work says everything about the Arab-Israeli conflict but in a

wholly contemporary way.

While *The Lands within Me* brings long overdue exposure to Arab Canadian artists work, one hopes to see these artists integrated into Canadian art shows in the future with the codifier "Arab" dropped from the work. Cultural diversity works best when the labels are removed and the art is presented in a broader, more open context.

John K. Grande

MONTREAL

INUIT ART: A RETURN TO BASICS

PAUL MACHNIK'S NUNAVUT 2000
PORTFOLIO COLLECTION

Studio PM, 270 Queen, 2nd Floor
Montreal, Qc H3C 2N8

Tel.: 514-878-9222

Fax: 514-866-9224

artist@studio-pm.com

It was after an Inuk artist, Osuitok, commented to James Houston that Inuits could make art as well as anyone, that the idea of initiating an Inuit co-op came into being. Since those beginnings in the 1950s, the art of the Inuit has steadily gained recognition and now has a worldwide reputation. Already as a child, Paul Machnik had been exposed to Inuit stone cuts and sculpture at his parent's home in St. Bruno. Since he began his career as a printmaker at Richard Lacroix's studio in Old Montreal from 1973 to 1978, he has never looked back. His Studio PM printmaking studio has published works by such renowned Canadian artists as Betty Goodwin, Jack Shadbolt, and Alfred Pellan as well as Germaine Arnaktauyok of Yellowknife, Elisapee Ishulutaq, Kenojuak Ashevak of Cape Dorset and Simon Shaimaiyuk of Pangnirtung. Patiently and persistently, Paul Machnik has brought printmaking techniques (the etching process in particular) to

many communities that had never been involved in the Inuit art renaissance of the 1950s and 1960s. It was on the invitation of Terry Ryan, head of the Dorset Inuit Co-Op that Machnik made his first foray up north with his son. He returned to Dorset in November 1995 with his wife, Mewa Armata and 23 of the plates he produced with Inuit were included in a special women's portfolio in Spring 1996 and the fall 1996 collection. Included were several collaborations between Mewa Armata and the printmakers Kakulu Saggiaktok and Sheojuk Etidloolie.

In the communities of Nunavut, which became the first territory to enter the federation of Canada (since Newfoundland joined in 1949) in April 1999, Machnik traveled with his portable press, papers and inks to a succession of Nunavut communities, many of which had no previous printmaking experience. Though the sculpting traditions up north date back millennia, young and old Inuit alike were inspired to draw on those traditions to make their first contemporary art prints. Machnik's proactive interventions actually perform a dual role, introducing printmaking as an educational feature in the Innu culture and secondly, awakening these people to the market potential of art.

Machnik's most recent initiative has involved printing 49 individual works—the Nunavut 2000 portfolio. Using Igloolik as a base, Machnik toured the Nunavut region, and with some funding from the Millennium Bureau of Canada he travelled to Arctic Bay, Broughton Island, Clyde River, Kimmirut, Qikiqtarjuak, Hall Beach, Igloolik, Pond Inlet and Rankin Inlet. Machnik's comment: "It was kind of difficult at first. These were communities that had not had a hand in printmaking. So the object was to get off on the right foot, to show them that you were not just looking for images of hunters and igloos. I really had to dive in and present myself as being at the same level



Paul Machnik's

as they were. I ate with them. I lived with them. I really wanted them to get to express what they felt. There was a lot of anger and violence below the surface that somehow had to be expressed. The work from the children and the senior artists was outstanding. I decided to make a banner and spent six weeks traveling all over Nunavut, from community to community, with this image roll, getting people involved in the collaboration. In April 1999, I presented this banner as a token birthday card to a Premier in Iqaluit."

With their natural sense of pattern and texture, as well as their unique cultural experience, a surprising range of personal and intuitive artworks came into being. Machnik's goal is to encourage a wholly contemporary attitude to art-making, less hampered by stereotypes and free of the southern market influence. As he states: "The Inuit art market is suffering in part because their work is not being given a chance to evolve. These days you can't show seals being hunted or anything controversial because it might offend someone, and might not sell. But I've seen work by Betty Goodwin and Louise Bourgeois that would floor some people. If all we get is a safe art, people are bound to get bored. Not just the public, but the artists too. These people have to be given a chance to really create even if that means its not pretty." The Nunavut 2000 portfolio prints will be reasonably priced, given the work and time that has gone into their production, and present lively new interpretations of Innu daily life and culture that recall the Dorset engravings from the early 1960s.

John K. Grande

SUSAN EDGERLEY:

POETRY ENCASED IN GLASS

Galerie Elena Lee
1460 Sherbrooke St. West
Tel: 844-6009

What strikes us most with Susan Edgerley's works is their unbearable fragility.

Organic, alien, almost other-worldly, her art takes the medium of glass to an entirely new realm. The use of the word 'art' is, indeed, conscious and deliberate, for there can be no doubt that Susan Edgerley is a brilliant and unique artist, and an ambassador for one of the most undervalued art forms. Born in Toronto, Ontario, and living most of her life in Quebec, she belongs to a fascinating group of glass artists and teachers who are pushing the boundaries of the medium. In the process they are putting Quebec in the fore-



Susan Edgerley
Vau, 1998
122 x 25 x 305 cm
Flameworked glass, handmade paper

front of international glass movement. What inspires and sustains Susan Edgerley is nature. Having said that, think 'nature' and a world of metaphysics opens up, and that is where her works take the unsuspecting viewer. Moved by the fragility and resilience of plants, she has transformed her pieces into poetic representations of the spirit that imbues them.

Through her undulating *Berences* series, to the esoteric *Fleet-ing Glimpses*, she has magically transported glass to a new dimension, combining it with everything from copper and forged steel, to paper and wood. In the *Seed Sowers* series, Edgerley creates a mesmerizing world of eerily alive flora inspired by her garden and its life cycle. In it, she has produced, or rather tended and brought to life, textured pods that sprout delicate copper leaves, tendrils and filaments. But Susan Edgerley surpasses herself in the following series titled *Semence... Seeds*, with a collection of pieces that are pure Zen poetry. A suspended translucent, gossamer chain made of fluid glass links, evokes both the spine and an umbilical cord. On a mirrored tile on the floor nests a group of pale opaque shells with textured, carved surfaces. They split, emanating an invisible, seductive energy that compels the viewer to kneel beside them for a closer look.

A great deal of physical effort goes into the creation of Susan Edgerley's enigmatic works of art. The process of casting demands both time and patience, not to mention strength. For Susan Edgerley it is also a humbling experience. Her reverence for the medium, and an almost spiritual approach to her work can be seen in each piece: "What better material with which to express the diversity and complexity of human existence: its power, its beauty and its pain. Glass is the fragile metaphor

with which I can ponder, struggle with and create those things which live inside me." One of Susan Edgerley's latest works—a diaphanous wall installation titled *Vau*, is a visual haiku of breathtaking simplicity. Glass droplets spiral into infinity, and the spectral echo of the last bead carries the eye into an invisible realm, captivating the viewer for a long time. Tenderly, lovingly made, each of Susan Edgerley's creations encapsulates

a metaphor that is a prayer to life, a eulogy to a dying world of nature, and a paean to its inevitable rebirth. Applied to human life, these are powerful, three-dimensional mandalas.

Dorota Kozinska

JEAN NICHOLS:

AU DELÀ DE LEURS AILES

Montreal Firefighter's Museum
5100 boul. St.-Laurent

Tel.: 872-3757

This show is testament to a tragedy, captured with great honesty by Jean Nichols and presented in



Jean Nichols
New York, 11 September 2001

support of the Firefighters Fund for New York. Early in September, Jean Nichols, a photographer and firefighter from Ville St. Laurent went down to New York City to visit his fellow firefighters in New York. On September 8th, he photographed them at the 42nd Street Great Jones Fire Station with their trucks Ladder 9 and Engine 33 behind them. New York's firefighters are considered to be in a class of their own and are respected the world over. The firefighters in Nichols' photos may look like ordinary guys but in reality they are proud angels, heroes of everyday life. Three days after, on September 11th, two of the men in Nichols' photo—Robert King and Kevin Pfifer—went missing.

That fateful morning Nichols had just come out of his hotel to get some juice and became aware of a great disturbance. Little did he know what he was to behold that day. He was soon to become a front line witness to the tragedy that unfolded. Hearing that something had happened at the World Trade Centre, but not entirely sure what, he grabbed a taxi and headed straight for the place. It was so dark after the twin towers went down at 10 am it was like night. Nichols had to crawl on his knees, feeling his way along the walls of buildings and eventually found an opening. He began to climb a series of stairs upwards until the air was less thick with ash and dust and eventually came to a rooftop where he could see the immense tragedy as it was taking place. Jean Nichols photos of this event are not just documents. The way his eye has captured these unforgettable events with a sense of the urgency of the moment makes them great photography. In one image, taken at the intersection of Broadway and Murray Streets, we see the remains of an airplane engine sitting in a compressed lump on the street. A nearby sign has been bent by the engine's fall through space. On the floor of a fire station, Nichols simply captured the remains

of a missing firefighters gear: his helmet, insulated suit, pick, and oxygen tank. It is a poignant and powerful statement of how this tragedy affected so many. The scenes of bewildered people straggling through the smoke, asbestos and ash in the darkened streets, of a family with child in a stroller with their faces covered to breathe better, of a solitary ghost-like figure walking

without a particular destination, as if in shock, each of these bewildered remembrances from the Trade Centre disaster is unforgettable. An image of a fire engine from Ladder 9—since destroyed—and taken a few days before—has the same impact. We see the throngs of New Yorkers making their exodus from the city on foot in broad daylight across the Brooklyn Bridge. It all seems unbelievable. New York will never be the same. She has lost so many of her angels of everyday life, those firefighters who went on call September 11th to save lives, and lost their own.

John K. Grande



PETERBOROUGH, ONTARIO

DOUG BACK:

SHADOW GRAPPLING

October 20th–December 2nd, 2001
Art Gallery of Peterborough
2 Crescent St., Peterborough
Ontario K9J 2G1
Tel.: 705-743-9179

Doug Back's weird and wonderful world of gadgets and contraptions involve recycling materials and rewiring or assembling them. The resulting interactive devices which use digital technology, handbuilt machines and kinetic devices are less bizarre than Jean Tinguely's, and more pseudo-scientific but with a human touch and message. While the rationale behind most machines is to perform a task, each of these devices simply asks us—the participants—to understand their strange and irrational *raison d'être*. Back doesn't overload these works with meaning and this dedicated, fly-brained approach is part of what attracts us to them. The first thing you will see on the ramp before entering the exhibition are a series of Doug Back's sketchbook drawings. These whimsical studies reveal the inner workings of Back's mind and have curious notations like LM3915, Soft, Medium, Hard, along with mystifying squiggles and linear motifs. Beautifully simple they are distant cousins to electronic diagrams.

Sitting down at a table to look into a microscope, you move a joystick back and forth, and can see the magnified remains of wasps, that alternate with the miniaturized texts you see on household product labels like Warning!, Call Physician if Swallowed, Induces Vomiting, and the all too familiar skull and crossbones. The toxic warnings and wasp corpses make you feel just a little bit uneasy. With *Internal Clock* (2001) you attach a sensor to your ear. A clock on the wall ticks its seconds in tandem

Doug Back
Jacob Wrestling with the Angel, 1985

with your heart beat. Time takes on a completely new meaning. It is no longer the precise, quantifiable sectional splitting of time but a register of our natural heartbeat. With *Stranger Culture Lab1* (2001), we see a close-up of a fingernail found in a Toronto subway. It sits in a Petri Dish and the image is projected onto a miniature screen video monitor that hangs in mid-air. This is archaeology as Back sees it, a found living human remnant around which a culture will grow for the duration of the show.

Outside the gallery, you can see the silhouette of an earlier Back piece titled *Sect* (1985). The shadow it casts onto a material screen at night could be a person or an insect, depending on how this miniature computer controlled "puppet" changes its timing, and it does! The most interesting piece in the show *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel* (1985) is the most elusive. A television monitor on a raised plywood platform projects images on what lies underneath. We can look through an opening on this two foot high "stage" to see the hidden found elements beneath. A camera on a tripod turns in a circle capturing these images in seemingly random stop and go sequences. The TV monitor images look like a live feed from this camera but in reality the screen sequence of the same objects is pre-recorded. We question the TV appearance and real presence of these "things". *Sticks* (1979) involves five sticks placed so close to each other that, as they whirl around and turn kinetically, they occasionally hit each other. While the weakest of the two reverses its movement, the second continues on its circular path. Eventually the sequences adjust and they turn in harmony "avoiding" each other. Doug Back's quasi-scientific *shadow grappling* show provides a welcome relief from the all too serious sociological investigations of many artists,

and, it seems, has a social message nonetheless. He has a lot of fun recycling the found gadgets, electronic devices and objects he scavenges from dumpsters, yard sales, and searching the streets of Toronto. One man's garbage is another's gold. Curated by Su Ditta, this 20 year survey of Doug Back's work is a must see. Kids will love this show as much as the parents!

John K. Grande

TORONTO

AGANETHA DYCK:

INTER SPECIES COMMUNICATION
ATTEMPT (JOHN GRANDE)

DeLeon White Gallery

September 13th–November 3rd, 2001

1096 Queen St. West
Toronto, Ontario M6J 1H9

Tel.: 416-597-9466.

Fax: 416-597-2495

deleonwhite@home.com

While some artists and sculptors will create site specific outdoor works to express their connectivity to nature, Aganetha Dyck painstakingly chooses objects, the detritus of consumer culture, or nostalgic elements like clothing or domestic items, and engages in a process whereby bees rework them in their hives. The results are poetic, and express something of the inherent fragility of life itself. In the *Survivors* show at the Royal Ontario Museum, Dyck presented *Hive Bodice* (1994) as a response to the show's theme of breast cancer among women. The title of the present show, *Inter Species Communication Attempt* is an ambitious one (particularly as bees have no concept of art) but the results are edifying. The sculptural component was previously exhibited at the Cen-

tre d'Art Contemporain in Troyes and at the Canadian Cultural Centre in Paris. We see, for instance, a pair of stereo speakers that have been all but obscured by the bee's wax layerings. Another has a kitsch romantic figure of a woman in a long skirt, the kind that would adorn a shelf at your grandmother's. The wax and honeycomb organically fuse with parts of the figurine. Another has a wrapped jar that looks somehow archaic after the bees have done their work on it.

Aganetha Dyck's process is like pre-fab archaeology. The Romantics went to Rome in the 18th century to discover, draw and record ancient Roman antiquities because there was a sense of mystery and lost history to them. Aganetha Dyck's brings a new resonance to our society's lost and displaced yet commonplace artifacts. She transforms them into near minimalist objects, clothed in mystery. Somehow, the process is analogous to what the Romantics were doing, but the discovery of ancient grandeur is now contemporized and involves manipulating nature's own processes. Sometimes it takes several years of careful administration, due to the bee's brief six to ten week annual period of productivity, to produce a completed object. The bees markings, patterns, and traces are fascinating for and of themselves. (Some might say more than the art.) There is always something fascinating and mysterious about the way time transforms things. But is it art? By touching an energy that is not our own, Aganetha Dyck's art brings the history of our culture back into the living dynamic of nature, and this is something today's art world can use.

The aesthetic is rather like the way Canadian artist Eric Cameron layers paint onto objects again and again until they are absolutely transformed. With Cameron's, we really do not know what is inside unless told. Aganetha Dyck's leave clues,



Aganetha Dyck
Inter Species Communications Attempt, 2001
DeLeon White Gallery, TOR
Installation detail
Varied dimensions

traces, mimetic signs of their former function. Once transformed their function has changed. Once products, functional items produced out of materials from nature, they engage in a partial return to nature, but with the help of bees. We can smell the scent of the wax. In a dimly lit gallery room at DeLeon White, studio remnants of the bee hive boxes, small fragments of the hives, tools for bee keeping, shoes and other objects, rest on two presentation tables while a sound composition by Richard Dyck provides an eerie buzzing accompaniment to the installation.

In the catalogue essay for the show, Virginia MacDonnell, who for several years has run her own Queen St. art gallery, comments on Aganetha Dyck's process: "She doesn't direct the bees as such, but rather responds to *their* response to her work. It is—in the truest sense—a collaboration". This show includes a new series of works that innovate by ironically letting the bees transform the art, in this case small scale ink drawings Aganetha Dyck made of bees' bodies on braille paper. The bees apparently dance on the dots (their way of communicating) and then leave their own wax markings and traces on the art!

John K. Grande

HARLEQUIN UNMASKED:

COMEDY TRANSFORMED

September 22, 2001–
January 20, 2002

The Gardiner Museum
of Ceramic Art

111 Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario 5S 2C7

Tel.: 416-586-8080

Fax: 586-8085

The theatre known as Commedia dell'Arte went into terminal decline in the mid-18th century, when playwright Carlo Goldoni (1707-1793) abandoned the masks that were its stock in trade. Its influence had been wide: after inception in 1545 in Italy as street theatre, companies featuring all its dramatis personae spread throughout Europe. The characters were archetypes, rather than recognizable people: Harlequin, coquettish Columbine and her friends, Pantalone and his beautiful daughter, her effete lover Cynthio, "Dottore" her unwelcome suitor, the servants Scaramouche, Pulcinella, Mezzetin and Pierrot.

They live on today vestigially: in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, the servant Malvolio is persuaded by his mistress to dress, like Harlequin, "yellow-stockinged and cross-



Pierrot
Detail from the Hall of Masks,
Cesky Krumlov Castle, Czech Republic
Fresco (c. 1748) by Joseph Lederer
(1729-1762).

gartered"; in *The Merchant of Venice*, the figure of Shylock is a tragic reprise of the buffoonish Venetian merchant "Pantalone". In Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*, his conical hat tips the audience to Pulcinella. Our dolorous circus clowns are Pierrot; low walking Groucho Marx with his painted moustache is Scaramouche. But the ensemble is gone forever. Anna Karina, in Godard's *Pierrot le Fou*, calls Belmondo, "Pierrot" (because that's exactly who he is); his futile response is always, "Je m'appelle Ferdinand".

Naturalistic theatre shattered the Commedia's conventions, but as this theatre collapsed, it was resurrected in a radically disparate artform: the porcelain figurine. *Harlequin Unmasked* builds itself around The Gardiner's extensive collection of these figurines, but makes some welcome additions that contribute to illumination of the form. These include original Commedia costumes from Cesky Krumlov Castle in South Bohemia; engravings of particular scenes, as well as the room-sized reproduction of a *trompe l'œil* mural from the same castle, with the characters represented; reproduced paintings, including Watteau's famous *Pierrot* (known as *Gilles*) and the engraving of another, now lost, of the players being expelled from Louis XIV's Paris; musical charts used in the plays.

In 1710, Augustus the Strong of Saxony founded a porcelain factory in Meissen. Some years earlier he'd set up Angelo Constantini, a "Mezzetin" (players maintained the same roles all their performing lives) in Dresden, when the actor's Italian company was expelled from Paris on a rumour that they were producing a satire based on *The False Prude*, a

novel about the king's wife.

Commedia characters provided inspiration for the artists at the porcelain factory. The first figures were ceramic, then "soft-paste" porcelain, without the kaolin hardener, then by mid-century, "hard-paste" porcelain, capable of emulating the most brilliant of true China glazes. Often characters were interchangeably cast in sugar, a relatively hard and very expensive commodity at the time, as desert-table ornaments to go with candied fruit and marzipan. The precision technology that enabled high-temperature kiln firing, ironically doomed the medieval

Commedia. In the great age of printing and the book, The Commedia's characters were late survivors of the old Europe, the oral tradition of mummers, wandering mountebanks and Mystery plays that was on the wane even in Shakespeare's time. That they should have survived in this form of miniature is intriguing.

It's not that the figures are expressive. They're not particularly. In the age of van Dyke, arguably the greatest portraitist ever, there's little individuation amongst the figures. But they're powerfully informative: about the repertoire of gestures, costumes and their colours, hand signals (rude and otherwise), props, spatial relations between figures in groups, stock contortions and facial expressions. In a way, their lack of expressivity becomes our advantage, allowing the viewer access to the form without editorial overlay. They're a time-capsule, a souvenir in the original sense. But what do they remember? Sugar, for a start, as a plastic, sculptural medium, rather than as simply the comestible it is today (the term "sugary" is sometimes used to describe this kind of porcelain sculpture). Also the banquet itself as a companion to art, at which these figurines appeared on the dessert table as prelude to the appearance of the real life players. If the figurines can't quite remember the play, they can allude to the devices ("slapstick", wooden syringe/enema, etc.), and to the gags and diversions that happily stalled the action.

Commedia dell'Arte was a theatrical counterpart to the picaresque novel: meandering, evading, satirizing, only occasionally returning to the main action. A very enticing model for an art of the present, whether plastic, spoken or culinary. Perhaps that's why this show has the surprising impact that it has.

Oliver Girling

CALGARY

MICHAEL CAMPBELL:

ENLIGHTENMENT IN THE SUBURBS

Truck Gallery

815 First St. NW,
Calgary, Alberta, T2P 1N3

Tel. 403-261-7702

Fax: 264-7737

November 2–December 8, 2001

Michael Campbell's installation, *MindReader*, at Truck gallery is one part hallucination, one part pseudo-scientific investigation and five parts concrete free-association. A three times life-sized aluminum lawn chair (sans webbing) has a similar effect on the viewer as the liquid in Lewis Carroll's "drink me bottle" has on poor Alice. We shrink to child-sized proportions. The wall projected video of slowly falling water and ghostly bodies (actually footage taken from beneath a white translucent waterslide!) encourages a feeling of falling, floating and weightless pleasures. An open book rests on top of what appears to be an old radio floor cabinet. An illustration on one of its pages is illuminated and animated, a strange montage of light bulbs that swirls on the page. A few feet away at the end of a black, elongated pyramid shape is a larger book with a similar animated picture. This one is created by a rear-projected video onto a translucent panel inserted into a hollowed out book. The image is of an underwater scene of people swimming in a river.

The texts that accompany the images are fragments of what appear to be pseudo-scientific records. One offers the account of a six year old girl from 30 years ago who, while watching Saturday morning cartoons, has a hallucination that would do both Stephen Hawking and Ken Wilber proud. The other text sets this individual experience within a larger cosmology, as if by meditating on any part, one could glimpse the whole unfolding of the universe.

This is a strange phenomenology that at once seduces with its promise of a unified theory of science and metaphysics, but ultimately frustrates by only offering shards of that vision.

Campbell seems fascinated with how our mundane experience often offers glimpses of a greater reality. The installation explores the possibility of enlightenment in the suburbs; that great consciousness (like great art) is not contingent on location. There are two voices here: the young girl, a most unlikely adept; and the crack-pot, amateur scientist/philosopher who lacks formal training in the area of his intuitions. He



Michael Campbell
MindReader
Truck Gallery

(or less likely, she) is a small town William Burroughs—but without the drugs—who putters on low-tech hallucination machines in the garage, hoping to prove his cosmological theories through material means. The third consciousness is the voiceless person who assembled the installation to pass on as research or a joke.

I read this work as a serious attempt to reintroduce the metaphysical and the uncanny to an incredulous and canny art world. Given the present state, it must do so through the back door—by presenting the vision through an antiquated voice that could be taken as a joke by skeptics and as a point for departure for the curious. An ironic reader can choose to see *Mindreader* as an illustration of a crack-pot theory, a desire for meaning beyond material reality. While the voice is unconventional it is not necessarily insincere. But the viewer who is sympathetic and tries to turn the page to learn more, will be rewarded with frustration—the book is sealed. They can either feel duped or read this as an encouragement to seek their own, parallel investigations. The installation may be just a prompt, a guide to the visual elements, and a portal to the imaginary.

Campbell is emerging as newest member of the Lethbridge School, that includes Janet Cardiff, George Bures Miller, and David Hoffos. The language in many of the works by these artists (especially Cardiff and Miller's *Dark Pool* and Campbell's *Mindreader*) is poised between science, fiction and spirituality; as if trying to reactivate the pre-postmodern imaginary of mid-century sci-fi radio shows and novels that subverted the dominant discourse with through anxious, apocalyptic speculations, conspiracy theories and a mistrust of rationality. These experiences are especially available to children and artists who afford themselves a most precious commodity, time for purposeless reflection and goal-less play. Cool contraptions cobbled

together with what's ready-to-hand create a moment of strange delight. The objects are not trying to imitate the commodified world but take it by surprise. The secret of the success of the Lethbridge School is they are not ironic, are no longer making art about art for artists, nor are they pandering to a commodity culture. They are tapping into the moments of reverie, guile-less observation and magical thinking common to everyone. Campbell magnifies these moments and presents them for our contemplation. *MindReader* is magic.

David Garneau

VICTORIA, B.C.

FROM GEISHA TO DIVA:

THE KIMONOS OF ICHIMARU

October 5, 2001–January 1, 2002

The Art Gallery
of Greater Victoria

1040 Moss Street
Victoria, B.C. V8V 4P1

Tel.: 250.384.4101

Fax: 250.361.3995

aggv@aggv.bc.ca

About one thousand years ago (ca. 1003), Murasaki Shikibu wrote *The Tale of Genji*, a fictionalized story of love and romance that describes court life of the 10th century Japanese aristocracy. Written by a woman who borrowed from her own observations and diary entries, this impeccably constructed narrative, written in the classical tradition, is possibly the world's first novel. We know from *The Tale of Genji* that the courtesans wore exquisite clothing, kimono, which were layers of the finest Chinese silk....

During the Edo Period (1615–1868), the Geisha culture developed in Japan and was an extension of Kabuki Theatre. The earliest geisha were male entertainers and musi-

cians. By the late 1700's, female geisha outnumbered the men, dominated the profession, and extended it into an artform of erotic elegance and beauty. The *Cult of the Geisha* flourished during the Meiji Period (1868–1912) and reached its zenith around the turn of the 20th century... In 1906, Mitsue Goto was born in Nakatsugawa, Gifu Prefecture. This young girl of humble origin entered the geisha community, "the flower and willow world," and became one of the great Living Treasure's of 20th century Japan. Her geisha name was Ichimaru. On October 5th, 2001, four years after her death, the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria opened an exhibition of Ichimaru's kimono.

The Tale of Ichimaru bears a resemblance to *The Tale of Genji*, a.k.a. *The Tale of Murasaki*. Both women educated themselves, enclosed themselves in elite communities, and excelled in the arts. The classical poet/intellectual offered her service to Empress Akiko while the modern Geisha/Diva entertained the corporate and political elite. Lady Murasaki's text informs intellectuals, Ichimaru's voice enchants music lovers. Both women enjoyed an intimate relationship with kimono, "a thing to be worn." A geisha's livelihood depended upon a supply of kimono that changed with the seasons and the parties she attended. Ichimaru's collection included about one thousand kimono; the courtesans of Murasaki's world layered twelve kimono at one time.

The kimono from the Ichimaru collection are cultural artifacts of great beauty. Embedded in their threads, rich histories, traditions, and narratives interweave. Their embellished motifs, designs, and colours represent a reverence for nature—the fall of a leaf, the ripple of water. Each garment was specifically designed to fit Ichimaru's sophisticated and glamorous lifestyle as a Tokyo geisha. In 1933, Ichimaru left the Okiya (Geisha house), to continue her studies in classical Kiyomoto style singing and Shamisen, a stringed instrument favoured by geisha. One of Japan's leading celebrities, Ichimaru's career lasted fifty years and included hundreds of radio, theatre, and television performances. Ichimaru performed in the elaborate style to which she was accustomed, as a geisha. Her kimono and accessories were integral components of each performance and are included in the exhibition. The kimono, such as the one illustrated, is an elegant tomosode that was traditionally worn by an unmarried woman to attract a man. Ichimaru broke the rules of kimono etiquette,

wearing this yuzen dyed New Year's kimono as a performance costume.

In this exhibition, we experience the exquisitely contrived, sophisticated beauty of the Japanese aesthetic, one that is formalized and traditional. Ichimaru, a modern geisha, exemplified the classical traditions of beauty, honour, respect, and harmony. As consummate consumers of culture, we are attracted to the 'zen-ness' of everything Japanese. We assist in the construction of "the floating world" and are seduced by its nostalgia. Perhaps the real beauty of this exhibition is the impermanence of an aesthetic that cannot possibly sustain itself; that it must change and, like the scattering of cherry blossoms, is ephemeral. Can geisha culture survive the 21st century? Does it have relevance in today's contemporary Japanese culture?

Linda Giles

Donated to the AGGV by Mrs. Fumi Suzuki (a confidante of Ichimaru from Tokyo), and Mrs. Yoshiko Karasawa from West Vancouver, the kimono collection of Ichimaru gift is a rare coincidence of friendship, generosity, timing, and circumstance.

A national tour of the AGGV collection includes the following venues:

The Moose Jaw Art Gallery, (January–February, 2003)

The New Brunswick Art Gallery at St. John, (April–June, 2003)

The Vancouver Museum, (September–December, 2003)

Some portions of Ichimaru's collection will be donated to a museum in her home prefecture of Nagano, Japan.

