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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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E. Edson
dwelling, 2000

SACKVILLE, N.B.

DWELLING:

AN INSTALLATION

ERIK EDSON

14 September–28 October 2001

Owens Art Gallery
Mount Allison University
61 York St, Sackville
N.B., E4L 1E1.

Tel.: 506 364-2574

I have always found installation art to be an elusive art form. It exists only at a particular place and time, unlike paintings or sculpture in a gallery collection, which can be visited over and over again. Photographs of an installation do not do justice to the artist's intent. You have to see the installation in order for it to make any sense at all. In point of fact, I generally do not like installation art at all, as installation artists tend to take themselves far too seriously. Much of it can be, at best, bad interior decoration, but Erik Edson's work is an exception. Erik Edson teaches printmaking and sculpture at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick and this is the third Edson installation that I have seen. I have liked all three of them. Perhaps this is because though there is serious intent behind Edson's work, he uses humour to underscore his concern for nature and the environment.

In the past, artists made their point about nature by painting landscapes. The Group of Seven jumps very much to our collective minds when we think about nature and art in Canada, but different times call for a different approach to nature by today's artists. We have become an urban society whose dips into nature are a trip to the cottage for those lucky enough to own one, the stuff we see on either side of the highway

as we speed down the road, and for the majority, what we see on television. As our attention spans shrink, it is difficult to get people to notice anything as subtle as traditional landscape painting.

Edson's *dwelling* installation provides another way of looking a nature by giving us, of all things, a peep show. Peep shows in general have a rather unsavory reputation and involve looking at something that we shouldn't be looking at. We look at them anyways. The peep holes in Edson's work are set into an artificial wall set up in the gallery in a way that effectively cuts the exhibition space in two. The viewing holes are all over the place. Some are just inches from the floor, others too high to reach, while others are at eye level. All the holes are fitted with tiny lenses like the ones on hotel room doors that allow you to see who is there without opening the door—and that distort the view. What you see in some of the holes is rather surprising: strange animals and birds which are really small plastic toys. They appear life size because of the distorting effect of the lens. Somehow, the use of plastic animals seems right in this panorama. The walls in the enclosed gallery space are hung with 19th century landscape paintings from the Owens Art Gallery's permanent collection which provide a counter-reference for this plastic menagerie. The results are funny and when people look through the holes they laugh. The animals may be artificial, but so are Edson's landscapes which are romanticized visions of a nature that never existed. What the viewers find funny is the replacement of a disappearing nature with something quite artificial which, in reality, is not that funny.

There is more to this installation than a wall with holes. Erik painted the gallery walls a stark white and outlined images of clouds with a thin blue line on the false wall. He added two other constructions in the open

gallery space. One is covered with a camouflaged coloured cloth with artificial greenery on it and the other has a blue willow patterned cloth topped with fragments of willow ware pottery. Again there is an interplay between two realities that symbolizes the ongoing struggle between man and nature. Nature is represented by the artificial greenery and man by the pottery shards. Edson neatly juxtaposes two competing visions of nature: one where nature is seen in its supposedly pure state where all is bountiful and the other where nature is a force to be conquered and overcome.

The idea of landscape is a man-made construct. Nature existed without man before he made an appearance on earth. Yet the idea of landscape cannot exist without human thought. Simon Schama's book *Landscape and Memory*, which describes how nature was, and is, used as a tool for nationalism by various countries, has influenced Edson's own thoughts on nature representation. Though Schama does not write about Canada, his ideas on landscape can be seen in a Canadian context. We are, after all, still a country with more trees than people and an urge to picture ourselves as lumberjacks. Edson's *dwelling* installation pokes holes in our stereotypical view of the Canadian landscape and he does so with such a sense of humour and irony. We are able to laugh at ourselves and still get the picture that nature is in trouble and that this might be part of the problem.

Virgil Hammock

QUEBEC CITY

BILL VAZAN:

COSMOLOGICAL SHADOWS

Musée du Québec

27 Sept. 2001–January 6th, 2002

Tel.: 418-644-6460

Synthesizing idea and image, using the land art projects he has become known for, or alternatively selected natural, architectural and archaeological sites around the world, or both, Bill Vazan has, over 35 years, built a significant body of photoworks. These have developed into an art production that parallels Vazan's large scale land art installations and sculptures seen at the McMichael Collection in Kleinberg, the Art Gallery of Peterborough, the National Gallery of Canada and elsewhere. While many of the land art projects Bill Vazan created in the

1960s survive only in the form of documents, photographs, books, films and videos due to their ephemeral conception, he has also created installations over the decades on the landscapes of world's five continents. Early in his career, Bill Vazan commented on his early use of grids, scanning and framing techniques in photography stating: "They are two-dimensional mental maps indicating the mind at work and akin to thinking about thinking—reductions of the images all about our multi-dimensional space and selves." The series of new works that form the main body of *Cosmological Shadows* at the Musée du Québec, grew out of these early photo *essais* and later evolved into photomosaics, globes, visual spheres, hovers, and photowrites.

The works on view at the Musée du Québec date from the past two years, and are, for the most part, photoworks. These include what Vazan calls *membranes*—photo series arranged as horizontal scans of a landscape. *Oval (Siting Osiris)/membrane* (2000) has at its top and bottom a series of consecutive scan shots taken on a ridge in the Theban Hills in the Valley of the Kings, Egypt. Inserted between these two 18 photo sections (which create the form of a globe with skyline using consecutive scanning), a horizontal line of 22 photos records a *bas relief* in the interior of the Temple of Abou Simbel that visually narrates Ramses II's exploits and battles. It was intended to aid the pharaoh on his voyage to the afterlife. Other innovations in the show include Vazan's ovals. *Oval: The Temple of Kom Ombo* (2000) and *Oval: Jacques Cartier Bridge, Montreal* (2000) resemble Vazan's earlier globes, but the shaping of these 360 degree scans is oval rather than circular.

One of the most visually surprising works in the show is *Smaller World* (2000) which juxtaposes an uppermost landscape view of Cap Trinité on the Côte Nord with images of the root structure of a birch tree, all this arranged in a grid-like format of multiple photos. Another is Vazan's interior photo reconstruction of the interior of the Abou Simbel temple in Egypt. Multiple statues of Ramses II, and the ceiling vaults built a sort of compartmentalized geometrical structure using this interesting imagery.

The term *singularities*, used in science to refer to what existed in the universe prior to the big bang, is adapted by Vazan to describe the thin lines of extending horizon views he now presents for the first time. For Vazan, a singularity that juxtaposes a view of the south-east coast of



Bill Vazan
Smaller World (2000)

Grande-Ile in the Mingan archipelago with the pyramids of Geza, builds a visual constructions that is "like a mirage, a warp or a twist". These visually stunning works are mindscapes that hinge upon the recording of actual topographies and provide a hint of the actual curvature of the earth. Also on view are single shot photo documents of recent large scale land art projects undertaken in the Mingan archipelago on the lower Saint Lawrence (2000) and in Egypt (2001). *Cosmological Shadous*, Vazan's latest show is a visually astonishing, up date on one of Quebec's most consistent and intriguing artist/sculptors.

John K. Grande

OTTAWA

ART PRICE:

A SCULPTOR FOR ALL SEASONS

Art Price is a Canadian artist with an international reputation whose work crosses seamlessly the borders of English, Quebec, and native Indian cultures. For the past 64 years he has made his home in Ottawa. As well as monumental sculptures, cast in bronze or aluminum and commissioned by cities from Victoria, B.C. to Gander, Newfoundland he has produced a cascade of paintings, drawings, small sculptures in wood, musical instruments, film and theatre design. This September he leaves the Ottawa house he built himself to join a daughter in Toronto, granddaughter of the great anthropologist Marius Barbeau.

Talking to Art Price, I found him totally down-to-earth and, as you would expect, practical. He was selling his own, and other artists' works and there were still treasures to be found. His house is immaculate,

nestled in the trees that have escaped the suburb clear-cut all around him. He has retained the quick laugh I remember from years ago and in fact thinks the only thing to do about modern life, with its fun-less plethora of computers and technological inventions, is to laugh. We walked along the roadside and picked fresh camomille plants to replenish the tea he drinks constantly. He is 82, fit and wiry and only agreed to the Toronto move because he admits he can no longer climb the 32 ft. ladders that were his métier.

The move will bring Price full circle to the city he moved to when he was three years old. Born in Edmonton, 1918, to Welsh and Dutch parents, he moved to Brantford outside the Indian reserve, south of Toronto, and later went to art school at Western Technical School, winning a bursary to the Ontario College of Art. From the beginning he supported himself with a wide variety of activities: as a night-club cartoonist, set designer for a ballet company, and eventually journeyed to Vancouver where he joined the Merchant Navy, witnessing the art of the Northwest Coast Indians for the first time. When war broke out, Price joined the army and designed sets for the Canadian Army shows going overseas to entertain the forces. In 1943 he went to the National Film Board as part-time animator, working with Norman McLaren. He met his wife Dalila there, and they would have five children, all of them artists.

Price tried Hollywood in 1946 but a strike in the industry changed his plans. He moved his family north, under contract to the National Museum, and travelled the whole of Vancouver Island and the Queen Charlottes. His notes and drawings were the foundation of much of his later work. The paintings were made into a *Native Arts of Canada* series, used first by the Pulp and Paper Association and later reproduced by silk screens hung in schools and offices all across Canada. For many people it was their first exposure to

this exciting art. It was Art Price, too, who found and transported the long-house and totems that make the nucleus of the beloved Indian Village at the University of British Columbia.

He returned to Ottawa to design free lance for the National Film Board. He illustrated some twenty books on French Canadian and Indian legends by Marius Barbeau, and produced a film-strip *Masks of the North American Indians and Eskimos*. He studied painters such as Klee, Chagall, Magritte, Harold Town. He was carving in wood and had begun working in metal, iron and copper, when the Film Board moved to Montreal. He stayed in Ottawa and in 1951 went to the Arctic for the Hudson's Bay Company, making drawings and paintings along the Mackenzie River. By this time he was a member of the Royal Canadian Academy, and the CBC had televised his work. He received commissions for larger works, and did five carvings for Jasper Park Lodge, two of them totems.

Art Price admires the simple and direct and believes that "art is the byproduct of activity." Don't be fussy, adapt, carve what comes to hand. He likes to follow the design from beginning to final product, enjoys the gamble and luck of pleasing an audience, like a performer, and says, "You can never predict the final affect."

He talked of his fortune in locating the Bond Brass Limited foundry near his home. It meant he could beat the cost of art castings by doing his own. He is a rare combination: an artist-foundry man. To quote a technical journal: "He has learned about gating, risering of difficult castings and can mould in green, CO₂ and oil sands, lost wax and polystyrene, and cast metal objects of all weights in both aluminum and copper base alloys."

For the record, the 60's produced some brilliant works. In 1964 he won the Grand Prize in Montreal's National Fountain and Monument Competition with the sculpture *Not even a Sparrow Falseth*, an ethereal bronze piece with delicate floating angels. He did *Labyrinth* for Expo '67. Another big commission in bronze was *Family Group*, for the Prudential Assurance Company of Montreal, an intimate view of family members.

In Toronto Price created *Man above Matter* for the Canadian National Exhibition, as well as a 30-foot exterior abstract for the Shell Company building. *Sails Aflame* is cast in bronze at the entrance to Harbour Castle Hotel. He did a set of richly coloured totems for the B.C. Room of the Royal York hotel. In Ottawa, *The Universe is You* is a silver-coloured, stainless steel ball outside the National Research Council. Abstract designs of nickel stainless steel, *Unity in Diversity* decorate the fountains on Sparks Street mall. His most recent work here is *Communigraph*, a 24-foot free-standing abstract for the new Post Office terminal. It's strong sets of vibrations form icy-cycles in winter and shine in the sun. The past joins the present in simple lines. These were the years when the Department of Public Works assigned a certain percentage of its budget to new art for new buildings. When that ran out, Art Price turned to other things. He carved, for example, a Pan Pipe flute from grey slate after an Indian model. He made a 10-note music machine in cast bronze, 12 feet tall. It plays like a carillon when the pedals and levers are pressed. He refurbished heraldic figures for the foyer to the National Arts Centre. Libraries and schools

Art Price
Birds of welcome: Gander airport



benefited from crystal ceiling decoration (the Ottawa Public Library) and standing abstract walls of amusing design.

Price travelled to Italy, Spain and Scandinavia to look into art exchanges. He made a number of trips to China, once under the auspices of the Federation of China and the China Friendship Association. He showed Chinese work naive paper cut-outs back in Ottawa. He spent three months in Mangshi, now Lusi City, far west of Yunnan province, with the interpreter, He Qui, giving lectures in English on Canadian art at the Teachers College.

He is a totally inventive man, and human stories abound. There was the man in Toronto, Max Florence, who sent his life's savings, \$1,224.67 as a gift to the National Capital Commission to brighten Ottawa. Art Price was commissioned to design a red granite sundial near Pierre Trudeau's official residence. The children in Winnipeg chipped in so their museum could keep a sculpture they loved, *Girl with a Cat*. In Ottawa, he put together the pieces of a beloved old building to save *The Tin House* in the market. He will doubtless surprise Toronto, especially if he takes the stunning 20 feet by 10 feet *Rain Wall*, now hanging in his garage with him. Ottawa will miss him.

Anne McDougall

TORONTO



Becky Singleton
Talking Ball Series, 2000 (detail)
2 sets of 6 C Prints, 16 x 20" each
Photo Courtesy Art Gallery of York University

BECKY SINGLETON

The Art Gallery
of York University

Sept. 4th–Oct. 21st, 2001.

Gallery Hours: Tues., Thurs.,
and Fri., 10:00 am to 4:00 pm
Wed.: 10:00 am to 8:00 pm
Sun.: noon to 5 pm

N145 Ross Building
4700 Keele St., Toronto
Tel.: (416) 736 5169

www.yorku.ca/admin/agyu

Its freshman week on campus and pimply first years are wandering the mall-like halls of York University trying to find the classrooms and food courts. I would not have imagined this setting to be conducive for this ambitious twenty year sampling of Becky Singleton's work. But like so many shows mounted at the AGYU, the curatorial staff aims at the highest common denominator. Perhaps they are out to prove that inside the mall a university does exist. I say this not to be elitist but to set you up for the fact Singleton's work is a hard read. The viewer is challenged by each and every work in the show and has to think to get it. The hand out brochure printed and distributed by the AGYU simply states: "...The resulting work is oblique, and raises more questions than it answers."

Singleton's conceptual explorations are, we are told, united by "...her interest in the structure of language, representation, and thought." One of the most amazing elements in the show is *Six Projections* (1981). This work has its own exhibition room and activates an entire wall. As the title suggests, it comprises six projections. The subject matter is simply Margareth Kluka, (Singleton's model) in each projection for the duration of the 16mm film stock, dancing topless alone in a room. This work is owned by The Art Gallery of Ontario, so we must assume it is more than a pseudo-Muybridge movement study and certainly more than jiggling objectified tits. Is it personal expression by way of self-directed movement, heightened by the consistency of the projection length and static camera? I'm not sure, but it certainly does leave a poetic imprint.

Other works in the show include the *Talking Ball Series* (1999-2000), *Dial Photographs* (1984-1994), *Beauty and the Beast* (2001), and the *How to photographs* (1981-1998). The *How to photographs*, like *Six Projections* also showcase Margareth Kluka as the model. In these photos, Singleton plays with the conventions of advertising and representation. My favourite of this

series is *How to wear a tinted raincoat* (1981/1998). In this work Kluka is properly dressed in panties, heels and a transparent raincoat. Yes it is zipped up and yes she's waterproof, but her ample bosom is packaged like a cut of meat in a grocery store!

Becky Singleton's show is a must see for anyone interested in challenging contemporary art! The staff at AGYU will gladly direct you to other publications that discuss Singleton's work in theoretical depth and context. Or you may simply want to visit York Lanes, the campus mall, and buy a neat clear raincoat for back to school.

Elizabeth Fearon

STANLEY SPENCER:

ANGELS AND DIRT

Sept. 14th–Dec. 30th, 2001

Art Gallery of Ontario
317 Dundas St. W.

Tel.: 416-977-0414

In this, the first show of Stanley Spencer's art ever held in Canada, the Art Gallery of Ontario presents 65 paintings and drawings by this quirky, yet fascinating artist. For a long time considered a regionalist painter in his native England where he lived in Cookham, a small English village in the Thames Valley some 30 miles west of London, Stanley Spencer developed a unique narrative style. For the way he referenced the Bible, he has been compared with William Blake. But Spencer developed his narratives differently, in a highly personal, and often obscure way.

What a complex inner life Spencer expressed through his art! Sometimes the convolutions and symbolic meanings are exhausting. His earliest works such as *The Apple Gatherers* (1912-13), for their residue of natural style, an echo of Gauguin's work, are more intrinsically joyful than what followed. The landscapes are often straight realistic portrayals, witness to what the eye beholds. We see this straight approach in *Cookham* (1914) and *Cookham from Cookham Dene* (1938). A poignant critique of modern morality, *Love Among the Nations* (1935) is jam packed with peoples of different races in their respective costumes, embracing, enjoying each others bodies. Its ultimate message may be that conventions of race and age do not matter when it comes to sex. The sketches *Patricia with Gramophone* (1943-44) *Patricia Shopping*, (1943-44), and *Taking*



Stanley Spencer
Self-portrait 1914, 2001
Oil of canvas, 62.9 x 50.8 cm
Art Gallery of Ontario

in *Washing, Elsie*, (1943-44) look less laboured than his religious paintings. The dramatic sketches and paintings of *Burners* (1940) or *Welders* (1941) done in the wartime shipyards at Port Glasgow, Scotland have that same energy and documentary veracity as Louis Muhlstock's realist treatments of similar war industry themes in Montreal: man and machine interface. But Spencer loads his paintings, crowds them, as if there were always more to capture. *Scrapheap* (1944) is one of the most poetic and beautiful. The waste and dirt Spencer so loved is evidenced in piles of rusted sheet metal, the patterns of empty rivet holes, all set against a brick background. Other paintings like *Carrying Mattresses* (ca. 1920-21) are amusing, and border on pantomime.

The religious themes Spencer addressed in a narrative style fuse the everyday banality of English village life with dramatic Biblical themes. They delight in the mundane, as if Spencer were bringing God back home for tea. A simpler delight can be found in the paintings less laden with overt symbolism, for Spencer loved being literal, bringing Gethsemane back to the village square. The swirl of details—a couch, clothes, couple and wallpaper—in *Love Letters* (1950), is a sincere evocation of Spencer's love for a woman, and delights in a deco style. His mission, to communicate a religious message through art, literal and laden with the English village life vernacular, can be seen in *Christ Carrying the Cross* (1920). We see workmen (or is it disciples?), a cottage crammed with "angels"

leaning out of its windows. It all seems too naive, even as Spencer sincerely believed in this message. Ditto for *The Crucifixion* (1921). The landscape and Christ on the Cross, seen from a bird's eye view, though modernist, even art deco, looks incongruous, as if God and real life met awkwardly at some crossroad in Stanley Spencer's mind.

Spencer's paintings from the 1930s are haunting and obsessive depictions of his sexual awakening. As evocations of an inner life, they reflect a bizarre obsession and guilt that turns inwards. *Toasting (or Sociableness)* (1937-38) shows a nude couple cooking a slab of meat in front of a fireplace, while *Consciousness* (1938) casts its shadow on a gossipy dressed-up couple. As expressions of convoluted relationships with both of his wives, these paintings share something of the macabre with Bosch and the painter Edward Burra. Spencer's penetrating portraits of himself and his wives are painful, poignant, and with a feeling for the spirit within. They conclude with a *Self Portrait* from 1959, when he was dying from cancer. Amid the angels and the dirt, Stanley Spencer undoubtedly had a vision, however perturbed and at times confused. It was entirely his own and he never wavered from that vision.

John K. Grande

ROGUE WAVE 2001:

ANNUAL OUTDOOR EXHIBITION OF SCULPTURE & INSTALLATION

Art on the Toronto Islands

Sept. 22nd-Nov. 11th

A few minutes and a short ferry ride away from downtown Toronto, the Toronto Islands are a magical place. When you get off the ferry at the Wards Island dock you enter a small, close knit, car free, community. The dominant mode of transportation on Ward Island is actually walking, and the dominant mode of moving goods and belongings is a bundle buggy!

Now in its fourth year, *Rogue Wave*, in the past functioned very much as a community art show. Surprisingly this year an open call for submissions from artists elsewhere was held. Though admittedly that community is chock full of professional artists, the open call brings *Rogue Wave* to another level as an exhibition. The decision to open up the exhibition to non-Islanders may have been spurred by the recent addition of The Gibraltar Point Centre for the Arts in the Island community. The aim of the

centre is to function in a manner similar to the Banff Centre for the Arts in Alberta, as a place for artist residencies, conferences, and retreats.

The exhibition this year sought to present the work of 30 artists in outdoor settings around the island. Indeed the setting and the request that artists use "environmentally and people friendly" materials may well be the only formal link of any kind between the works. While in a gallery setting this approach could lead to a very poor show, the sheer amount of space and "real world" environment between the works on the Toronto islands certainly adds to the various artists' presentations. Basically, the viewer sets out to explore the Island and has the added bonus of finding art along the way.

One of the better works they will find will be *Water Colour* (2001) a collaboration between artists Delwyn Higgins and Michael Davey. This work is located at the Toronto Island Water Filtration Plant. Very simply, this duo has activated 650 manhole covers located in a fifty by one hundred metre field within the plant's boundaries by painting the manholes. Each cover is painted one of a range of twenty shiny colours. When *Water Colour* is seen as a whole from the air or from the vantage point of a cat walk fifty metres above the ground, it certainly does read as a large-scale site specific painting on the ground... the artists' intention. The most astounding aspect of this work is the fact it has been designed to endure. It will remain long after *Rogue Wave* has swept the Island and will intrigue strangers who happen upon it while strolling the area. It will weather many more beautiful hot July days and bitter February nights. The strangeness of this inherent longevity is saddening in some ways, because it illuminates the short life span of most site specific independently produced work. Other artists to look out for who are participating in *Rogue Wave* include Geoff Currie, Paul Grajauskas, Kathleen Doody, and Robin Christmas.

Rogue Wave is certainly a special exhibition in a very special place. It's the kind of show you can pack a lunch and make a day of! I suggest you try and time your visit for mid-afternoon to evening. The view of the city at night from the Island is breath taking!

Elizabeth Fearon

For a ferry schedule: (416) 392 8193
Rogue Wave tour maps are available at the Wards Island ferry dock

DON BONHAM & JOHN WARD

Sovran Jensen Fine Art

October 15th

18 Hook Avenue
Toronto, Ontario
M6P 1T4.

Tel.: 416-766-5832

Fax: 416-766-9467

This show is a rare event for the Canadian arts scene that juxtaposes Don Bonham's finely crafted and fantastic, neo-mythological sculptures with John Ward's colour saturated invasions of the leaf world. Ward's cause us to investigate the rift between human culture and nature, while Don Bonham's neo-mythological machines and anthropomorphized techno-hybrids are finely engineered fusions of technology and humanity.

John Ward, who began as a scenery painter for theatre at the age of 17, and had rapid success as an illustrator, before turning his brush to the canvas full-time in 1974, has exhibited his works in Brazil, Monaco, France, Korea, Viet Nam and across Canada and the United

States. Ward prefers to paint micro worlds, elaborating on their patterns, details, decomposition and birth. They liberate his art from the heavily trodden fields of narrative. The leaf patterns and minutiae of details enable Ward to experiment with abstract variables—colour, light, form, texture and composition. The paintings reify the cyclical process of life and death, embodying all its transitory stages. Ward's approach to painting nature is ultimately a phenomenological one, for he does not impose his subject, but instead discovers it in nature's designs. Each element he paints has its own unperceived history. In *Red Leaf with Holes*, (1999) for instance, the details resemble a map of nature's processes in microcosm, which are synonyms for universal transformation. The leaf is at the point of turning from summer green to autumn red. As in *Yellow Light, Light and Dark* or *Yellow Leaf*, John Ward details the immediate as if there were no filter between himself and the abstract world he uncovers. The expanded scale which transforms the realism into an altogether different artform is analogous to the way



Don Bonham
20th century technology utilized
by 3rd world mentality
150 x 84 x 80"

John Ward
Light and Dark, 1999
Acrylic on canvas
134 x 274 cm



Chuck Close paints the contemporary portrait. Ward's visual relativism perceives nature through optical layers, then lays it down onto the canvas/membrane. As Ward states: "These (leaf) paintings were not born of an idea, in the sense of sitting down and intellectually deciding to do a series of paintings about leaves (...). They're about a feeling, rather than being just depictions or descriptions. I would have failed if people looked at them as botanical renderings. I see them as a vehicle for some kind of magical quality, a mystical sense. I see them as carrying that kind of energy."

Oklahoma City-born Cajun sculptor Don Bonham, an immovable fixture in the London, Ontario arts scene that included Greg Curnoe, Ed Zelenak and Paterson Ewen, has always attracted controversy. His performances included the unforgettable *Herman Goode Racing Team*, a fictional car racing team with a fictional life size racing car, and volunteer pit crew with uniforms and a "documented" history. They visited racing sites with their car/artwork, signed autographs, raising questions about the great gap between art and life and people believed they were the real thing.

The meshing of technology and mythology is succinctly addressed in Bonham's *Twentieth Century Technology Utilized by Third World Mentality*. This helicopter, a humanized hybrid machine is detailed down to the rivets and blades. The metal skin of this beast has arms extending out of its body, and pairs of human feet as landing gear. A hybridized dream creature sits maliciously in the cockpit, a kinetic sculptural spectacle that could only have originated in the black lagoon of Don Bonham's ubiquitous imagination. A wheel stands apart from the main piece, an icon of an earlier stage of civilization. The free standing *Zic Zac II* is a gargoyle that has grown up and left home. This high-tech primitivism is born of Bonham's naive celestial imagination. Bonham's *Monument for the Children of the 20th Century*, a solemn large scale sculpture monument, is cordoned off with chain. This chariot is like sarcophagus with wooden wheels. The arms of unknown people support this mortal body machine, that sits atop a support pedestal with carved *bas reliefs* of children's haunting faces. An epitaph engraved in metal declares this monument to be in memory of all the children who have died in wars in the 20th century. Bonham's sculptures are prototypes for a visionary world. Fusing the trophies and tools of today's technology to build myth objects, Bonham's art

jumps the chasm between a spiritual absence and the ongoing advance of technology.

John K. Grande

VANCOUVER

RECKLESS DOING:

CAI GUO-QIANG

Contemporary Art Gallery

555 Nelson Street
Vancouver, B.C.
V6B 6R5

Tel.: (604) 681-2700
www.contemporaryartgallery.ca

The Charles H. Scott Gallery

1399 Johnston Street,
Vancouver, B.C.
V6H 3R9

Tel.: (604) 844-3809
chscott@eciad.bc.ca

July 27 to September 23, 2001

"Art allows one to be reckless", says internationally acclaimed Chinese artist Cai Guo-Qiang. Renowned for the spectacular gunpowder explosions he stages throughout the world, and invited as guest artist for three projects created and on view in Vancouver until September 23, Cai Guo-Qiang is an artist who disrupts the boundaries between media and cultural traditions.

The Contemporary Art Gallery and the Charles H. Scott Gallery invited Cai to produce three projects interacting with the place and people of Vancouver. First, in *Performing Chinese Painting* he staged public painting by masters of traditional Chinese ink brush. In the second project, Cai himself painted a rapid series of oil paintings that illustrate his earlier explosion events. The final project, *Drawing for Fountain* is an explosion drawing performed at the Scott Gallery opening on August 2.

Similar to Cai's earlier performances, *Performing Chinese painting* orchestrates a group of artists working in a traditional medium—Chinese ink brush painting—in public at the Sun Yat-Sen Garden. This Ming Dynasty styled garden, recreated in downtown Vancouver, provided a kind of theatrical set for the event. Miniaturized landscape features in the garden—rock, trees, waterfall and pavilion—served as traditional references for three Chinese ink brush painters to create imaginary landscapes. Cai added a mechanical smoke machine device to these. Its bursts of vapour simulated the effect of real mist.

The painters took their paintings, as well as the smoke machine, back to the Contemporary Art Gallery and in a day, produced a single, huge ink-on-paper mural of mountains, waterfalls, and gnarled pine trees. They finished it during the opening the same evening. Bursts from the conspicuous smoke machine drifted past the scenery, a surprising illusion of expansive space and atmosphere. The intricate layers of artifice and landscape and painting formulae reflected the differing ways people look at landscape in the East and West.

At the Scott Gallery, Cai reconsiders his *Project for Extraterrestrials* that has involved staging gunpowder explosions in locations around the world since 1989. Sometimes vast, like the *Project to Extend the Great Wall of China by 10,000 Metres* (1993), the explosions provide brief moments of spectacle that climax months of preparation. Beyond entertainment, however, Cai conceives his elaborate blasts as metaphorical *signals to the universe* that escape any logical constraints, weaving ties between cosmos and self.

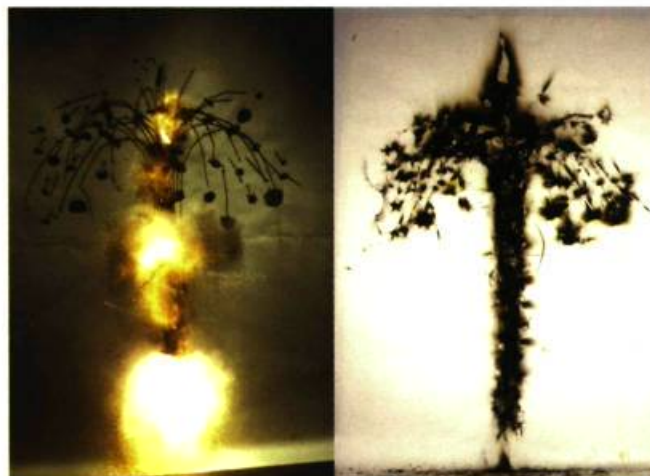
During the two weeks of his Vancouver residency, Cai undertook the performance task of painting a

canvas each day from memory and photographic records of Extraterrestrial explosions. Such a large production target undertaken in such a short time required explosive bursts of energy from the artist. The artistic act itself recreates its subject. The fourteen colourful, gestural images Cai made resemble Western abstract expressionist painting, yet we recognize something real even if ultimately unrepresentable in them. It is the complex interplay of film, memory, intuition, physical action and the qualities of the oil medium itself, that reconstruct a more complete kind of representation than could ever be possible in the moment.

For his finale, Cai literally painted with fire. In *Drawing for Fountain*, he attached fuses and packets of gunpowder to a wall-sized sheet of heavy Japanese paper, tracing the outlines of a previous outdoor explosion as it is recorded on video. When ignited at the public opening, the fountain flashed and charred its image into the paper. A video record was then added to the compilation already on view in the gallery. Strangely reminiscent of ink brush painting, the drawing is a delicate yet brutal reminder of devastation.

Cai's art fascinates both by its engagement of the senses, as well as by its endless subtle references. The original *Fountain concept*, representing water with fire, travels through several forms. Initially staged as an ephemeral outdoor explosion in the tradition of Oriental fireworks, it finds permanence in the new Western medium of video and then, in the historical Western medium of oil painting. The fragile explosion ironically draws its source from a quasi-representation of the record of a quasi-representation. Cai considers the explosion to be a compelling metaphor for the creative act, where dangerous forces are discharged. The residue can exist in our memory as it does in the material. But creative force is not entirely reckless. In Chinese ink painting, years of disciplined practice precede the instantaneous flow of energy through the brush.

Joan Richardson



Cai Guo-Qiang

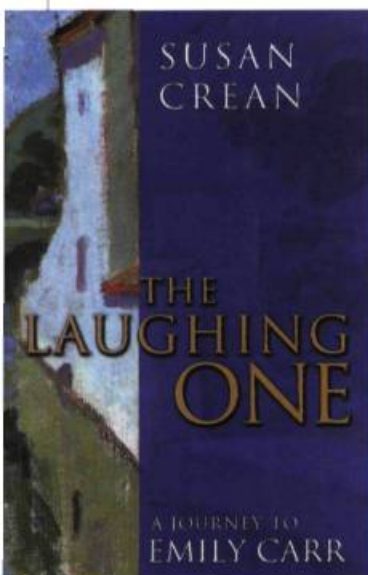
VICTORIA, B.C.

THE LAUGHING ONE:

A JOURNEY TO EMILY CARR

SUSAN CREAN

Harper Flamingo Canada,
Toronto, 2001, 496 pages



All biographies are fictional to some extent. They seek to present an accurate sketch of their subject/personality, but can never completely enter into that person's experience as it was at the time. Realism, rendering, representation all play a part. Sue Crean's *The Laughing One: A Journey to Emily Carr* does not try to follow the path of traditional biography. Instead, it is part travelogue, part recreation, and part literary interpretation of Emily Carr—the person—and the places and people she knew. Crean digs, delves, picks the anecdotal data shards she finds and reassembles them. The subject is Emily Carr—one of North America's most unique modernists.

Crean's search for Carr's essence includes examining her childhood, looking at her rejection of a man's love, revisiting the Skeena river and native territories Carr went to. It often becomes opaque, for she divides the details, splits the strands and shades them with her own ideational nuances—feminist, colonial, post-colonial, familial, regional, postModernist. The passion is lost in the jargon, tossed about as if the subject—Emily Carr—were a mere product label—so much art historical dross or dead-wood used to fulfill a writer's agenda. There are speculations about her being abused as a child, and shopping lists of her potential maladies and idiosyncracies. Aren't

many great artists unusual precisely because their lives were not prescribed, their experiences not normal? This is why their art sheds light on the inner glades of ordinary people's lives. How seldom we actually hear any description or delight in Emily Carr's actual paintings or artistic process in this book. Instead we get a mishmash of gossip, jargon, stereotypes and psycho babble—reinterpreted—of course. Emily Carr expressed her own view on this endless probing, describing a passage from D.H. Lawrence's book *St. Maur*: "Everything these days of people talking of sex and psychology. (...) It's so impertinent, digging around inside people and saying why they did things, by what law of mind they came to such and such, and making hideous false statements and yanking up all the sex problems."

Is this book a script for some future National Film Board of Canada docudrama? It has that postModernist (nationalist) Canadian feel to it—part travelogue, part fictionalization, part gossip, along with a timorous Hollywoodization—all in black and white—of Emily Carr's life. Crean's fictionalized account of Carr's brief meeting with Georgia O'Keefe in New York, for example, is overblown, embroidered on and speculated on far too much. The event is presented too self-consciously, as if it had occurred in a book rather than real life. Why does Emily Carr's meeting with Mark Tobey, a truly fascinating artist, receive only two sentences in this book? Minimal, diminutive politics? Do we really need to know absolutely every anecdote about an artist's life to enjoy their creation? As a child, I remember laying on my bed and looking at a Sampson & Matthews image of Emily Carr's chapel in the woods. The immense scale of the trees and grass that gave it an Alice in Wonderland feel. Why was the chapel there? Where was it? Carr's own extensive and immensely popular writings... *House of Small*, *Klee Wyck*... capture the beauty and truth of her vision, describe her encounters with West coast aboriginal culture and life in Victorian Victoria, the humour and hardship, in a lively way. In the conclusion to *The Laughing One*, Susan Crean describes Emily Carr as the penultimate malleable myth—an artist who serves any meaning—is everything to all people. I prefer to keep that distance Carr loved and enjoy her paintings as a sublime spiritual and uplifting visual experience. Emily Carr had a vision.

John K. Grande

EMILY CARR ECCENTRIC, ARTIST, AUTHOR, GENIUS

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Lining an alcove at the rear exit to the Emily Carr exhibit in the Royal B.C. Museum, large wall maps trace journeys made by the artist during the course of her lifetime. The journey lines criss-cross two continents, intersecting Alaska, San Francisco, Chicago, New York, Ottawa, Toronto, Vancouver, London, and Paris, tracing the development of the artist as she studied, taught, exhibited, met The Group of Seven, and formalized her art practice. They grow more numerous—indelible—along the north and west coastlines of Vancouver Island and the remote areas of the Queen Charlotte Islands (Haida Gwaii). Like bloodlines, they connect Emily Carr to her time in this place that she loved, the wilds of Vancouver Island and its indigenous peoples.

Throughout the exhibition, there are vitrines containing letters, journals, correspondence, and early manuscripts of Carr's fictions and autobiographies. Other memorabilia include Carr's pottery, her travel trunk, and personal effects—jewelry, gifts, photographs, and china—that embellish our sense of her creative life. On the walls we can see a vast collection of Emily Carr's sketches, watercolours, and oils on canvas. The objects and artworks, categorized into sections, parallel the stages of her life. The titles are drawn from the artist's award winning books and journals (*Book of Small*, *Growing Pains*, *Klee Wyck*, *House of all Sorts*, *Hundreds and Thousands*) and remind us that Carr's life and art were inseparable.

The most poignant part of the exhibit is a recreation of a forest setting in which a reproduction of Emily Carr's elephant is situated. The Elephant was Carr's travel trailer that she had moved to various locations, setting up camp and painting in the woods for extended periods of time. In this area of the museum, portions of old totem poles are installed; wild birdcalls echo through the semi-darkened spaces; scrim with painted forests encircle the forms; excerpts of Emily's writings are heard from

a disembodied soundtrack. This encampment embraces the heart and soul of the artist's later years (1933-1938), a time in which Carr's work matured in the secluded woods of Beacon Hill, Goldstream Park, and Metchosin.

In the years since her passing, much has been written, revised, and rewritten about Emily Carr. As with most revisions, there are many ambiguities that accompany a contemporary reading of the artist. For example, although Carr led a privileged existence in her early years, like so many she was impoverished during the war years, sustaining herself by operating a rooming house. Was Emily Carr really a feminist as contemporary writers tend to suggest? Like so many female artists from earlier generations, Emily Carr evolved in isolation on the Canadian west coast, a subject the high-spirited, independent artist wrote about in her journals, yet it was the company of male artists like Lawren Harris, A.Y. Jackson, and Mark Tobey that Carr sought out, and whose work inspired and informed her own (as did Post-Impressionism, Cubism, and Fauvism, all inherently male dominated Western European artforms). There is also the subject of appropriation. Did the natives who called her Klee Wyck (the Laughing One), appreciate Carr's intrusion into their culture? Did Emily Carr overly sentimentalize their lives? One must return to the legacy of her own work to unravel the mysteries,



Emily Carr
Grey, 1931

struggles and ambiguities. In so doing, one begins to realize that maybe because of it all, a strongly independent artistic spirit grew, developed its own language, and sustained itself. Victorians have now reclaimed their cantankerous eccentric artist, mythologizing her into a celebrity, bestowing upon her a status that is not hers to enjoy. A new generation of art lovers has come to realize that a great one lived among us and deserves our respect. Perhaps Emily Carr will smile in her grave and enjoy the ironic position of coming into her own glory.

Linda Giles

OTHER CURRENT EMILY CARR EXHIBITIONS:
DOWN FROM THE FOREST
 Charcoal drawings
 Art Gallery of Greater Victoria

EMILY'S ALL SORTS
 Objects, paintings, pottery
 Carr House
 207 Government Street, Victoria

LONGTIME, ONGOING EMILY CARR
 Paintings from the permanent collection
 Vancouver Art Gallery

CARR, O'KEEFE, AND KAHLO
 McMichael Collection, Ontario

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