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**SAINT-JOHN,
N.B.**

**UNE PIERRE POUR TOI
- A STONE FOR YOU**

MARIE HÉLÈNE ALLAIN

New Brunswick Museum
Saint John, New Brunswick

3 December 2000–15 April 2001

The New Brunswick Museum in Saint John is currently hosting a major exhibition of the work of sculptor Marie Hélène Allain that was, according to curator Peter Larocque, some three years in the making, but it was well worth the time spent on the project. Marie Hélène Allain is one of the province's most significant and interesting artists. She is also a Sister in the Order of *Les Religieuses de Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Coeur*. This enlightened community in the village of Saint-Marie-de-Kent has had the foresight to allow Marie Hélène to develop as an artist over a period of many years. Her spirituality is evident in the twenty pieces included in this exhibition.



Marie Hélène Allain, *Secrets of time*, 1996, St-John, N.B.
Photo: Dalores Breau

During the show's opening the artist gave a tour and spoke to a captive audience about each work. A friend of mine said it was her hands even more than her words that spoke elegantly about her work. During the talk she would guide her hands over a sculpture in a way that was like one might touch a lover. Sculpture is generally a physical art, for sculptures occupy real rather than illusionary space. Marie Hélène's sculptures use stone, metal and wood, materials that are difficult to work and unforgiving of any mistakes an artist might make during the process of their manufacture. In her artist's statement Allain maintains that: "Stone is the main vehicle for the meaning of each of my sculptures. (...) For me, stone is a reminder of our distant roots, an evocation of the constancy, durability and patience of the silent work inherent in the most basic transformations. Stone can create new life as it reverts back to sand, soil and humus, and it can create new life through the many symbols it evokes as it is transformed and, I hope, through the force of its symbolism in a work of art."

All of the work in the exhibition was completed between 1993 and 2000. The title of the exhibition, *Une pierre pour toi*, reinforces the artist's idea that her art is meant to be a gift to the viewer. Indeed in one work, *Présente* (2000), loose small stones within a bowl-like part of the sculpture are meant to be taken away by viewers, thereby making the title of the exhibition quite literal. It is very hard to classify Allain's sculpture, for they are neither modernist or post-modernist, but rather something quite her own. They can be funny, and almost realistic, as with *Spectres de la baleine* (1998), which looks like a whale doing a hand-stand, or more appropriately for a whale, a head-stand. They can also be very mysterious like *Secrets du Temps* (1996), which hides its meaning deep within abstraction.

The stone used in Allain's work comes from many places including New Brunswick, Quebec, Vermont, Italy and Madagascar. There is even one, *Merci* (1999), that employs sandstone from my hometown of Sackville, New Brunswick. The variety of stones used is important. Each type is so different in colour, surface texture, and, more significantly, in hardness the stones range from very

soft sandstone to extremely hard marble. The diversity of materials give Marie Hélène a broad palette which she works with in the same way a painter might use a variety of different coloured paints. Of course, the major difference between sculpture and painting is that you are generally encouraged to touch sculpture and actively discouraged from even getting close to paintings. There are unfortunately many museums that don't seem to really understand that sculpture is meant to be touched as well as looked at. Shame on them! Thankfully the New Brunswick Museum has made it easy for viewers to get close up and personal with Marie Hélène's sculpture. The works are displayed to their maximum advantage.

Marie-Hélène Allain's sculptures are unique and do not fit into the mainstream of contemporary art. They are mostly abstract yet appeal to viewers of all stripes. Curator Peter Larocque calls the sculptor a romantic in his catalogue essay. I would agree because, as he states: "The contract undertaken (with the work) is determined by a leap of faith on the part of both the artist and the audience."

Virgil Hammock

MONTREAL

**SPATIAL
METAPHORS**

KAY AUBANEL

David Astrof Fine Arts
3650 McTavish

February 14–March 14, 2001

Recalling Josef Albers comment that "Art is not an object but an experience", Kay Aubanel shapes her painterly visions of light and space in a highly individualistic way. Active in the Montreal arts scene since the early days of Powerhouse Gallery in the 1970s, Aubanel's art has explored architectural interiors and spaces for some time. The tight knit exhibition of paintings being presented at David Astrof Fine Arts further develops her themes of space, light and architecture, so much so that the structures become abstract metaphors for the passage of time. Suffused with sublime painterly surface and light effects, the architectural motifs—the starting point for these works—are transformed so as to become transparent. Light becomes a metaphor for some immaterial state of being. The forms we initially recognize seem to dissolve in space...



Kay Aubanel, *Passage*, 1993, Montreal
Mixed media on paper,
128 x 59 cm

In *La ligne Blue II*, a Dante-esque geometry of subterranean passageways and walls is followed, along its walls, by a blue line, always at the same height, a colouristic keynote that passes ignominiously through the warm and cool light areas of the painting. A door, slightly ajar, provides a suggestion of another space we cannot see. The surface swirls of paint are as riveting as the underground scenario. The ghostly painterly surfaces and play of surface light achieve a filmic kind of transparency, as if this were a subliminal metaphor for some subconscious and illusory state of being. In *Passage*, an industrial passage and roof structure is transformed into a sacred, contemplative, even visionary space. The hierarchical presentation of this passage looks archaic, like an Egyptian inner sanctum.

Kay Aubanel's art explores its spatial metaphors with a sublime sensitivity to place and the way time weaves its way onwards. *L'Offrande* expands and extends the multifaceted lines of a building interior, then superimposes a circular motif onto it. The sense of a dimensional shift, of an unfolding and cathedral-like abstract geometry of space and light is fascinating. The shapes and forms are illusory, and float magically in ever expanding space, a wave of transformation. In *Puits de lumière*, Aubanel's use of light-dark effects become the subject and space the ubiquitous metaphor for life's invisible and perpetual energy. Smaller studies like *Sans titre (la main dans la main-bleu)* are child-like in their simple abstract treatment of folds and swirls of cloth that unfold in space to become a torso and hand.

La traversée de l'éphémère, a 4-panel multimedia piece is undoubtedly the most powerful piece in the show. Here, Aubanel achieves a simultaneity of movement that recalls early 20th century Italian Futurist works by Gino Severini, Giacomo Balla and Umberto Boccioni. The dynamism is fluid, not mechanistic, and wholly naturalistic. The movement, seen in ghostly swirls of shadowy light and dark forms, is pure luminosity, trailing off abstractly into abstract space. These "forms" define their own dimensionality and each of the panels presents a unique, yet related scene. The suggestive configurations and continual movement build a rhythm, that in each panel is like a stanza, an interlude, that leads on to the next one. In the far right panel, a cube of pure white light offers yet another window or dimensionality to the scenario. The effect is like time sequence photography, a medium Aubanel experimented with at an earlier stage in her career. Many levels or layers of abstraction occur simultaneously.

Kay Aubanel instils her work with a sense of the passage of time, yet light remains the eternal constant that unifies her compositions. As Aubanel comments: "These works are often triggered by concrete experiences. It's the mystery behind the prosaic. My art springs from an acute sense of the passage of time, the speed of life. You have to flow with it, fight it, ultimately celebrate it..."

John K. Grande

A PROCESS(ION) OF ILLUMINATION

LISA NEIGHBOUR

Liane and Danny Taran Art Gallery
Saidye Bronfman Centre
for ther Arts

Until March 4, 2001

From the intensely personal to the ultimate impersonal truths of universal human existence, Lisa

Lisa Neighbour, *Super Power*, 1996/97.
Montreal
Mixed media, size variable,
approx. 200 sq.ft. (floor), collection the artist.

Neighbour's work has been coined "folk art futurism".

Much as Kandinsky opted to embrace folk art rather than conform to the whims of the moment, Neighbour exploits the lasting power of these universal expressions of the spirit. This 10-year survey of the ingenious light sculptures of Toronto-based Lisa Neighbour currently on view at the Saidye Bronfman Centre's Liane and Danny Taran Art Gallery draws largely from the iconic imagery of religious folk art imagery which she describes as "...using the symbolism of light and darkness to describe philosophical and religious concepts which are hard to describe. It is interesting to see that a completely different culture was talking about things in a way that I could really understand." These cultural metaphors for the human condition serve as a highly charged repository for contemporary socio/political content. The folksy religious content becomes a mortal point of departure into an encounter with ultimate truths about existence, and death. Using a variety of imagery such as an imperial crown, a wreath and a treasure chest of gleaming jewels Neighbour allude to the hopes, dreams and fears of a generation of artists who shared with Neighbour the trials and tribulations of coping with emergent and ongoing crises on the national and the world stage.

Upon entering the gallery, one is greeted by a work titled *Super Power IV*. A mute yet dignified chorus of 50 household lamps are arranged on the floor. As the bulbs flicker on and off, giving off a multi-coloured radiance, they illuminate a nearby brown and black macramé sculpture intricately woven using the wires of the lamps themselves. Its shadowy shape looms above.

The attributes we might associate with these decorative lamps, evoke associations with the snug liberal mindset of a generation whose attitudes held sway over the artists in their ongoing struggle for recognition. This mindset was in part responsible for much of the "pathetic" and angry art in Toronto

during the late eighties and mid-nineties. This was an art imbued with a sense of resignation and failure about the artist's condition and inadvertently, the human condition in general. The upheavals that these artists faced, namely the cataclysm of AIDS and public hostility to their own work, created a political *raison d'être* for social protest, and shared experience.

Influenced by a crown of thorns motif she saw at the St. Ines Catholic Church in Toronto, *Trance Wreath #3* is a wily work that makes deft use of Catholic symbolism. This wall-piece made of painted plywood and lit up with random bursts of light conjures up an aura of the tragic and celebratory. It is an epitaph to Neighbour's stricken artist compatriots, yet inevitably leads to a road that she metaphorically walks alone. Using the simplest of metaphors, mutating them so our usual associations with them become skewed, Neighbour builds an amalgam of metaphoric meaning out of a bizarre range of influences. In so doing, she expresses the most unutterable truths in an unobtrusive way.

Isak Augustine

CLASSIFIED: NATURE

LOCUS IN QUO

KATHRYN LIPKE

Maison de la Culture Mercier
8105, rue Hochelaga

March 4–April 12, 2001

SEED CATCHERS

KATHRYN LIPKE

McClure Gallery—
Visual Arts Centre
350, rue Victoria

March 2–24, 2001

Is our memory of place real? Is the act of reconfiguring memory illusionistic? The questions raised by Lipke's *Locus in Quo* installation are overshadowed by the sheer aesthetic beauty of this place. The persistence of the presence of nature in our memories and in reality seems all the more remarkable for what we have done to it. While nature remains the central impetus for this ensemble of elements—photos, videos, physical elements and a crafted boat, the diversity and approach Lipke has taken evokes a sense of the global scale of environmental concerns, of the cause and effect interconnectedness between all things physical. A spiritual dimension thus enters into the work, but Lipke approaches her theme as a witness, and with great modesty.



Kathryn Lipke, *Saplings*, 2000/01,
Kozo paper bees wax,
each—240 x 80 x 100 cm approx.

There are traces of the human presence that surface in the video imagery of the Barents Sea and coast of northern Scandinavia, brief cues and clues—the detritus scattered near the seashore, or an abandoned home, but the rhythms and patterns of nature are the platform on which it all rests...

A seemingly innocent tool—a surveyor's transom on a tripod—historically used to map, measure and transcribe locations on the continents of the world, here becomes a device we look into not to take a reading, but instead to witness a myriad of images on a micro video monitor of moving water, of undulating ocean and water sway and the worn shoreline of northern Scandinavia. This brief historical reference—the transom—presented as it is—reminds us that it is only we who attribute, ascribe places with labels, measures, categorize all manner of things.

Pervasive images of WATER, seen in large scale photo images, in the videos, and in the boat Lipke has crafted, give the overall work of art a dream-like quality, as if this were a voyage through time, and not a journey on the physical plane. The point of departure and arrival, if there is one, rests within our soul. This boat Lipke has put together, whose "skin" is made of paper, is scaled like a war canoe, as if embarked on some ancestral journey, in a search for the identity of its invisible passengers. Salt crystals have been placed near this "war canoe" to represent a shoreline. An essential ingredient in the human circulation system, salt maintains our bodily temperature and health, just as the ocean's currents, like a giant radiator, sustain life in northern regions like Iceland, and Scandinavia by modulating the



earth's climactic patterns. A sensual swath of silk that trails off Lipke's boat is anchored to the floor by three white quartz rocks, weights are the memory that anchors us in our identity.

In a room set apart from the rest of the show, there are salt water samples from sites around the world—the Baltic, the Great Lakes, Barents Sea, the Arctic, the Atlantic, the St. Lawrence River. The water "samples", contained in simple chemists flasks, play on and with scientism, the way so much human energy is dedicated to rationalizing and quantifying nature's systems and resources. It is as if instead of working with nature, we are working against it. There are tiny stones atop each flask and on the gallery floor a larger river of stones provides a narrative sense of the actuality of the place. A trio of video monitors, presented adjacent to other elements in the gallery, provide us with close up images of the Barents Sea off the coast of Norway and Finland that merge with distant views.

Kathryn Lipke has engendered a sense of the totality of nature's systems, using a myriad of effects, objects and elements. Above all, the sense of time and memory, that brings nature to us as we experience it in imagistic and sensorial fragments... the specificity of place at a moment in time. We carry a memory of nature in each of us, in our bodies, and are embarked on a brief journey *Locus in quo* wherever we are.

The *Seed Catchers* exhibition at the McClure Gallery consists of five freestanding sculptures, multimedia works and "offerings" of living plants. The five "primitive looking" structures made of saplings whose skins are made of Kozo paper covered in beeswax establish a natural presence in the gallery. The *Seed Catchers* look as though they were made from available materials for a particular purpose, and could even have been made by nature herself to mirror the specific (fictional) local ecology they arose out of. The pointed branches whose bark has been stripped off are sharp, like weapons at their extremities, as if designed to fend off predators. We know nothing of the *Seed Catchers'* purpose. Do they provide a place for life to grow out of, or for some species to live within? Yet because their forms and support structure, skin and entirety, all derive from, and are part of nature, they become a kind of riddle whose ultimate purpose remains a mystery.

Adjacent to the *Seed Catchers*, we see three actual living plant species, each placed votive-like on

stands. They provide something of a cathartic healing component to the show. Each of these—Myrtle, Rosemary and Violet—have symbolic associations; Myrtle has through the centuries been considered a representation of Venus and love; Rosemary is an emblem of fidelity for lovers; Sweet violet emits a seductive scent that evokes strong emotions, symbolizes fertility and was the plant of Venus and Aphrodite. The multimedia *Silentium and Occurrence* works presented as a compliment to the assemblages and living elements in the exhibition echo themes of protection and aggression, a natural part of the life cycle. Seen as an ensemble, Kathryn Lipke's *Seed Catcher* assemblages, plant offerings and multimedia works develop a subtle and naturalistic dialogue on the *prima materia* of earth and the life cycle as a source for growth and sustenance.

John K. Grande

JACQUES CLÉMENT'S NUDES

CORPUS

JACQUES CLÉMENT
Saidye Bronfman Centre
for the Arts
5170 Côte-Sainte-Catherine Road
February 1–28, 2001

JOURNAL INTIME

JACQUES CLÉMENT
Observatoire 4
372 Ste-Catherine West
suite 426
February 24– March 24, 2001

WORKS BY JACQUES CLÉMENT

JACQUES CLÉMENT
David Astrof Fine Arts
Thomson House
3650 McTavish

Jacques Clément's paintings of the human body are not simply standard representations of the body. While the nude is a point of departure, at the core of Clément's opus is the distinctly postModern idea that the nude is a 'mode of representation', and not just a depiction. Whether the execution is naive, spontaneous or accomplished, Clément's calligraphic approach can be compared to the serial representations we see in comic books or film. The images need not be consecutive, nor do they naturally lead from one to the next, but the nude remains a keynote from which the variations evolve, transform, are elaborated upon. Sometimes the nudes are



Jacques Clément, *Observatoire 4*, Montreal.

symbolic self-contained entities, othertimes allusive, and conjure up a cadence of quiet repose and reflection. The nude can also be simplified to become a mere representation of the idea of a body. The effect is musical, spontaneous, and the figures are phantasmic, dream-like.

The various sections of *Journal Intime*, the 8 by 56 foot wall mural presented at Observatoire 4, are, Clément has stated, interchangeable, can be moved around at will, and as such are in a perpetual state of impermanence and changeability. To put it another way, the actual order of representation is secondary to the language of representation. For Clément, these nudes drawn in ink on a wash background and elaborated on with collage, stencil, and spraypaint encourage an infinite recombination not just in reality, but in our mind, as we perceive them. Presented in vertical rows of Kraft paper, that are folded and refolded in an accordion or fan-like fashion to cover an entire wall of the gallery, these nude variations are like a series of fleeting recorded moments or synchronous visual legends.

The filmic narrative and decontextualized, ultimately diachronic presentational arrangement of Clément's *Observatoire 4* show, is equally evident in his *Corpus* show at Espace Trois, in the Saidye Bronfman Centre for the Arts. A diversity of presentational formats for Clément's chosen subject—the nude—seen in over 40 paintings. Seen as an ensemble, *Corpus* is like a periodic diary inscribed all over the walls of the gallery, full of nudes in a variety of scales, sizes, serial formats and media. Two large scale monotypes presented on a dark background almost seem to vaporize, hovering as they do on top of this darkness. Other, smaller works, are executed with oil stick and dry pastel or encaustic, background wash and ink brush, or in various combinations of these media. We begin to realize this visual

language of communication Clément plays with, reworks, creates and destroys, only to rework the again, involves an appreciation of format, formulation and recombination. The largest piece, a 6 x 18 foot mural, immediately strikes one for the way the body—whether reclining, sitting, turned to us or in profile—is merely a point of departure for this scripting of images. The bodies vary endlessly, from silhouettes, some white, others dark, to pure line drawing, and more intricately detailed depictions. Motifs are interspersed between the nudes at random—circular red, white and black markings. The process heightens the sense of actual, freeform sequencing like a brief sound break, or pause in a musical composition, an allusion perhaps for the way our mind simultaneously perceives reality on a conscious and subconscious level. The gestures vibrate with life and when brought together, represent a succession of moments in time, of impressions, each contained by their specific moment in time by the artist's eye and hand. Like a narrative that supersedes its subject—the human body—Clément's art conveys the simple notion that representation itself is a symbolic act, a kind of visual writing.

John K. Grande

TORONTO

FLOTILLA

GRETCHEN SANKEY
Virginia Macdonnell Gallery
1340 Queen St. West
www.1340queen.com
February 10–March 10, 2001

Death, cake, sheep, and toys playfully lull the viewer into Gretchen Sankey's "Flotilla". Flotilla is half fairy tale, half personal fiction, a non-linear exploration of narrative structure. But perhaps most importantly its fun!



Gretchen Sankey, *Some of the parts* (pane 3), 1999, Toronto
Ink, gouache and acrylic on paper, 50 x 35 inches, (Air plane girl detail)



Gretchen Sankey, *Some of the parts* (pane 1), 1999, Toronto
Ink, gouache and acrylic on paper, 50 x 35 inches, Photo: Simon Glass (Proud Mary detail)

Sankey has activated the gallery space with installation elements, as well as painted works, in a winning visual anthology. The relationship between the story elements in the paintings and the figures in the paintings echoes through the viewer due to the way Sankey has made the installation elements in the same scale as the voyeur/viewer. The same goes for the large figures in her paintings relation to the story vignettes. So you quite literally enter Sankey's world. It is one that revels in skewed perspectives, detailed dioramic structures, and strong design elements. At first, the design elements may seem merely like formal activations of the white space of the gallery. However, on closer reading the pink stripe that runs parallel to the gallery floor is playing connect the dots between elements a wall length apart! The design elements add an extra dimension to the layered reading of Sankey's art. Rather than relying on a traditional "gallery" reading of objects (i.e. One work is

placed near another so they create a third contextual meaning through juxtaposition), Sankey encourages the viewer to piece together various elements and construct a reading gradually during the time spent in the gallery.

Sheep is my favourite piece in this very complex show. With *Sheep*, Sankey has elected to tell a personal story drawn from her memory and has reconfigured this in two distinct pieces: a diorama and a mixed media work. The wall mounted diorama depicts three dead bloated sheep beneath an apple tree. The perspective of this installation creates a strong feeling of uneasiness. Sankey has implemented the sculptural equivalent of a filmic "Dutch Tilt". She has secured the ground of the diorama flush to the wall. In so doing, the tree under which the sheep lie juts out from the wall at a 45 degree angle. The bloated, dead, and sweetly vulnerable sheep seem in jeopardy of falling out of the picture. In talking about this work Sankey simply stated

"We grew up on a farm and one day after school we came home and the sheep had eaten all the apples that had fallen. They were just lying there bloated and dead". She then turned to her brother and asked "Do you remember that?". Witnessing this exchange between siblings made the honesty of Sankey's work and the role that shared and retold memories play in her work evident to me.

Elizabeth Fearon

LIFE AND SOUL

GREG CURNOE

Art Gallery of Ontario

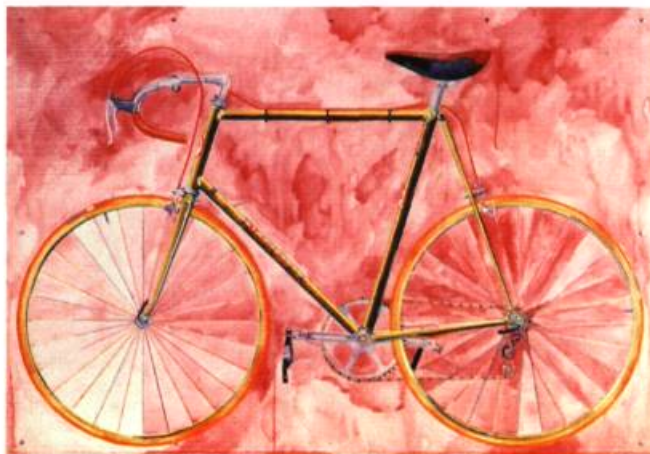
March 9–June 17, 2001

Canada's most adept protagonist of the Pop art mythology, Greg Curnoe likewise railed against the pervasive Americanization of Canadian culture from his base in London, Ontario. His art hit its stride in the 1960s when American draft dodgers opposed to the Viet Nam war flowed into Canada in droves and the nationalist left-leaning Waffle Party was a real presence in the Canadian political scene. A co-founder of CAR (Canadian Artist's Representation) along with John Boyle, Curnoe was part of a small kernel of artists in London who sought to develop a regional identity in art beginning in the early 1960s. Along with Jack Chambers, Tony Urquhart and Brian Dibb, Curnoe formed Canada's first artist-run centre, called the Region Gallery, in London, Ontario. Were they trying to prove the New York market dominance of the art world wrong? Perhaps they simply believed in the diversity of regional culture as an embodiment of popular expression. Multi-talented, an artist, activist, musician and cyclist, Greg Curnoe produced an amazing range of artworks during his career.

The central irony of Curnoe's art was precisely that the overtly political anti-American icons he lovingly produced used the vernacular of the New York Pop art genre, but he also drew inspiration from early 20th century Dada and collage art from Europe. Perhaps because Curnoe critiqued the American domination of the international arts scene he was and still is, despite his impressive artistic production, hardly known outside Canada. *True North Strong and Free* (1968) with the words "Close the 49th Parallel" emblazoned on it, is quintessential Curnoe, a work that reflected the sublime tenor of 1960s confrontation and protest, just as the fictive maps he created with Canada and Mexico sharing a common border (the United States having been left out) were. The anti-imperialist rhetoric and stylistic genuflection Curnoe so loved now has an overdue date stamp feel to it, but many of the artworks in this show reveal Curnoe's skill as an innovator whose understanding of the Pop vernacular is forever fascinating. Certain works such as the *View of Victoria Hospital* series are unique and lasting landmarks of Canadian art. As Dennis Reid, chief curator at the AGO has stated: "(Curnoe's) legacy and importance as a cultural figure in Canadian art cannot be overstated. We cannot understand Canadian art of the second half of the 20th century without knowing well Greg Curnoe's art."

Greg Curnoe: Life and Soul includes a full repertoire of Curnoe's best known works, such as *What if Life in Canada is Boring?* (1997), a penetrating *Self Portrait* study, and studio works—just pen and ink line drawings—like *Greg Curnoe, About 10 Feet High* (1970) that poke fun at the enigma of the artist and the legacy of modern art in general.

Greg Curnoe, *Life and Stuff* (pane 3), 1978/79, Mariposa T.T.
Watercolour, gouache and graphite on wovv paper, 119 x 117 cm,
Gift of Sheila Curnoe, London, Ontario, 1997



Watercolours such as *South of La Sarre, Looking West* (1974) provide proof of Curnoe's sophisticated use of the watercolour medium. His ever popular and memorable large scale watercolour studies of bicycles like *Mariposa T.T.* (1979), which merge Curnoe's interest in cycling and Duchamp, have always been in high demand in the galleries of Toronto's Yorkville District and for good reason! They are finely wrought colour and form studies. *Greg Curnoe: Life and Soul* is a long overdue and fitting tribute to one of Canada's most exacting and resourceful artist-innovators. If you want to know something about how Canadian art developed its own approach to the modernist idiom in the 1960s and 1970s... see Curnoe at the AGO!

John K. Grande

SPRAWL

ERIC GLAVIN

Toronto Sculpture Garden
115 King Street East

October 4, 2000–April 15, 2001

I like to climb on things in parks. Perhaps this is why the minimalist architectural sculpture made of aluminum siding, steel tubing and roofing paper by Eric Glavin reads like a stage to me. Glavin's sculpture is replete with foot lights! Sadly they are pointed in the "wrong" direction to illuminate the snippet of a musical number I had to steel myself from performing on the art.

Don't dismiss *Sprawl* based on my glib reaction. On the contrary I like the piece. It makes me feel like dancing. And its been a long time since anything referencing minimalism has made me feel like dancing! Glavin states in his press release "The shallow box-like structure of the work is a scaled-down version of the ultimate contemporary architectural form, suitable for a plethora of different possible uses: the store box outlet. Generic vessels articulated through featureless facades, these structures proliferate the urban landscape of late capitalist culture." The major difference between this sculpture and any industrial park is the effect the artist's decision to scale down has on the human spirit. Industrial parks are functional, cheap to build, and rather disheartening places. By scaling down his piece, Glavin has reduced the oppressive quality of such forms and returned modernism to a place where the sublime is tangible for the viewer.

Elizabeth Fearon



Des media collective, *Untitled*, 2000, Regina
Collaboratively painted video backdrops,
individually produced drawings, collectively produced video
Photo: Don Hall



BGL, *Perdu dans la nature* (Lost in Nature), 1998, Regina
Salvaged woodpaper
Photo: Don Hall
Pool: Collection BGL, Automobile: Collection Musée du Québec

REGINA

A BETTER PLACE: PRACTICAL UTOPIAS

Mackenzie Art Gallery, Regina

February 9–May 13, 2001.

For many artists, particularly younger artists, a kind of irony fatigue is setting in. It could be that they perceive the grumbling artist as outside agitator or an old fashioned, modernist 'type'. Or perhaps irony itself is out-living its usefulness as an aesthetic trope. As a critical rather than a creative mode of expression, ironic art calls for alternatives but does not offer any and often simply slides into sarcasm. While some postmodern theorists and environmental activists have been successful critiquing modernist ideals driven by utopian visions, the failure of 20th century utopian projects are a sobering reminder of how (past) visionaries' hopes and dreams were out of scale with the social and political realities of their time.

A Better Place's curator Timothy Long seeks to show how artists can play an important role in rethinking how society organizes itself. The creative alternatives offered suggest that the general condemnation of utopic visions and optimism is less about utopic thinking than that utopian are conceived on an unsustainable scale. Rather than imposing utopian mega-projects on communities, the artists and collectives in *A Better Place* offer local interventions that act as small scale prototypes for a broader vision of social change. *A Better Place* borrows its title from a statement made by Tommy Douglas, former premier of Saskatchewan and legendary father of Canada's Medicare system: "Courage my friends. 'Tis not too late to make the world a better place." Hosted by the Mackenzie Art Gallery, appropriately situated in the T. C. Douglas Building this exhibition features installations by two art collectives BGL (Quebec) and DES Media Collective (Vancouver),

and seven artists: Adrian Blackwell (Toronto), Gilbert Boyer (Montreal), Brian Jungen (Vancouver), Sylvie Laliberté (Montreal), John Marriot (Toronto), Jayce Salloum (Vancouver), and Kiki Thorne (Toronto).

The exhibition theme is best summed up by the Elvis Costello quote in John Marriot's installation: "What's so funny about peace, love and understanding?" It's not that peace, love and understanding are funny concepts, but their popular association with hippies and '60s idealism is. Brian Jungen's designs for *Busb Capsule*—a Buckminster Fuller-style geodesic dome made from lawn chairs bound by shrink-wrap—has all the excitement and enthusiasm of 1960's fun written all over it. Rather than just emulating the past, artists like Marriot offer quirky twists on utopian thinking and the irony deployed in many of these works is more loving than cynical. BGL's creation of a Mercedes-Benz and hot tub out of recycled lumber could simply be critical of backyard 'nesting' utopias, except these artists also seem to be having a lot of fun. While not functional, these objects are made with care—the patterning at the bottom of the hot tub is particularly beautiful. BGL's simulacra of suburban desire is both a tease and an expression of some measure of appreciation.

John Marriot's hilarious *Incidental Park Zones* project is like a campaign style hybrid of Participation that encourages the public to take a moment out of their busy day and make of themselves a park. Slick banners, a video, postcards, a web site and didactic panels all explain how you can "Pause in a public place." "Pose as though you are mesmerized watching something," and "Participate by greeting people and speaking with anyone who appear curious about your activities." While playing on well meaning but easily ridiculed campaigns like the province of Alberta's "Smile, you're a tourist attraction," the gesture is not all irony. It has the potential for

sincere emulation in the manner of "Pay it Forward" or "Random Acts of Kindness." More camp than kitsch, the project is less a critique of government lifestyle improvement programs than a chance to laugh at our reluctance to take good advice. While sending-up the transparently manipulative packaging of government-run 'citizen betterment' programs, Marriot's art also pokes fun at an urban cynicism that has become more habit than reasoned response. The DES (Downtown East Side) Media collective, whose community work in Vancouver's east side and with people in Regina's inner north end while installing their project, echoes 1960s collective community activism. The voices of individuals are used to communicate, rather than co-opt, their concerns. There are no calls for manifestos or communes here, just modest proposals that we see and act our way toward a better world. However corny that may seem, everyone knows it's a good idea!

David Garneau

VANCOUVER, B.C.

COLOURING THE WEST: A CENTURY OF B.C. PAINTING

Vancouver Art Gallery
750 Hornby Street

Until April 29, 2001

This panoramic overview of a century painting in British Columbia shows how the region's artists developed their own painterly vision of the West Coast.

It began with a 19th century British idiom, that was rejected in favor of modernist abstraction informed by interest in indigenous culture. B.C.'s peripheral location relative to international art centres, allowed only a few—notably Emily Carr, Jack Shadbolt and Gordon Smith—to receive wider renown.

Colouring the West begins with the period between 1900 and 1940 when Emily Carr and Frederick Varley rejected the earlier British traditions, adopted modernist ideas, and created vivid and forceful landscape paintings. Varley's *Bridge over Lynn* (1936) with its vertiginous view of a North Vancouver canyon is direct, intensely personal. Equally dramatic is Emily Carr's *Red Cedar* (1933) where rhythmic, colourful strokes express the energy of a lone cedar thrusting into the forest canopy, while Jock Macdonald's *Fall (Modality 16)* (1937) reminds us that some of Canada's earliest abstract painting occurred in B.C. What follows are the works of three key painters—B.C. Binning, Jack Shadbolt and Gordon Smith. Artist, architect and educator B.C. Binning's precise, formal paintings reveal a curiosity about abstract form, love of the West Coast and a desire to integrate art with daily life. The careers of Jack Shadbolt and Gordon Smith are played off against each other. From Shadbolt's *Indian Village* (1948) to his *Silent Land* (1985) and from Smith's *Red Painting* (1957) to his *Pacino 43* (1993), a kind of dialogue is established on B. C. modernism. We see Shadbolt move away from realism into expressionistic images structured by a cubist sensibility and informed by the land and the First Nations presence on it. Throughout, Smith's passion for pure painting evokes a feeling for the open coast and dense forest.

From here, the exhibition's stream widens into a confusion of post-war styles. Subject matter ranges from social comment to the purely aesthetic. Isolation has been a boon to E. J. Hughes, who persists with in his unique and unwavering realistic portrayal of West Coast landscape to this day. Maxwell Bates' *Beautiful B.C.* (1965), turns an ironic eye on popular myths and social mores. Others, such as Don Jarvis, explore formal painting and innovate with abstraction in novel ways.

Out of this crowd Gathie Falk, a major painter of the generation that followed Shadbolt and Smith, steps into the spotlight. Curator Ian Thom believes Falk exemplifies the B.C. artist's search for "personal place within our surroundings" through her "intensive study of her everyday world" seen in a work like *Lawn in Three Parts* (1978) whose colour field abstraction combines with a meditative observation of the details of a daily environment.

The advent of serious abstract painting in B.C. perhaps dates to Lawren Harris' 1940 arrival in Vancouver.

Two of his large, rigorous abstractions inspired by the Canadian landscape and his mystical philosophy lead into a group of formalist works. We see artists of the '50s, '60s and '70s exploring in many directions—colour field, hard and soft edge form, shaped canvas—often sharing a common reference to landscape. By the '60s, however, an important shift to popular culture appears in works such as Michael Morris' *The Problem of Nothing* (1965) and Dallas Selman's *Filter Menthol* (1967) with their witty quotes from advertising and cartoon imagery.

It was only in the '70s that new artistic directions and production really took off and the '80s, saw Vancouver art receiving international critical acclaim. The Young Romantics Attila Richard Lukacs, Graham Gillmore and Vicky Marshall, with large, expressionistic canvases dominate this section. Alan Wood's *Sechelt* (1977) is juxtaposed next to Ken Lum's *Untitled Language Painting...* (1987), jarring proof of the range of approaches to art-making. Wood's huge, constructed painting is an aesthetic, subjective experience of landscape, while Lum's conceptual work questions how identity is wrapped up in the imagery of commercial culture. First Nations artist Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun's vivid and disturbing painting of *The Impending Nisga'a Deal...* (1996) goes full circle, appropriating the painterly tradition of a colonizing power to express anger and protest over the colonizer's ownership of native land. The lavishly illustrated publication *Art B.C.: Masterworks from British Columbia* (Douglas & McIntyre, 2001) authored by Ian Thom that compliments *Colouring the West* is a welcome synthesis of B. C. art that seeks to cover all media and integrate First Nations art into the story.

Joan Richardson

VICTORIA, B.C.

MAPPING THE BODY

Open Space, Victoria

Part I: March 2-4, 2001

Part II: April 6-28, 2001

The opening scene from Stanley Kubrick's film, 2001, *A Space Odyssey*, has left its imprint on the collective human psyche. No less disconcerting is a passage from Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things* (1966), that speaks of mankind's image as "erased like a face drawn

in sand at the edge of the sea." If Foucault's image in the sand is to be restored, perhaps a reclamation of the body is essential. Open Space engages in this restorative process with *Mapping the Body*, a two-part exhibition of eight artists' work done in collaboration with the gallery selection committee, the artists, and exhibition coordinator, Jessie Lacayo. Each artist's particular concern implicitly recognizes a shared practice and discourse that extends and unframes the historic depiction of the body in contemporary art. While issues of sexuality and identity are considered, the main emphasis is on how the body interacts with technology and in the environment. The body is represented as gendered, sacred, public, private, ritualized, mundane, erotic, mechanized, organic, abstract, and at times, absent.

Mapping the Body, Part 1, includes the work of four women artists: Kelly Mark (Toronto), Wendy Peart (Regina), Karen Ralph (Calgary), and Su Rynard (Toronto). While Karen Ralph and Wendy Peart share a connection with objects and installation, Kelly Mark and Su Rynard use video works to explore their ideas. Karen Ralph's *Oasis* installation (2000-2001) includes hundreds of beeswax body parts and clay Buddhas. Casts of her tongue and hundreds of cast fingers, lips, and ears installed randomly on a blue wall build an atmosphere of redemption and self-discovery. These sensuous objects are symbols of longing and desire. The metaphor is extended from gallery wall to floor where a series of hand cast clay Buddhas evoke an air of compassion and the fulfilment of desire. *Oasis* celebrates the feminine with a directness that needs no apology. Watching a Kelly Mark video is like "Waiting for Godot." Grounded in Minimalism and Conceptual art, Kelly Mark's video art has a subjective, "being there" attitude. The video *33 Minute Stare* holds the camera's gaze without compromise while two simultaneously programmed 15 minute videos based on a month long performance piece, *Hiccup (Day 3)*, and *Hiccup (Day 4)*, serves to reenact her experiences and observations in a deadpan way that is loaded with cultural implications.

With the notable exception of Ed Pien's drawing installation *A Mixing of Dreams* (2001), the Part II phase of *Mapping the Body* is predominantly photo-based work. Extending the entire length of the far wall, Pien's 30' x 12' drawing seems flimsy, insubstantial. Upon examination, the layered papers, one opaque

the other translucent, tremble with movement, revealing an underlayer shadowed with figures. Overlapping green snake goddesses hiss venom and establish a tenor of violence that is echoed by two monstrous, aggressively engaged, and intentionally ambiguous headless figures to the right. The implicit narrative is one of fear, repression and control. Pien's use of lush, exotic, Japanese silk paper brushed with color and wrinkled like skin allows us to enter easily into a nightmare-like territory of the imagination. The Asian and Western mythologies that intertwine in Pien's work reflect his Taiwanese childhood, a time in which a fear of ghosts invaded his psyche and reemerges here to haunt, tantalize, mystify us.

Monique Mees' photo installation *Historical Specimen Plates* from her 1999 Prosthesis Series simultaneously deconstructs two systems—art and medicine—in which the female nude has traditionally been conventionally misrepresented and objectified. Ninety small silver print images on plexi have 19th century Daguerreotype images, appropriated and rephotographed by Mees, that depict nude women in medical and pornographic situations. Mees' *Historical Specimen Plates* seek to construct a successful representation of the female nude.

Barrie Jones' *Another Body Series* of Cibachrome prints are large, technically perfect, upside-down representations of male and female bodies. To achieve a state of authenticity, Jones sets up a collaboration between himself and his subjects. The resulting images are arrived at through a series of posed gestures, both intuitive and ritualized. Eroticism is turned back on itself as the voyeur becomes viewer.

Consider recent advances in technology and medical research, and the human genome project. We are confronted with the contradictory realities of genetic sequencing and human erasure, i.e. the extinction of the human species. Consider also that we can know with the click of a mouse what is happening on the other side of the world. We are instantly wired into the spectacular events that shape the world news. This wiring is both connected and disconnected. It creates a techno-sublime reality that, in its virtual otherness, threatens to separate humans from their subjective selves. Being disconnected is a postModern condition, a heightened dispossessed kind of alienation. Call it what you will, it is the human condition. Can art reconnect us? Can art restore us?

Linda Giles

BOOK REVIEW

THE SONG OF SONGS,

ILLUSTRATED WITH 12 WOODCUTS

Cecil Buller

Fomorian press, ottawa, 2001

Books illustrated with original woodcuts by artists of high quality are rare in the history of Canadian art. Indeed, one of the few examples is Robert Choquette's *Metropolitan Museum 1931* illustrated by Edwin Holgate, a rare and sought after work. Between 1929 and 1931, Montreal artist Cecil Buller, who actually travelled by boat to Europe with Holgate (the two were lifelong friends) created a series of original black and white woodcuts for the *Song of Solomon (Cantique des Cantiques, Editions du Raisin)* in Paris, France. The French translation of the original Biblical text was by Isaac de Maistre de Sacy and this masterwork folio was limited to 80 copies. A scarce and cherished collector's edition, Buller's illustrations for *Cantique des Cantiques* have never been republished until this year, when Ottawa's Fomorian Press decided to produce this spectacular edition.

A quality production, and tribute to Cecil Buller's remarkably subtle, lush and evocative woodcuts *The Song of Songs* includes appreciation of Buller's life and art by her son, Sean B. Murphy. The forward informs us how the Song of Solomon, a book of the Bible like no other for its sensual images of love, rife with

erotic imagery is quite at odds with all other passages in the Bible. According to legend, the Song was a duet between the King Solomon and a daughter of the Pharaoh of Egypt. We read: "The tone of the work is very reminiscent of the courtly love poems of the Middle Ages. Appropriately, it is said to have been the Biblical book most frequently interpreted in the Mediaeval period, by both Christians and Jews."

Above all, Buller's highly original and evocative imagery instils this mysterious Biblical text with an Art Deco style typical of the 1930s era. More than mere illustrations, Buller's woodcuts for the Song of Solomon are masterful incantations, personal revelations executed in a style all her own. A student of William Brymner, Cecil Buller, one of Canada's most accomplished female artists of the pre-War era studied in Paris under Maurice Denis (1892-1977) where she was exposed to the art of Paul Gauguin, Felix Vallotton, the Cubists and Fernand Léger. Moving to London, England in 1915, she studied wood engraving under Noel Rooke and met her future husband John J. A. Murphy. Buller's woodblock prints were exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 1940, and her works can be found in the collections of the British Museum, the Metropolitan Museum, the National Gallery of Canada, and the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris.

For this version, the Fomorian Press chose the King James version of the text, chose a new digital version of Toronto graphic artist Carl Dair's Cartier typeface, which was the first Canadian-designed typeface since Methodist missionary James Evans designed a font for a Cree syllabary in 1841. The Fomorian Press edition of *The Song of Songs* celebrates one of Canada's most masterful, visionary and less well known print-makers of the early 20th century. A significant document in the history of Canadian art, it is also a book that lovers will give to lovers for years to come!

John K. Grande



The Song of Songs

illustrated with 12 woodcuts by
Cecil Buller

and with an afterword by the artist's son,
Dr Sean B. Murphy



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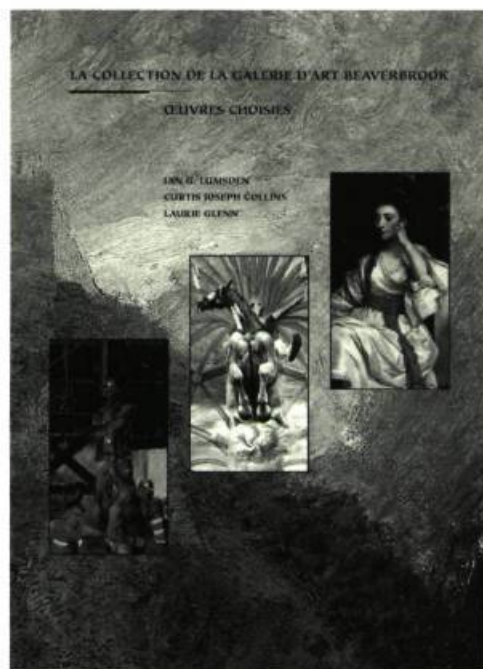
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