

English reports

Volume 45, Number 183, Summer 2001

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/52989ac>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

La Société La Vie des Arts

ISSN

0042-5435 (print)

1923-3183 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

(2001). Review of [English reports]. *Vie des Arts*, 45(183), 74–79.



Molly Lamb Bobak
Beach, 1972
Oil on Masonite
The Beaverbrook Foundation

FREDERICTON, N.B.

THE NAKED AND THE NUDE:

WORKS FROM THE
PERMANENT COLLECTION

To September 2nd

PRATT, DEICHMAN, BOBAK:
THE WOMEN

To September 25th

THE BEAVERBROOK COLLECTION

Beaverbrook Art Gallery

To January 6th 2002

The Beaverbrook Art Gallery in Fredericton will open three exhibitions on or around June 25th after being closed for several weeks for repairs to the Gallery's roof. The three exhibitions are: *The Naked and the Nude: Works from the Permanent Collection*; Pratt, Deichman, Bobak: *the Women* and *The Beaverbrook Collection*. Pratt, Deichmann, Bobak: *the Women* is a celebration of the work of three of New Brunswick's best known women artists. While Mary Pratt no longer lives in the province, the roots to her Fredericton birthplace run deep and are reflected in her paintings and, more recently, in her writings. Painter Molly Bobak is the doyenne of New Brunswick artists. Molly, and her husband, Bruno Bobak, are fixtures in the Fredericton arts scene. Erica Deichmann, and her late husband, Kjeld Deichmann, are credited with making ceramics synonymous with fine art in New Brunswick. This exhibition features excellent examples of the works of each of these artists.

The Beaverbrook Art Collection: Selected Works is not only the title of the current exhibition, but that of a recent gallery publication. The featured works that figure in the publication include major pieces from the Canadian, British and International sections of the gallery's permanent collection. There are many fine works in this exhibition including examples by the artists Emily Carr, Lucian Freud, Henry Moore, and John Singer Sargent. The Beaverbrook Art Gallery has a very interesting permanent collection that reflects the gallery's unique history as a largely privately funded (the Beaverbrook Foundation) institution. In particular the gallery has a rich collection of British art.

The concept behind the exhibition *The Naked and Nude: Works from the Permanent Collection* is very interesting, particularly in this age of political correctness. What is the difference between being naked and nude? Does the distinction reside in the intention of the artist or is it perception of the viewer? Is naked lewd and the nude sublime? Questions such as these have caused confusion ever since the first artist discovered the delight of unclothed flesh. Students are often told in art school that the nude figure is just another subject and no different from drawing or painting a still-life or landscape. More recently art works featuring the female nude are regarded as exploitive by many academics... I once said that works featuring trees in Canadian art would fill many volumes of books on our art history while the nude in Canadian art could be contained in one very slim volume. I still think that this is true and likely even more so in Atlantic Canada. Perhaps it is simply that it is so cold much of the

time in our country that we don't think of ourselves without clothes. In reality our prudery runs much deeper and is forcefully linked to our conservative Protestant roots. Two Atlantic artists who buck this prudishness are Alex Colville and Chris Pratt. Colville's figure works, in particular, are charged with sexual energy although almost all of his female nude images are those of his wife Rhoda. There is nothing

in his imagery that remotely suggests that his nudes are mere exercises and devoid of any sexuality. Indeed, Colville's nude paintings and prints leave little doubt about sexual desire. Christopher Pratt's nudes have a coldness to them, but they too are explicitly sexually charged.

A painting in the exhibition that raises more complicated questions about the issue of sexuality than the solidly heterosexuality of nude art works of Alex Colville is Atila Richard Lukacs's *In My Father's House*. This very large painting, featuring male nude figures, caused a furor when it was purchased by the gallery a few years ago. Fortunately it was purchased with private funds rather than public money and didn't give local and federal politicians much of a chance to make fools of themselves with the usual cries of outrage about tax payer's money being used to buy pornography. *In My Father's House* features male neo-Nazi skinheads in various states of undress. They are engaged in what appears to be post-, pre- and actual, unnatural sex acts. This is not the normal stuff that one would find on the walls of the Beaverbrook, a public gallery usually recognized for and identified with its large collection of the works of Cornelius Krieghoff. It is possible to remove sexuality from the naked figure in art, but the results are like flat Champagne—devoid of any sparkle—and in a word, boring. This exhibition does show both sides of the equation, but given my rathers, I will take sex every time over the asexual.

Virgil Hammock

EASTMAN

JIM FARLEY:

THE NAKED FLESH

Riverin-Arlogos Gallery
197, chemin du lac d'Argent
Eastman (Eastern Townships)

April 21–May 22, 2001

Figurative art is slowly making a comeback, it seems. Yet throughout history, there were always artists dedicated to depicting the human form, oblivious to the trends around them. Louis Muhlstock, now 97 years old, was one of the only Canadian artists to paint nudes, at a time—the 1960s—when the body was not in fashion. During the 1960s the English painter Lucian Freud upset the art establishment with his painfully realistic portraits and nudes. Some saw it as the artist's reaction to the triumph of abstraction, as much as the continued questioning of figurative art. But for art critic Jean Clair, Freud's paintings spoke of a more profound involvement: "The problem is not simply the breaking of the rule imposed by society banning figurative art. It appears in the question: how to depict a person as a single entity, a single body, after all these mass deaths, witnessed by our 20th century world? How to resurrect the body after the era of crematoria?" Freud's figures are stripped of clothing, of surroundings, devoid of any social context, displayed as form and colour, that unique entity Clair writes about. Looking at Jim Farley's paintings, one cannot escape the comparison with Freud. His nudes are painted with a similar intensity and unflinching realism, and recall Freud's contorted, at times emaciated bodies. "I paint the human without any artifice," the Montreal artist explains. "Without makeup, without clothing. There are no decorations and the colour is never used to seduce." Although the palette is darker, more sombre than Freud's, Farley's nudes continue the tradition of modern figurative art, quite distinct from the idealized bodies depicted by artists since the Renaissance. As if by some collective unconscious, many of Farley's paintings echo those of Freud.

At a recent exhibition of Jim Farley's works at the Riverin-Arlogos gallery in Eastman, a portrait of the artist's wife wearing a fur coat over her naked body, is reminiscent of Freud's *Girl in a Fur Coat*. The facial expression, the blond hair and muted colours are similar. Somewhat different from the other portraits on display, it harkens back to Farley's paintings from the 1980s.



Jim Farley
Naked Girl Asleep, 2000

After a hiatus of several years, the self-taught artist is back at his easel, and with ardour, which is quite visible in his paintings. The eroticism of his earlier works is no longer there, replaced by a preoccupation with the inner world of the model, as well as with pictorial demands of the craft itself. Beyond the instant seduction of his oeuvre lies a great talent and technical mastery. Farley's reclining nudes, again, bring to mind Freud's portraits, particularly *Naked Girl Asleep*. The pose and angle, closed eyes and limbs splayed on a bare floor, the pubis as central point are almost identical. Both artists seem here to refer to the French painter Gustave Courbet (1819-77) and his infamous painting of a nude titled *The Origin of the World*.

The application of colour, the way the body is constructed on canvas, also links the two artists, separated by time and distance. The gesture is clearly visible, the movement of the coarse brush can be traced in the nuanced shading of the body, and the disturbing, swirling, abstract background. The rawness created by this technique gives the bodies a certain materiality and realism, and at the same time, keeps them within the realm of pure painting. This is what makes Farley's solo exhibition such a satisfying viewing experience. Surrounded by a pantheon of sombre-faced, naked figures, the viewer's senses are assaulted in a variety of ways. Once the impact of these paintings is digested, one proceeds to an almost meditative contemplation of the brush strokes, and from there, the message in the stance of Farley's sitters. His models differ from Freud's in one significant way—their attitude. Eyes wide open, they engage the viewer in an instant dialogue, somewhat uncomfortable perhaps, even disturbing. That's exactly what Farley wants. "I believe,

that our modern era, by manipulation, endangers our psyche and, due to a moral unconsciousness, our physical integrity. This is what I'm trying to paint: undress, yes, take off everything. Look at your face without makeup. Your papers, jewellery, into that bag there. Now, against the wall."

Dorota Kozinska

MONTREAL

COLOUR ZONE:

LAWRENCE PAUL
YUXWELUPTUN

Liane & Danny Taran Gallery,
Saidye Bronfman
Centre for the Arts

April 5–May 27, 2001

Traditional native myths and the ovoid decorative forms become a kind of popular painterly advertising for Vancouver painter Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun. He describes the contemporary reality with great versatility and imagination bringing out unconscious associations, going back and forth from the representational landscape to inner reality. The synchronous visual legends seen in Paul's better known "surreal"

works, and his more recent neo-pop abstract ovoid-isms on view at the Liane & Danny Taran Gallery, focus on contemporary native issues of sovereignty and cultural links to the environment. Beneath the surface—be it "abstract" or "figurative"—there is usually a spiritual message, but a hybrid one. Lawrence Paul's particular brand of "surrealism" is a fusion of traditional native ovoid forms, markings, symbols. In the representational works they are juxtaposed like news items encrypted with symbolism, dancers, shamans and white men amid a landscape that looks like it could jump out of its own definition.

When André Breton wrote his first Surrealist manifesto in 1924 in referring to the free exercise of the imagination and the "generous and far reaching" ideas of the Surrealist programme he used the term "salvation" as surrealism's possible goal, something that would redeem humanity from the imperatives of practical necessity. If there is any salvation in Lawrence Paul's poignant visual recitations on resource exploitation, the destruction of indigenous culture and the current state of the (post)modern soul, it is in the way he weaves a sense of humour into the native traditions and the white man's havoc wreaked on the world. Lawrence Paul merges native forms, colours and subject matter to develop an ongoing narrative on exploitation of land, culture, individual and collective rights. While Paul seeks to dispel myths about nature and the colonialist paradigm, he just as easily pokes fun at native stereotypes. The traditional shaman, for instance, is a participant in the existential and beguiling contemporary reality, just as scientists in white lab coats can be as they physically try to patch the sky's (invisible) ozone hole in *Red Man Watching White Man Trying to Fix Hole in Sky* (1990). In *MacMillan Bloedel Ecosystem Destroyers and Their Preferred Weapons* (1994) loggers

stand hesitantly atop tree stumps brandishing their Husquvarna and Stihl chainsaws like warriors engaged in some sort of war of wanton destruction. In *Usufruct* (1995) the landscape itself is like a sleeping beast or monster whose body is the landscape decorated all over with ovoid markings, trees and topographical details.

The ambient "impurity" of Lawrence Paul's intercultural dialogue on the destruction of nature and even the landscape as imagery, uses traditional native symbols and subjects. They become poignant springboards for a cogent attack on the unassailable dogmas of the contemporary and modernist aesthetic perhaps, and definitely overproduction and consumption, but what looks surreal is more existential on closer examination.

The more recent "abstract" works like *Northwest Coast Wednesdays* (1998), *A New Indian* (1998), and *Caution! You Are Now Entering a Free State of Mind Zone* (2000) are vivid and bright. The colourful ovoid forms—oranges, mauves greens and reds—dance on the canvas. They're lively reformulations of 1950s and 1960s abstractions, innovative and freeform. The "surface plane", the "forms" and "colour co-ordination" reveal a new found delight with neo-pop abstraction. There are even micro-abstract forms aligned like bon-bons or chicklets in vertical totem-like alignments. It is almost as if Lawrence Paul knows a genre when he sees one and wants us to know it. This is not really a distant cousin of Breton's psychic automatism, more like walking the psyche through a visual and tactile reality that is manifestly unreal, manipulated and transformed beyond our belief or that of our ancestors. Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun's *Colour Zone* is not aesthetic primitivism, or even surrealism, but evergreen existentialism!

John K. Grande



Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun
*Caution You Are Now Entering
a Free State of Mind*, 2000
Oil on Canvas

OTTAWA

PIERRE BOOGAERTS:

A RETROSPECTIVE

Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography

August 3, 2001–January 6, 2002

A well deserved retrospective of photographer Pierre Boogaerts' works begins this summer at the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography and reawakens a whole world of conceptual photography that was, and still remains, an art-form that developed apart from, yet well aware of, the dominant trends of minimalism, Pop and land art of that era. As Boogaerts wrote: "Our vision is socially and culturally constructed (...) We see what we believe we have to see. This is the reason the image represents more our belief than it does reality. In fact, the image represents us." Belgian born Montreal-based Boogaerts was, throughout his career, an artist who followed a train of thought. His art career began in 1971 and effectively ended in 1990. He donated 20 years of his work in 1994 to the National Gallery of Canada. Sixty of these, which include negatives, maquettes,



and finished works, form the basis of this retrospective of this internationally acclaimed Canadian photographer. In 1981, when he met Vlado Stévanovitch, Boogaerts was persuaded to study and eventually teach Tai Ji Quan.

Boogaerts was very much a Montreal phenomenon, publishing his work in *Parachute* magazine, exhibiting at Gilles Gheerbrandt and Galerie Optica. Over time he created a body of work that was overtly analytical. They included exposés of the nature-culture paradigm as in

his *Référence: Plantation/Jaune Bananier* (1975), a series of works taken in and around Montreal and Brussels, that fixated on the theme of a banana grove, or in *Dieffenbachia* (1985), *Lys* (1986-88) and other floral/arboreal studies. Pierre Dessureault, in his interesting catalogue examination of Boogaerts' photographic accomplishment, refers to the maquettes for *Leaves-Traces* (1982) as a cycle in which the artist "breaks free from the rigidity of the photographic support and displays a group of unmounted prints on a wall, cascading down the wall, to reconstruct an image of dead leaves or tracks in the snow." The parallels between leaves of photo paper and tree leaves are evident and exemplary in this work.

Affirming the totality of the photographic image, rejecting the pictorial and formal aspects of the photo image, Boogaerts had a basic awareness of historical precedent. His generation of Montreal artists who explored and extended the language of experimental photography included Serge Tossignan, Bill Vazan and Robert Walker.

A master of the intimate, soulful gaze, Boogaerts' photographic pilgrimage took him to New York, where he produced the *Street Corners (Pyramids)* (1978-79) series of works, later published in a book. The inversion of sky and architecture, the diachronic building of multiple images to create a single work, show Boogaerts masterfully interpreting urban spaces, dimensions and sites in his own unique pictorial way. The interplay between the photo image and its assembly could consist of multiple imagery or it could be within a single rectangular format. He drew with images, exploring the cosmic void, the opening and closing of visual space. The tactile and optical worlds intertwined, overlapped in an unusual and often surprising way.

Between 1971 and 1990, Boogaerts produced a unique body of work, exploring in depth and with great subtlety, supported by extremely personal theoretical underpinnings, the paradoxical distinction between the virtual space of photography and real space. He sought to demonstrate the mechanisms of vision by exploring and reformulating the photographic process in an astonishing number of ways. Included in this show are his *Synthetization of the Sky* (1973-75) series. These multiple images of cloud and sky formations are arranged to build a basic pyramidal geometry, an artificial structure in a serial grid format that alludes to another reality (that of the artist/photographer's cosmic vision) using photo documentation as its raw resource.

Boogaerts' collective œuvre can be seen as a unified whole, a succession of long cycles of work, within which he examined specific aspects of the medium under thematic guise. A poetic essence is frequently overwhelmed by the conceptual and theoretical anachronisms Boogaerts investigated, always with great sincerity and subjectivity. Analogy, parallel truisms, visual devices are part of his toolbox of visual tricks. Visual beauty operates in tandem with associations inherent to the medium of photography. In this sense Boogaerts is an artist's artist, well aware of the tautological dilemmas and history of photography while seeking to advance beyond the limitations of its central paradigm. Above all, Pierre Boogaerts' photographic œuvre calls into question the formulation and function of the work of art itself. His art resonates with a tenor of experimentation and exploration that was the era in which they were produced. For this reason alone this retrospective is a must see.

John K. Grande

TORONTO

VISIONS OF ME:

BETTINA HOFFMANN,
KATHARINE MULHERIN,
EILEEN YAGHOUBIAN

ZsA ZsA

962 Queen St West

May 3–June 3, 2001



Eileen image still from Yippee Yaghoobian
Unleashed, 1997

ZsA ZsA, a store front gallery on the increasingly trendy stretch of Queen St. West in Toronto boasts an intelligent, intimate show that looks at the increasingly common practice of self portraiture. This tiny tight show, conceived of and executed by independent curator Sophie Hackett, is part of this year's Contact 2001 photo extravaganza. The show tromps



around the terrain previously staked by artists like Suzy Lake and Cindy Sherman. Hackett's curatorial statement brings the works together by emphasizing the non-event, the snapshot medium and the "foiled and altered" narrative.

Eileen Yaghoobian's Super 8 film (transferred to video) titled *Yippi Yaghoobian Unleashed* (1997) is a prime example of the foiled narrative. Constructed with only in-camera edits and with a rough home movie style approach, this film leads the viewer on an alien/artist's vacation visit to the planet Earth. As Yaghoobian states "Yippi Yaghoobian is my ultra ego." Beyond this Ziggy Stardust liberation, two main features emerge. Firstly that Yippi is alone. Secondly, a great deal of the footage records the set up for self portraiture. These two elements set this work apart from the home movie genre Yaghoobian generally employs.

A glaring lack of technical virtuosity is also an inherent part of the *Never a Bride* series (2001), Katharine Mulherin's contribution to *Visions of Me*. Mulherin's autobiographical snapshots explore "failure." Sneaking into bridal shop dressing rooms armed with a point-and-shoot camera, the artist attempts to steal a glowing bridal image of herself. Each document both erases and records the moment. As the flash explodes the artist's face is obliterated by the process of recording that the flash makes possible. The resulting image is just a hollow shell of convention where we usually expect a woman's face to be.

While Mulherin explores absence, Bettina Hoffmann explores presence, and lots of it! Using multiple images of herself, Hoffmann seeks to question notions of individuality and identity. Banal domestic situations like getting dressed are the usual setting for Hoffmann's works. While the characters are identical, each maintains a different role based on their facial expression, position, and clothing. While each work certainly does tell a story, nothing really seems to be going on. Rather like daily life, there is no big blow up or serene joy, just a sea of interactions. We act and react to, and with, other people, never knowing with certainty how we are perceived. *Visions of Me* is a long overdue beginning to the necessary discussion of snap shot self portraiture as a contemporary genre.

Elizabeth Fearon

KIM ADAMS:
RECENT MODELS AND
WORKS ON PAPER
Wynick/Tuck Gallery
401 Richmond St West
June 16-July 14, 2001
Tuesday-Saturday 11 am-5pm
www.wynicktuckgallery.ca
Concurrent Exhibitions:
THE BRUEGHEL BOSCH BUS
KIM ADAMS
Oakville Galleries
Centennial Square
May 5-June 24, 2001

THE POWER PLANT
KIM ADAMS
June 15-September 3, 2001.

Kim Adams didn't invent the wheel but his art certainly questions the stability of the wheel foundation late capitalism is built on. Suburbia and much of our leisure activity is based on the use of the wheel. Wheels are likewise often integrated into Adam's sculptures. They lend mobility to objects we don't usually think of as mobile and ground the objects we do think of as mobile. Using the wheel in this way highlights the dichotomy between art and utility. Further questions are raised by Adams' choice of materials. Many of these are readymade, recognizable utilitarian objects that can be purchased at stores like Canadian Tire. Integrating a glut of ready-made materials the artist has turned shopping into a creative activity that is also an integral part of his artistic process.

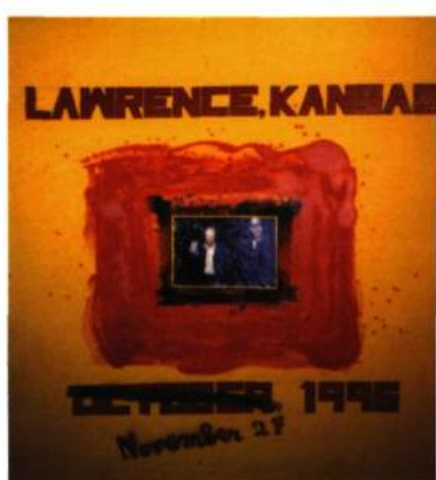
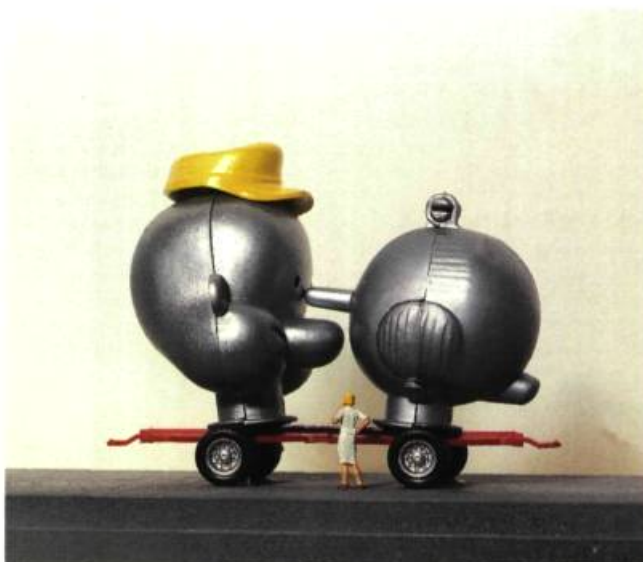
Seeing and being seen is also a major theme in Adams' work. This is particularly evident in the work titled *Two Headed Lizard With a Single*

Shot which employs two truck cabs and a pre-fabricated metal garden shed to construct a public/private, seer/seen frame of reference.

The act of looking is perhaps most evident in Kim Adams' model works. The details in Adams' over-worked micro-colonies, are sumptuous and full of all manner of content; tiny plastic figurines, train sets, topographies and landscapes that never were. They condense all manner of ephemera and objects and are extremely fun to visually explore. In many ways Kim Adams has granted us "God" vision. We explore the dioramic wonders of nature he has painstakingly assembled: a clean up crew diligently mopping up a chemical spill, or the beauty of a mini-bird sanctuary. These are just a few of the sites/sights in Adams' visionary landscape.

If you are interested in Kim Adams' large scale installations, they can be seen at concurrent shows at The Oakville Galleries and the Power Plant. If, however, you are interested in the behind the scenes story, and want to understand how Adams conceives and works towards the major pieces, the drawings, smaller models and maquettes at Wynick/Tuck give a good idea of the rough intellectual process that Kim Adams is involved in. Whichever portal you choose—the major works or the preparatory sketches and maquettes—the journey will lead into the wonderful, dreadful, absurd, hauntingly familiar world that inspires and is realized in Kim Adams art.

Elizabeth Fearon



Lawrence Kansas, 1996.
Acrylic and photograph by John Geiger
on canevas, 167.6 cm x 167.6 cm
Collection of Chris Cran

CALGARY, ALBERTA

JOHN WILL:
AIN'T PARALYZED YET
Nickle Arts Museum,
University of Calgary
February 9-April 21, 2001

John Will: ain't paralyzed yet is an over-stimulating thirty year survey of excremental punditry by Calgary's art world court jester. This retrospective literally crams the cavernous walls of the Nickle Arts Museum with Will's crank chronicles: hundreds of irreverent paintings, prints, collages and videos that document or satirize the human condition in general and, more specifically, John Will's condition. Only John Will could make this huge space seem modest. As if to boast of his inability to be contained, summed up or depleted, he has shown work in more than half a dozen solo or group exhibitions throughout Alberta in the past year. He is a cornucopia whose flow of strange artistic fruit is irrepressible.

Anything and Everything, a collection of 200 colourful, square, mixed media canvases that collectively cover a space 2.44 x 18.3 meters, is a useful index to the exhibition. Most of the canvases in the massive grid arrangement have text rendered with careful lettering or graffiti-ish thick paint. Each panel records a thought, an observation, an overheard phrase, a name, or a tabloid caption, often in combination with a magazine clipping or a Polaroid snapshot. Will seems especially fascinated by misreadings, mistakes in general and what they might reveal. At least two dozen panels have names of people from the Calgary art scene. He spoofs the artist's role as documentarist while also indulging it. His strategies often look like irony,

but are more like a sincere gesture fatefully undermined by a disbelief in the possibility of sincerity (seen sincerely as sincerity). Other texts are aphorisms that may state Will's philosophy about art-making: Everything From Anything, Alfred E. Neumann-like comments that seem true and yet far from true like "Who Me? Well I'm Just an Old Man" use non-standard English, and are like lines taken from casual conversation. Wisdom, it seems, can be found anywhere. What could be more profound than, "Nobody Knows Nothin'?"

Will loves to juxtapose sagacity and scatology: "Hey! That Guy's Pretty Well Hung" (with drawing of said guy); "Ooommmm Hey man I dig your chick". Less "stream-of-consciousness" than Tourette's syndrome in paint, Will appears happy to let his inner idiot run riot and forget the consequences. In a wicked expression of his preoccupation with, and deconstruction of, fame, Will even immortalizes and misrepresents his friends: "A True Story: I placed the painting of Chris Cran and ManWoman in front of the cat's dish so that the cat might look at them. The next morning there was a pile of throw up in front of the dish." *Anything and Everything* documents three years of throwing up words and images to see what can be made of them. Such contradictions as could be wrapped in an off-hand remark and covered by a rhexed tabloid headline, become a way for Will to embrace the sacred and the profane in the same work. He's not afraid to be silly or so cynical as to reject wisdom, as long as both can be taken simultaneously as serious and as a joke.

Much of John Will's popularity derives from his effervescent iconoclasm, an ideology that appeals to youth and artists of every generation. But what makes Will more than merely cynical and destructive is the fact that his acidic brush targets himself as often as the rest of the world. The subject of John Will's art is John Will and whatever passes through or by him. He appears fascinated with his every thought and bodily experience: desires, aging, friends, experiences, inner failings. Like Falstaff he knows how to have fun with himself, but prefers company.

A collector of images, ideas and people, yet suspicious of what text and representation can achieve, John Will oscillates between attachment and detachment, participation and bemused observation. John Will (the character) comes across as an introvert with an attitude, a crank on a soapbox. He is a prophet of the age of anxiety who can't afford to take himself seriously because he knows

he could be wrong. Unfortunately, like much Canadian poetry, John Will's art seems addressed to the community of fans who are also its subject. His work is designed for local consumption and unless others will let themselves in on the joke, Will may be a regional phenomenon for longer than he deserves to be.

David Garneau

VANCOUVER

LIFE AT THE NEW CONTEMPORARY ART GALLERY:

GERMAINE KOH & KEN LUM

May 5–July 14, 2001

Contemporary Art Gallery, 555 Nelson Street, Vancouver, B.C.

For the opening of the Contemporary Art Gallery's new premises two of Canada's leading conceptual artists—Germaine Koh and Ken Lum—are presenting some recent works. Lum and Koh have established vigorous practices in an international context with challenging reconfigurations of everyday experience—Lum with his photo/text diptychs and Koh with her recuperation of mundane objects and behaviour(s). To show Lum, firmly rooted in his hometown Vancouver, and Koh, based in Toronto—both of "Asian descent and Canadian identity" (to quote outgoing CAG director Keith Wallace)—together makes for a fitting finale to a decade in which the CAG has come of age as Vancouver's public gallery for contemporary art.

Lum's takes over the roadside business sign, brings a new twist to his earlier photo-portrait and logo/text paired works. The two-part panel usually displays a business name and information in permanent text above a board with tracks holding moveable type that announce changing services and offers. Lum's are actual full-size signs, designed by the artist and commercially produced in plexiglas, aluminum, enamel paint and plastic letters. Bold typefaces in flat contrasting colours advertise fictive mid-scale businesses from printing supplies to adult entertainment. A room full of them under stark lighting amplifies the visual assault of a strip mall.

What we read initially as a simple ad, shifts abruptly to a personal declaration inserted in the second, temporary message. In *Jim and Susan's Motel* we are startled by the plea "Sue, I am sorry. Please come back." In *Paris* the moveable text concludes with the religious invocation "Praise

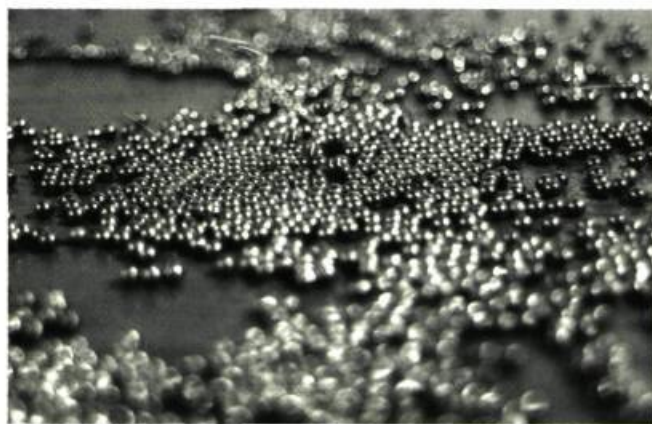
be to Allah" and in *Taj Kabab Palace* with a call to end conflict in India and Pakistan. The joke gives way to the realization that these "signs" disrupt the conventional relationship between seller and buyer with emotional outbursts on topics usually taboo in this context—sex, politics and religion. They draw the viewer into an imaginative, projective attempt to identify and locate the speaker in relation to the advertised business.

In this remarkable way, Lum introduces portrait and narrative qualities to an unlikely format as usually commercial messages negates personal voice. The unsettling effect of Lum's "signs" reveals that to violate mercantile protocol is risky, perhaps radical. Lum's dedication to finding a means to give voice where it appears most absent is courageous and fundamentally humanitarian.

Germaine Koh presents two installations with kinetic elements: *Prayers* (1999) in the gallery foyer, and ... (2000) in the second of the

viewer. ... is an all encompassing unique experience. My own impression: I pause on the threshold of an empty room, windows opening to a busy intersection—cars, road work. Then the sound: a constant rolling and clicking. I see the patterns of tiny, silvery balls on bare concrete, and realize they are falling. I am arrested in the unconscious act of entering. All senses are on the alert. First the social risk: Is it permissible to enter? What is the art work? Is it licit to be "inside" it? Second, the personal risk: Pain and possible injury. Will the balls hit my head? Will I slip?

... compels the visitor to conscious decision, to accept the risk of entering with heightened awareness of head and feet, with attention split in two vertical directions and between the public and the private. This "rain" with its busy-ness, constant sound, and silvery puddles evokes an alive, independent phenomenon that nevertheless needs human intervention. The gallery attendant wielding a magnet must



Germaine Koh
... 2000
Ball-bearings, electric motors and mechanical parts, vinyl tubing
Commissioned by the Gendai Gallery, Toronto
Courtesy Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver

new galleries. Both pieces invite the visitor to make decisions, to be involved. *Prayers* consists of a machine that puffs grey smoke through an aperture in a window to the outdoors. Messages passing through the office computer or typed by visitors at a nearby terminal are translated and transmitted to the city in a morse code of long and short smoke bursts. ... is a room empty but for a gentle, constant rain of ball bearings. Thousands of tiny steel balls roll through two circuits of tracking suspended from the ceiling. Punctures allow ball bearings to fall to the floor, where they bounce, then pool, into shimmering irregular patterns on the polished concrete.

This is conceptual art that relies on the actual sensing presence of the

several times daily recycle the fallen ball bearings to ceiling reservoirs. In both of Koh's installations, the human experience is accompanied by a different but parallel order or language. At first foreign and chaotic, it subsequently resolves into its own emergent logic. Smoke is ordered into linguistic communication and ball bearings reveal the latent topography of cement paving.

Both artists imply and employ the momentary. Koh's works are transient, constituted by motion and change that are perceived as they pass. Although Lum's objects are permanent, the momentary is implicit: a sudden crying out. Koh and Lum restore the unique actual moment within a larger unconscious physical and social system.

Joan Richardson

VICTORIA, B.C.

IN PURSUIT OF SUCCESS:

TRISH SHWART

Art Gallery of Greater Victoria

April 26–May 17, 2001

A profound moral crisis unfolds in Trish Shwart's sequence of twenty drawings on view at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria. The figures seem burdened with tension, share intensely destabilized situations and states of mind. Freeze-framed into aggressive postures, the psychic space they inhabit is similar to the hell in *Dante's Inferno*. Oblivious to outside intervention, their conflict is absolute, and they seem to be engaged in relentless self-destruction. Shwart's drawings are powerfully rendered, tactile, gritty and disturbing in their honesty. The figures for Shwart represent: "(...) individuals struggling with their own internal demons (...). They are simultaneously attracted to, and repulsed, by the pursuit of success. Success is not a constant. Instead, it is a delicate balance between inner truth and outward action. Any conflict between these two can only be resolved temporarily. Something will change and the solution which was right days, weeks, or months ago, is no longer right. Things are once again out of kilter. This never-ending conflict (...) forces us to continuously re-examine our motives, our purpose, and to question whether or not we are behaving with integrity."

Like many artists working in a contemporary context, Shwart uses the human body as a site for discourse. In many of the sequences, the body is cropped, often dismembered, and in some cases, headless. The figures collapse, hover, become airborne, and extend into vacuous space. Whether male or female their isolation is implicit. Although these subjects have a gender, they look ambiguous and fraught with misunderstanding. Shwart comments: "I want these drawings to communicate

the ever shifting and ambiguous nature of the male/female relationship. Is the male figure ready for battle or for flight? Is the female figure sitting placidly or is she gesturing in anger or impatience?", Shwart's narrative enables the viewer to create or manufacture through shared experience and language. Although rendered in a contemporary way, these individuals carry echoes of past traditions. Layers of ambiguity, half-truths, untold stories of people trapped in their own lives are captured in these drawings. They bristle with energy. In *Burning in Every Moment*, the female figures are vulnerable and human. Much is said with a simple gesture and much is likewise left unsaid. A way of dealing with Shwart's own inner conflicts about success, the drawings depict individuals rather than stereotypes. They show how both personal and collective choices are influenced by societal or organizational conventions and attitudes. The three figures in *Managing Risk* (a term used to describe a way of analyzing a decision-making process) look like corporate CEO's who are risking their corporate lives. Do their positions entitle them to make that decision?

The *Pursuit of Success* drawings with their fragments, cropped images and multiple perspectives carry traces of the photographic tradition. The gestures and marks are ephemeral—shift, dissolve, and collapse. Ultimately these drawings succeed because they are not photographs and maintain a self-contained integrity through the labour of drawing. A theatrical artifice is evident in *Burning in Every Moment*. The marks, composition, cropped imagery, the way the figures move, combine to create an emotional sensation. Like photographer Larry Towell's work, these drawings are not tidily composed, and can blur like the camera lens effect Towell uses. Body fragments thus come to symbolize something individual, just as people's lives often do not fit tidily into a stereotypical definition of success.

Linda Giles



Trish Shwart from In pursuit of success (AGGV)

Trish Shwart from In pursuit of success (AGGV)



GALLERY MOOS LTD.

en permanence

Jean-Paul Riopelle

622 Richmond Street West, Toronto
Ontario M5V 1Y9
Tel.: (416) 504-5445
Fax: (416) 504-5446

Membre de l'Association Professionnelle des Galeries d'Art du Canada