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CHRISTO AND JEANNE-CLAUDE : WORLD WRAP

Running Fence, Sonoma and Marin Counties, California 1972-76
5.5 meters (18 feet) high / 39.4 km (24 1/2 miles) long
Copyright Christo 1976
Photo: Jeanne-Claude

The Umbrellas, Japan-USA
Photo: Wolfgang Volz
Copyright: Christo1991

The Pont Neuf Wrapped, Paris, 1975-85
40,000 sq. metres (440,000 sq. ft) of woven polyamide fabric &
13, 000 meters (49, 900 ft) of rope
Copyright: Christo 1985
Photo Wolfgang Volz

Christo and Jeanne-Claude were both born on June 13, 1935. They have worked together since their first outdoor temporary work Dockside Packages, Cologne Harbor, 1961. The outdoor art projects they have generated are some of the most recognizable ever seen in the world. Whether urban or rural, their works are entire environments. In 1994 they decided to officially change the artist name Christo into the artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude for outdoor environmental projects exclusively. The artists intervene in a selected environment, and in so doing, cause us to perceive that environment in a new way. Among their most notable projects are *The Running Fence, Sonoma and Marin Counties, California* (1972-76), *Surrounded Islands, Biscayne Bay, Greater Miami, Florida, 1980-83, The Pont Neuf Wrapped, Paris, 1975-85, The Umbrellas-Japan – USA (1984-91), Wrapped Reichstag Berlin 1971-95*.

On January 22nd 2003, Michael R. Bloomberg, Mayor of New York City gave permission to Christo and Jeanne-Claude to realize their temporary work of art *The Gates, Central Park, New York* (1979-2005). Scheduled for February 2005, and with 7,500 gates, 4,87 metres high, with widths varying from 1,82 to 5,48 metres, the gates will have the appearance of a golden river, appearing and disappearing through the bare branches of the trees. It will also highlight the walkways and footpaths one finds in Central Park, New York.

J.G.: I believe you originally met in Paris?

C.: Yes. In Paris.

J.G.: Christo was actually painting at the time.

J.-C.: Christo was not painting at the time. He was creating his early works – 1958 – which he couldn't sell. As a result he couldn't pay his rent. So he found three ways to survive. He was washing cars in garages. He was washing dishes in restaurants. And he was painting some portraits – oil on canvas. He signed his early work with his first name Christo. When he was washing cars in garages and dishes in restaurants or painting portraits that was Mr. Javacheff – his last name. Portraits were signed Javacheff.

J.G..: Early on, you were involved in doing some work in Abu Dhabi...

C.: *The Mastaba of Abu Dhabi* is a project for the United Arab Emirates which we started in the late 1970s. I was already working with oil barrels in my studio in 1958, sometimes wrapped, and sometimes not wrapped.

J.G.: And this work was less involved with the object and more in the event?

J.-C.: No – an oil barrel is an object!

J.G.: I make reference to that because both of you do not consider your work conceptual.

C.: Absolutely not. We spent $26 million building a work of art *called The Umbrellas Japan – USA*, completed in 1991. You would never find anybody on Wall St. who would call $26 million a conception.

J.G.: A project like the Umbrellas involves an enormous scale. Do you consider scale a way of communicating emphatically, directly, in an evident way?

C.: Scale as a way of communicating applies to any work of art whether it is a sculpture by Calder or apples by Cézanne. The scale is always a way of communicating. It is most obvious, for instance, in a sculpture called David, by Michelangelo.

J.G.: You did receive some criticism about the effect on the land with The Umbrellas *(1984-1991) project or* The Surrounded Islands *(1980-1983) at Biscayne Bay in Florida....*

J.-C. : ...There was no effect on the land

J.G.: I have read that these umbrellas were actually recycled. Everything involved in the project was recycled.

J.-C.: The materials were recycled, not the umbrellas. The umbrellas were taken apart and the materials were recycled. The aluminum was melted down and went back to being aluminum, tin cans or parts of airplanes. We always recycle our materials. There was no effect on the land.

J.G.: And all you works are up for two weeks.

J.-C.: Usually 2 weeks, but sometimes 3 weeks. It depends. It has happened that it would be longer, as in the *5,600 Cubicmeter Air Package* (1968) in Kassel Germany. It remained two months. *The Wrapped Coast* in Australia in 1969 also remained almost two months, so it depends...

J.G.: Yes... and the after image, the works that people will collect and so on are less important than the integration in a landscape where people have lived and maintained an activity. This is not necessarily pristine landscape in which you work.

C.: We have never worked in pristine landscapes. You are absolutely right. All of our sites, whether they are urban sites or rural sites, because we use both, are always places or sites which have been previously managed by human beings for human beings.

J.G.: Community and social involvement is an extremely important part of your work. In a sense you are educating city councils, governments, and the public about the importance of art as a communicator.

C.: That is an after effect. Our aim is not that at all. Our aim is to create a work of art of joy and beauty which we create for ourselves and our friends exactly as all true artists do. They always create a work of art for themselves first. If it so happens that other people enjoy it, that is a bonus. but that is not the aim. Our aim is to create a work of art of joy and beauty and to create it in total freedom and that is why we pay ourselves for all our projects. We accept no sponsors, no donations.

J.G.: I was going to get to that. Why do you feel that sponsorship in a sense compromises the artist's message or even intention?

J.-C.: We do not feel that. Any artist who wishes to have sponsors, its fine with us. but it is not fine for us to accept sponsorship. This is total freedom. We are not against sponsors in general for other people. It is only for us.

J.G.: I believe that the images last while the artworks don't remain. In this sense, do you feel that the imagery is a more powerful communicator than the object.

C.: No. We do not. Our work has to be experienced, lived, touched... People have to feel the air, see the work breathing, living, moving in the wind, changing colours every time of the day. Images, whether they are books, postcards, posters or films do not substitute. They are a souvenir, a record but they do not substitute the real experience, no more than you probably never have made love to a photograph of your girlfriend.

J.G.: Regarding the wrapping of the Reichstag. When you did this work in Berlin did you select it because of its historical context or simply because it was a site in which to work that you found appropriate or beautiful?

Surrounded Islands, Biscayne Bay, Greater Miami, Florida, 1980-83
Copyright: Christo 1983
Photo: Wolfgang Volz

Wrapped Reichstag, Berlin, 1971-1995
100,000 sq. meters of polypropylene fabric (1,076,000 sq. ft) & 15,600 meters (51,181 ft.) of rope
Copyright Christo 1995
Photo: Wolfgang Volz

J.-C.: That one was chosen more by Christo than by me because Christo was born in Bulgaria and was brought up under a very Communist regime, and the east – west relationship was extremely important for Christo. The only building in the world that was under the jurisdiction of the four Allies after the war: the British, French, American and USSR plus East Germany and West Germany, and the only building that represented the east-west relationship was the Reichstag.

***J.G.:** Willy Brandt help to get this project moving didn't be?*

C.: He tried to help, not to initiate. We met him much later. He came to see us in New York in the early 1980s, to tell us not to abandon the project which we had started in 1971 and which we completed in 1995.

***J.G.:** And you received some criticism from ecological groups about the materials used, and finally that was ironed out, I believe.*

J.-C.: I am not aware of that, not that I know of.

***J.G.:** The Central Park project in which you are involved... Are you planning other projects in New York, after this tragic event on September 11th.*

J.-C.: We are presently working on two works in progress. One is called *The Gates, Project for Central Park* in New York City, which we started in 1979. And we are working very actively at a project called *Over the River, Project for the Arkansas River* in the State of Colorado. We started this in 1992 and do not have the permit yet.

***J.G.:** I wanted to ask whether you believe an artist must stay away from politics.*

J.-C.: I believe that artists should do whatever they please.

***J.G.:** And you make reference to the fact that the works you create are aesthetic decisions. I would like to ask what is an aesthetic to you*

C.: There is no definition of aesthetic. When we say we want to create works of art of joy and beauty. Joy and beauty have many many different facets. For instance part of our aesthetic, an important point, is the way we finance our projects in total freedom That is also part of what we call our aesthetic.

***J.G.:** And the financing is that from preparatory drawings and prints...*

C.: ...and early works also, early works from the 1950s and 1960s.

***J.G.:** I believe that Christo contributed to a publication called KWY in Paris, involving a lot of young artists in Paris?*

C.: Mostly Portuguese artists who were living in Paris, with the exception of Jan Voss who was German and myself, who then was stateless – no passport.

***J.G.:** Are the materials for your projects often donated?*

C.: No. Never. when we purchase materials from industry they have to sign a contract that they never would use it for advertising purposes.

***J.G.:** And are the people who work on your projects volunteers or are they paid?*

J.-C.: Everybody who has worked on the projects had been paid, with the exception of my mother, who always works for free, and another exception was in Australia in 1969, eleven architecture students worked and refused to be paid. Four of them have since become artists instead of architects and one of them, Imants Tiller, is now today one of the best known Australian artists.

John K. Grande

SACKVILLE, NB

SEEKING THE IDEAL: THE ATHLETIC SCULPTURES OF R. TAIT MCKENZIE

The Owens Art Gallery at Mount Allison University
24 January - 23 March 2003

R. Tait McKenzie was an athlete, doctor and sculptor. He was born in Ontario in 1867, the same year that Canada became an independent nation. It is his sculpture that is featured in this very unusual exhibition. It is unusual because it is not very often that sculpture of this type is shown in a contemporary gallery like the Owens Art Gallery. Tait McKenzie's sculpture has more in common with ancient Greek sculpture than it does with contemporary work. His work is very traditional and in tune with what was popular in late 19th and early 20th century in North America. This is what makes this exhibition extremely interesting to modern viewers, who have seen very little sculpture of this type or, more likely, have an understanding that representational sculpture such as McKenzie's was somehow bad because it was just about skill and not ideas.

All art is about ideas although some ideas are better than others. McZenzie's ideas were about athleticism, health, and the beauty of the human form. McKenzie was not a trained artist, and never went to art school, but he had a Bachelor of Arts degree and a Doctor of Medicine from McGill University. He did, however, work with and learn from two Montreal sculptor friends, George W. Hill and Louis-Philippe Hébert. His early interest in anatomy led him to make sculptural models for classes in the subject that he taught in Montreal at the end of the 19th century. He had also become an excellent athlete while a student at McGill. He believed that students needed a strong body as well as a strong mind. McKenzie went on, in 1904, to become Professor of Physical Education at the University of Pennsylvania while still teaching anatomy in Canada and the United States.

Very successful person in everything including his sculpture, McKenzie had his work shown, bought and collected in Canada, the United States and Europe. Work in this exhibition were borrowed from, among other places, the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, although I would bet that the work from these two institutions had not seen the light of day for many years until this exhibition came along because of the changing taste in art over the last forty or fifty years. That is a shame

The Plunger, 1925
Bronze

as much of the work in the exhibition is very good by any standard.

I particularly like the small, maquette-like works such as *Tumbler: somersault* (1934) and *Tumbler: split* (1935). These sculptures were done near the end of his career and recall the small scale Dégas and Rodin bronzes. A sculptor friend of my said he thought the work in the exhibition was like that done by Nazi or other Fascist sculptors and, indeed, McKenzie was chairman of the Fine Arts sculpture committee for the 1936 Berlin Olympics, but the charge is really unfair as my friend had not seen the exhibition and was going by what he thought the work was like. This certainly points out the problem of work by sculptor such as Tait McKenzie. First, you have to get people into the gallery and, second, you have to get them to look at the work.

I would agree that a work such as his frieze, *Brothers of the Wind* (1925), which portrays a group of naked men speed skating strikes one as odd, but it is neither Fascist nor homoerotic. Homoerotic could be another way of interpreting McKenzie's art. There are no nude women, only nude men, and all of the men are heroic, but this direction too misses the point. Who am I to ponder the artist's sexuality? McKenzie's heroic athletic sculpture and designed medals for athletic events merely followed the artistic conventions of the time. It is so easy to slip into revisionism, layering today's thinking on yesterday's art.

Jointly organized by the London Regional Art and Historic Museums and the Canadian Medical Hall of Fame *Seeking the Ideal: The Athletic Sculptures of R. Tait McKenzie* demonstrates how artistic taste and fashion changes over time for, just as McKenzie's art was popular during his lifetime, it was largely ignored for decades after his death in 1938. He was a skilled craftsman who believed that his art encouraged positive values of physical work and athletics, even if he limited his vision to men. R. Tait McKenzie's art deserves this second chance of an audience and is well worth seeing.

Virgil Hammock

MONTREAL

FRANK MULVEY
A SIMPLE BEAUTY

Galerie de Bellefeuille
February 13 - 25th
1367 Greene
website: www.debellefeuille.com

An Ear for Earthly Matters, 2000
Charcoal on paper, 24 3/8" x 29"

Using the simplest and most ancient of tools – paper and a single stick of charcoal – Frank Mulvey has managed to create a magnificent body of work. His latest drawings attest to both his unusual talent and his mastery of those rudimentary materials. Fuelled by an intellectual curiosity and profound literary knowledge, Mulvey delves into archetypes of our common cultural baggage, weaving visual narratives of human and mythical proportions. Incorporating the technological reality that is part of his environment, he has produced a fragmented tale in a series of visual instalments that seduce the viewer, stirring the imagination of each and every one who enters the gallery space.

Harking back to antiquity, to Pompeii and Rome, to biblical tales and mythology, Mulvey's images remind us of the beauty in art, reconstructing, reconfiguring architectural and organic motifs, incorporated into enigmatic slivers of the past that may or may not have existed, but one that seems to breathe again, as if released from the confines of our own mnemonic slumber. Accompanied by poetry, these drawings are like pages from a forgotten journal of a traveller emerging from a mysterious realm of our own ancestry.

Mulvey's talent is breathtaking from the very instant one stands before his drawings, which, framed in his handmade trademark metal frames, resemble objets d'art taken off the walls of some ancient structure. Composed of light and shadow, of velvety blackness and gossamer mists, they are like murky obsidian mirrors in which forgotten images have been trapped forever.

Thus immortilized, the figures in his drawings seem caught in a moment in time, frozen like the petrified bodies, stopped in their tracks by the weight of Vesuvian lava. In *Embrace Without End*, a nude couple lies tangled on a tiled floor, their entwined bodies locked into a multi-edged frame, like a discarded cut-out.

Ancient Sister has two female faces smile with a Mona Lisa gentleness, one ancient, composed of tiny mosaic tiles, the other all flesh, contemporary, separate yet one, united by their mysterious smile.

From Another Garden draws on biblical imagery, a close up of a modern Adam and Eve, in which, in a reversal of the primordial tale, he is the one handing her an apple. The exquisite detail with which the pair is rendered imbues this scene with a plethora of interpretations, from the very obvious, to somewhat more erotic, judging by the facial expressions and the accompanying verse. This is art to be looked at for a long time, like opening a book at random and trying to decipher the preceding and following events.

The game becomes even more intriguing when faced with smaller, fragmented images, which are a wonderful departure from Mulvey's more dense and narrative compositions. Focusing on but a portion of an imaginary larger tableau, he has given free rein to his manual dexterity, the charcoal stick like a magic wand bringing to life a world of detail like no other contemporary artist.

A drawing titled *Fact and Fiction* echoes the composition of *Ancient Sister*, juxtaposing a skull with its tiled image. Lying among scattered flowers, the skull grins in its macabre stillness, the Inca-like reflection behind it repeating the grimace. At once foreboding and seductive, it speaks of life and death, and of the beauty in both.

Distant waves, 2002
Charcoal on paper, 44" x 30"

In *Fleeing Pompeii*, all we see is a foot on a tiled, mosaic floor, yet all the drama and pathos is locked tight into this sliver of a larger image, one too great to fit within a frame. And there is no need for it. The foot is in motion, leaning heavily on tip toe, just lifting off the cold tiles. Shards of light rain down upon the running figure, and an invisible but clearly tangible tremour imbues the work.

A similar atmosphere of danger permeates another work, *Dangerous Days*, which focuses on two linked arms, holding tight while a tornado rages on a distant horizon. Narrative and symbolic, Mulvey's art reminds us of what art has always done, enlarging our vision of our world and, while looking at the artist's soul, we rediscover our own.

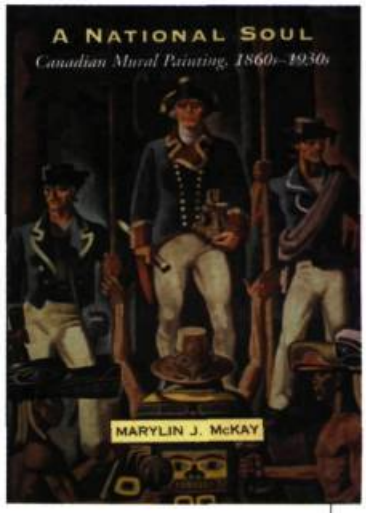
Dorota Kozinska

A NATIONAL SOUL: CANADIAN MURAL PAINTINGS, 1860S - 1930S
BY MARYLIN J. MCKAY

McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003, 304 pages with index
website: www.mqup.ca

With the resurgence of interest in the Mexican Mural Movement, and the release of the film *Frida* about Frida Kahlo's long arduous relationship with Mexican Muralist Diego Rivera, public interest in mural painting has recently grown. The popularity is likewise attributable to the fact mural painting is public art, often created for public places and spaces. Mural painting is an art, rather like public and war monuments, that has a political and social aspect to it. It exists in public space and often treats social, historical and public themes.

Marylin J. McKay's *A National Soul* looks at mural painting in both French Catholic and English Protestant Canada. As an area of public art, mural painting's recognition as an artform in Canadian art history is long overdue. Marylin McKay, Chair of Art History at NASCAD in Halifax, has finally laid down the foundations for further study of the subject. Not only does this highly detailed study bring to light a lot of mural art most of us would never have heard of, but in so doing it rekindles an interest in contemporary mural art as well. An appendix provides in depth details about the murals discussed in the book. Many, like the Christian scenes E.J. Hughes, Orville Fisher and Paul



Goranson painted for First United Church in Vancouver in 1934 have been destroyed and exist only in photo docs, while others such as Charles Comfort's *Captain Vancouver* (1939), Alex Colville's *The Circuit Rider* (1951) or Adam Scott's thirteen panel depiction of local Quebec history at Chateau Montebello, are still *in situ*. Interestingly, we learn from this book that the renowned painter Frank Brangwyn was hired to produce a painted wall work for a Canadian patron. In this case, the scene was of *The Introduction of European Civilization into the country of the Red Indian* originally in the Offices of the Grand Trunk Railway in London, England and now located at the Canadian Government Confederation Centre in Ottawa. Likewise, George Agnew Reid painted murals for the living room of Charles Russell and the Onteora Church in New York State. More renowned artists such as C.W. Jeffreys, Frederick Challener, Hal Ross Perrigard, William Brymner, Ozias Leduc, Maurice Cullen and Joseph-Charles Franchère are all featured in this scholarly investigation of Canada's less known mural art history. This book belongs in all university fine art and art school libraries in Canada. It will provide readers with a better understanding of the process and principle behind mural painting. It has a long tradition in Quebec and in Canada.

John K. Grande

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HULL

THE MYSTERIOUS BOG PEOPLE

Canadian Museum of Civilization
Dec. 6, 2002 - Sept. 1st, 2003
www.civilization.ca
Tel.: 1-800-555-5621

Nederfrederiksmose Body (discovered) 1898, photographed *in situ*. Courtesy Drents Museum and the Canadian Museum of Civilization

Pot. Ceramic jar in Funnelbeaker Culkture (3400-2850 B.C.) style found 1931 in a bog near Drents village, Weerdinge, Holland. Courtesy Drents Museum

European peat bogs, long a source of fuel for homes across northwestern Europe, have, during peat cutting activities (in Ireland, Great Britain, the Netherlands, northern Germany, and Denmark in particular) offered up a wealth of artifacts, hundreds of bodies, and clothing. These bog bodies date from 8000 B.C. to the early medieval period and provide much needed information on early life in northern Europe. This unusual and surprising exhibition includes the ancient and actual remains of men, women and children preserved by the unique conditions of the bogs. There is also an incredible range of material artifacts that evidence the level of sophistication in craft, weaving, metal work and shoe design in so-called "primitive" and pre-modern Europe. The levels of metal and cloth technology achieved then surpasses, in many ways, what mass produced technology can. Ancient guild and craft knowledge, previously passed down from generation to generation, was largely lost due to industrialism, and exists only in pockets of culture these days in the Western world.

This international exhibition will be seen at four major museums in Europe and North America (the Drents Museum in Assen, Holland; the Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum in Hanover, Germany; the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Hull, Quebec and the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, Alberta, Canada) and tells the story of life in Northern Europe from the Stone Age to the end of the 16th century. We see videos of bog cutting from earlier this century, incredibly finely crafted artifacts like broach pins, necklaces, chains and even finely woven mediaeval textiles. Though how many of these people ended up in bogs is not certain, tradition tells us that Roman Iron Age people offered human sacrifices to celebrate military victories, and to recover from illness, and even executed people as punishment for crimes in northern Europe. Many of the bodies ended up in the bogs. Studying *The Bog People*, immortalized in P.V. Glob's ever popular classic book on the subject, has enabled a better understanding of dress style, eating habits, and many aspects of earlier Iron Age and mediaeval life in Europe. Well worth the visit!

John K. Grande

TORONTO

KATHE KOLLWITZ: THE ART OF COMPASSION

March 1st - May 25, 2003
Art Gallery of Ontario
317 Dundas St. W.
Tel.: 416-979-6660
www.ago.net

Lamentation: In Memory of Ernst Barlach, who died in 1938, 1938
Bronze
AGO collection, gift from the Junior Womens' Committee Fund, 1963

A mask of Goethe hung over Kathe Kollwitz's bed before she died and the last words of this great artist/pacifist were, "My greetings to all." Kathe Kollwitz, renowned for her brooding, expressionistic graphic works, and tight compacted propagandistic tributes to the common person, is being celebrated at the Art Gallery of Ontario in a show comprising 77 works in a variety of media. Of course, there are the famous etchings such as *The Peasant's War series* (1906), *The Prisoners* (1908) *Pregnant Woman* (1910) and penetrating *Self Portrait* (1912), all works that bear witness to the painful First World War era in Germany.

Mother, 1919
Transfer lithograph on wove paper
52.2 x 62.9 cm
AGO collection, gift of W. Gunther and Elizabeth S. Plaut, 1995

A series of exceptionally sensitive and humane tributes to the human form, on loan from the Graphische Sammlung in the Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart, Germany offer a rare opportunity to see Kollwitz's incredibly refined drawings and charcoals firsthand. Not only are these portraits of austerity and famine and the ongoing struggle to survive, but they incorporate an exceptional capacity to find the mystery inherent to the human portrait subject. Kollwitz, who was born in Konigsburg in East Prussia in 1867, had much of her artistic production destroyed in a Second World War bombing of her Berlin home, but some letters and art were saved from the wreckage. When the Nazis took power in 1933, she was forced to resign from the Berlin Academy of Arts, thus losing her teaching position, directorship and studio there.

These quintessentially humanistic works by Kollwitz include a bronze sculpture from the AGO collection titled *Lamentation: In Memory of Ernst Barlach, who died in 1938*. Hers was an atypical life, and her art mirrors that experience. It is testament to an anti-war, proto-humanist German vision that was hidden from history, and these voices were smothered by the 20th century's two world wars. As the artwork evidences, Kollwitz herself had an incredible sense of light and texture, of the human form, and composition that influenced expressionist art of the West, and Soviet and East European art. Her main motif was the human form, and her hand hewn sculptures of the mother and father made for the military cemetery of Eessen in Flanders where her son Peter was buried, carry that same strong graphic, linear sensibilty as her drawings and graphics. This show is an experienced study of the process of life itself by someone who studied the world and learned from that experience.

John K. Grande

REGINA, SASKATCHEWAN

LORI BLONDEAU

ShuBox Theatre
University of Regina

Lori Blondeau, a performance artist from Saskatoon, presented something old and something new at the ShuBox Theatre at the University of Regina on January 23rd. The old piece, *Sisters*, is a simple but eloquent series of actions that Blondeau has been honing in locations such as Milan, Italy, in recent years. Her latest and second performance *A Moment in the Life of Belle Savage*, which premiers a new character of Blondeau's cast was, however, as heavy-handed and awkward as the former work, *Sisters*, was subtle and confident.

Sisters consists of four sequential scenes that lead to a double-twist

ending. On the theatre's bare, black stage, a grapefruit-sized stone rests on larger, rougher rock. To the right we can see a fish and a neatly folded red cloth. Blondeau enters in an off-white "Indian-style" cloth shift carrying a basket of Saskatoons. For the next fifteen minutes, she crushes the berries, guts the fish, and tears the cloth into strips. She remains straight faced and silent throughout. The unfolding events are reproduced as a video projection on a screen in the middle of the stage.

Initially, the activities seem authentic, a theatrical presentation of Aboriginal "women's work" of a century and more ago. But soon, things look a little off. For example, the crushing is sloppy. The lower stone should be flatter, more like a bowl to keep in the pulp and juices. The way the rich purple mush oozes over the rock like a messy sacrifice is evocative, but not of efficient pemmican making. And, in the hands of a pro, fish cleaning is fast, precise, mechanical. Blondeau's evisceration is slow, careful and incomplete. That the chore is unfinished suggests that she is up to something more.

Blondeau switches gear in the fourth action when she reaches for an industrial lunch box and pulls out a Big Mac. The twist causes us to reconsider the first scenes. The earlier actions no longer seem sincere recreations of Indian life, but instead those of a contemporary First Nations woman playing at being a traditional "Indian" for our edification and entertainment. The sloppiness, then, is the result of a deliberately poor imitation. It underlines the disconnection between the lived experience of a contemporary urban woman and the traditional daily lives of her ancestors. The sequence confronts us with our own expectations and stereotypes.

The second twist occurs when Blondeau takes only a few bites from the hamburger before moving on to another and another and to nearly a dozen more. As she choked down the processed food, I couldn't help but consider the contrast between the healthy traditional food (fish and berries) and the physical labour required to gather and prepare them, with the fatty, prepared meat and its alienated labour. The result of this dietary change and shift to more sedentary life-styles has led to higher than average obesity, poor nutrition and diabetes rates among Indigenous peoples. All together, it is a moving performance that haunts the imagination and conscience long after the event.

A Moment in the Life of Belle Savage haunts in a less certain way. The sketch features Blondeau in a 1950s style cowboy outfit wandering the stage shooting cap guns and taking swigs from a bottle of tequila. In the few minutes it takes Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers to wail Swingin' over the P.A. system, Belle chugs back the rest of the bottle. Real booze or not, its hard to watch. Belle continues as before, briefly, then bids us adieu. The audience claps but, uncertain, stays seated. Belle returns and taunts the audience as the performance fades.

In theatrical performance we know we are watching artifice and suspend our disbelief. In performance art, we are not so assured and must be ready for anything. *A Moment in the Life of Belle Savage* teeters uneasily on a rickety fence between the two forms. Blondeau may eventually resolve *Belle Savage* into a campy but polished cabaret-style act (in the manner of Shawna Dempsey's Calamity Jane) or let the nascent threats to the audience's comfort loose while exploring Belle's self-destructive possibilities. Such a performance could tap the emotions and experiences that are barely tasted in the present production. As it is, *Belle* is a jittery bluster only threatening to explode.

David Garneau

VANCOUVER

MARTIN BOYCE, *Our Love is Like the Earth, the Sun, the Trees and the Birth*

ISABELLE PAUWELS, *Unfurnished Apartment For Rent*

IAN SKEDD, *Wooden Slat Screen*

Contemporary Art Gallery
555 Nelson St
website: www.contyemporary artgallery.ca
until March 2nd, 2003

These three solo exhibitions on display at the Contemporary Art Gallery weren't, so far as I know, a curated group show, but it was easy to pretend that they are, so seamlessly did they play off of each other.

Martin Boyce is a Scottish artist whose sculptures and installations alter classical modernist designs in surprising and oddly poetic ways, transforming, for instance, an Eames chair into a hanging sculpture whose graceful weight and abstract forms look for all the world like Alexander Calder's mobiles.Boyce's large installation, in the CAG's darkened main gallery, turned the big white box into a city park at night. Young "trees" – made of fluorescent fixtures that sprouted from the floor and branched, glowing, in midair – were scattered between metal benches – half park bench, half daybed – and garbage bins canted off at odd angles. Wandering through Boyce's installation felt like stumbling onto an Expressionist film set, a place whose otherworldly angles and lighting induce a swooning sense of vertigo, a dream-state between sleeping and waking.

Isabel Pauwels and Ian Skedd are recent Emily Carr Institute graduates whose installations and sculptures, while conceptually related, couldn't have looked more different from each other. Pauwels works by altering preexisting architectural spaces, by cutting into gallery ceilings or walls. Hers is an art of absences and voids, an aesthetic indebted to the work of American artists like Gordon Matta-Clark, Dan Graham, and, perhaps, the early Richard Serra. Pauwels' work doesn't have that much in common with any regional sculptural practice, and is all the stronger for it. Pauwels' latest work, *Unfurnished Apartment for Rent*, was a probably unfilmable script about a group of youngish actors who, for lack of money, are forced to cannibalize the walls of their apartments in order to build tables, chairs, and beds, furnishing their rooms at the expense of any privacy. For her CAG exhibition, Pauwels chopped huge gaping holes in the gallery's walls, and used the liberated sheetrock and drywall to build plinths, on top of which were displayed small cardstock maquettes of each apartment referred to in the script. The script itself – published by the CAG as a bookwork that had to be cut apart to be read – fell short of Pauwels' accomplishment as an artist, but her installation's impact is, overall, profoundly successful. Pauwels' originality and intelligence make her, for me, one of the city's most interesting emerging artists.

Ian Skedd, like Pauwels, also alters preexisting architecture, but by adding features so well-designed that they seem to merge with the things they're attached to. His work, like Boyce's, liberally name-checks a century of modernist design. Skedd's *Wooden Slat Screen* was composed of strips of wood cladding that surround the gallery's front windows, filtering the light from the fluorescent fixtures concealed in the window vitrines, thereby altering the gallery's street front appearance. Skedd's work was far subtler than Boyce's and Pauwels', but no less interesting.

Christopher Brayshaw

E. J. HUGHES

Vancouver Art Gallery
January 30th to June 8th, 2003
website:
www.vanartgallery.bc.ca

Steamer Arriving

Indian Church

E. J. Hughes is one of Canada's little known secrets, an artist who has achieved renown, in part due to the efforts of Dominion Gallery's founder Dr. Max Stern, who represented Hughes for 35 years, and likewise encouraged another British Columbia painter, Emily Carr, in her painting. Hughes grew up in North Vancouver and Nanaimo in the 1920s, studying at the Vancouver School of Decorative and Applied Arts in the 1930s studying under Frederick Varley, Charles H. Scott, and Jock Macdonald. He actually worked on murals during the 1930s before serving as an official war artist with the Canadian military. He found a place of peace and quiet in the Cowichan Valley of southeastern Vancouver Island in 1951, where he could devote himself to painting with less of the commercial pressures. Much of E. J. Hughes art on view at the Vancouver Art Gallery is a celebration of the Coastal landscape of British Columbia.

These realistic paintings are heightened by bright colouring and painstaking detail. Major works included in the show: *Steamer Arriving at Nanaimo* (1950), *Indian Church, North Vancouver* (1947), *Coastal Boats near Sydney, B.C.* (1948). Early print etchings and linocuts, pencil drawings and watercolour works from the 1930s offer viewers an insight into the artist's process and particular vision. There are likewise several seldom seen wartime works, and scenes of

logging, coastal boats, the car ferry at Sidney, and the British Columbia Arbutus trees. A quintessential west coast painter, E. J. Hughes continues to work and paint the land and sea he loves. Ian Thom's well researched book on E. J. Hughes is the most definitive and well illustrated tribute to this Vancouver Island painter ever. Future *E. J. Hughes* venues include the McMichael Canadian Art Collection (November 2003) and the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria (Feb. 2004).

John K. Grande

LIZ MAGOR

Vancouver Art Gallery
Nov. 16, 2002 to Feb. 23, 2003
website:
www.vanartgallery.bc.ca

One Bedroom Apartment, 1996
Courtesy Susan Hobbs Gallery, Toronto

Burrow, 1999
Collection Vancouver Art Gallery

Chee-to, 2000
Collection Art Gallery of Ontario

The Vancouver Art Gallery pays tribute to Liz Magor with a major exhibition of her sculpture, photography and installation work. The show includes 18 works created over the past 13 years that deal with such themes as nature, history and domesticity. Some of the most controversial works Magor has made use ordinary everyday objects, but present them in a non-traditional gallery setting. The result is that we come to question what seems to be standard.

In re-evaluating the function of Magor's objects of engagement, we participate in her anthropology of the present. Sometimes the effect is exhilarating, othertimes dull. It depends on the individual work. This act of cultural recreation is best exemplified by Magor's *One Bedroom Apartment* (1996) which includes rented household items, furniture, packing boxes. Works such as *Chee-to* (2000) which have plaster, resin and food as components or *Burrow* (1999) which has a natural look, yet is entirely synthetic, cause us to question the nature and function of materials in a highly developed production era.

The gelatin silver photos from the *Civil War Portfolio* (1991) and the *Camping Portfolio* (2002) are likewise re-enactments that, like theatre, make us aware of role playing and the distance between present and past in historical interpretation. Many of Magor's works, like the log cabin she erected in the Toronto Sculpture Garden, harken back to the colonial backwoods experience but her art does more than simply investigate our relation to nature.

Armoured with a wry wit and sense of our place in a contemporary world, Liz Magor uses nature, history and the like as a foil which enables us to better examine the present -day state of contemporary culture. Magor, who has represented Canada at the Venice Biennale in 1984 and Dokumenta VIII in Kassel, Germany in 1987, continues to produce her highly individualist, ironic iconic objectified brand of art process. As this interesting exhibition evidences, Liz Magor is an acute observer of the habits and textures of contemporary life, at her best when she uses allegory, history and nature as a vehicle to communicate her contemporary cultural vision.

John K. Grande

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