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N.B. SACKVILLE

I FINALLY FOUND SOMEONE WHO REALLY CARES

THE 8TH ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM OF PERFORMANCE ART

Owens Art Gallery, Struts Art Gallery, Faucet Media Art Centre
19 to 25 October 2003.



Rita McKeough during a performance

The annual symposium of performance in Sackville has become a significant event since its modest beginnings eight years ago. It is international in scope and encapsulates a full week of activities with three different venues taking part. The lineup of this year's artists included Chris Cran, Calgary; Kirsten Forkert, Vancouver; Robyn Moody, Lethbridge; Craig Leonard, Kingston; Rita McKeough, Halifax and Franklin Sirmans, New York.

Rita McKeough is no stranger to the Sackville area, having taught several years ago in the Department of Fine Arts at Mount Allison University. For this symposium she put together an installation at the Owens titled *Outskirts*. The audience was invited to interact with the exhibition and the artist throughout the week. This multimedia installation/performance looked at the relationships between the borders of rural and urban life. The title *Outskirts* refers to that area where city meets country. It is the collision between urban and rural values that are the core of the work. Audience members drew their own conclusions based on their individual experiences with both the installation and McKeough's performance.

New York City based writer and curator Franklin Sirmans is the organizer of *Mass Appeal: The Art Object and Hip Hop Culture*, also at the Owens Art Gallery. This

multi-media exhibition includes the work of twelve emerging and established international visual and media artists influenced by, or engaged with, hip hop culture. The artists are Edgar Arceneaux, Davide Bertocchi, Iona Brown, Jonathan Calm, William Cordova, Nicola di Caprio, Luis Gispert, Nikki S. Lee, Adrian Piper, Keith Piper, Nadine Robinson, and Kehinde Wiley. While hip hop culture is obviously foreign if not outright exotic to Sackville audiences, it was plainly something that appealed to the mainly university aged audience of the symposium. Popular music and culture are natural subjects for performance and an installation art exhibition like *Mass Appeal* sees itself as a bridge between the elitist world of the art gallery and that of the street. I would question if *Mass Appeal* actually has mass appeal to people outside the world of art galleries and university art departments, but if those who attended such exhibitions gained some insight into a subject like hip hop culture, then so much the better.

The problem with any idea of mass appeal in the arts, particularly visual art, is that art is usually with in the confines of an art gallery. In spite of many galleries' noble efforts their exhibition spaces are still a foreign place for a lot of people. With that in mind Vancouver's Kirsten Forkert took her performance work on the streets of Sackville. Street theatre has a long tradition much longer than the gorilla theatre of the 1960's. There was theatre in the streets of Europe in the Middle Ages and it connected with its audience. With today's television, movies and internet, street performances have their problems. Artists like Forkert, who take their avant garde art to places where people never visit art galleries, deserve kudos. Forkert is a braver person than I.

The truth is that I am not much of a fan of performance and installation art. These annual symposiums at the Owens Art Gallery and Struts having been wearing me down to the point that I am beginning to enjoy them. The programmers and the artist/ participants obviously believe strongly in what they do by introducing new media and looking for new audiences. The Owens Art Gallery and Struts *I Finally Found Somebody Who Really Cares* was an attempt to go beyond their walls and work within the larger community. I look forward next year's symposium.

Virgil Hammock

CARAQUET

FESTIVAL DES ART VISUELS EN ATLANTIQUE

July 2nd to 6th

The latest edition of this Acadian visual arts festival featured a series of sculpture events and installations, and a wide and culturally diverse range of artists. Granby-based Jean Coté donated *Héritage de l'Acadie* (2003) to the Festival, a large scale abstract assemblage that collaged whale vertebrae, rusted iron fragments, and wood onto a maritime map. Quebec's Muriel Faille visited from Lac Brome to present her incredibly light sensitive abstract paintings. French sculptor Antoine Thomas' huge carved wood *Présage*, a landmark of last year's FAVA, was pulled out of the ocean where it had been and an astonished audience discovered the newly unveiled piece had more resonance and texture from the ocean waters' wear.

For the actual competition, it was the young Acadian artist Alexandre Robichaud who won 1st prize for his mixed media piece *La Somme des Connaissances Humaines* horizontal rows of paper that had deep textural burnt areas. The piece raised questions about the fragility of cultural and informational heritage in a globalized highly technological world plagued by war and violence. Other winners were Roger Vautour for his ingenious hybrid boat and tree painting *Bateau Closse* (2003) and Frédéric Avy for his triptych *Terre Amérindienne*. Moncton artist Georges Blanchette won the newly established Prix Claude Roussel. Claude Roussel's retrospective afforded locals and visitors the occasion to become better acquainted with the painting and sculpture of this veteran of the Acadian arts scene.

Outdoors near the main exhibition space, Jacques Newashish from Wemotaci in northern Quebec created a fascinating environmental interweave of natural materials and painting. Hand painted sticks arranged in groupings pointed to the heavens above. Other tree sections were intended to represent the four human races and native colours and there were spirit catchers in various places; a collectivity of natural elements expressed a wish for harmony with nature. At the opening of the event, Newashish had expressed his gratitude to the Acadian organizers for inviting a Native Amerindian from Quebec stating: "Mother Earth needs us. We should think of her." André Michel presented a packaged sculpture using natural forms and materials—posts with



Jacques Newashish beside his outdoor installation at Caraqueet, July 2003

rocks perched on top all tied together with yellow cord. Armand Vaillancourt contributed a new work titled *Le Crépuscule (Fin de Temps)*. The centrepiece of the assemblage/installation was a light green wooden boat that recalled the fish industry predominant in the region for centuries. Turned onto its side the boat spilled oyster shells onto the surrounding blue hillside and was in the process of emptying (like the ocean's resources). Other found readymades that referenced the industrious history of Acadia's people surrounded this piece and were illuminated at night by eight illuminated torches.

Inside the main building Edward "Ned" Albert Bear carved with butternut and horse hair masks for the public to see the process. Carlos Gomez demonstrated his drum making skills using bear grease, Red Cedar wood from British Columbia, and deer skin. Mario Cyr's hybrid and imaginative art and his bingo events (winner takes a painting home) attracted people of all ages. Michel Marin, René Cyr, Nicole Haché, Tina-Rose Bastien, Marcel Boudreau, Sylvie Marc, Georges Goguen and Bernardo Rosso each added their unique and colourful artworks (and personalities) to the events that ensued. Caraqueet native Paul Ouellette's brightly painted unicorns, ships and amazing objets were a total discovery for many. Even some neighbours had never seen his highly original artwork before! Charles LeGresley's installation that was like a sanctuary made of bows and branches of evergreen and cedar. Titled *L'être éphémère* (2003) LeGresley's piece, which almost resembled a dancing figure in its entirety, won the Prix du Public for the event. We look forward to next year's FAVA with great anticipation!

John K. Grande

CLAUDE ROUSSEL INTERVIEWED BY JOHN K. GRANDE

From Folk to Avant Garde and back again

CLAUDE ROUSSEL WAS BORN IN 1930 AT EDMUNDSTON, NEW BRUNSWICK. HE WENT ON TO STUDY ART FROM 1950 TO 1956 AT L'ÉCOLE DES BEAUX-ARTS DE MONTRÉAL AND WAS AWARDED DIPLOMAS IN ART PROFESSORSHIP AND SCULPTURE. WHEN HE RETURNED TO HIS NATIVE CITY, EDMUNDSTON, HE BECAME THE FIRST ARTIST TO TEACH ART IN FRANCOPHONE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF THE PROVINCE. IN 1959, HE WAS APPOINTED ASSISTANT CURATOR AT THE BEAVERBROOK ART GALLERY IN FREDERICTON. IN 1961, HE WAS AWARDED A CANADA COUNCIL SENIOR FELLOWSHIP THAT PERMITTED HIM TO VISIT EUROPE AND WORK FULL-TIME ON HIS ART WORK. IN 1963, HE BECAME RESIDENT ARTIST AT L'UNIVERSITÉ DE MONCTON AND PARTICIPATED IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE VISUAL ARTS DEPARTMENT, FOUNDED AN ART GALLERY, AND WAS A PROFESSOR THERE FOR 29 YEARS.

Claude Roussel's art has always been accompanied by an intense and varied artistic production that includes permanent architectural and monumental art projects. His works are in the Olympic Sculpture Garden in Seoul, Korea (1988) and many other collections. During his career he has received various distinctions and medals: in 1964, the Allied Arts Medal from the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada; in 1967, the Centennial Medal; in 1977, the Queen's Commemorative Medal; in 1982, the Ordre de la Pléiade Medal; in 1984, the Order of Canada and in 1992, the 125th Anniversary Medal of Canada; in November 1998. In December 1999, Claude Roussel was elected a member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts (RCA).

J.G.: Claude, I believe you actually began carving at a very early age, before any schooling

and many of your subjects came from nature.

C.R.: Horses, birds... The first thing I remember carving was an airplane. Before I did model airplanes I could not afford to buy them at 10 years old, so I carved the airplane. And from the airplane I went on to carve birds and became more refined. Between age 14 and 16, I carved many race horses. In this mini retrospective, I have 60 years of documented works and photographs.

J.G.: And Dr. Laporte was quite an inspiration.

C.R.: Yes. My parents were impressed by my ability to do things but Dr. Laporte was instrumental in encouraging me. When he came to our house in Edmundston, I was the oldest of a family of 13 so the doctor came fairly often and he saw the fish carving. Being a wood carver himself, when he saw my interest in

art, he enrolled me in a correspondence course in taxidermy which led to mounting various species: fish, rabbit, grouse, deer heads, etc. It kept me close to the anatomy of things. The year after that I knew I should refine my technique in sculpture so I used illustrations of other nature artists and adapted them to carving. But of course gradually, I also felt the need for personal expression which led me to interpret historical and Indian legends.

J.G.: There is already a game going on with the compositional formats...

C.R.: Yes. I was discovering that the importance of art is to be able to create your own designs.

J.G.: Actually The Scalp (1947) which you did as early as 1947 shows an incredibly intricate capacity and technique in wood carving and this is before going to the Ecole des Beaux-arts. When you were first working your influences, were they mainly church carving or what?

C.R.: Before doing religious work, I was interested in historical themes. Between naturalistic illustrations and Indian themes, it was mainly the picturesque habitant type of sculpture - the Bourgault style - but I always considered any theme a pretext to do something. I saw the work of the classical Greek and Renaissance sculptors in the encyclopaedia and was striving to be as good as them. I spent a whole winter carving a block of wood (*Scalp*) with very small crude tools, and managed to achieve fairly good results. Anatomy always interested me a lot.

J.G.: Going to the École des Beaux-arts in Montreal in 1950 was a big step for someone coming from Acadia. Were there any other Acadians there at the time?

C.R.: Not at the same time, but two others came shortly after. There were a few who attended the school before me but they never had the courage to come back to Acadia. When I got there, I spent 6 years developing new techniques and



Claude Roussel with Birdwatcher

practising creativity in clay modelling sculpture, painting, drawings, etc. The teaching was still fairly traditional at the time. In painting, it was more far out. Alfred Pelland had already been there. The contemporary spirit I learned there stimulated me throughout my career.

J.G.: And who were your favourite teachers?

C.R.: I guess they were all important but Jacques Detonnancour, Louis Archambault, Julien Hébert, Armand Filion, Sylvia Daoust and Maurice Raymond were very demanding and important to me. I still have quite a few drawings from the time, but all the major paintings and sculptures were kept by the school.

J.G.: We see you are absorbing a lot of contemporary influences but you were also making religious pieces.

C.R.: At the time, religious works were the only public art in demand. I paid my studies by working during vacations doing sculpture for twelve churches. I was the first one to do the entire decoration for the whole church including a Way of the Cross and an altar painting for the Church of our Lady of Seven Sorrows in Edmundston from 1953-56. I won a prize in Montreal with the carving *Immaculate Conception* in 1954, and that was a break!

J.G.: In a sense didn't your Montreal's Ecole des Beaux-arts education isolate you in your native Acadian community?

C.R.: They always thought that the art schools had spoiled me. They did not mind the narrative religious drawings and similar works, but the nudes were shocking to them.

J.G.: When you came back to Edmundston, you were jumping between commissions which were a financial necessity and a more avant-gardist expression or experimentation.

C.R.: At the same time I was doing works like the Haida tribute which was totally abstract. Living in Edmundston after my studies from 1956 to 1959 I made work for

myself. I had a few requests for public sculptures that dealt with themes of communication and survival.

J.G.: *There is a kind of cultural colonization that happens not only in the real world but in the art world. Adapting to the latest international trends in the 1950s and 1960s is one thing, but trying to deal with the hierarchy of that same art world while maintaining a regional identity as an Acadian must be difficult...*

C.R.: I had a very traditional public, and the arts specialists who expected a contemporary approach. I was always caught on this tight wire of trying to please both camps, while maintaining my identity, so I could do something more progressive. I had to be as sensitive to international trends as to my Acadian environment without being overly regionalist. I was envious of the protective acceptance of larger cities. Our art can be as meaningful and different from that of Montreal, Toronto or Vancouver.

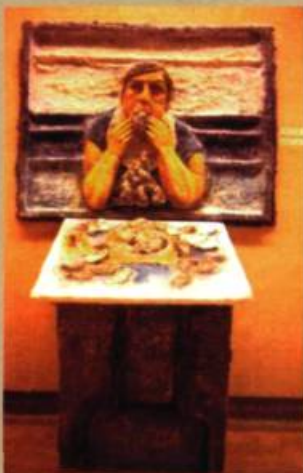
J.G.: *In those figurative, very realist scenes of miners and fishermen in Acadia you made, you experimented with new techniques such as sand on enamel and masonite.*

C.R.: The theme of the fisherman was always very important to me. Sculpture is very rigid and demanding, but painting with sand and enamel was looser, more lyrical. I put the enamel in squeeze bottles, and drew free hand à la Jackson Pollock, with a controlled dripping. I used this technique from 1961 to 1966 and came back to it in 1996. In 1967, I worked a few years on geometric wood reliefs until 1970. Then I started a series called The Moon and its Effects - shaped canvas reliefs inspired by the moon expeditions with a sense of fantasy and sensuality.

J.G.: *You were not afraid to treat social themes in your art. For instance, there is The Anxiety of the Fisherman and Chomage (1971). This latter work experiments with polyester resin collaging newspaper articles documenting unemployment in Acadia.*

C.R.: The unfortunate thing about all this is that I collected that documentation on the problems of this north eastern region of New Brunswick in 1971. Would you imagine it is still the same problem. It is like a singer who does a chanson engagé in the hope that it will help the situation.

J.G.: *An even more powerful political series are the plastic works,*



Claude Rousset, *Oyster eating contest*, 1989 (Cast paper, 89" x 50")

serigraphs on vacuum formed ABS, like Who Will Take the Cutters? (1975). The latter piece deals with political and cultural isolation and depicts a series of cabins that form enclosed circles around parts of a New Brunswick map...

C.R.: Even if I am not active in social and political movements, because of my natural sensitivity to the human condition, social and political problems, I must react to unacceptable situations to help make people aware of them. From 1971 to 1979, I did many of these works in polyester resins and vacuum forming. This technique consists of heating and dropping serigraphed plastic sheets on a mold. The vacuum causes the form to fit the solid shapes underneath.

J.G.: *You were involved with CAR (Canadian Artist's Representation) early on, and helped improve the facilities for artists in the Moncton community.*

C.R.: Along with Georges Goguen and Sister Eulalie Boudreau, starting in 1971, we tried to apply the national CAREAC policies to Atlantic art galleries. The going was tough, but now these policies and the artists' status are accepted.

As for improving facilities for Acadian artists, that was my dream. I knew that in order to develop myself personally I had to go to Montreal. One of my goals was to try and make my passion for art available to other Acadian artists. Lord Beaverbrook actually hired me to be a link between the Acadian and English communities at the Beaverbrook Art Gallery from 1959 to 1963. I could have spent my whole career there, but I didn't. I was aware of the lack of visual art tradition brought on by our tumultuous Acadian history and devoted much of my energy in art



Claude Rousset, *Who will take the cutters?*, 1976 (Serigraph on ABS, 19" x 26")

education to sensitizing the public to art. It was a naive and Don Quixote-like approach, but looking at the present vitality of our arts scene, I think my contribution has paid off and I consider it as important as my own art production.

J.G.: *You returned to the sand and enamel technique with new landscape works in the 1990s.*

C.R.: When I retired I bought a van. My first wife, Brigitte, passed away in 1988. In the early 1990's with my second wife Raymonde, we traveled quite a bit and went out to Western Canada and US. Seeing unusual landscapes and mountains, I felt the urge to come back to drawing. When she was driving I did quick sketches. Back at home, I enlarged them in transposing the composition and finally transposed them into a large format of enamel painting - the landscape theme is unlimited.

J.G.: *Yes... Your recent work marks a return to traditional wood carving. The Observateur (1999) series have a figure who looks like an Alex Colville figure with binoculars in all his 3-D splendour staring straight at us. And then there are these carved and painted birds on wood pedestals. The carving recalls your beginnings working in taxidermy.*

C.R.: At the beginning I was doing craft but now I am going farther than craft. I use the same natural beauty, but the large scale of each element also gives it an abstract feel.

J.G.: *The presentational Observateur series is very contemporary. The format, the plinths, the carving and colour. These colourful carving enable you to bypass today's trends in art, while incorporating your knowledge of carved sculpture.*



Claude with *Birds Hommage to Haida No 2*, 1960 (Oil on plywood, 24" x 48")



Claude Rousset, *Montana*, 1995 (Enamel and sand on masonite, 36" x 48")

C.R.: I am stubborn yet open to all forms and expressions in art. When I discover a new material or even a new tool, it provokes new possibilities. I stay true to myself, and remain honest even if my sculpture is not the latest trend. I like to compare my attitude to a weather-vane that is free to respond to the winds of life and inspiration... renewal, exploration and the pleasure of creating and communicating. One of my great regrets is that my art was never exhibited or shown regularly in the rest of Canada!



Bruni Babarit. *La carrière dans la forêt (esquisse): faire naître ensemble une île-jardin et la protéger,* installation, Domaine St. Bernard, 2003

THE LAURENTIANS

LA LIGNE DU NORD

CONTEMPORARY ART
IN THE LAURENTIANS

Ville de Mont-Tremblant,
municipalities of Labelle and
St-Faustin-Lac-Carré

Mont-Tremblant and
the Domaine Saint-Bernard

August 7th-31st, 2003

La Ligne du nord saw the realization of permanent and ephemeral sculptures in the Laurentian mountains. As an initiative the project seemed visionary and is an inspiration for public and artists seeking to draw links between nature and contemporary culture. In St. Jovite Catharine Widgery created a mountain-like passage sculpture, Bill Vazan worked under the telecabine at Tremblant incising the rockface in one of the largest picto-megaliths he has ever worked on. Meanwhile Pierre LeBlanc created a steel sculptural homage to David Smith at the train station. Even more remarkable were the contributions from German sculptor Nils-Udo three kilometres into the forest at Domaine St. Bernard, a series of five rectangular caves on a hillside with boulders set in them. A haunting poetic feeling of the primordial power of nature pervade this piece. The French duo of Bruni Babarit created



Roy Staab. *Mobius Manic,* installation, Domaine St. Bernard, 2003

an environmental sketch in a sand pit using plated trees, burned trunks of tree and rocks. The piece was a superb earth sensitive integration. Likewise Roy Staab from the United States created a moebius strip with 3 overlapping circles of maple branches that hovered illusionistically over the waters of a still pond. Ingrid Koivukangas from British Columbia worked at an integration that involved applying birch bark to the exterior of over 60 trees and creating an earth sensitive directional piece. Jeane Fabb's forest interior work involved treelength stretchers laden with cones. The seedlings were placed like patients in the army-like cots, as if a reminder of the fragility of nature, in an area undergoing monocultural planting and eco-touristic development. Dominique Valade has created a boat and archway sculpture for permanent installation on the Riviere Rouge near Labelle.

What is remarkable about such an initiative is that it causes the public to reassess their relation to the Laurentian landscape in response to the artworks being created in situ. The Laurentians have never had a contemporary art event of this magnitude until this one. Co-ordinated and realized by Dominique Rolland of the Centre des Arts contemporain du Québec à Montréal this event was a celebration of diversity—both cultural and natural—and merged nature and art in a truly contemporary way. Let's hope there will be more in the years to come!

John K. Grande

MONTREAL

TOM HOPKINS

Galerie de Bellefeuille
1367, avenue Greene

Tel : 514-933-4406

Fax : 933-6553

art@debellefeuille.com

July 3-15th, 2003

Tom Hopkins' name carries a lot of weight in the local art circles and he has set free many a talented soul from his academic workshops. But it's not his knack for spotting a budding artist that has made his name famous, it was, and is, his own art. Hopkins' body of work is impressive and steady, with a predilection for heavily textured surfaces and mythological themes, and scattered amongst them, blossoming from time to time, marvelous delicate monotypes.

As fresh and powerful as Hopkins paintings were once upon a time, they seem to have lost some of their luster. Oddly, his new works

shimmer with luminous light - one thread that weaves through his oeuvre - but it does not make up for the cumbersome rigidity of the forms and composition. The massive figures in Hopkins mythical universe are laden with layers of paint, immobilized by weighty surfacing, frozen in awkwardly foreshortened movements. Drawing his themes from ancient lore is a lofty notion that somehow does not segue easily onto canvas.

Yes, there are figures bathed in light, and cypress-like trees with elegant, elongated trunks, strange cities looming on the horizon, but it is all lost in a cacophony of colour and texture. Hopkins wields his brush with gusto, and is at his best when lost in an abstracted layering of colour patches that take shape intuitively, revealing a world of its own making rather than conjured by the intellect. There still is a lot of the magic of Hopkins in the latest exhibition of his works at Galerie de Bellefeuille, despite their ponderous bulk. It is in fact in that magma of paint that his greatest talent hides. Not in the contrived titles and fantastic imaginings, these are not up to Tom Hopkins's stature. He has the ability to infuse light into the pigment and then paint. It's a kind of alchemy that produces shimmering endless vistas that appear in many of his works.

The boat series continues, and he really shines in these canvases. The symbolic, stylized vessel hidden in the shadow of the foreground, leaves the stage for the dance of light that shapes the backdrop. This explosion of brilliance culminates on a horizon that recalls J. M. W.

Turner's burning skies that glowed into abstraction. In these paintings, Hopkins streamlines his palette, reaching for bright ochre and yellow that fuse with light into a brilliant tapestry. The only accent is the flash of crimson red of the boat's prow as it sits quietly moored, half-hidden in darkness. While all that shine and glow seems overdone in the mythological works, in these paintings it is the theme itself.

A more contrived version of the boat symbol comprises a series of bowls whose contents reflect the alien environment that we see in so many of Hopkins' works. Spindly trees and geometric architectural structures surround this vessel, seemingly in adoration. The sky itself pours a golden light into it as if onto an altar, transforming an otherwise solid composition into a spectacle. Tom Hopkins' true mastery of the medium is still in full bloom in a series of Caballero paintings, featuring a distant horse and rider. Drawn from some ancient time, the image is wonderfully stylized, the giant trees and faraway walls sculpted of thick paint, giving the work the feel of a roughly textured mural. There is a wonderful fusion of all the elements that make Hopkins's works such a creative feat. Texture and light merge and mould one another, the figurative melds into the abstract and the palette is symphony of colours. No ostentatious symbolism here, just pure art and the joy of painting.

Dorota Kosinska

Tom Hopkins
Sightline: Cantata, 2003
Huile sur lin
57" x 55"





Harbinger, 1996-97
oil on canvas
62 x 48 in (157.5 x 122 cm)
Collection: Alberta Foundation for the Arts
Photography: Newbery Studios, Edmonton

OSHAWA

JEFFREY BURNS

TERRENE

Robert McLaughlin Gallery
August 28–October 26, 2003

In this, East coast painter Jeffrey Burns's first curated solo exhibition, nature and culture meet head on. Burns's fabulistic constructed landscape and biomorphic details recall Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*, but are more inquisitive, and much less macabre. Whether in a seemingly innocent painting like *Garden* (1997) or more phantasmic painterly constructions like *Harbinger* (1996-97) which depicts a nest-like appendage, and myriad growths, orifices and outgrowths, we are made aware that these scenes are not real, yet they display a kind of natural diversity one might find in some hidden micro-cosmic environment under sea or on land.

Twenty years after *The Origin of Species* first appeared in 1859, Darwin's theory of natural selection and evolution (transformism) had largely been accepted by the scientific community. Jeffrey Burns's paintings are anachronistic. They play on and with natural diversity, using hybrid bioforms, and touch on themes of dystopia. In a still life painting like *Untitled* (1998) there are clues or cues to human civilization such as the button-like, and door knob-like objects that rest like archaeological discoveries adjacent to unusual growth forms. The future shock scenario is alluded to, with traces of the topsy-turvy effects of

genetic manipulation, toxic transformation, pollution and evolution, of new landscape of species. It all takes place in a background noise of human intervention and species-istic elasticity.

Nature and human culture impact on these painted landscape scenes.

In *Crater* (1996), we see a mesh-like grid patterned substance that covers areas of this opening in the earth. The science fiction potential of such a scene is imaginative, comparable to Mark Tansey's paintings, but there is more speculation and ideation in Jeffrey Burns's subject matter. As Burns states: "It is important that I reveal evidence of past, present or future human civilizations in many of my paintings. I do not have a strong political stance. I seek to raise questions about technology as it is applied in land use and, in more recent works, medicine. I am cautiously optimistic that we are going to make progress in areas of human health and the environment, perhaps using the same technologies that have been responsible for some of the problems."

Catalysis (1995) reveals the two tendencies that have since become more pronounced in Burns's informational art. An early industrial building becomes the backdrop for various bizarre bioforms and two geodesic domes; a man with a stick pokes the ground. It is this push and pull, back and forth play with elements of nature and human culture, where the backdrop of transformation could suggest either disaster or potential evolution that keeps resurfacing and has become so pronounced in Burns's art. *Selection* (2002) presents a woman reaching out to clip a pod—a symbol of growth—that she has chosen. The proposition in the latter recent painting is more an affirmation of humanity's potential to overcome, or at least circumvent with a degree of selective intelligence, situations that have arisen from our manipulation of the physical environment. *Terrene*, Burns's first touring solo show on this planet demonstrates that painterliness is next to godliness... and raises questions about the state of contemporary culture. These are ingenious painterly projections of some future or well hidden micro-cosmic earth-based scenario. Terrene will travel to the Illingworth Kerr Gallery in Calgary, Harcourt House in Edmonton, the Confederation Centre Art Gallery in P.E.I. and the Owens Art Gallery in Sackville, New Brunswick.

John K. Grande

TORONTO

REBECCA BELMORE

THE NAMED AND THE UNNAMED
May 7–August 3, 2003

TOM THOMSON

Art Gallery of Ontario
317 Dundas St. W.
www.ago.net
May 30–September 7, 2003

economic and cultural causes of these collective tragedies never surface or are directly confronted... The anger and the absence is what we feel—probably that's the way the victims felt...

A First Nations artist whose allegiance to womens' rights and the disenfranchised is most evident, Rebecca Belmore has a long track record and is a master of the contemporary installation. Whether installation is a technique, a style, or just an extension of reality, the chair floating on a cloud of white mater-



Rebecca Belmore
Blood on the Snow, 2002
Installation (chair)

A canoe draped in black is a very poignant Canadian symbol. One need only think of the Tom Thomson legend—that he died in a canoe in Algonquin Park. The issue with *The Great Water* (2002) Belmore's black draped canoe sequence is solid 3-D, and may not actually be about whether Tom Thomson was murdered or died naturally. It may actually be more of an introduction to the poignant and painful video sequence that follows. This video or that video, whichever way you want, is about a collective tragedy, the serial killing of women in Vancouver's skidrow district.

This tragedy is the point of Rebecca Belmore's painful exposé/exhibition, and it is an intense, violent and very contemporary experience. She treats it thematically like a life cycle. The title of Belmore's performance/video shot in a vacant downtown Vancouver lot near where many of the slain women lived is *The Named and the Unnamed* (2002). We see Belmore tearing flowers through her mouth and screaming the names of the murdered women—young, native and many prostitutes—at the top of her voice. One feels as alienated as the victims of that serial killer must have felt. One wonders why the larger social,

that has a blood red top speaks a lot about pain. It could be about abuse, murder, or any tragedy, but what we, as audience sense, is the urgency, and the violence, the absence that follows. Titled *Blood on the Snow* (2002) Belmore's piece is very theatrical, and very poignant.

Tom Thomson (1877-1917) the Canadian legend is the subject of another major show at the A.G.O. comprising more than 140 of the artist's paintings, oil sketches and works on paper. We become aware of not only Thomson's great capacity for art and design, but equally the full range of subjects he addressed through his direct and very painterly approach. The oil sketches, the watercolours and early graphic works stand out. Nature looms large throughout Thomson's art. What a national tragedy that Tom Thomson died so young, yet as this exhibition evidences, his art spurred on a whole movement towards the wilderness and nature in painting. Canada's Group of Seven arose soon after Thomson's death perpetuating something of the excitement Thomson's art generated, and still generates, towards Canada's northlands, nature parks and wilderness areas that remain—now a lot further north than Algonquin Park.

John K. Grande



ILAN SANDLER

DOUBLE STOREY

Toronto Sculpture Garden
115 King St. East

Until September 15th

Chairs are prime design objects and we spend a lot of time in them. They are less often the subject of a major artwork. Ilan Sandler's *Double Storey* is super-scale design furniture in an urban landscape; a very visible summer item/object on the King St. East strip. This is not an extraordinary sculpture object, but it is so basic and elemental as to catch our attention. We are reminded of American sculptor Claes Oldenburg's oversized Pop art objects, or alternatively European César's huge thumb sculptures, but this Sandler piece is somehow ironic because it looks temporary, like an icon waiting to be pulled down or taken away, the way so much art in exhibitions, or promotional billboards can now be. Though it is so visual, this sculpture at least looks like a lawn chair, but like a steel and nylon skeletal one. As the diagrammatic character of *Double Storey* become more apparent on second glance, we see it as an object/idea or re-presentation of a chair, rather than as the actual thing...

Sandler's chair is an enigma with no prospective promotional or practical purpose but it does conjures up memories of the chair as design object; of Gerrit Rietveld and the design movement that endlessly reinvents the chair for each successive generation, even returning to earlier design prototypes at times. *This is more a low-tech attempt to be high-tech, while infusing irony into the design debate while ascribing a sculptural intent to the whole effort.*

The scale is humorous, but Sandler's *Double Storey* chair is also a temporary phenomenon, a visual and vernacular tool/sculpture, and a physical embodiment of something designed for human comfort. This chair enables us to enter into its makeshift framework/structure. We can explore the

surrounding space and view around King St. East or the garden itself. Because it is so ordinary, Ilan Sandler's sculpture presents a somewhat tried and true challenge to our usual notions of what art is or could be. Neither practical nor purely aesthetic, this is an impure purist design statement rendered in a city that thrives on modernist design.

John K. Grande

JAMES GILLRAY

THE LAST LAUGH

Art Gallery of Ontario
317 Dundas St. W.

www.ago.net

To October 12th, 2003



James Gillray
The Zenith of French Glory
February 12, 1793
Gift of Trier-Fodor Foundation,
Courtesy of the A.G.O.

Caricature is a popular art. Among the artists who caricatured the human condition with the popular medium of engraving in the early 19th century, James Gillray (1757-1815) ranked among the best. Thomas Rowlandson and George Cruikshank, likewise active at this time in England, and Henri Gerard-Fontallard, or Adrien-Pierre-Francois Godefroy from France were all artists who sought to present court, royal and political controversy in their engravings. The élite did not really suffer as a result of this, but they did get the message. Gillray and his early 19th century caricatures now on view at the AGO have their contemporary equivalents in Folon, Topor to name a few.

This superb exhibition of James Gillray's satirical art reveals an artist who embodied what later become known as the "golden age" of British caricature at the end of the 18th century. Approximately 30 etchings ridicule royalty and political figures with a ribald and hilarious abandon. James Gillray lampoons

the foibles of Georgian society... his engravings get the last laugh, even beyond the grave!

John K. Grande

REGINA

ROB BOS

CHANGING ROOM

Art Projects Gallery

September 1st-October 17, 2003

Art Projects is an artist-run gallery squeezed into a row of run-down stores in Regina's inner city. Upon entering the storefront space to see Rob Bos' exhibition *Changing Room* you are likely to wonder if you have stumbled into the wrong shop. The small but neatly renovated space is decorated with six business suits hung and a makeshift change room. It could be a tailor's or second-hand clothes store. But a camera and tripod and dozens of photographs suggest something else.

Changing Room is a modest performative installation in which visitors try on suits, have their picture taken and added to the wall. They may even purchase the outfits (\$25). With so little here, the viewer is persuaded to attend to details to discover what the work is about. All the same size and reflecting a similar, unassuming taste, these used suits probably belonged to one person, a slight man of average height. The outfits suggest he worked in an office, probably air-conditioned. Mostly wool, they are off-the-rack, not fashionable, not power suits, but serviceable and professional. The wear in the knees is particular to bureaucrats... Was the man middle

Rob Bos
Changing Room
(installation detail)



management, middle-class, middle-aged? Other clues like the clothes hooks in a change room are very Duchampian and a small room off the gallery like a resource center, sure enough, has books on Duchamp and Beuys. Is this a hint that the clothes are a species of readymade (Duchamp) and that the visitor participation is an attempt to make everything art and everyone an artist (Beuys)?

We learn from an artist's statement the suits belonged to his recently deceased father. This information evokes a flood of possibilities. Some used clothes have no trace of their previous tenants and can be worn without thought. Other clothes, especially as a set like this, not only show signs of their forebearer, but also come with a provenance. It is one thing to buy a stranger's old clothes from the thrift shop and quite another to wear the clothes of a dead man and know it. To do so in the son's presence carries with it a haunted intimacy. And what you do with the clothes, how you wear them, says volumes about your attitude toward death. Are you matter of fact, utilitarian and looking for a bargain? Are you horrified? Excited?

Bos has made his grief art. By having friends and strangers assume his father's clothes, he can see and record a range of emotions in others that might rhyme with his own feelings. The photos reveal an array of reactions and performances. Most people look like they are acting a part inspired by the suit and they look very uncomfortable. These suits seem to be wearing the people, and not *vice versa*. As an art gesture, these suits may be a metaphoric riff on "shuffling off our mortal coil." A *memento mori*, the installation suggests that it's not the clothes that make the man. Or is this a melancholic study of how clothes make the person. There is a sadness

John Scott

Trans-Am Apocalypse No. 2, 1993
1984 Pontiac TransAm engraved by artist
Photo courtesy: National Gallery of Canada
Photo: Ronald Simon

here as so little of the man survives death. Perhaps after Beuys, this may be a celebration of the life of an Everyman. It can also be an expression of anxiety about being fated to an average, even recyclable life. The artist has no need for his father's suits, and he is not, as an artist, filling his father's shoes. The exhibition shimmers with the possibility of both guilt and joy of not taking the path of one's father. Yet Bos does use the suits. They symbolize all the valuable/expendable baggage any son inherits.

Changing Room is an understated installation that coaxes the viewer into becoming a participant. He seduces us into dealing with feelings and a topic many of us would rather avoid. Bos has managed to make work about his father's death without being sentimental or even personal; he leaves these possibilities up to each viewer.

David Garneau

VANCOUVER

MASTERS TO HIPSTERS

DRAWING THE WORLD
Vancouver Art Gallery

June 28–September 21, 2003

For the Record: *Drawing Contemporary Life* is an ambitious show that brings together international and Canadian artists' drawings. Unfortunately this all inclusive vacuum features a widely varying range and quality of artworks. When you mix quality international artists with earnest regionals, you end up with a show that has no focus, no unity, no intensity. More interesting, *Drawing the World: Masters to Hipsters* presents a range of media on which the drawings are enacted. Drawing happens on canvas, on ceramics, and even on a car—a Trans-Am engraved by John Scott with all the chapters from the Bible's *Book of Revelations*. Even garbage and computers become a way of generating drawing. Less exciting is the failure to emphasize that drawing is a unique artform, every bit as self-contained as sculpture or painting.

Curator Daina Augaitis's stated focus on content over form in drawing is, from this critic's perspective at least, a mistake. Largely figurative, the drawings in *Masters to Hipsters* document contemporary lifestyles and that is it. Ironically, Vija



Celmins *Untitled #14* (1997) looks like a painted representation of a night sky but is so dull it makes one pray for some budding Van Gogh to emerge from the fray. Could someone shed a vision onto this science-ridden art drawing world? Techno-techniques and post-human technicalities become the fashion that dominates... Some of these artists are simply and plainly bad like Ann Kipling, Toba Khedoori, Chiho Aoshima and Derek Root. Xu Bing's *Landscape* (2002) is a strong text/landscape—good work! In the experimental realm, the Royal Art Lodge seems to have generated energy out of their art though where it will go from here is not clear. One unusual exception is Shahzia Sikander, whose *Nemesis* is a very curious hybrid of Indian and Persian miniature painting tradition and contemporary art. An elephant is forming through several images and when complete consists of a conglomerate of mythical animals, people and masked figures. Natasha McHardy's *Weed* (2002) recycled garbage becomes a 3-D wall drawing reminiscent of Tony Cragg's early assemblage wall drawn pieces.

Fashion wins over inspiration and technique becomes the master. This is the case with Alex Morrison's *Every House I've Ever Lived in Drawn from Memory*. It consists of a series of clean linear exercises in house drawing. Elizabeth MacKenzie's repeated hazy image of a woman's face in *Reunion* (2002) is simple and plain—no more—no less. More definitive is Jack Shadbolt's *Hornby Suite* (1969-70) and the untitled William Kentridge drawing for the film *Stereoscope* (1999). This show suffers from the worst aspects of political correctness. By trying to serve too many masters it serves no one—not even a public.

John K. Grande

TOM THOMSON AND THE GROUP OF SEVEN

By David Silcox, Firefly Books,
2003, 441 pages with index.

While many Canadian art books that attempt a survey of an era or movement suffer from an overly academic, or alternatively oversimplified overview, David Silcox's *The Group of Seven and Tom Thomson* gets the right balance between information and attention to the actual arte. Silcox's *Tom Thomson: The Silence and the Storm* co-authored with Harold Town was one of the most successful Canadian art books ever published, just as this popular and enduring Canadian art book will undoubtedly be.

Art books these days usually treat the paintings as fodder for discourse and lose the reader. David Silcox has the skill to imagine an audience and turn his visual experience into words for a general public. Silcox is one of the few Canadian art specialists to achieve that balance between visual description and real in depth understanding of the history he is addressing. He is not a superficial observer of past Canadian myths and he doesn't re-invent the Great Lone Land myth of the Group. Instead Silcox brings it all to life with 123 seldom seen paintings from private collections among the 369 full colour illustrations that are in this book.

Many of these newly published paintings sought out by Silcox from collections across Canada depict humans in a landscape—urban or rural. The proof is there—that the Group of Seven were a lot more contemporary than the myth they



perpetrated particularly as they came into being in a post-Cubist era.

Divided into ten sections *The Group of Seven and Tom Thomson* covers little known subjects like *Gardens, Still Lifes, and Portraits, The First World War, and Cities, Towns and Villages*. Edwin Holgate's *Fishermen's Houses* resembles American social realist Thomas Hart Benton's paintings, and A. Y. Jackson's colour animated *Herring Cove, Nova Scotia* (1919) is a truly freeform advanced work of painterly realism for its era, for example. Some of the Lemoine Fitzgerald paintings look better than ever, while Fred Varley still shines through as the Group's mystical luminary. The industrial landscape is romanticized, as in Lawren Harris's *Billboard (Jazz)* (1920) and *The Eaton Manufacturing Building* (1911). The illustrations are excellent. This book offers some surprising and seldom seen perspectives on these artists output and we are better informed as a result. It is the most comprehensive book ever published on the Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven.

John K. Grande