HALIFAX

JERZY KOLACZ

January 28 - February 16
Studio 21
1223 Lower Water St.
Tel.: 902-420-1852
www.studio21.ca

Polish Canadian Jerzy Kolacz's paintings, along with sculptures by Wojtek Biczysko, form the basis for this two-person exhibition in Halifax. This is the first time that these artists have exhibited in Atlantic Canada. Kolacz is also a well known graphic designer having taught that subject at the Ontario College of Art for some twenty years. Other than formal concerns such as colour and composition, it is difficult for most people to see a relationship between Kolacz's paintings (he is foremost a formalist and modernist) and his graphic works, but, in reality there are links between these two areas of interest. All of the painting in this exhibition are non-objective works and, of course, graphic design, by its very nature, normally has some sort of representational subject matter. Poland, where the artist was educated, has a rich history in graphic design. Posters that came out of Poland during the Communist period were particularly strong but some of the best painting in the late Communist period tended to be non-objective. The mid-1970s social realism was a dead issue in Polish painting and young artists looked to the West for role models and, further, to Abstract Expressionism in particular.

Kolacz's paintings in this exhibition are about beauty. In an interview with the Polish Canadian writer and poet Edward Zyman, Kolacz comments: "In visual arts, in painting or sculpture, truth (beauty) is felt, not read, as we perceive the message contained in a book." Certainly the concept of feeling beauty is at its most basic in the visual arts, particularly with non-objective abstract works that need not be filtered through the subject matter as post-Modern art can be. This is not to say that non-objective art is better than subject-laden post-Modern art. Rather, the subject of modernist non-objective is beauty, or to put it more simply l'art pour l'art. In viewing one of Kolacz's paintings in this exhibition music immediately comes to mind, classical music to be sure, but music nonetheless. His titles are enigmatic such as Haiku XI, High Priest X, and Landing. All seven paintings in the exhibition were completed in the last year or two. They are reasonably large, ranging from 60" x 42" to 66" x 72", and are mixed media on board or canvas.

Somehow, and I think it is because of their ability to draw you in, these painting seem to look larger than they actually are. An example would be High Priest XI (2004) a 60" x 42" mixed media on canvas. Looking at this vertical canvas I was unaware of its borders and became totally immersed in the work - its colours, its textures and this is when I hear the music. I do not hear a particular work of music, but rather get the same feeling that I often have listening to classical music, such as chamber work by Schubert. High Priest XI is not a brightly coloured work. If anything its is somber tending to grey. The surface quality, the texture, of this painting, and the others in the exhibition, is also an important part of the viewing experience. I wanted to touch the painting and run my hand over its rough surface. I did not, but if I owned the work I would. In my viewing of Kolacz's paintings I was reminded of my experience of looking at the paintings of Mark Rothko and the non-objective works of Philip Guston which invoked similar feelings.

There is no doubt that Jerzy Kolacz's painting are High Art and for many younger artists could represent an elitism that, from their point of view, is to be avoided. This is too bad because it misses the point of his art. Kolacz is capable of making political points and he has done so with his graphic art. Non-objective art was the revolutionary art when he was beginning as an artist in Poland. Social Realism was the stuff with content and it is supposed to be one with the people. By the mid to early 70's Social Realism was pretty dead in Poland, but it was freshly buried and some of the stink remained. Poland, at that time, was still not a great place to live and it was possible to go to jail for your ideas. Abstract and non-objective art was a way to thumb your nose at the state as many of those in charge had no idea what the artists where up to and, besides, beauty was a fine place to escape to even if it was only in your mind.

Kolacz is an interesting painter of the old school which is the same one that I belong to and, with that caveat in place, I believe that he still has things to show us. Beauty is more than skin deep, at least when beauty is concerned. Jerzy Kolacz's paintings in this exhibition are about nothing and, at the same, about everything. These paintings to have the ability to move you. If you take the time to stop and look. Virgil Hammock

MONTREAL

MARK LANG: IN AN INSTANT

February 3 - 14, 2005
Galerie de Bellefeuille
1367 avenue Greene
(514) 933-4406
www.debellefeuille.com

There is a theory which maintains that everything is happening at the same instant; the past, the present, the future, are in fact just a spec, a blink of an eye, all in one and one in all. Mark Lang's recent canvases are the visual accompanying that theory, an aphel, as it were. Epoch and people wavin in and out of time in his imaginary museum, where old masters encounter each other in front of their own 'ancient' works. The viewer is instantly transfixed by these fictional scenarios, inadvertently taking in an art history lesson for which there are many interpretations. Lang's latest paintings at Galerie de Bellefeuille seem surreal with their juxtaposition of eras and artists, while the execution is pure realism. It is fascinating to have followed the career of this talented painter, from his early canvases of mysterious interiors occupied by equally enigmatic characters, to the latest works that astound by their maturity and subject matter.

Rather than copy old masters, Mark Lang has incorporated early masterpieces into his vast halls hung with paintings that most of us recognize. His compositions resemble snapshots from a museum, eerily realistic while created entirely by the artist's imagination. There is de Kooning's dancing painting titled Composition, providing a backdrop to a wonderful portrait of a laughing girl; as is Géricault's The Raft of Medusa, its ancient drama echoing the troubled features of a female viewer seated on a bench, her back to the enormous classic.

With admirable handling of the medium of oil, Lang paints the difference, the separation between his contemporary sitter and his rendition of famous masterpieces. They are instantly recognizable, but remain in the realm of the past, while the visitors to Lang's imaginary museum are indiscernibly of our era. Equally intriguing are several portraits of famous personages in contemporary guise, as in the work titled Rétrospective, featuring Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin. The two famous artists are wearing today's clothing and seem lost in a discourse in front of what looks like Millet's The Gleaners, throwing the unsuspecting viewer into a time warp with a twist. In Portals another play on time and space is taking place, where a couple of imaginary characters have stepped off the canvas to carry on in an empty museum hall. The title of this work suggests that art is, indeed, a key to other dimensions, a realm of endless possibilities in which we all can play. Well, maybe not all. It takes the talent of an artist like Mark Lang, his audacious self-assurance as a painter, to appropriate great works and use them as setting. It takes even greater mastery to paint them into vast oils, whose...
uncompromising format would intimidate a lesser artist. With that same mix of modesty and hubris, Lang paints himself into several of the works... in the guise of a weary museum janitor oblivious to the great art that surrounds him. His latest works present a new way of looking at and using art, in a time where everything has been done it seems, and painting is dead in the opinion of some, and where the success of an exhibition depends more on the curator's selection, than on the power of the works themselves. Lang's paintings are putting in doubt all of the above.

Dorota Kosinska

What is surprising on viewing this show firsthand is how varied both the method and intent was among minimalist artists: they worked less as a group and more as individuals solving a puzzle to which they were all respondents. Despite the seeming naked methodology of the placement of common materials in space (Flavin's commercially available fluorescent lamps, Judd's and André's factory-fabricated galvanized steel and copper plates), each had their own aesthetic parameters to which they rigidly adhered.

Carl André's work was guided by the prefabricated settings and measurements of his materials. From there, the inherent properties of his 'units' would be assembled to interact with space. Lever (1966) is a line of common bricks laid on the floor in 'a header course', a bricklayers' term, that dissect the space and emphasizes a horizontality at loggerheads with common notions of sculpture at the time. Pile (1977), is a neat stack of 277 copper plates (all André's groups of units add up to be a prime number; divisible only by itself), each 12 inches square, and piled to the height equivalent of an average person. The piece nests itself compellingly into the corner of a wall.

Dan Flavin's transformation of the prefabricated fixture into an aesthetic and inclusive object is exemplified in his strangely dramatic Monument 4 for those who have been killed in ambush (to P.K., who reminded me about death) (1966). Another corner piece by Flavin puts four standard-issue fluorescent lights in a spatial arrangement that looks like a crossbow jutting out into the gallery space. Suspended at a certain height, this bow basically points at the viewer's head. The colored light, a standard-issue fluorescent red, gives off a glow that dematerializes the structure and points the viewer towards the more sanguine theme indicated in the title.

Donald Judd, also not adverse to notions of beauty in classical modernism, takes a painterly eye to his reductive form. With a uniformly characteristic of modern consumer production methods, and simple scaling according to aesthetic priorities, the piece engages the space. Composition, texture and color differences become barely perceptible equations. As Judd said, "One or four boxes in a row, any single thing or such a series, is local order, just an arrangement, barely order at all." Judd's Untitled wall piece of rectangular galvanized steel boxes, each spaced exactly to emphasize a relationship with negative space, engages the viewer with its vertical emphasis. Like André's Pile, it recalls the transcendentalism of Brancusi's Endless Column rather than the cheeky irony of Duchamp's Fountain. Visiting 3 x 3 reacquaints the viewer with the minimalists and their fervent search for visual and aesthetic truth that was as empirical as it was deductive.

Cameron Skene

GUERINO RUBA

Gesù – Centre de créativité
1200, rue de Bleury
Montréal
Tel: (514) 861-4378
www.gesus.net

As the title suggests, 3 x 3 at the Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery is an exhibition consisting of three major works each by three seminal American Minimalists: Donald Judd, Dan Flavin and Carl André. Drawn from the National Gallery of Canada's collection and curated by Diana Nemiroff, 3 x 3 draws attention to the aesthetic impetus that fostered minimalism in the 1960's. As a purely logical conclusion to the open-ended dialogue resulting from Abstract Expressionism and Post-Painterly Abstraction, minimalism was a natural answer to a reductive aesthetic. If minimalism didn't exist, they would have had to invent it.
and departure? Those cardinal points could be very similar for the estranged person who migrates, or is in exile. Another of Ruba’s sculptural integrations contains a collectivity of figures. Each is following the next, walking in a line. Are they migrating? They do not look ahead too far, and the leader of this migrating group is out a balance. He is falling over to his side. Will they ever find another home? If they do will they be accepted? Without an ethical basis for determining the value of life, Ruba’s art informs, we may find we are simply objectified like that ghostly section of meat that hangs from menacing hooks within another of Ruba’s containers. Is it a human torso? It is hard to tell... things are quantified, measured, abstracted from any source or context ad nauseum.

We can see a life-size window in white plaster on one wall. It is closed, shuttered and has two boards. The two boards form an X sealing up the (imagined) building. Wartime memories of abandonment, of removal, a detail that a child would typically see and ask questions about. This is the kind of experience Guerino Ruba formed his world vision out of as a child. The incapacity of people to communicate the most elemental of emotions and feelings, and of a rampant fear... Common wartime experiences that cannot be erased. A tiny wall placed sculpture building typical of those from the village Ruba grew up in has a boarded up window. The two boards form an X with the board to the left sealed. The Coyote caged in a cage, is on display in a small window in the house. An objectified like that ghostly section of meat that hangs from menacing hooks within another of Ruba’s containers. Is it a human torso? It is hard to tell... things are quantified, measured, abstracted from any source or context ad nauseum.

I am so sorry that... 2003 mixed media. Photos Paul Lutherland.

‘United Fuckin’ Nations’ every ten seconds or so. The other screen flashes all the states of the United States’ flags interspersed with the text phrase United F____ States of America. Flashing at hyperspeed, the artist’s screenwork seems to invoke the use of subliminal advertising, a hallmark of the American entrepreneurial spirit.

On the opposite wall, all of the State flags of the United States individual states are presented at the same hyperspeed, in a flash. Again, the metaphor of the flag serves to speak of darker things beneath the facade. Matilabi has said he has a ‘love/hate relationship’ with the U.S. Its clear that he represents a multitude of perplexed lovers of America.

What is interesting is that Matilabi’s indictment of the current state of the world is based on the sense that bestial self interest, rather than compassion, rules world policy. Artists and writers such as Gunther Grass have echoed the same opinion of the government of the United States since 9/11. What is interesting is that Matilabi’s stance is like America/America (detail) 2004 Serigraph on kozo paper, balsa wood, pearls, needlepoint, electronic components fibre optic cables, LED

Hannah Claus

Souvenir d’enfance n° 7 (detail)
Bronzo, for 142 x 10 x 17 cm

John K. Grande

AFSHIN MATILABI: ANXIETY APOLOGY
January 14 – February 19
Optica
372, Sainte-Catherine Ouest
Suite 506
Tel.: (514) 874-1666
www.optica.ca

Afshin Matilabi is a multidisciplinary artist whose current presentation at the galerie Optica consists of a video installation and a large drawing respectively. These works that comprise this show do not only speak of the anxiety fueled state of affairs in a world largely being shaped and determined by the United States of America, but also about another phenomena that could have more to do with the character of culture these days.

Citing the guilty who have recourse to crimes against humanity during the 20th century, i.e. the Pope for the Church’s complicity in the Holocaust, the Japanese for treatment of their prisoners of war, and the Americans for their decision to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki, for example, Matilabi has made a large drawing in multimedia titled ‘I’m So Sorry That’ depicting 44 ‘made from the waist up’ male figures running across a field.

These cartoonishly drawn figures run across the green verdure with blood dripping from their hands, all in a race to redeem themselves at a fountain of pure water which awaits them. They are all uniformly guilty and democratically unified in their collective mandate.

The effect of using a cartoon style of drawing in I’m So Sorry... is profoundly disturbing in the face of serious world issues. It implies that a vision worthy of the world’s redemption is only possible under the most brutal of adolescent banners, namely the cartoon. It seems that once true morality enters the field of political change, war breaks out, or the art dealers start creating taste.

The video piece, titled ‘United Fuckin’ Nations’ is composed of two monitors that face each other on opposite walls. One monitor screens Matilabi’s crudely rendered drawings of all of the flags belonging to the United Nations, interspersed with heart of America’s big apple – New York City. The Wall Street Journal, delivered each day to the René Block Gallery and part of the installation performance were dutifully placed in stacks. The coyote caged with Beuys would usually urinate on these Donald Judd-like stacks of paper soon after they were delivered.

Just like Joseph Beuys did in his era, Afshin Matilabi likewise raises vitaly relevant issues about cultural identity in the artistic arena and on the political plane respectively. Matilabi accomplishes it with a sense of humour. This in and of itself is a worthy achievement.

Isak Elliott Augustine.

QUEBEC CITY

IN MY LIFETIME
February 3 – April 24
Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec
Parc des Champs-de-Bataille
Tel.: (418) 643-2150
www.mnbe.qc.ca

Issues of identity and territodialy have often been the subject of contemporary native art shows that have included Land Spirit Power at the National Gallery of Canada and New Territories: 500 Years After in Montreal. What is most interesting in this show guest curated by Lee-Ann Martin is the way these concerns have evolved as a language that expressed native concerns within the forum of contemporary art.

What strikes one the most in the current show is not the explicit political and minority rights flag waving, (though David Garneau

Hannah Claus

unsettlements (detail) 2004 Serigraph on kozo paper, balsa wood, pearls, needlepoint, electronic components fibre optic cables, LED.
MISTISSINI

GLENNA MATOUSH: WALL OF PERSONALITIES

Museum Lodge
Tel.: (418) 923-3253 #228
www.nation.mistissini.qc.ca

Comprising a series of 8 large 4 x 8 feet mixed media on canvas works, *Wall of Personalities* by Montreal-based artist Glenna Matoush comprises a series of semi-abstract portraits of people from village of Mistissini. These big Matoush pictures tell the whole story of a community that has undergone dramatic change over time yet holds onto its traditions. *Wall of Personalities* does so with an all inclusive energy and vision. Not only do the personages depicted in these paintings traverse the Cree generations from very young to elders – one even gets a sense of the passage of seasons and time in general. We see women hand washing clothes in a tub, some hunters home for the summer relaxing on the front steps of a home, a person with a bear cub, a tipi structure… One painting has an elder man fishing while a woman stretches moosehide. Youthful faces – a reminder of the future – are also there. Interpersed throughout these textual multi-media paintings are sensitive and intricate abstract details, lines, colours and that raw texture that Glenna Matoush has always excelled in.

The most striking of Matoush’s new series is the one that depicts a marriage some 55 years ago in Mistissini, which is located north of Chibougamau. We see all the people staring out at us from the canvas larger than life. Other contemporary personages can be seen wearing a blanket, decorated costumes, and there are ravens – a harbinger of good luck. Another dipthich from Glenna Matoush’s *Wall of Personalities* (this actually covers two walls at either end of the Mississini Motel/Museum) has an ancient feeling for the forest and rocks of the north. An ambiance is projected of a home, a person with a bear cub, a tipi structure… One painting has an elder man fishing while a woman stretches moosehide. Youthful faces – a reminder of the future – are also there. Interpersed throughout these textual multi-media paintings are sensitive and intricate abstract details, lines, colours and that raw texture that Glenna Matoush has always excelled in.

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to ban land mines) and a we see a one-legged black child in the foreground. Beside the book are the shaped cut out text pages (once the book's contents) that are a sculptural adjunct to the rest. A source of information and knowledge or culture these reconstituted books are a metaphor for the way these knowledge containers are now being replaced by other media.

The book, once deconstructed is given technological change. Largely intuitive of how radically the way information are a metaphor for the way these culture these reconstituted books the book's contents) that are a sculptural unique to human imagination, ingenuity and craft.

Liz Ingram's installations are poetic evocations of the lived relationship between people and nature. Fragile Source is a twelve-panel photo intaglio and silkscreen print on wood. Ambiguous body parts flank blue water that flows down the center. In a dark curtained-off space resonant with the sound of running water, Sacred Stream consists of two light images of hands moving through water. These hands play, swim through, or dissolve into that primordial liquid. Such elemental experiences suggest a wordless spiritual connection between bodies and nature. The connection is underlined in Fragile Source by the a test floating across the panels... "succulent, soul, skins, sanguine, source, fragile flesh..."

Amy Lowen’s A Peace Project radiates optimism. Six floor-to-ceiling hangings made by weaving long strips of folded rice paper are suspended in a row. Some strips are printed with words in many languages; others are made from fragments of brush calligraphy. The
We sense how space(s) is organized, world from a point we never see it.

Space of Making is an ambitious for the way it presents an everyday contemporary life. Contemporary these are fixed in place, and as we read these works as illustrations of the ambiguity inherent to the urban idiom can likewise reify worlds in microcosm with a linguistic feel as if these particulars were denaturized as the artist's goal is to "interwine world phenomena and symbols to express our deep appreciation for the diversity of cultures and beliefs." And the woven words reflect these sentiments: "compassion, kindness, respect, understanding, patience, tolerance, gentleness and forgiveness." The viewer is meant to circle into Fear this exhibition uses gentle persuasion to illustrate a meaning, to help form our understanding of this photo still.

David Garneau

BERLIN

CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHIC ART IN CANADA: THE SPACE OF MAKING
Jan. 14 — February 27
Neuer Berliner Kunstverein / Vox Populi
www.voxphoto.com

Photography forms part of the language of our times and images are a veritable well that we draw from in apt out of curiosity and also to help form our understanding of place(s) and beingness... Canadian photographers are particularly well versed in the art of drawing from the well of images, particularly before these are fixed in place, and as contemporary life. Contemporary Photographic Art in Canada: The Space of Making is an ambitious exhibition/presentation curated by Marie-Josée Jean and presented at the Neuer Berliner Kunstverein early this year. Among the photographers who visual and pertinent perspectives on place, and identity we can find Stan Douglas, Louise Noguchi, Isabelle Hayeur, Michael Snow and Nicolas Baier. The urban idiom can likewise be a landscape, a vista and Alain Patience's view from above of a studio/loft interior is fascinating if only for the way it presents an everyday world from a point we never see it. We sense how space(s) is organized, lived in, almost as an anthropologist from Mars might. Carlos and Jason Sanchez's The Gettys (2004) and 8 Years Old (2003) are in the tradition of many situational photographers who build an image, detail by detail — to illustrate a meaning, or develop a narrative sense. In the latter we see a boy in his bed. His road race kit sits on the floor nearby. This room is liltered with the standard accouterments of today's suburbia. John (2002) is actually very funny; a scene of a taxidermist smoking amid the plastic models and fur are quite funny. Scott McFarland's Inspecting, Allan O'Connor Searches for Borytis cinerea, like all his gardening, trimming, clipping apparent photos have a quirky, catchy sense of the botanical and the domestic. These are garden photos your aunt or uncle could appreciate but there is always an extraordinary, extra-terrestrial feel as if these participants were denaturized as the gardens themselves are "introduced" phenomena. Who is this tool equipped man? Where does he come from? Where is he going and what is in the cage he is holding? Whether re-establishing a fictional narrative on the suburban or even the urban white man's myth will be understood or appreciated 50 years from now is not certain. As illustrations of the ambiguity inherent to any stereotype these photos work well.

Nicolas Baier's photos are particularly fascinating for the way they seize abstract elements from the everyday by digitally scanning the surfaces of things. These photos reify worlds in microcosm with a vital visual vernacular taken from real phenomena and physical effect. From computer keyboards to scratchy paint surfaces, these worlds are cosmic photo containers full of flavour. Louise Noguchi's recreations of the western cowboy myth replete with costumed fill-ins are situational scenarios that look like sets — intentionally false and slapstick — a bit like Buster Keaton's films once were. Slapstick has become a post-genre, an Oceans 11 phenomenon, where the stereotypes themselves are recycled and re-contextualized to make a fake. Maybe less imaginative than the originals from the silent film 1920s the nuances, for the fact they seek to mimic other places, other visions, are amusing. We visually glean it all at a glance and out of the corner of an eye! Vid Ingelvics literally documents the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York with a series of seemingly innocuous photos of the inside terrain of a presentational museology; security guards, a fire extinguisher under an ornate stairway, signology, an encased wall-placed Mondrian! Most amusing are Lynne Cohen's set up scenarios. They expose the dichotomies of contemporaneity with a sanctuary sense of Pop iconic meaning. We read these works as nostalgia now, for the cut-out characters on top of a pile of tires, or the intrinsic generic office with no way out, or the hermetic sealed up statuary from the Pop style all are documented, captured as part of our world. Humour abounds in a humourless world! Isabelle Hayeur's illusionistic visual topologies encapsulate city and desert nature vistas with a beatific sense of scale in colour photography despite the desolate content. Stan Douglas shows a still from the artist's own Journey Into Fear (2002). Unlike the original film by Norman Foster this scene is a film set in transition, a domestic room structures contained in a built structures that for all its temporary sense is a site within a site. For Douglas the decontextualized reconstruction of a film can reveal something of the era it was made in... hence his reprising in this photo still.

It is these photographers' recognition of all things urban and rural, of aspects of wilderness and civility, set in a non-space that is wholly contemporary, a tentative "space of making" that comes through as the thematic link for all of them. Canadian contemporary photography it appears is at an apex of creative production. These photographs, for their sense of distance, of imaginative contemplation, and the clarity of their nuanced, sequenced, questioning vision(s) are truly inquiring and well worth the look.

John K. Grande

VICTORIA

MILES LOWRY & DAVID FERGUSON: (SUDDENLY DANCE THEATRE)

NATURE ECSTASY
January 13 — 22
Open Space
510, Fort Street
Tel.: (250) 383-8833
www.openspace.ca

Suddenly Dance Theatre's multi-disciplinary production Nature Ecstasy privileges the visual components of video, dance performance, and art installation more-or-less equally. This interdisciplinary approach is a signature feature of the ensemble's collaborative ventures mounted successfully as perfor-
L.A.'s Eclipse Quartet performed twice on the opening night of the installation's 12-day run at Open Space with intense soundscapes that veered between Romanticism and jagged edge New Music interpretation. The musicians responded to the visual imagery and participated with a preternatural speed interpreting the movements, gestures and rhythms. Eclipse Quartet's sound reified the dancers fluid and jagged movement resembling the rocky precipices and prehistoric structures of a landscape. Their tense, tempestuous improvisations became a Romantic and 'sublime,' response supported by staccato, rhythmic base notes. This bottom-heavy accompaniment seemed appropriate as Ferguson stuck closer to the grass and stone of earth than is usual for him, eschewing the aerial leaps and gravity-defying moves of past repertoires.

Nature Ecstasy's comprehensive visual concept was 'through-designed,' with all aspects reflecting parts of an integrated vision. Ferguson's urge to embody his interaction with the landscape through 'sublime' or ecstatic responses are perfectly expressed through the labyrinthine danced shapes. The visual art works that make up the concrete installation component of Nature Ecstasy also reflect the illusionary weightiness of a natural world that science and magic more accurately recognise as a quality of movement. Ferguson's paintings, rendered on cast cotton panels have thick impasto paint and rhythmic base notes. This bottom-heavy accompaniment seemed appropriate as Ferguson stuck closer to the grass and stone of earth than is usual for him, eschewing the aerial leaps and gravity-defying moves of past repertoires.

Looking at a Cy Twombly work on paper is to discover some lively, enigmatic, curious details that have become paintings in and of themselves. The eighty-four works in this show collected from the artist's studio to celebrate his 75th birthday are at once High Art and yet maintain a lively interest for their open, almost childishlike interest in the act of notation, the perceptual quotient of recording that one can never truly capture. Less angry than Dali and just as naive, Twombly is an artist who works with visual enigmas, with the character of words, of markings, and all this on the flat dimensional space that painters will work with. Cy Twombly: Fifty Years of Works on Paper at the Whitney Museum of American Art reveals Twombly's incredible pulse for the scribbles, the notations, the visual detail as an omnipotent gesture—above all a gesture. Some kind of coded response to layers of history and rhythms, their identification with the elemental languages... the rocks, trees, water patterns, the sky...
celebrates the artist's love of life, of our place in the natural universe, and the personal friends, some of whom figure in this book. Following in the footsteps of earlier Canadian artists McCarthy made a trip up north top paint the icebergs, and fantastic surreal landscapes of the north, to Lancaster Sound, Resolute and the shores of Greenland in 2002. The patterns, shapes, and rhythms of ice, snow and water are testament to the energy inherent to nature in the north. In McCarthy's paintings reproduced as colour photos in this book they express a personal cosmology of nature and spirit, as do the images of McCarthy's daily life at her Georgian Bay cottage.

A respect for life, an understanding of the individual's place in the world, all served up with comments from this wise woman make this an entertaining read... for the cottage or in the city!

John K. Grande

ART NATURE DIALOGUES: INTERVIEWS WITH ENVIRONMENTAL ARTISTS

www.sunypress.edu

If the entire art edifice collapsed tomorrow, it may well diminish us as a culture but it will save some trees. Art Nature Dialogues, a collection of interviews with 21 environmental artists by writer and critic John Grande, without saying so explicitly, edges our thoughts toward a similar conclusion. There is an understated imperative that defining artmaking as patterns of thought rather than visual events is the best direction for art.

Art Nature Dialogues is steer'd by Grande's adroit questions and def responses to artists' ponderings. The author's own thoughts in the interviews make up a good share of the book — it is less a series of interviews than a platicnic dialogue with artmakers around the environment as both model and source for art. Grande embarks on this dialogue with both noted and obscure environmental artists — David Nash, Betty Beaumont, Alan Sonfist, Pat Dougherty, Bill Vazan, and Michael Singer to name a few — who work with nature to create ephemeral or permanent large-scale pieces. Other interviews in the book sketch the motivation of artists who take their craft to its furthelest end, despite considerable aesthetic and professional risk.

Grande brings the reader through some of the more interesting processes and paradoxes of cultural production in the environmental niche. From British performance artist Hamish Fulton (who eschews the 'production' part of artmaking in favour of the more directly experiential part of walking great distances) to Betty Beaumont, who directly and almost provocatively interferes with natural processes, thoughtfully revealing the nature of human intervention in the landscape. Best known for her Ocean Landmark (1978-80), where 500 tons of processed coal waste were dropped into the Atlantic Ocean to paradoxically become a fish habitat, Beaumont is, like a number of artists throughout, a revelation in the thoughtful complexity possible in the subject matter. Notions of 'environmental' in relationship to art multiply and conventions are challenged by Grande's constant theoretical nudgings and plain curiosity in his dialogues.

The book is also a nuanced and varied tussle with the dance of intention between artmaking and nature. Where one veers close to an almost Wagnerian romanticism — like the sapling assemblages of Bob Verschueren, another veers too far away — exemplified by the monstrous, hybridic mechanical musings of Doug Aitken, Grande avoids polemics by using the dialogue format to jostle ideas to the forefront. The author selects or centers the interview almost purely on method, so that the artists then riffs on his own working process. The result is not only a heightened sensitivity in the reader to the role of the environment in the thoughts of a certain segment of the art world, but an expanded awareness of the possibilities inherent in considering nature as the hub of all things. This is an indispensable book for anyone interested in the processes and paradoxes of environmental art, and a useful addendum to the currents of thought in contemporary artmaking in general.

Cameron Skene

THE BOW: LIVING WITH A RIVER

by Gerald T. Conaty, Toronto.

The Bow: Living with a River gives an exceptional viewpoint on the transformations, encroachment and natural beauty of the Bow River valley in Alberta. Done through and with artists' interpretations and 100 historic and documentary photographs, this book tells the story of a river that is ever changing and eternal. Over time engineering projects, urban growth, bridge building, human and natural history and nature itself affect the Bow River. Among the artists' visions of the Bow Valley we find A. Y. Jackson, Frederick Verner (renowned for his scenes of buffalo on the plains), A. C. Leighton, Frank Johnston, and W. J. Phillips. The Glenbow Museum in Calgary exhibited these artists works and other including Roland Gissing's Group of Seven-ish forest of trees and Dorothy Knowles's pure watercolour impression rooted in nature. Margaret Shelfon's colour and black and white woodcuts, for their graphic pre-war feel are great. And there are many other intriguing artists we have never heard of in history books: James Nicoll, Lars Haukaness and Richard B. Newitt. All in all quite a discovery!

John K. Grande