HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA

ARTPORT: CONTEMPORARY
May 14-October 30
1055 Marginal Road
Pier 22 North
(entrance through Pier 21 lobby)
Tel.: 902-424-8935 or
AGNS: 902-424-7542
www.agns.gov.ns.ca

ARTport, an exhibition organized by the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, is one really great idea. Conceived by gallery director Jeff Spalding and Jeff Gray its Manager of Development, ARTport is the largest exhibition in the history of AGNS. Pier 22 is directly connected to Pier 21 Immigration Museum and is the gateway for cruise ships to Halifax. It is also a 30,000 sq. ft. building. The idea was to turn this very large venue into an exhibition that introduces shipboard visitors to Nova Scotia to Canadian art and perhaps draw them to visit the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia while in port. Obviously such a large space has problems of its own. Traditional museum fare such as wall hung paintings really would not work that well much less that the non-weather proof building would never meet museum standards for exhibition. The space, however, is tailor made for installations. There are approximately forty bays in the building and the plan is to display the work of forty artists and up to sixty works of art. At the time I viewed the exhibition there were works by thirty-four artists.

A majority of the artists are from Nova Scotia and many trained or are faculty at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. Generally I am not very keen on installation art, but the uniqueness of location of ARTport make an elegant case for the genre. A work such as Gerald Ferguson's Cast Iron Flowers would be difficult at best to install in a traditional gallery space, but works very well at Pier 22. One hundred and forty-four holes were drilled in the concrete floor of pier in a grid and the stems of the iron flowers placed in them. It gives the appearance of metal flowers growing out of the concrete. Another work by Gary Neil Kennedy, is a monumental reworking of his Figure Paintings. This reworking, to my mind, is better than the original.

In addition and this too is due to the pier location. Kennedy has painted large military ship identity numbers on the interior of a series of the pier's doors. It is very effective.

Halifax Harbour, 2005 by Terence Johnson is the most intriguing piece in the exhibition and one I enjoyed the most as well. It is a map of the harbour drawn on a large circular blackboard-like surface that marks the tidal currents and the celestial bodies overhead at 10 am on May 14, 2005 and 5 pm, October 30, 2005, dates that mirror the opening and closing time of the exhibition. He has also placed nine ship like shaped sculptures on the surface of the work. The work could have been more effective viewed from a higher vantage point, but it is still a haunting and beautiful work of art. While I am on the subject of beautiful works, Mark Boxley's Mind Field, 2001-2005, is a stunning and very simple video projection of an image of the sea's surface on a far door of the pier. The effect is that the door disappears and one is looking a calm sea surface. It is very relaxing.

Not all of the works in the exhibition are large. Some, such as Michael Fernandes sound work, Monkey, are nearly invisible. His work is a small hidden tape recorder which plays a tape loop which plays the message: "Want to buy a monkey?" to passers by on their way out of the pier. Thierry Delva's Two 45 Gallon Drums are full scale solid granite and ash sculptural recreations of forty-five gallon oil drums. You might pass by something them to be the real thing, but on closer inspection and by touching them, you realize they are masterful sculptures.

ARTport puts art into a new non-confrontational context. The visitors, cruise ship passengers, come across art where they least expect it and are free to look at it or not. They are inadvertently presented with a good case for Canadian visual culture. Generally crossing into Nova Scotia, or any other province, there is no art to confront one, just the usual tourist information centre with pamphlets, hotel information, washrooms and a collection of tacky souvenirs. Last year, 138,000 cruise ship passengers passed through Pier 22 and there should be that many or even more this year—big potential numbers for any art exhibition. Art gallery director Jeff Spalding would like this exhibition to be an annual event and it certainly should be, as it is a great showcase for Canadian art. As ARTport proves, Spalding helps make the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia an exciting and invigorating place.

Virgil Hammock

MONTREAL

BRENDA KENNEDY: IN YOUR FACE
June 6-20
Beaux arts David Astrof
Thomson House, 3650 McDavita
Tel.: 514-266-2476
1-888-932-4836
www.artap.com

Brenda Kennedy has quietly and consistently produced a body of portrait works that are very much about the world of her social experience in southeastern Ontario where she lives. These paintings are like snapshots—surprise moments—but for all their instantaneity they are produced in the slow medium of painting. As paintings they acquire a different sense than the original cliché photos they interpret. While Kennedy readily admires these paintings are produced from photos and not actual models, as art they capture a sensibility true to our era, where the image holds more intensity than the reality in mediatic terms. Photos that formed the basis of these paintings were gathered from neighbours and friends, and people in the region. For instance, there are seven Susan portraits in the show, all women who are artists. These sharp, full focus realist style portraits are chosen at random. They defy the commemorative or official portrait's sanctity because their subjects are ordinary people, actual people. They probably would never have considered being painted for reasons of posterity.

Live culture being what it is, Brenda Kennedy's considers her paintings a kind of theatre, where images are transformed from photo to painting. This world painted from life balances itself precariously and distils experience in the process. These paintings do speak for their times, as snapshot moments. Other paintings on view in Kennedy's In Your Face show offer a break from the portrait mode. They include three recent paintings of trucks from Mexico rife with a nostalgia born of exploration and travel. Other anomalies include still life's of a black tulip and a stalk of rhubarb.

The actual presentation frames these painted portrait scenarios to enhance the eclectic character of the subjects and the presentation. Each frame has its own particular cachet. As Kennedy states: "We've been collecting them for a long time and the more ostentatious the better and some of course are quite wrecked so I've had to repair and gussy them up. It's been interesting to treat the frame as part of the painting and to make it part of the creative process. For instance with the 'Me trying to be Frida Kahlo (again) I've wrapped the frame in surgical gauze. Not to mention the savings when one recycles... I'm also partial to older materials and the way things used to look and for a while I made assemblage pieces so there's a reference to that."

In one portrait painting we see two elderly but still smiling Women with Necklaces (2004) staring out at us. The strange similarities between two Redbeads (2004) is not just these twins' facial or physiognomic but also the way their inner characters are alike. Kennedy brings this out in her own eclectic and penetrating painterly style. She does the same with Men with Glasses (2004) and Man with Fedora (2004). It is the contrary
A lot of fun!

frontal, askance or in tandem,
painting and caught in ludicrous
subject. A large horizontal painting
them because the painterly focus
that they challenge social norms and
in the individual persona of each
century, they fulfill a standard repre­

THE GARDEN OF JOY
ANNE ASHTON:

The title of the exhibition Garden of
Joy is taken from the name of a jazz
and blues club in 1920s Harlem. Just
as the paintings were inspired by the music of that era, the flowers themselves, with their sensuous
shapes and crevices were given names taken
from the lexicon of the Dirty Blues.

And so a frail, pink dahlia blooms under the title Peaches, taken from another bluegrass classic, “Sittin’ on top of the world”, and the words of the song decorate the elaborately carved frame. Incongruous, amusing, Ashton’s creative license has suddenly turned the innocent flower into a symbol of a very different ilk. Yet, both the words and the frames seem unable to contain Ashton’s robust flora. The petals spill onto the frames, reach out of their confines. The paintings become almost 3-dimensional, more objets d’art than framed image. Portrayed in different stages of bloom and wilt, her flowers are both ancient and contemporary, decorative and sensual, imbued with a touch of personality, yet staunchly alien. Ashton’s oil on panel paintings can be read on several levels. A highly skilled painter, she chose to seek the beautiful in her surroundings, and what she offers the viewer is a visual, sensual experience, the kind only a painting can provide. But beyond the tactile beauty of her organic models, hides an endless source of inspiration, the magical, ever-changing world of Nature, to which we all have access. And that is the main message of The Garden of Joy.

Dorota Kozinska

DESSERT ISLANDS IN SUBURBIA:
THE NOMADIC THINKING
OF ISABELLE HAYEUR

With the restless soul of a nomad, Isabelle Hayeur surveys our planet, uniting its places and nonplaces into one seamless universe. Here the wilderness meets up with suburbia, the industrial park with an untrodpen peninsula. Whether traveling far and wide, incessantly walking the streets of Montreal (as she does, and daily), or securing images from the virtual world, she is always passing through, always on the prowl for promising sites. But she is mostly in her studio, of course, working on her remarkable photomontages. These works have little to do with verisimilitude or, contrarily, with willful deceit. They have everything to do with porosity, interchangeability, and myriad possibilities of interpretation.

For the last many years, Hayeur has focused on issues related to landscape design and architecture and has dedicated herself to the making of artworks which test the definitional limits of what landscape is and can be.

The work yields equal measures of disruption and pleasure and insight for the viewer. By merging heterogenous sites into unlikely, invented places which do not in fact exist, she invents new spatial coordinates for places which have hitherto-unknown latitudes and longitudes. The result? Shaped for our attention which draw upon our embodied imagination as much as our fragmented memories of place. If we are duped by the work, we are willing accomplices to the duplicity.

Hayeur employs different methodologies as she sees fit, but she usually uses high-level digital manipulation to bring multiple sites together into one lateral image, eliding divisions between them and leaving no tell-tale traces of their intermarriage. Even if we could perceive the touchups in this surreal bricolage, they would only, we feel, enhance the exoticism of the newly
bithed space. The viewer is left with an image of a place that is actually a montage of different sites, often in impossible (or otherwise incomposable) or unlikely juxtapositions. The powerful strangeness of the work, its claim and the enduring ambiguity is induced. There is a desire to move away and, at the same, time, a need to move in closer still. This implicit tension in seeing the work is central to our experience of it.

In the series titled Uncertain Landscapes, Drift and Foundations, Hayeur investigates the sundry no-places of landscape, including empty lots and modified "natural" areas. She has also made video-works which explore kindred concerns. Since the beginning of 2003, she has been working on a series titled Destinations. This remarkable series, which transcends any mere aesthetics of landscape, is based on photos of North American cities, national parks and tourist attractions. Hayeur is a gifted poet as well as a nomadic practitioner of the "as-if". Her seamlessly-woven narrative photomontages—panoramic poems, real-ly—are journeys in intensity which give birth to all manner of possible worlds.

James Campbell

TORONTO

MASSIVE CHANGE

BRUCE MAU

Art Gallery of Ontario
317 Dundas St. W.
M5T 1G4
Tel.: 416-979-6648
www.ago.net

In a post-McLuhana era where the horrors and pleasures of all the Global Village have come to rest on a computer screen, Toronto graphic designer Bruce Mau has assembled an incredible range of broad-based information on technological transformation for Massive Change: The Future of Global Design. While apparently impressive and obviously full of "information", one wonders what all this exhibition's information can possibly do to enact change. While the notion that design and designers can play a role in transforming the future present holds true (just look at what the Bauhaus did to architecture in the early 20th century), what is not understandable is how one can "exhibit" such a vast range of specious and highly specialized information and make it hold water with a broad-based public. This is what happens when the information age matures. It breeds more information which is far from design principles based in real world observation, instead to materials and economy of means. Instead we are witness to a surfeit of information on all manner of issues from Cyberwar, to military economics, to tissue engineering, to the grid, to integrated systems, to aesthetic concerns. Since the beginning of 2003, she has been working on a series titled Destinations. This remarkable series, which transcends any mere aesthetics of landscape, is based on photos of North American cities, national parks and tourist attractions.

Hayeur is a gifted poet as well as a nomadic practitioner of the "as-if". Her seamlessly-woven narrative photomontages—panoramic poems, real-ly—are journeys in intensity which give birth to all manner of possible worlds.

James Campbell

SCOTT JOHNSTON:
STORIES FROM THE BRIDAL PATH

April 21-May 11
Engine Gallery
1112 Queen St. W.
Toronto M6J 1H9
Tel.: 416-531-9305

Ruins can evoke a great number of emotions. They captured the Romantic poets and painters interest from Byron to Flaxman to Turner to David and Fuseli. It brought many of them to Rome to paint and write on the ruins firsthand. For those artists and writers the attraction was with a vanished history, some culture in the past where fragments, decayed buildings, and monuments all inspired the imagination. What attracted them is that never truly existed as the Romantics saw it. We now live in a culture where ruins can be manufactured, and structures are conceived as temporary. Ephemera and pop culture drive us to accept different aesthetic precepts, formatted and not necessarily about grandeur or idealization. Reality is edited, manipulated, transformed, and even ruins acquire a different meaning and sensibility. For his latest series of photos, some C Prints and others archival ink jet printed, Scott Johnston has produced a series titled Stories from the Bridal Path that capture modern-day ruins, an unusual subject seen from the photographer voyeur's point of view.

Situated in a wealthy sector of Toronto, the Bridal Path is home to some very upscale neglected buildings and modernist mansions. Abandoned by their owners for unknown reasons, they have a haunted quality, as if we feel the spirits of the people who once lived there. In this museum of memories the traces and details are all that remain. The specific rooms and garden accoutrements are all part of the scenario. Johnston captures these with an intrepid eye from seemingly haphazard points of view. The building, rooms—inside or outside—are stale constructs, abandoned shells whose crumbling structures were once grandiose and opulent in a cheap upscale way. Why were they abandoned? Who lived here? Such questions remain unanswered. What
Disaster or human fallibility? Many world events described as disasters were the product of human error. In this controversial show, three Canadian artists explore blurred boundaries between truth and fallibility with a specific focus on disaster. A subject to their message is the possibility of hope despite the immensity of these tragedies.

Donna Sroke's video installation reasonable and senseless a condensed history of technical disasters is presented on 20 LCD monitors. Some of the details seem ludicrous, given our greater knowledge of the dangers inherent to war such as the "duck and cover" method taught children in anticipation of nuclear war. As Sroke states: "Reason, when cut off from our hearts and souls, is a dangerous tool... Often, in the name of reason we make gravely bad choices. Educational, advertising and promotional films delineate a culture's values, omissions and biases."

One of the dangers of relying on didactic and historical materials to create informational "ironic" art, is that the art itself suffers from the same didactic limitations as the raw materials used by the artist to make it. What is more there was always an opposition, less dumb, less encumbered than the artist would have us believe. It is just they were silenced. K.D. Thornton's Dairy is more amusing but equally presentational. Consisting of seven plastic milk jugs emitting an aura, the work suggests that food, properly packaged, may actually be more contaminated than you would ever think. Don't judge the food by its container... More interesting is Michael Alstad's unusual take on global warming. MELT enables visitors to look via satellite at images of the cracking and melting of the Wards Hunt Ice Shelf. Over time, one sees images of oneself in conjunction with Arctic landscape imagery, as Alstad comments: "Although technology facilitates our geospatial knowledge, the 'disaster' is perceived as something separate from 'here', as though only imagined. With MELT, my intention is to transport the viewer into a space where there and here converge."

John K. Grande

VICTORIA

PAT MARTIN BATES: DESTINATIONS, NAVIGATIONS, ILLUMINATIONS

The Art Gallery of Greater Victoria
April 8-July 10
1040 Moss Street
Victoria, B.C., V8W 4P1
Tel.: 250-384-4171
www.aggv.bc.ca

AGGV's survey exhibit of Pat Martin Bates' installation works draws from nearly forty years of her artistic creations. These three-dimensional pieces, mounted on plinths, create a ceremonial air and set the tone for the viewers' entry into Bates' alchemical/magical space. Created in 1967 and 1968 respectively, they are "Letters"—communiques between reigning astral bodies—but they are also windows or doorways—translations of energies, light vibrations, patterns or "thoughts" between the polarities of light and dark, day and night, warm and cold, reason and intuition.

Pat Martin Bates' work has always been profoundly spiritual while being simultaneously dogmatism and cosmology. Her vision is more aptly described as divinely witty, embodying a glorious whimsy and light-handed graphic treatment. There is a sense of mystery in the works on prepared paper, suspended and back-lit in lightboxes, giving one the impression of standing on one side of an ever-thinning veil or membrane. Not only does light and energy emerge through the perforations, grommets and frayed areas, but the spectator begins to penetrate past the darkened "veil," or surface of the pieces, into abstract understandings of the lyrical geometries of their designs. It's a "spaceing out" effect. And that's where PMB's "Sufic" choreography of whirling shapes, poetic forms, channelled light effects, and philosophically inspired lines achieves its alchemical function. A kind of embodied mind-expansion by gradients.

Eight-pointed stars are a favourite shape for PMB, perhaps a natural geometric evolution of the primal circle she recognises as "the first universe of God." The eight-lobed star was a time-honoured sign of the star goddess in the ancient Middle East, in Early Hebrew iconography, and the cosmic divinity for 1500 years of Islamic art. PMB has them whirling through space, streaming light trails or sporting 'tails' like comets. Ohsia Night and the Star That Acts in the Stillness (lightbox, 1984) reveals patterns that are both astral and floral. They give the sudden, impromptu impression of the spontaneous combustion of volatile energies and colliding directional forces. There is an expansive movement, suggestive of the Big Bang, and a gently hovering numeral 9,' suggesting vulnerability, power and completion. Alchemy Cube (light cube with plexiglas, lacquered painted and perforated paper, 25.2 cm square, 1968) is like a crucible for mysterious scientific or philosophical formulae. The archaic object and aim of alchemy was catalytic, spiritual and physical metamorphosis. The symbols of the four elements of earth, fire, air and water are all accounted for on the surfaces, as is the fifth element of ether. Where all these elements are present, alchemy can ensue, according to the ancient philosophy. This is the case with the "Letters" between the Sun and the Moon, the two pieces that frame one's entry into the show. The four plexiglas plaques deliver a cumulative alchemical missive: the 'windows' open one upon the other, channelling light among the layered planes, until the composite message is complete. They are interactive, dynamic love letters among cosmic harmonies, as are all of Pat Martin Bates' works in this timeless, transcendent series.

Yvonne Owens
LONDON, ENGLAND

ANTHONY CARO
Jan. 26-April 17
Tate Britain
Millbank, London SW1
www.tate.org.uk

Anthony Caro's remarkable career as a sculptor engendered the post-War period, Clement Greenberg's shadow cast its influence even in England. Caro sought to purge of figuration, to establish new orders of sculpture where pure aesthetics became the context for judging a sculpture. His innovations included emphasizing horizontality in sculpture, the removal of the pedestal and presentational "extra" and bringing life to what had become a heavy, monumental or commemorative medium for the most part. As the sculptures in this show evidence, the syntax and structure of a given sculpture played a role. Material's capacity as a metaphor for the human body is also evidenced in works such as Dejeuner sur l'Herbe, The Rape of the Sabines, The Last Judgement and the Descent from the Cross.

What strikes one in seeing Caro's output over the years in one exhibition is the sense that in turning the pages of time one arrives full circle—both aesthetically and in terms of what makes art tick with Caro's sculpture. The earliest sculptures are among the liveliest like Man Taking off His Shirt (1955-56) and Pulling on a Girdle (1958-59), less self-conscious, less grandiose. At his best, Anthony Caro is agile, quick in assembling a metaphor or material relation—never overburdened. But Caro did reinvent the wheel. In so doing, he proved he was a master of allegorical abstraction. He invests his best sculptures with an atmosphere that re-configures figuration abstractly in a strange, elliptical way. The post-War context (or should one say burden?) of figuration was exactly what Caro and his generation at St. Martin's School of Art in London sought to eradicate and obviously Greenberg played a role in encouraging this direction. The remarkable works in the Tate Britain's current show evidence Caro very visual and structural syntax at which he is a master. To the educated eye, these "exercises" are nothing less than brilliant but the concerns are primarily pure aesthetics.

The Last Judgement (1995-99) is a remarkable sculpture and has the look of a theatrical stage set. It blurs the boundaries between sculpture and installation. As in so many of Caro's idiomatic smaller exercises through the years they allude to architectural or structural allusions introspectively but in a much more austere, minimal way than his senior David Smith might have. A recent work, The Last Judgement could simply be some horrific grief-stricken vision of the artist's own mortality or of history's way of perpetuating injustice. The objects and materials in this work range from brass, to ceramic, to concrete, wood and stone and echo mid-1990s Trojan War series including Agamemnon and Achilles sculpted archetypes. The Last Judgement is tinged with pathos, sadness like some Romantic echo of Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem on the passing of an ancient monumental sculpture—Osmundias.

Many viewers will enjoy the visual quips, and purely conceptual jeux de materials that Caro is well known for such as Gold Block I (1997) or Arena Piece Beginning (1995) where Caro walks the line between assemblage and sculpture. More elegant and elegiac are the extended, more spatial and linear table piece Catalan Maid (1987-8) and Writing Piece 'Where' (1978). There are shades of Robert Motherwell, or even Chamberlain in the latter. A sense that the relevance of sculpture rests in the object, once so essential to modern art pervaded the show. Dejener sur l'Herbe II (1989) for all its formal capacity and rather too literal and hackneyed allegorical flair, rests upon art historical referencing. Much better is The Soldier's Tale (1983) which does not seek to summarize or contain form, or seek an absolute perfect syntax. The metaphors are open, engaging, irreconciled. As this show evidences, Caro's life in sculpture very much reflects the dissonance of the historical progression(s) that his art was part of. Caro as Caro is. One understands the passion and vision in his work. It reflects an entire inner world of implicit thought and reflection. His art is encapsulated by and defined by parameters that became rhetorical over time, a sublime and beautiful incantation that was the modernist paradigm.

John K. Grande

GALLERY MOOS LTD.

en permanence

Jean-Paul Riopelle

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

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