

English Report

Virgil Hammock, Brian Grison, David Garneau, John K. Grande, Dorota Kozinska, Lori Beaman, Sophie Pilipczuk and Ji-Yoon Han

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FREDERICTON, NB

YOUSUF KARSH: INDUSTRIAL IMAGES

Beaverbrook Art Gallery
Fredericton, New Brunswick
Tel.: 506 458-2028
www.beaverbrookartgallery.org
January 19th to March 30, 2008

I have forgotten what a great photographer Yousuf Karsh was. The photographs in this exhibition are, in a word, stunning. Karsh was best known as a portrait photographer. His 1941 image of Winston Churchill is one of the best-known photographs of the past century. The industrial images in this exhibition are a different matter and represent an unusual period in the artist's career. In 1951 Ford of Canada commissioned Karsh to photograph its Windsor, Ontario operations. The results of this commission, and two commissions from steel companies in Canada and the United States, are the core of this exhibition. *Yousuf Karsh: Industrial Images* originated at the Art Gallery of Windsor and was curated by Cassandra Getty who also contributed an essay to the beautiful illustrated catalogue which accompanies the exhibition.

So what's so good about these fifty year old plus photographs by a photographer whose work is thought by many critics today to be passé? Outside of technical brilliance it is the philosophy of the artist that takes this work out of the common place and puts it into the realm of real art. What he has done was to make heroes, icons, out of common working middle class men. He has done so without a hint of contrivance or irony. The fifties and early sixties of Twentieth Century Canada and the United States were a high point of industrial Capitalism. Indeed it was a paternal Capitalism on the part of both employers and unions. It was a Capitalism that Karsh truly believed in with all his heart and the photographs in this exhibition are a testament to his beliefs. Karsh is quoted in the catalogue as saying: "I have sought to portray the dignity, the pride of workmanship, the sense of independence I have found in these steelmen who work with their brains and their hands in a free economy under a democratic form of government. ... They had a joy in working which transcended even the very excellent pay they received at the end of each week." It is hard to imagine an artist today making such a statement with a straight face.

There are two photographs in the Atlas Steel series, a Canada steel mill since closed, in the exhibition of a worker named George Emerson that are good examples of Karsh's industrial work. First, they are two wonderful examples of 'straight' photography. Karsh often doctored his photographs such as sandwiching two negatives together to form one image and many of the photographs in the exhibition are doctored photographs. The photographs of Emerson are the results of what Karsh saw and shot. Second, and this is common to almost every image in the exhibition, the subject is individualized and given great dignity by the photographer. Most industrial photography of the period paid little heed of individual workers. They were cogs in the machine, part and parcel of the company. Not so with Karsh, he saw the workers as heroes and archetypes of the North American dream. George Emerson stands tall, the tools of his trade in his hands, in front of the machine that he masters. Every detail is crystal clear. The lighting, as in all of the photographer's work, is theatrical. Photographs such as these two need to be printed large, and they are, to mirror the heroic nature of the images.



Gow Crapper, 1951
Ford of Canada series
Putting trim cord on rear window, Trim Line No. 1, Plant No. 4.
Gelatin silver print
Collection of the Art Gallery of Windsor

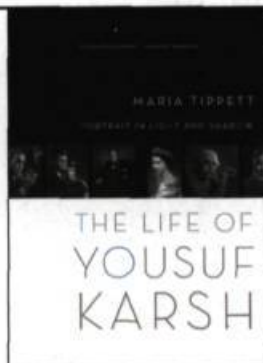
Every worker in every photograph in the exhibition is identified by name. The captions list their age, their ethnic background, hobbies, if they were married or single, their whole history. Most were your average working Joes, but in these photographs everyone is a hero. Granted there is not a single woman to be found in these photographs, but this was the 1950's. The women who worked so ably in these same plants during the war had been replaced by the men returning home from war and had been forced back to their conventional roles as wives and mothers, but that's another story for another time. There is a need to look at this exhibition in its historic context and the 1950's are not the present.

Ethnic background was important to Karsh, as he was an Armenian immigrant who came to Canada as a fifteen year old in 1925. (2008 is the 100th anniversary of Karsh's birth.) He believed in the mix of Canada's people and that anything was possible for those who worked hard to fulfill their dreams and this was certain the case with his own dreams. Within a few years of his arrival in Canada he was its most famous photographer and one of the most famous in world shortly after and all this after a short period of study with an uncle, George Nakash, and American photographer John Garo. He was, to put it mildly, a quick study. Karsh discovered his trademark lighting by doing theatre photography in Ottawa in the early 1930's. The theatre taught him the drama that could be achieved with directional lighting. He became a master of multi lighting, which he used to good effect in his industrial photographs.

In a brief period of less than ten years, 1950 to 1959, Karsh did almost all of his industrial photography. Indeed, the three projects, the two steel mills and Ford Windsor plant are a majority of the work. If he had done nothing more than the Ford project, it would still stand as a milestone in the history of the genre. When I look a photograph such as *Laurence Larsh 1951 Plant No. 2 End of Motor Assembly* or *Gow Crapper Putting Trim Cord On Rear Window Trim Line No. 1* I realize that a time has passed in our history and it will not be repeated and I believe that we are the poor for it.

Yousuf Karsh: Industrial Images ends its tour at Robert McLaughlin Gallery in Oshawa, in a showing from May 8th to June 29th of this year. It is a fit location for an exhibition that honours working class people.

Virgil Hammock



PORTRAIT IN LIGHT AND SHADOW

THE LIFE OF YOUSUF KARSH
BY MARIA TIPPETT

Published by House of Anansi Press Inc., 2007
426 pages, with illustrations, \$39.95

Biographies are inherently compelling. They satisfy myriad human cravings, from surreptitiously voyeuristic to educational. Maria Tippet's book on the life and work of Yousuf Karsh offers all of the above, presented in her signature elegant style and founded

on extensive research, which included interviews with family members, friends and employees.

With full collaboration of the Karsh estate, following the artist's death in 2002, she has produced a rich portrait of one of Canada's greatest cultural treasures, hailed by many as "the Rembrandt of photography."

The story of the man is just as fascinating as the era in which he lived. It begins with his childhood in Turkish Armenia, a lengthy yet entirely justified introduction considering the volatile and tragic history of that region, and essential to the understanding of his roots.

Part of the Armenian Diaspora, Karsh immigrated to Canada at the age of 15, ending up in Sherbrooke under the care of his uncle, a portrait photographer. The rest one could say is history, but what history and what heritage.

Karsh left behind a rich legacy of images, faces of some of the most famous and prominent people of the era, many of who illustrate the biography. Beyond the portraits, that also include photographs of Karsh and his family, lie anecdotal stories of the photographer's encounters with his sitters from a glowering Winston Churchill to a theatrically seductive Anita Ekberg.

Among the living legends captured by Karsh's camera are John F. and Jacqueline Kennedy, Pablo Picasso, Pope Pius XII and many others... politicians, actors, musicians.

In stark black and white, these portraits are at once works of art and documents, fulfilling the medium's inherent function as well as the photographer's intent.

Karsh settled in Ottawa where he established his own studio, a vantage point of his own choosing. Although his first choice was Washington, the Canadian capitol provided sufficient material and resources.

He was made wealthy by numerous private and corporate commissions, and travelled the world with his camera seeking famous personalities, people he called "achievers."

Karsh was a fascinating person himself, at once charming and demanding, an intuitive psychologist who managed to make even the most recalcitrant sit for him.

Tippet, a prominent Canadian cultural historians and author of many books on art, culture, and history, including biographies of Emily Carr, F.H. Varley, and Bill Reid, is once again in her element, deftly weaving the didactic and archival with the anecdotal and personal.

The book was a daunting undertaking, considering that Karsh's career spanned over 60 years and that other than his own autobiographical writings, no one has ever told the full story of this grand artist. His multifaceted personality comes to life in these pages, shown in a light as revealing and respectful as the one used by Karsh in his portraits.

Dorota Kozinska

VICTORIA, BC

CALEB SPELLER OVER MY DEAD BODY

The LAB, Art Gallery
of Greater Victoria
1040 Moss Street, Victoria, BC
V8V 4P1
Tel.: 250 384-4171
www.aggv.bc.ca
May 29 to July 14, 2008

The title of Caleb Speller's exhibition refers to the three core issues of his life and art: the history of his body of work, his present creative self, and the inevitable transition of his physical and artistic self into history. This trinity will be embodied in everything he brings to and produces during his six-week residency in the installation he will construct through his work in the LAB. Walking around the installation and watching Speller work, the viewer will have entered the inner-sanctum and history of the artist's creative life.

The installation occupies three walls of the small gallery. On the right hand wall, display shelves represent Speller's daily collecting of urban litter that is attractive and useful for his work; flattened pop cans, broken combs, bits of packaging. This

collecting and displaying symbolizes his history and his relationship with the world.

Secondly, Speller himself, and the works of art he produces during the exhibition, become metaphors of his life and creativity as an inevitable link between his past and future. Against the gallery's end wall, viewers will observe an artist's worktable, drawing tools and materials, drawings pinned to the wall, and, most important, the artist himself, working. While Speller is unsure what he will produce during his residency, or how he will respond to the visitors watching over his shoulder as he works, he nevertheless recognizes the magical role of the viewer in this process.

The third element in the installation is about a dozen photographs of the clothed, seemingly dead, body of a young adult male lying in the middle distance of various settings; schoolyard, supermarket, parking lot. These are speculative projections of the artist—reduced to a kind of litter—in his afterlife.

These simultaneously prescient and speculative photographs of Speller's end will prompt viewers to participate in the artist's art-making as an act of resistance. Like both the guardian angel and the angel of death, the viewer watches over Speller as he works in the gallery, just



Over My Dead Body
(in pool), 2008
35 mm colour print
on photographic
paper
16 x 22 in.

as other viewers will watch over his after-life.

However, the viewers' continuing presence in the world after the death of the artist also represents the real agenda of art in the world. Art is not for the artist as much as it is for the viewer. While the artist might struggle to remain infinitely creative and alive in the present, only the viewer is endless in the future.

In an attempt to reside exclusively in the present creative moment, Speller compulsively draws on anything, "just to keep it going," as he told me. To stop is to slip toward the future—the end of it all. This partially explains the seamless slip-page among the different media and genres Speller employs, drawing as drawing, as painting, design, collage, figurines, bowls, assemblages, installations, scrapbooks, even text, all produced in a frenzy of messy,

funny/serious scribbling and doodling that reflects the burning comet of his physical and artistic being:

I feel as if I'm recording the days of my life, making something with each day to help myself feel like I'm using up my time.... I see my work as some sort of partially written book made with missing pages from other books. When I have the opportunity to put a room together in a gallery... this is when the story becomes strangely written. It's an interesting way for me to bang my artwork.

Speller exhibits his whole life—using up his time—in this installation/performance. This could be an uncomfortable encounter for viewers, were not Speller's physical life and history not already overflowing with such ironically delightful drawings and other things.

Brian Grison

SASKATOON, SASK.

CITIES:
JOHN
HARTMAN

Kenderdine Art Gallery
51 Campus Drive,
University of Saskatchewan,
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
S7N 5A8
Telephone: 306-966-4571
April 4 to June 27, 2008



Lower Manhattan, 2006
Oil on linen
198 x 229 cm

Oil paint is coloured goo. It must be counted as one of human culture's major achievements that this gummy substance can be thinned and disciplined into the shape of a picture that can move us to tears, to delight, to thought, even action. From a painter's point-of-view, paintings divide into two categories. There are *pictures* that trick the viewer into seeing through paint to a scene, and there are *paintings* that, while they may coalesce into a resemblance, never let us forget their viscous material nature. There is a certain tense, almost participatory pleasure that comes from looking at paintings that is missing in our relationship with pictures. Rather than being astonished by mastery and veracity, when dealing with a painting you are in the trenches, vicariously sharing in the artist's struggle to rescue meaningful arrangement from muddy chaos.

In "*Cities*," John Hartman balances picture and painting. His eighteen large canvases are bird's-eye-view cityscapes: great metropolises—New York, London, Glasgow, Toronto, Vancouver—and smaller cities, Calgary, Halifax, and really small places—Owen Sound and Parry Sound. Most are ports. Buildings aggregate on rocks like coral and seem as fragile. While designed to evoke these places, the works do not picture them quite as a camera does. The scenes seem remembered, imagined and reconstructed from a number of references. I frequently saw people looking into the scrapes, clots and smears for specific addresses. They told their companions about which cities they visited and how this or that painting captured a sense of the place but that things were wrong, or not quite as they remembered. Hartman is an unreliable witness of the actual but a poet of the visceral.

As *paintings* for painters, "*Cities*" is an embarrassment of riches. The huge, writhing Vancouver and Halifax triptychs are sublime, and Manhattan astounds. From a distance, these

paintings describe space with the usual formal devices, overlap and a very loose analytic perspective. However, looking at the painting up close or from the side reveals a complex topography of thin and built-up paint—up to several centimetres in places. Most delightfully, these encrustations do not only appear in the foreground but often appear in the background. This normally flattens the images, but Hartman corrects this with atmosphere perspective. The works are battlegrounds where pictorial logic meets painterly desire.

I oscillate between elation and melancholy with these works. On the one hand, this is bravado painting. The paint is built up and demolished like a continuously renovating city. Some parts are tamed into place; other passages resist capture and nearly flee from. Some of the excited brush and palette knife work wriggles with self-delighted confidence. Other moments face agitated uncertainty; they would rather not be part of a building. On the other hand, these are pictures. Their subjects are cities without people, the built environment's relationship to nature. This may lead viewers to an ecological interpretation. Some may see Hartman's cities as a cancer, others, may see an indivisibility between human nature and Nature. The painterly-ness of these pictures suggests that our substance is not so different from the material of the rest of the environment; we are from common clay. And yet, because his gaze floats above the fray, cool and remote, it creates a separation that is both elating and melancholic. It reminds me of Leonardo da Vinci's late "Deluge" drawings. From his immobile and protected peak, Leonardo draws pictures of imagined natural disasters ruining the settlements below. Through his eyes we are both a part of and apart from the world.

David Garneau

KINGSTON, ONT.

WORLD UPSIDE DOWN

Agnes Etherington Arts Centre
Queen's University,
University Avenue at Bader Lane,
Kingston, Ont.
K7L 3N6
Tel.: 613 533-2190
www.aeac.ca

20 October 2007 to 17 February 2008

The first thing one sees on entering *World Upside Down* one is Jim Logan's *The Diner's Club: No Reservations Required* (1992), an Amerindian take on Edouard Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*. Western art history's Greatest Hits go Native with Logan's *Classical Aboriginal Series* and this painting, one of that series reverses the order with clothed women and a nude male stretched out on the grass. Challenging social and aesthetic conventions is what the exhibition *World Upside Down* is all about. As curator Richard W. Hill says, "The world upside down is one in which the symbolic order is turned on its head. As an artistic strategy, symbolic inversion illuminates and challenges the visual conventions that police social hierarchies." While these works truly do challenge social and political hierarchies, and the selection is excellent, doesn't that simply set up a new set of hierarchies that claim to be non-hierarchical?

The best work in this show, to my mind is Yinka Shonibare's *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews without their Heads* (1998) which plays off Thomas Gainsborough's quintessentially English portrait where landscape figures so prominently. Born London, UK, 1962 Shonibare is of African (Nigerian) descent and unusually he transfers the original set of assumptions to make this re-creation a three-dimensional sculptural one with an African couple whose heads are "missing". Interestingly, the wax-print cotton costumes on the sculpted woman, assumed to be African textile patterns, were actually adopted from imported textile patterns, that over time were more associated with Africa than their source country.

Challenging the stereotypes, Lori Blondeau's *Lone Surfer Squaw* (1997) is a backlit digital print portrait of the artist herself as a bikini-clad native woman. She stands, club Med-like with surfboard in the incongruous and rugged winter landscape... Likewise Mark Miller's 2004 DC Comics release *Superman: Red Son* tells a new tale of Superman. Superman appears as a heroic Soviet who arrives as a youth to grow up on a collective farm in the Ukraine. Capitalism or communism—what's the difference now? Miller re-works the Superman icon/logo/symbol delightfully just as General Idea re-phrases Robert Indiana's graphic 1960s LOVE icon, for another era. Like many works in this show AIDS and *Superman: Red Son* captures that trendy tendency to re-work rather than invent, a legitimate direction that art and artists have taken, but it can be boring for us, the unwashed public. Indiana's LOVE icon that became a sculpture, with the



Yinka Shonibare
Mr. and Mrs. Andrews without their Heads, 1998
 Wax-print cotton costumes on mannequins, dog
 mannequin, painted metal bench, rifle
 Collection of the National Gallery of Canada
 Purchased 1999
 39849.1-5

General Idea collective (1965-1995) becomes *AIDS* (1989) wallpaper, not the subject but a background. A *Black Like Me* movie poster, the film about white Texan journalist John Howard Griffin's 1961 real life account of the bad treatment he received when disguised as, and perceived as a black in American society hangs on that AIDS wallpapered wall. Cartoonist Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*, is part auto-bio with the artist as a cartoon figure furious about America's involvement in the Iraq war. Other scenes above depict George W. Bush as a troll/cowboy with pro-war demonstrators.

For the Kingston venue, *World Upside Down* commissioned Terrance Houle and Jarusha Brown to install a billboard at a public venue in downtown Kingston. We see Terrance Houle dressed in native regalia shopping, at an office job, "acting" the part so to speak. The images cause us to rethink the various roles from both sides.

Roger Shimomura's *Mr. Wong's Theatre Company* (2001) drew its inspiration from an internet cartoon Mr. Wong, one that defined its Asian personage as crudely as the 1960s Dick Tracey cartoons once did. Replete with stereotypes this painting comments on the way stereotypes are perceived and by whom. Shinamura's art seems to highlight how stereotypes, often harmless, often become polarized by public (read media) perception of them.

World Upside Down is creative curating at its best, and draws on cultures, social and political strata, examining stereotypes that cause us to realize how similar we all ultimately are, for all the surface differences. Hierarchies turned on their head as art make us realize how little effect art has, ultimately, on changing those hierarchies, power structures, injustices. Let us hope for more shows like *World Upside Down* to challenge all of that!

John K. Grande

TORONTO, ONT.

KAI MCCALL

REARRANGING STORYLINES

XEXE Gallery
 624 Richmond Street W.
 Toronto, Ontario M5V 1Y9
 Tel.: 416 646-2706
 www.xexegallery.com
 May 29th to June 27th, 2008

Canadian artist Kai McCall spins quite a yarn in his curious compositions. A contemporary surrealist, he creates paintings impossible to place stylistically and as challenging to decipher.

His recent works continue to focus on the narrative, enigmatic as it may be, and always with myriad cultural and literary undercurrents. From British poetry to 17th Century painting, McCall assembles styles and personages into one-of-a-kind tableaux. They bring to mind the work of contemporary German artist Neo Rauch, whose monumental paintings owe a lot to the influence of Surrealists Giorgio de Chirico and René Magritte.

As in McCall's compositions, incongruous encounters take place between characters from different historical eras, held against confusing fragments of architectural elements and without a clear narrative thread.

But while Rauch's preoccupations seem to be as much with personal history as with the question of industrial alienation, McCall is clearly delving into the subconscious in his latest works. There are no specific stories behind the strange gatherings of personages; the image evolves by itself, its narrative as mysterious to the artist as to the viewer.

This has allowed for a new flexibility in arranging the various elements: human, architectural, organic, bound by the ubiquitous surreal note.

The historical and literary references are this time secondary to the strange drama taking place in McCall's canvases. In *Your Friend Little Bear*, Tyrolean trekkers converse beside an enormous fallen tree stump that seems to be morphing into a soft bulbous matter, a red snowplough idles in a garage behind



Lemon Tree, 2008
 Oil on canvas
 62 x 84 in.

them. The mountain scene also includes a bunch of fluttering balloons, and the title of the painting offers little in way of explanation.

It is more about composition, colour and form coming together, the figurative elements used as pictorial vehicles. The meaning is not what the artist sought in this work.

One will be hard pressed to find it in *My Struggle With The Worm* as well, and although the worm, or something resembling one, figures in the composition, it does little to help decipher this surreal battle between a romantic young man and the weird creature. It brought to mind a painting by Frida Kahlo, in which she regurgitates similar, disturbingly organic plasma.

There are, however, no morbid notions in McCall's paintings. His palette is oddly muted, often recalling the tones of 1950's illustrations and hand-coloured postcards. The bucolic scenery that serves as backdrop further confuses the reading of the painting.

With echoes of Tiepolo and a hint of Velazquez, McCall's *Drop* is monumental tableau resembling old religious paintings. A heavenly stream is trickling into an outstretched hand of a young man, his eyes raised to the firmament in rapture. The curious oval backdrop in this master composition is an example of the artist's surreal handling of the landscape, a giant overpass warping into a domed ceiling.

McCall finds his models, both architectural and human, in clippings from newspapers and magazines; visual notations that stimulate his imagination, and sooner or later find their way into his unusual scenarios, or what he calls "illusion of a story".

The sense of false drama is particularly compelling in works such as *Lemon Tree* and *If I Was A Puppy Dog*, both limited to two players engaged in intriguing visual dialogues.

In the latter, a small boy is kneeling in front of a man in a suit standing on a sofa, a giant cushion poised above his head. There is an uncanny resemblance in the feature of the two personages, and the Freudian undertones are impossible to ignore.

That same sense of unease permeates the seemingly innocent picnic scene in *Lemon Tree*, where a young woman in a summer dress is being observed from above by a man leaning against a pickup truck behind her.

She is twisting to look at him, a lemon in her hand, others scattered beside her. Her crimson dress focuses the eye, but attention is inadvertently drawn to where it slides up along her thighs, revealing just a blur, perversely more intriguing.

The man is featureless, the tension instead captured in his unnaturally nonchalant stance and the painfully twisted trunk of the tree next to him.

The sense of hidden violence in these works is never brought to fruition, mitigated by the painterly composition and the flat, muted palette.

It is as if the artist was not prepared to sharpen the lines and the colour, to confront the unconscious vision that lies just beneath the surface of his paintings. McCall's battle with proverbial demons has not yet reached its peak, and when it does, the results could be spectacular.

Dorota Kozinska

MONTREAL

RAFAEL SOTTOLICHIO

S'ÉTRANGER

Galerie Orange
81 Saint-Paul Street E.
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www.galerieorange.com

The free-for-all that is today's art scene cannot be easy for the artist. Anything goes, while the creative mind struggles to remain viable without the guidance of an established trend. From classical to abstract, from conceptual to surreal, the enormous individualization that is the mark of our times makes navigating the art world a daunting task, both for the artist and the viewer.

As for the critic, what is called for is an open mind and willingness to set expectations aside.

Such attitude proved the perfect recipe for viewing an exhibition of recent works by Montreal artist Rafael Sottolichio, which held a number of surprises. Divided into distinctly separate series of works, including a collection of small format paintings done specifically for the exhibition, incorporating, extending as it were, one corner of the gallery, it showcased Sottolichio's original talent.

Versatile and prolific, he bases his art on photography, which in his creative process substitutes for drawing. It is also the gateway into an understanding of the world of media and technology that has so irreversibly altered everyday reality and our relationship with it.

Sottolichio takes the subject head-on, exploring the plastic potential of this kaleidoscopic landscape of symbols and data, of shifting images and virtual spaces. This is his world, and his attempt at recording it through art results in works that are fresh and curiously familiar.

The latter sensation comes from Sottolichio's use of actual spaces, photographic images of interiors and urban scenes which he transposes

onto canvas before transforming it into a painting.

The painterly aspect of his works is particularly intriguing and hints at the artist's yearning for abstract expression. This "desire to paint" manifests itself in the colourful magma oozing, spilling into otherwise realistic scenery; in the bright pop-art specks that litter the steps of an escalator; in the grotesque, Baconish figure suspended against a giant industrial crane.



Engulfed, 2007
Oil and acrylic on canvas
Courtesy Galerie Orange

Colourful, empty phantom silhouettes of passers-by float in a shopping mall interior in Sottolichio's *Esapces publics/Public Spaces* series, their presence as fleeting as the flickering neon light casting no shadows. They resemble Bruce Nauman's neon figures, and echo the American artist's notions of body and identity, and the phenomena of spatial awareness.

Human alienation in the face of technology takes a different shape, literally, in several large canvases where the photographic *underpainting* is subverted by shape and colour of the composition. The figures forming a crowd of people waiting at a train

station in *Où êtes-vous?/Where are you?* are definitely corporeal albeit not entirely human. Suspended as if in a matrix, they are featureless, one-dimensional, dare one say... virtual.

Building on a similar geometric skeleton, Sottolichio lets the reins of his painterly vision loose in *La conspiration*, creating a deeply toned, murky tableau saturated with dense purple. It opens up onto a mysterious, industrial interior with an endless perspective, hiding within its shadows a mysterious group of figures.

The paint drips like a curtain across the canvas of this imposing tableau, creating an undulating film separating it from the viewer, caught, once again, in a shifting, alien universe. Born of Sottolichio's vision but riding a very different visual current is a series entitled *Engloutis/Engulfed*, presented in a salon style on one wall of the gallery.

Less narrative but equally intriguing, this collection of semi-surreal works focuses on floating figures, leaning against, suspended in an invisible yet tangible energy field manifested in psychedelic gushes of colour, in cascades of vibrations rising upward and around the surprisingly contemporary and realistic human models.

These are beings hovering in a virtual reality, swept away by its seductive artifice, existing in several dimensions at once, submerged, not as in drowning, but as in rebirth.

Sottolichio trails a telescopic blind spot on the features of the models, accentuating their separateness, transforming them into creatures of another realm and the viewer into a dispassionate observer.

But that too, is an illusion.
Dorota Kozinska

ANNE-SOPHIE MORELLE

Han Art
4209 St. Catherine West
Westmount, Qc
Tel.: 514 876-9278
www.hanartgallery.com
May 17 to June 15, 2008

An exhibition of sculpture is always a treat if only for the pleasure of interacting with a three-dimensional work of art. It is also a rare experience, as contemporary sculpture remains less marketable than other visual arts. This does not in any way imply a paucity of contemporary sculptors, and the exhibition of Belgian artist Anne-Sophie Morelle at Han Art gallery is a case in point.

A figurative artist focused on the human condition, she produces bronze sculptures at once classical and contemporary.

Educated in the European academic tradition, Morelle soon developed her own style under the critical and ultimately transforming guidance of the Belgian contemporary stone and marble sculptor, Philippe Desombere. His avant-garde approach to sculpture encouraged the artist to expand the parameters of her work, releasing an inner vision that found its ultimate expression in sculptures of quiet formality and profound emotional component.

OTTAWA



I remember and I forget, 2007
50 x 50 cm on 60 x 60 cm paper

They bring to mind the artwork of German Expressionist sculptor Wilhelm Lehmbruck, and there are indeed unusual parallels in the art and life of both artists despite their separate epochs.

Like Lehmbruck, Morelle first worked in the medical field, which at one point saw her posted to Zaire with an NGO team on an anti-polio campaign.

What she saw and experienced marked her and echoes in many of her pieces.

Working in a hospital during World War I, Lehmbruck, too, witnessed much suffering and pain, all of which later found reflection in his original sculptures. Beginning in a traditional manner, he created his own, highly stylized approach under the influence of artists like Modigliani and Brancusi.

Morelle's sculptures, like Lehmbruck's, concentrate on the human body and like his, are influenced by Naturalism and Expressionism. But while most of his works express agony and human tragedy, Morelle's figures offer the hope of loving redemption. Whether it is an expression of female nurturing, as opposed to the unforgiving emotional brutality of Lehmbruck's art, or simply a different creative approach, the reading of Morelle's work requires a more reflective stance.

Devoid of detailed individual features, her figures are nevertheless unbearably human, standing in, as it were, for our own predicament. This emotional component is particularly tangible in works incorporating two figures, the dynamic between them providing an additional dimension.

In *Faire c'est défaire*, the couple is not so much embracing as leaning into each other, with the man gripping the woman's arms as her back melts into him with childlike trust. They are both tragically vulnerable, their stooped bodies roughly moulded, tattered somehow, painfully incomplete. A hint of dress anchors them in some form of physical reality, but they remain anonymous, alone in their silent drama.

A very different universe is offered by *Le guépard*, an imposing sculpture both in format and expression. The unusual coupling of a young child and a giant cheetah combines sculptural and narrative elements with a particular virtuosity and sensitivity. The roughly hewn body of the cat juxtaposed with a soft, smooth treatment of the child produces a visual and tactile experience unique to this medium.

It is reminiscent of an equally incongruous pairing in Barry Flanagan's bronze sculpture, *Cougar and Horse*, in the entrance hall of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. The

smooth, classical treatment of the giant steed is in joyful contrast to the roughly moulded body of the cat perched on its back.

Morelle's classical training finds its way into several single figures, whether of a standing boy mirroring an antique Kouros, or a giant blue angel of Gothic proportions, where her use of patina adds a subtle colour note.

The aesthetic changes in several sculptures in which the artist aims at a more realistic rendition, but devoid of an emotional component, works like *La Grande Dame* simply fall flat and verge dangerously on pretty.

It is when she departs from the formal and the narrative that Morelle truly finds her voice. In a smaller piece, *Grace*, featuring a seated figure with legs extended in front of it, the artist seems to have suspended her work, abandoning it in its unfinished, primordial state. This is the most abstract of the sculptures in this show and the most powerful, its barely-formed human shape speaking volumes. Without a defined compositional context, all that is left is emotion encapsulated, a prelude to a new visual dimension.

Morelle would do well to continue on this path.

Dorota Kozinska

Faire c'est défaire, (2007)
Bronze
150 x 45 x 40cm



JUSTIN WONNACOTT

THE FISH LIST/ I REMEMBER AND I FORGET

justinwo@rogers.com

I remember and I forget is a unique exhibition in a world in which it often seems that there is nothing new under the sun. Actually, *I remember and I forget* is the book form of the exhibition I'm reviewing here, which is more properly named "The Fish List". Don't search for this exhibition in a gallery, because it's only available in virtual format. And don't bother to search for it on line, because it's only accessible if the artist puts you on his mailing list. Although the hard copy book is a good representation of the "Fish List", the email version of this exhibition offers a more original visual experience.

I heard about *The Fish List* from a friend, who had seen a monstrous monkfish in a fish market in Ottawa and then later thought she recognized it in one of Wonnacott's photographs (it was, as it turned out, the very same fish). I emailed the artist, Justin Wonnacott, and asked him to put me on his Fish List. Soon thereafter I began to receive, sporadically, and seemingly randomly, images of fish by email. Each email comes with an image, the title of the image, and the statement "You will receive fish irregularly until I run out of images that are worth sending, the series is completed or if you ask to be excluded from the fish list. Cordially, Justin Wonnacott".

The images are photographs of, predictably, fish. The fish are dead and posed perfectly on beautiful porcelain, on wax paper, and with each other. These images are simultaneously stunningly beautiful, macabre, and sometimes humorous. The image "*Sea urchins are sometimes eaten with a mother of pearl spoon*" blends the orange-pink innards of a smashed open sea urchin (accompanied by two urchins who remain unscathed) with the pearly rose hues of shrimp (heads on). Reminiscent of the Dutch still life tradition, these images convey both violence and calm. Unlike that tradition, there is a critical edge and social commentary in Wonnacott's work that is absent from their 17th century precursors.

This work was inspired by Wonnacott's shift in diet. In the front cover of *I remember and I forget*, he states, "At the beginning of 2007 I was obese. I realized that I had to improve my health and I changed my diet and lifestyle. I monitored the caloric value of everything I ate and consumed a diet heavy in fish". In an interview, Wonnacott commented that he was "amazed that I could command the deaths of these creatures from thousands of miles away". His work constitutes a sort of requiem for fish and raises more serious questions about the ways in which the creatures with whom we share this earth are served up for our pleasure.

The opportunity to subscribe to *The Fish List* is still open. Email the artist at: justinwo@rogers.com

Lori Beaman

HALIFAX, NS

DEFIANT BEAUTY: WILLIAM HIND IN THE LABRADOR PENINSULA AND URSULA JOHNSON THE URBAN ABORIGINAL GUIDE TO HALIFAX, NS

Dalhousie Art Gallery
6101 University Ave.
Halifax, NS
www.artgallery.dal.ca
14 March to 27 April 2008

There were 12 people in the expedition, including the two Hind brothers, two crown surveyors, five French-Canadian voyageurs and three Innu guides. The party got lost in the early stages of the journey,

Innu Guides, however, because of her cultural background and her experience at the MicMac Friendship Center, a community and outreach center where she works, helping migrant aboriginals new to Metro as well as youth at risk navigate both the system and the city. Johnson proposed to make *The Urban Aboriginal Guide to Halifax, NS* as a large (5 x 9 ft) hand drawn map of the city to be mounted on the wall, and a guidebook to finding traditional foods (rabbit, eel, local produce), lodging, spiritual places (parks and citadel hill are included along with various churches, synagogues and temples), historical and cultural sites and tax free shopping. The piece is cheeky and Johnson turns the tables by making herself "the immigrant to a new land and the coloniser



William Hind
Cold Water River
Courtesy of Dalhousie Art Gallery

Two exhibitions currently share the exhibition space of Dalhousie Art Gallery. *Defiant Beauty: William Hind in the Labrador Peninsula* chronologically documents the journey undertaken in 1861 by Henry Hind to assess for economic purposes the state of Canadian fisheries, natural resources and the Aboriginal people of the Labrador Peninsula. Henry's younger brother William, an artist, made over 150 drawings and paintings of the voyage. Hind alternates mid-range, wide views and close-ups in his depictions. The use of a camera lucida perhaps affected the way he found his views and chose to crop his subjects. The result is a contemporary feel. Peppered amongst the works are detailed and insightful comments in both French and English by Gilbert Gignac whose passion for the subject brings the expedition to life.

and had it not been for Dominique, Chief of the Montagnais of Lake Ashwanipi (who happened to be travelling with his family by canoe along the Moisie River), the mission would have failed.

Though Natives and Innu did not use maps, the perfect knowledge of navigating their environment enabled them, nevertheless, to draw detailed ones, surprising European explorers from Cartier and Champlain down to Hind. Examples of such maps are very rare. There is a copy of an original birch bark map from 1822 on display.

Ursula Johnson moved from the Eskasoni reserve to Metro in 2001. "Halifax was so different from what I knew." Remembering her feelings of being a stranger in a strange land, Johnson could relate to the Hind brothers and their absolute dependency upon their guides. "I was amazed at how people would jet around the city and I trusted them because they knew their way around." She empathised with the

of an existing culture." Funny, when you think that first Nations cultures have been here for over 10,000 years and those original European colonizers were really the first immigrants. Little coloured flags, red for culture, white for spiritual, green for food, riddle the map and loose euro-centric associations of geography lessons, battlefields and police investigations float up in my mind. The legend is big on Ursula Johnson's map, the colours punchy. Green spaces punctuate the city. The water of the harbour is deep blue. Dykhuis has a long history with maps in his own practice. "Every map has a built-in point of view. Look at what is in the center, what is included and what isn't." Johnson offers a new perspective of the city, one that is both refreshing and useful. These two exhibitions are a part of the citywide exhibition series *Creative Diversity: Artistic Perspectives on Immigration to Canada* and will be on display until April 27. Sophie Pilipczuk

LONDON, PARIS, NEW YORK

LOUISE BOURGEOIS RETROSPECTIVE

Tate Modern (London)
October 2007 – January 2008

Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris)
March 5 – June 2, 2008

Guggenheim Museum (New York)
June 27 – September 28, 2008

Museum of Contemporary Art
(Los Angeles)
Fall 2008

Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture
Garden (Washington D.C.)
Spring 2009

London's Tate Modern and the Georges Pompidou Centre in Paris have collaborated together to present a retrospective of the mischievous mistress of pure geometric form and the implacable poetess of sculpture, Louise Bourgeois.

From one exhibition to another, I kept coming upon the same pieces: in wood, bronze, carefully threaded like a string of pearls upon steely stalks—jubilation, obstinacy; *Femme—Maison, Enfant poignard, Quarantaine*; sky blue, marble, latex, fury; installations caged beneath a grid and those that trap the visitor underneath their tent; the spiders—monumental, exquisite; *Passage dangereux, Precious Liquids*; old clothing, the fabric sewn and re-sewn, threadbare tapestry; drawings hanging on the walls, rosy spirals in oil-stick or mischievous *Sainte Sébastienne* woven of lead and sensuality.

How to organize such a retrospective? Both exhibitions chose to follow the risk-free path of chronology of works—with some exceptions, nevertheless, notably by exhibiting *Cell (Choisy)* in the first room, while the piece is not from the artist's early production. Such prominent placing of this sculpture can only be justified by the link between the *Femmes-Maison* painted in the 1940's and the marble sculpture representing the Bourgeois family's house in Choisy-le-Roi, which enthrones the *Cell*.



The viewer is further informed, that the reference is to an old water reservoir in New York. But let us resist for a moment the temptation to accept this explanation, let's open our eyes... However imposing, the piece is not hostile; its rounded shape hints at a human form, even maternal. Its seemingly square silhouette is *round*, inviting. Its structure speaks not of enclosure but on the contrary, offers a way of escape through its punctured roof.

Its heavy laminated form ought to be quaking silently underneath the fissures and the patina, but instead the undulation of the concentric circles on the surface of

the wood, the delicate variations in hue, carry but the echo of the material's indentations.

Engraved in rusty metal above our heads read the words: ART IS A GUARANTY OF SANITY. This is the chamber of the artist-alchemist—announced by this dilapidated sign, like a vestige of better times, that hasn't yet succumbed to the rain's erosion.

Ji Yoon Han

Louise Bourgeois in 1990 with her marble sculpture *Eye to Eye* (1970).
Photo: Raimon Ramis
© Louise Bourgeois

The visitor is invited to weave the artistic with the personal—the original work, and the origin of the piece...Moreover, in London as in Paris, the *chronobiography* of the artist was particularly highlighted, taking up entire walls, as if to impress the notion that a work of art must be seen through the prism of the artist's private life.

Certainly, she herself has contributed to this misunderstanding, by constantly bringing up her childhood marred by her father. Yet she writes: *The important thing is not where my motivation comes from, but how it maintains.*

Couldn't we stop seeing her work as merely an autobiographical outlet?

Perhaps, to quote Robert Storr, we need to be reminded of the banality of the evidence that "to understand fiction or poetry, it is essential not to confuse the 'I' in the text with its author."

Storr also remarked that "if indeed the extraordinary production (of Louise Bourgeois) has finally received its full and complete recognition, one should all the more separate it from her charismatic persona, the shortcuts that stood for a description of her life, and the motivations behind her vivacious narrative."

We should look instead.

A cask, immense. Or rather a barrel—rising upward like a bristling barricade, from which, seeping between soft, scented wooden planks, run streams of red wine, blood red... At the base one can read its title, *Precious Liquids*.

BOOKS



**SCISSORS, PAPER, STONE:
EXPRESSIONS OF MEMORY
IN CONTEMPORARY
PHOTOGRAPHIC ART**

McGill Queen's University Press,
2007

352 pages, illustrated throughout.
\$55.00

One of, if not, Canada's pre-eminent curator and historian of all contemporary photography in Canada, Martha Langford has, with great capacity, gone further with ideas already echoed by writers in another McGill-Queens book titled *Image and Imagination* (2005). The evolution is subtle and pertinent. Using the simple and playful metaphor of a child's game we all know—scissors, paper, stone, Martha Langford explores the relation between memory and the image. As Langford states, "Translating the game to contemporary photography, scissors becomes the joust between remembering and forgetting; paper, the meeting ground for memory and imagination; and stone, the relationship between memory and history." And Langford has not abandoned straight documentary photography in attesting

to the disconnect between image and reality, instead underlining the historic evolution, as a phenomenon that parallels the social disconnect that is part of our times. And so the photographers follow this, whether Genevieve Cadieux or Jeff Wall, relegating the role of photography to that of a game, no longer a reflection of common truths. It is true photography is a product of the mind, but it can capture truths, not partial, but holistic, grander truths if the photographer seeks it out. Are these works truly investigative, earth shattering or just plain mediatic? More like nepotistic navel gazing for the most part, and pre-meditated ad nauseum... And so we have to learn to gaze at our own navels before we find it at all engaging... some of us just can't do that and so we pay the price... Social progress is negated, relegated to a dispassionate, ironic, digitized and technology dependent reflex by so many of these seemingly well intended conformists.

I wonder if, in the next century, when the world is truly turned on its head, if mainstream North American white culture will be regarded with the same eye as it now is... for these are not profound artists, more of what we saw 20 years ago, now institutionalized, professors for the most part, a status quo if ever there was one... and how complicated, multi-layered, even idiomatic these photographers' processes are... As a seemingly common person, I cannot get their messages visually without being "informed of their practices". How I miss Brassai, Cartier-Bresson, even Sam Tata... and Edward Burtynsky, a photographer who is truly of our era. Aren't those devastated landscape of the oil fields, the north of Alberta, the landscape of garbage, part of a memory? ... not

even mentioned. And the late native Carl Beam, in this book is not a photographer, though he fused the imagery of western art history and of nature, and native legends in his multi-media artworks.

That said, Martha Langford is an accomplished writer and curator. She does her job well, underwriting her own, and contemporary Canadian photography history's place in the academic forum. She does so conscientiously and with a clear, monotonal rectitude born of the white culture's post-colonial and ongoing privilege. Even Jin Me Yoon's works use a language of conformity to address issues of identity. Rather than extending the language of art, Jin Me Yoon becomes a slave to it... My question now becomes, "Where are the young photographers in this book?" And if the history of photography is such a bane on contemporary photography's progress, why are these artist/photographers so self-conscious about their own place(s) in that history they were supposed to have rejected?

Scissors, Paper, Stone: Expressions of Memory in Contemporary Photographic Art is the comprehensive Canadian contemporary photographer's history, and a splendid teaching tool for Canada's universities and colleges. Outside the box, some of us need a grain of truth to play this game.... The photographers represented in *Scissors, Paper, Stone* play the game. They seek, reflect, exhibit and process the data of a culture of overabundance.

John K. Grande