

Ronald Bloor: White on White on Paper

Winchester Galleries, art@winchestergalleriesltd.com,
<http://www.winchestergalleriesltd.com/index.php>, October 11
to 29, 2008

Brian Grison

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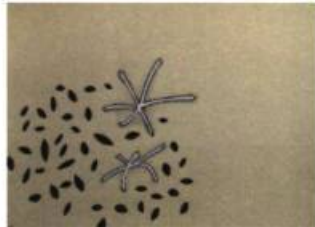
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Untitled, ink, oil,
18 in. x 24 in., 1980



Untitled, six figures, graphite, oil,
9 in. x 12 in., 1979



Untitled, ink, gouache,
18 in. x 24 in., February 1980

VICTORIA, BC

RONALD BLOOR

WHITE ON WHITE ON PAPER

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October 11 to 29, 2008

One of Canada's most accomplished elder abstractionists, Ronald Bloore, recently presented an exhibition of his works on paper from the late 1970s and early 1980s at Winchester Galleries in Victoria. The public had not seen these works until the late 1990s; friends had studied them only in Bloore's studio. Even the artist eventually forgot them in the busyness of his studio life. They re-emerged in the late 1990s as his studio moved to a new address, and their first public exhibition was at the Moore Gallery in Toronto in 1999. This recent exhibition in Victoria was a rare opportunity to view eight of these spontaneous works that have not found their way into the large permanent collection of Bloore's art at the Peterborough Art Gallery.

None of these small mixed-media works are titled, a surprise considering Bloore's clarity with the spoken and written word as he discusses his artistic and philosophic intentions (see his website). Bloore explains that his resistance to titles "limits the viewer's range of interpretation. It is what you visually experience it to be. Period.... What you see is what you are."

This apparent minimalism is extended to the material and formal means that Bloore employed in these works. Each of these quick and spontaneous works employs a narrow range of media, colour and technique. They all consist of delicately marked surfaces of oil and gouache paint, graphite, Mont Blanc fountain pen ink lines and washes, and brush and India ink. They are all produced on medium textured paper from an Arches watercolour block. The dense oil paint, sometime with subtle tints, is applied like plaster and regularly blurs the ink lines. I was surprised and concerned about the oil paint on unprimed paper. Bloore's terse,

but humorous, response was that if Cezanne wasn't concerned about such things, why should he.

Untitled, December 11, 1979, shows a ruled line bisecting the picture-plane from just right of the center at the top edge to just left of the center at the bottom edge. Three random pen-drawn shapes float into the pale grey of the left side of the painting. Other unknowable white shapes float in pale beige around a small geometric near-perfect but somehow threatening isosceles triangle in the center of the right side.

Untitled, January 26, 1980, is black India ink and gouache on raw paper. Small black shapes reminiscent of leaf shapes of different dimensions drift toward the lower left of the drawing, one even slipping beyond the picture plane. Three black line exploding star or star fish shapes in fountain ink line float among the black leaf-shapes. The inside of these shapes is roughly filled with thick glossy gouache, while here and there the outer edge of the water-soluble ink line has been carefully feathered out with water to faintly suggest a natural fractal system.

Untitled, February 22 1980, on raw watercolour paper, displays a variety of shapes and marks in fountain pen ink, brush and ink, and gouache. The vague nature of the content and its composition evokes the scratches and marks on prehistoric cave walls, or the centuries of natural and un-readable patina of human presence texturing ancient monuments. One shape suggests the beginnings of

a particular letter, while another possibly describes an ancient sea creature. The point of an arrow-like triangle scribed in dashed lines enters the drawing from the upper left, suggesting the slash of time consciousness. Two carefully measured mechanical horizontal lines with perpendicular stops suggest the origins of the page. One of these lines passes over - thus creating perspective - a semi-engineered shape filled with glossy white gouache with a black flame-like shape rising from it. Two large gangling 'Xs' could be swimming viruses, while elsewhere, with the acquisition of dots in the elbows; they might represent the beginning of mathematics, and the loss of innocence. With its faintly surreal narrative, this drawing seems to pinpoint the Big Bang of history or the end of Eden.

Bloore does not apply a specific meaning to these drawings. The "ground zero" of these works is Bloore's insistence that the viewer enter into a kind of silent, pre-literate conversation with the marks he makes, the exploding stars, broken and smudged lines, textured spaces, dimly organic or geometric shapes, rather than depend on his, or anyone else's 'academic' commentary. Bloore's silence partakes of the essence of modern art, which is (or once was) the rediscovery of humankind's primal place in nature, unmediated by culture. Without the verbiage of thought, these works remind me of the crude but beautiful craftsmanship of a prehistoric potter or builder seeking a place to live within the silent sphere of nature. □