Citer ce compte rendu
SACKVILLE
THE COLVILLE GIFT TO MOUNT ALLISON UNIVERSITY
ALEX COLVILLE
Disheveled Destiny
Colin Campbell
Owens Art Gallery
Sackville, New Brunswick
September 29 - November 12, 2000

There are two rather different exhibitions currently at Mount Allison University's Owens Art Gallery in Sackville, New Brunswick. The first is an exhibition of a major gift of eighty-nine drawings to the gallery by artist Alex Colville and, the second, a video presentation by Colin Campbell. Both artists have direct connections with Mount Allison University. Colville is an alumnus and former long term (1946-1963) professor in the Fine Arts Department and Campbell taught in the Department in the early 1970's, but that is where the similarities end. Colville is perhaps Canada's best known realist painter and Campbell is a pioneer video artist.

While in Sackville in 1972, Campbell produced the video Sackville Fun Tours which has gone on to be recognized as a classic in the medium. This video deals with a sense of humour about the problems of identity of an avant-garde artist. Art Star (Colin Campbell), in a small town (Sackville), over twenty-five years later Campbell was invited back to the university by the Owens Art Gallery as a millennium project to produce another video titled Disheveled Destiny. For this video Campbell sets out to unravel: "...some forgotten (perhaps buried) histories of Sackville, while probing the anxieties of the present's concern about the future."

In addition to showing the new video, the gallery is presenting an exhibition curated by Owens director, Gennu Kelly, that includes artists such as Fredette Frame, Ian-Carr Harris, Thaddeus Holownia, Geoffrey Jameson, T. Nell Kennedy, Barbara Sernberg and the NE Thing Co., all of whom have produced work that is about the Sackville area. Sackville is a bit of a paradox in that it is a major Maritime art centre, but located in a relatively isolated community of fifty-four hundred people (excluding students). There is a story there, but it is too long for this short review.

Alex Colville has given the university some eighty-nine drawings. The majority are preparatory studies for the mural Athletes which was completed and installed on the campus between 1960 and 1961. This is an important gift as it provides insight into Colville the artist works. The drawings reveal Colville to be a most careful artist who leaves little to chance. This does not mean he is not creative, quite the contrary. These drawings show the way Colville builds an idea step by step from original conception to completed project. The changes in the composition from one drawing to the next, how geometry plays such a central role, reveal Colville's creative process from start to finish. Viewers can step across the street from the Owens Art Gallery to Athletic Centre where the permanently installed completed mural is on display. There is also another earlier Colville mural in the building next to the Athletic Centre, Tweedy Hall, whose subject is the history of Mount Allison University. These two murals are the only two works not in the Owens Art Collection by the artist on campus.

The year 2000 marks the eightieth birthday of Alex Colville and the day before the official opening of this exhibition on October 1st, the town of Sackville declared an Alex Colville Day with a number of official events that included the unveiling of a plaque designating Colville's former home on York St. as an historic site. The house is located just one block away from the other three buildings where the artist lived and worked from 1949 to 1975, on the same street as the Owens Art Gallery, the Athletic Centre and Tweedy Hall.

Some of Colville's most important early paintings such as Nude and Dummy, 1950, were conceived and painted in the very crowded attic studio of this house.

Much has been written about the influence of Alex Colville on the development of realism in Canada. It can certainly be seen in the work of his students such as Tom Forrestall and Christopher and Mary Pratt. This partially explains why the Department of Fine Arts at Mount Allison has been identified with realism, through Alex Colville stopped teaching there in 1963. In truth, what has gone on in Sackville over the last half a century is much more interesting than pegging the place to one particular style of art. Colville has stated that he never tried to teach students to work like him. The Pratts have both said me that this was true and from Forrestall, a leading proponent of contemporary realist style was an expressionist when he graduated from Mount Allison in the 1950's.

This exhibition shows two poles of artistic activity within one artistic community. There are far apart, but they share the common bond of art. Colville has stated that he never tried to teach students to work like him. The Pratts have both said me that this was true and from Forrestall, a leading proponent of contemporary realist style was an expressionist when he graduated from Mount Allison in the 1950's.

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Continuing until September 27th, the National Gallery of Canada's retrospective Alex Colville: Milestones, presents an interesting counterpoint to the Sackville show. Included in this major show are Colville's Nude and Dummy (1950) created during Colville's Sackville years and the masterworks Horse and Train (1954), Hound in Field (1958), Pacific (1967), Berlin Bus (1978). His most recent painting Living Room (1999-2000), which depicts a pianist and seated man, explores the luminous effects of surface light effects in novel ways. In generating an illusion of reality that is distinct from photography or cinema, Alex Colville continues to demonstrate the power of painting as a contemporary medium of expression.

QUÉBEC
ARTBORETUM
(BIENNIAL OF CONTEMPORARY ART)
Maison Hamel-Bruneau
2608, chemin Saint-Louis,
Sainte-Foy
June 12 - August 20, 2000

Ranged around the beautifully treed grounds and gardens of the Maison Hamel-Bruneau and interior gallery space at Sainte-Foy, the ArtboRetum Biennial of Contemporary Art, curated by Guy Steun-Durand, author of L'art comme alternative is an interesting show, juxtaposing the works of four artists who works with themes of nature in different ways. Sioui-Durand states his choice of artists and their approach to nature expresses, "a will to reflect on the existential significations of art, to achieve a new ethical balance to our rapport with the environment."

Yvan Binet's immense 44-foot photo display ranged in and around the trees in a horizontal series, depicts his mother sitting under a tree on the Plains of Abraham. This immense representation of his mother against a backdrop of a tree is presented on its side within a natural, albeit manicured context. The juxtaposition of a billboard size photo of an elderly person in a natural (and
Lucie Robert, La femme en pot.

historical) setting in a living natural environment is slightly unsettling. We often see such imagery along a highway, or in a city, and its purpose is usually purely commercial. Inside the museum Binet juxtaposes a section of a real tree trunk complete with insect marking on its surface with a close-up photo image of a tree. The effect is surreal. Binet’s Château Riche panoply of photos of trees in a landscape after the Ice Storm are truly eloquent vista recordings of this natural catastrophe panorama.

Lucie Robert’s gigandesque La femme en pot, is the most monumental work in the show, and comprises an immense flower pot made of a very thick wire screen — (the kind used to keep mosquitoes out of a cottage) — and metal structures. Constructed around a mature tree at the entrance to the grounds, Robert’s reconstruction of an artificial structure whose usual function is as a ‘nature container’, a larger than life flower pot, builds a rapport with an organic living structure. It causes us to reflect on the great divide between nature and culture in the simplest of ways. Inside the Maison Hamel-Brunreau are a series of ingenious and playful representations of the human figure by Robert. These sensitive introspective works, whose figures are engaged in a kind of ritual ballet absurde are sometimes pierced with holes so light projects from behind, otherwise pieces together in sections to look like marionettes.

Native artist Sonia Robertson’s sound and object installation Prêtre is the most powerful work in the show, particularly for the unusual way it transgresses any notion of the art object and instead engages in a ritualistic representation that transgresses environments, even the walls of this museum. The form of Sonya Robertson’s tree, made of rice paper sections with tree bark textures imprinted on it, is presented on a museum wall and has viewing holes next to it that enable us to see the tree outside, and recorded sounds of rain falling on a tree. Wooden prayer beads or “pearls” are in the four traditional native colours, white representing north, yellow the south, red the east, and black the west. The colour green for earth and blue for sky have also been added. Robertson ritualistically assembled this chain of literally 40,000 beads herself as part of the project and the immense necklace begins inside the gallery, pierces the walls and making its way to a mature tree outside rising up along the trunk to the first branches in a gesture of ritual healing and restitution. A recording of Robertson’s heartbeat can be heard emanating from a speaker at the base of the tree.

Louis Fortier is the absurdist in the group. His surrealist deconstructed, exaggerated faces and forms of people and children are like biogenetic mutations of Disneyland people. One small wax piece of a child’s face is truly horrifying as is Fortier’s Double Adam, a breast-like wax form painted grey presented on a pedestal. The exact same form in exactly the same scale is mirrored upside-down on the ceiling of the gallery. Outside, hanging from a tree are hundreds of Fortier’s wax moulds of heads painted gold. They look like golden apples and play on and with the legendary ancient myths of the golden apple associated with Hercules that promised eternal fulfilment. These apples with their mutated faces, distorted by cloning, surround this tree of life and reveal Fortier’s fascination with recumbent DNA structure and alchemy. Artéfactum is a great show that achieves its purposed goal to address ethical and humanistic issues in presenting a myriad of artistic responses to the theme of nature in a serenely beautiful setting. There are even two old fashioned Marc-Aurèle Fortin paintings Clair de lune (1960) and Paysage, Sainte-Rose (1953) at the Maison Hamel-Brunreau to remind us how far Quebec art has come from the days when landscape painting was king!

John R. Grande

■ MONTREAL

THE DREAM

STATE/ THE STATE

OF THE DREAM

RÉVERIE LUMINESCENTE

Maison de la culture Mercier
8105, rue Hochelaga
June 15 - September 3, 2000

SUSAN EDGERLY ANDRÉ LAVOIE
CHRISTINE PALMIÉRI FRANCINE PRÉVOST
DONALD ROBERTSON

RANANG ROUSSEAU

As part of the event D’un millénaire à l’autre occurring across twenty sites in Montreal, six artists have participated in a project whose themes are dream and luminosity (light).

The materials used for the event range from glass, wire and wood, to video, light and sound. Each artist achieves his/her own unique expression not only in terms of physicality, but also in the addressing of the “other” by conceptual strategies. One of the highlights of the exhibition is how inventively the role of dreams is explored in contrast with the “real world”. The spatial and temporal aspects of the works paradoxically raise questions about its role in today’s contextualized landscape.

Ranang Rousseau’s piece is a video installation titled Drums N Bass 2000. Three video monitors arranged in the middle of the gallery in the shape of a triad, complete with chairs and headphones. From the monitors flow photographic montages of various geographical and human situations. In a staccato rhythm too haptic for the eye to settle upon for more than a second at a time, glimpses of a Kalahari Bushman, then an American astronaut on the moon, then birds in flight and so on, become a blurred gestalt of the world in crisis. Meanwhile, Rousseau recites a monologue describing the need to remedy the situation as he exhorts the viewer to take a stand. Rousseau’s juxtaposition of information overload, besides the prevailing pattern of failure for humanity to change fundamentally, creates a eulogy to the power of the dream (a transcendent impossible). However, his sense of urgency provokes nostalgia for romanticism rather than convincing us to concede that the dream is obsolete in this context. Here, the world is presented as a film without depth, and dream is neither able nor relevant enough to affect any constructive change.

Christine Palmieri’s multi-disciplinary work, titled Neant Compulsif 2 enacts a pushing back of the world — as commodifier in order for her dream to maintain its distance within the context of her own personal history. Two igloo-shaped structures placed onto the floor house her past and future. Projected on these vinyl-covered structures is a pastiche of images depicting souvenirs of herself (a superimposed self-portrait), her family, and other subjects, such as fields of flowers. From above, spotlights shine down in the primary colors striking the ground as if excavating the past with pulse-like regularity. This suggests the potential for colour to open the doors to primordial realms. A recording of a gently flowing river plays on, creating a sensual convergence of light, sound, image and transcendence. The artist’s intergalactic site is a simultaneous search for past and future equipped with a radical sense of experimentation. Her dream is enough to launch herself accordingly, and like Kubrick in A Space Odyssey 2001, Palmieri sees the seeds of the dream by going to the depths of the symbolic traces of original thought.

Donald Robertson

Canadian, 1993

Susan Edgerley

From the one, series V, 1999

From a dream to maintain it’s distance.
At first glance, André Lavoie’s formal wood floor sculptures captivate the eye for their lyricism and mystery of craft. Signes des Temps (Sign of the Times), is a group of elegantly carved wood works. They contain a heavy tortuosity at the base, and their extended outgrowths seem to exist in a state of unrest bordering on torment. This formal resistance to the environment suggests a conceptual dialogue between a historical framework, (within the context of plurality), while maintaining a poetic voice. They bring to mind the grave asceticism of Roland Poulin’s obsidian floor pieces, yet Lavoie departs from sheer density of weight by allowing light to pass through the contorted gesture. Signes of the Times reflects formalism’s metamorphosis, albeit a painful one. Where darkness once remained safely at home in the recesses of time, serene and unquestioned, Lavoie’s manipulation of light where none might be is like Lazarus who, having been declared dead, rises in painful knowing that it is a redeeming gesture.

Susan Edgerly’s piece, entitled Lari, is an exquisite wall sculpture that uses small fragments of molten glass pinned to the wall to form the shape of a large spiral. Her choice of materials expresses fragility. Glass, a conduit for light (and electricity), is the traditional medium, but Edgerly puts it onto a pedestal of contemplative beauty. Her piece has no rational purpose, other than to reflect the relationship between the ever-living cosmos and consciousness.

This show raise awareness about the way the dream has its place in the lives of these artists. Dreaming is an organic necessity for human survival, and also a prophetic visionary mystery. It is also the last possible, uncharted realm securely emancipated from the commodification of the rational mind: the dream as a site and as a basis for engaging the real world has never seemed so relevant. This impression remains long after the viewing.

Isak Augustine

**TROIS-RIVIÈRES**

**CIMES ET RACINES**

**ART & NATURE SYMPOSIUM**

Parc Nature La Gabelle
August 1 - 27, 2000

Sited around the historic La Gabelle hydro dam site on the St. Maurice river north of Trois-Rivières, the Cimes et Racines Art and Nature Symposium is one of Quebec’s best kept secrets. The actual location around a dam completed by the Shawinigan Light & Power Company in 1934, with its natural glaciated river banks, cliffs and shorelines is nothing less than spectacular. The only river crossing point between Three Rivers and Shawinigan, La Gabelle was a place where natives traded with the French settlers in the early days. Energy, industry, nature and history all meet here and the invited local, national and international artists had a rare opportunity to create quality arts in this place steeped as it is in the natural, cultural and economic history of Quebec.

North Carolina artist Patrick Dougherty’s freeform assemblages woven together out of tree branches are visual enigmas embodied by the artist with a fanciful, fairy-tale quality. Dougherty’s Landwork created at La Gabelle is the first work conceived and created in Canada. Dougherty exploits the supple tension, elasticity, tonal and textural qualities of the wood he works with. His art has a “wildness aesthetic” rooted in the North American experience. Combining craft, and the physical practice of drawing in space with tree saplings, Dougherty gathers, cuts, assembles and weaves, in this case, a gathering of seven 20 foot towers made of braided red maple saplings. These swirling wooden towers, drawn in space, are surrounded by a swooping braided form that acts as an aesthetic container for this highly charged, large scale installation.

Roger Gaudreau’s La Rosace set in the forest interior on the east side of the St. Maurice River is a gesture of healing, laid out in the form of a Rose window, the kind one finds in European Cathedrals like Chartres as well as in Quebec. In the tranquil quietude of this interior forest setting, Gaudreau has created this circular form using intricate concrete sections, brightly coloured crushed brick, and an array of red and green flowers. Planted Norway maples surround the site. The unusual allusion to the Church in a contemporary artwork is neither critical thereof nor in the arspeak genre, but instead uses nature as a bridge to link an architectural form associated with our Judaeo-Christian heritage amid the natural history of this place.

For his immense Transformer piece, Reinhard Reizenstein relocated a 55 foot white spruce tree found in the forest nearby and raised it between two dissused hydro pylons where it now hangs upside down on a hill overlooking the Saint Maurice River. Clearly visible from across the river, Transformer is a spectacle to behold. The tree, a natural resource from the early days of the primary forest industry in Quebec takes precedence over the aesthetic of the hydro pylon, which incidentally has boat-like shapes in its upper section. French artist François Davin likewise alludes to the early logging in the region. The phantom-like 50 foot long logs he has reconstructed in the scale of those that grew in the primary forests over a century ago, look somewhat artificial, constructed as they are out of an agglomeration of “piturows”, the tiny logs now found floating in the river. Ranged around a stream they look almost surreal.

Louise Paillé’s Le Grand Voyage was inspired by her discovery of a 160 by 10 feet long graveyard of old trees that mark the spot where the Saint Maurice river flooded its banks over 50 years ago. Paillé has again used piturows whose surfaces have been softened by their river journey, to create a circular assemblage near the river. The plaque-like poetic copper engraved notes on some logs recount her feelings about the history of these trees: “In this whirlpool the metamorphosis of the world takes place.” A pile of similar, part-reconstructed, part natural piturows have been placed nearby, an enigmatic expression of the diminishing scale and volume of our forest resources...

The two outdoor assemblages titled La Temps Suspenso by Lynda Baril on both sides of the Saint-Maurice river are assemblages of tree-like forms that hang in the forest between trees, a hybrid fusion of the natural and man-made. Baril asked local residents in the region to provide thousands of coat hangers for the project. Each coat hanger, its past use and memory concealed, represents the human presence. Collectively assembled like all those forgotten memories and people who once lived near La Gabelle in the 1920s, Baril’s coat hangers (with natural wood fixed onto their bases), an allusion to the nature and resources that provided the people who lived here with their well being. A worthy tribute to nature in this new millennium the Cimes et Racines Art and Nature Symposium is scheduled to take place again next year.

John K. Grande

**TORONTO**

**WILLIAM KENTRIDGE**

Art Gallery of Ontario
317, Dundas Street West
August 5th - October 29, 2000

South African artist William Kentridge, an artist whose multidisciplinary background in political science, philosophy, theatre and fine art drew him to investigate the social and cultural landscape of his native country, is holding his first show ever in...
Canada at the Art Gallery of Ontario. Though Kentridge never intentionally set out to depict apartheid, the drawings and films he has produced feed off the brutalized society left in its wake. As the renowned South African writer J. M. Coetzee writes of Kentridge’s choice of subject matter: “In Kentridge, the balance of power between man and nature has altered; it is nature, for a change, that is vulnerable to man. The landscape of his films in particular is the devastated area south of Johannesburg: mine dumps and slime dams; pylons and power cables; roads and tracks that lead from nowhere to nowhere.”

The technique used in Kentridge’s films is interesting, for he performs a kind of stone-age animated technique. He begins with a drawing on paper on a studio wall, sketches an image, then films the image using an old Bolex camera. As the drawing evolves, the image is repeatedly recorded. Usually only 20 drawings are needed to illustrate an entire film. Kentridge’s latest film Waiting... and Wanting, the seventh in a series begun in 1989 on view at the AGO, chronicles the life of the fictional character Soho Eckstein. Kentridge’s films are populated by archetypical characters from businessmen in existential crisis, to lost souls of the cultural and political transitions taking place in South Africa. While in earlier film episodes Eckstein’s films are populated by archetypical characters from businessmen in existential crisis, to lost souls of the cultural and political transitions taking place in South Africa. While in earlier film episodes Eckstein is a man too self-interested and occupied with material gain to be aware of his own complicity in the political, social and physical devastation that surrounds him, in Waiting... and Wanting, Soho has taken stock of his life and begun to thoroughly reconsider his priorities. The suggestion is hopeful, of a possible spiritual awakening in this man and in a greater sense, his homeland.

The 18 charcoal drawings in this show which often reference the same subjects as Kentridge’s films, use a technique resembling animation or old time illustration yet the textural, light-dark contrasts and outlining make these works good art with or without the politically charged and insidious that accompanies them. The troubled psyche of the white South African becomes witness to atrocities, sometimes overt, othertimes as inoffious as a lonely figure seated by a boardroom table. These images make us all the more aware of the stereotypical roles such people assumed in the past and that no longer make sense. The caricature element in Kentridge’s drawings cannot be underestimated. The often incomplete, rushed look of these graphic depictions, sometimes compared with the 18th century caricaturist William Hogarth (whose Rake’s Progress looked at English society with the same disparaging eyes as Kentridge looks at contemporary South Africa), parallels the transitional and “incomplete” state of South African society today. The way Kentridge observes society—not as active participant nor disinterested observer—but simply objective witness, makes his show a must see for all interested in the unbridled, often difficult path of progress in South Africa’s newly awakened democracy.

John K. Grande

PETER VON TIESENHAUSEN: DELUGE

Southern Alberta Art Gallery 601, 3rd Avenue, S. W. Lethbridge, Alberta May 6 - June 28, 2000

Peter von Tiesenhausen is known for his decompositions, Wagnerian environmental sculptures he sets on fire or allows to rot into the landscape. He has built heroically futile ships wattled from willow and pine branches and abandoned to sink into the soil—huge woven willow pods that desiccate high in the trees of his farm—and ponderousyet ethereal burnt men that perch on inner-city rooftops. While designed to decay and built of salvaged branches and derelict wood, his sculptures are always well crafted. But his latest installation, Deluge disrupts this pattern; it is hardly crafted at all. Arranged rather than built, it is more cerebral and cryptic than anything he has done to date.

Von Tiesenhausen has an international reputation for his sublime site-specific installations. He has been increasingly challenging himself to make work as an immediate response to whatever new space is offered to him. Arriving at the gallery only a few weeks before the exhibition little more than his imagination and whatever the site has to offer in the way of raw materials, history, environment, and helping hands, the artist goes to work. This high-risk game has lead to some amusing moments and some wonderful sculptures. However, upon seeing Deluge I was sure he had lost the gamble in a big way.

When you enter the spacious gallery on the second floor of the Southern Alberta Art Gallery you may be disappointed, as I was, to find three dozen unremarkable branches hanging from the ceiling. Ranging from a few centimeters to over two meters long, and everything in between, the spine prunings are suspended at various lengths from the high ceiling by fishing line. Well separated from each other, the rough, thin sticks are neither evenly distributed nor do they appear to be arranged in meaningful groups. Seeming patterns dissolve as you circulate through the work. Though I enjoyed walking among the swarm of branches (it was like floating through a stilled storm) that minor pleasure was mitigated by the creeping feeling that I was missing something significant or mistrusting a hoax for an enigma.

At the end of the gallery opposite the entrance, a pedestal supports what looks like a rotting piece of wood, but turns out to be a cast bronze. As you walk around the pedestal you become aware that it is positioned like a pulpit or a podium and the room resembles a small church or community hall. And then it hits you: Looking out from this point of view, the random bits of wood suddenly collude to form the contours of a levitating boat surrounded by floating crosses. It's magic! The scene surrounds and seems to penetrate the viewer. The image rushes both toward and away from you. Cruciforms fly overhead, to either side, and just beyond your peripheral vision. It's low-tech virtual reality!

As long as you stay within the vantage area's invisible sphere, even if you rotate your head, the thick picture remains in perspective. Straying from the vantage area causes the scene to fragment into an abstract field. Looking with both eyes, the mind oscillates between reading a picture and fathoming for depth. This scintillating effect is reminiscent of looking through a stereoscope.

Deluge comes on looking like a knotty bit of minimalism but resolves itself into a room-sized picture puzzle. While it can be appreciated for its ingenious optical illusion, seeing Deluge as only a one-liner requires a willful blindness to the obvious religious symbolism. It is extremely rare to see a contemporary religious artwork in a public gallery that does not have an ironic twist. There are very few taboos in the art world; politics is acceptable if it is liberal or oppositional; sex and violence are passable if contextualized and labeled, but mainstream religious symbols must be smuggled in.

In part, von Tiesenhausen wants the viewer to re-experience his excitement, while walking in a Lethbridge park, of seeing a crucifix in a tangle of branches. But beyond the illusion, the content (the Christian symbol) recalls others who have discovered God sending messages through nature. While Deluge may be contained by an ironic reading, and some people see messages in nature, they really only see their own projected desires. It remains possible the artist is sincere, that he wants to prime the pump and have viewers discover the magic he finds in nature.

In an interview, von Tiesenhausen expressed his hope to capture some of the (pre-Christian) symbolic energy in the cross without the Christian baggage. In this installation, the symbol is so over-weighted by Christian associations.
Between Two Worlds: The Art of Poland 1890-1914

Vancouver Art Gallery
750, Hornby Street
June 10 - November 12, 2000

Between Two Worlds: The Art of Poland 1890-1914 is neither a summer blockbuster nor even a display of heroic painting, as its publicity might lead one to expect. It does, however, open a window on a confused moment when modernism hit the cultural life of occupied Poland around 1900. The National Museum in Cracow selected a hundred items from its collection to sample the range of concerns and media explored by artists who formed part of "Young Poland", an intellectual and cultural movement similar to others across Europe that flourished in the liberal climate of Austria-ruled Cracow, by Nietzsche, Schopenhauer and Maeterlinck, these artists were anti-heroic and internationalist in their outlooks, yet persistently passionate about Polish identity and culture.

This exhibition provides new material for those with a special interest in the emergence of European modernism but it is not clear what the wider appeal of the show might be. The parallels between the search for national art in Poland and Canada alluded to by the curators of this show, are, despite the common French modernist and Scandinavian influences, not that clear. The group of Seven's search for an essential national identity in the Northern landscape was part of an occupying power's claim to conquered territory.

Polish painters worked in precisely the opposite direction by identifying with their indigenous homeland. In place of the unified national style one might expect, expressions of the Polish experience are diverse. A renewed interest in this period of Polish art interestingly coincides with the post-socialist economic development of Poland. The show's corporate sponsor in a press release describes their business interests in Poland, and goes on to proclaim Polish artists to be "always powerful and persuasive" defenders of national freedom and cultural identity. It seems ironic to hold up as heroes of Polish nationalism and capitalist development, artists who first sought to escape from ideological obligations during the period covered by this exhibition.

The real contribution of this show may be to throw into question the validity of art serving heroic, nationalistic objectives at all.

Joan Richardson


VICTORIA

MEMOIRS:
TRANSCRIBING
LOSS

Art Gallery of Greater Victoria
1040, Moss Street
September 15 - November 19, 2000

An exhibition of five thoughtfully considered works by contemporary artists Christian Boltanski, Betty Goodwin, Mary Kavanagh, Arnaud Maggs and Patrick Trice. Memoirs investigates aspects of personal history, ritual, and cultural experience as they relate to memory, loss, and mortality. Using photography, video, and installation these artists establish a wholly contemporary, yet evocative discourse of yearning. These contemporary momento mori create a contemplative framework within which to consider the passage of time and the spaces between life and death, body and spirit.

French artist Christian Boltanski's Archives du Musée des Enfants (1989), an installation involving sixty photographs and twelve lamps, contrasts the monumentality of the work's presentation with the vulnera-
able images of faintly lit faces, whose fragmented histories remain shadowy and partially hidden. Bolanski’s installation sustains, with an existen- 
tial dexterity, the emotional charge that accompanies our memories of past time(s), incorporat- 
ing the passage of time, and its inevitable col- 
lapse into remembered reality. The disparate qualities of presence and absence enable the viewer to recon- 
struct memories, as we do in looking at images from our own childhood. The implicit loss they signify 
involve a reframing of reality that is subjective and within this subjective reality, truth as the body knows it, is 
realized.

The spectral image of Anne of Brittany (ca.1517 - 1531), reproduced from the mediaeval transi tomb of the abbey church at St. 
Denis, is the subject around which Saskatchewan artist, Mary Kavanagh con- 
structs her work, En Transi (1997). This close-cropped enlarged, and 
blue-tinted photographic detail de- 
picts the inert stillness of the post- 
mortal corpse, (transi) dramati- 
cally. Above the still a video projection 
of a slow-moving flame that runs in a 
10 minute loop completes the 7’ 6” 
diptych, dissolving into vibrant or- 
ange, yellow, blue, and white colours. 
Viewed in darkness, Kavanagh's pun- 
ing of an ‘inert, historical image with 
a vivid moving one — the flame — 
is beautiful and disquieting. The anx- 

ty-producing aspects of mortality dealt with in this work are left unan- 
swered and open.

Early in his career, Arnaud Maggs adopted a method that became a per- 
sonal philosophy; every image photographeD was contact printed and included in the finished work. Maggs' 
seminal obsession with the portrait favours a grid format in which a sub-
ject is often situated both frontally 
and in profile, as in C4 Portrait Stud- 
ies (1976–78). Since then Maggs’ se- 
rialization of subjects has expanded 
to include the collecting, classifying and photographing of the entire catalogued numbers of all 828 Jazz LP's 
issued on the Prestige record label in The Complete Prestige 12” Jazz Cat- 

alogue (1988), of over 300 obitua- 
tions. Hotel signs in Paris for Hotel 
(1991) and all the pages of photog- 
incorporates photographs of a col- 

clection of black-edged 19th century 
mourning stationery found in French flea markets. The 96 neatly arranged, 
subtly nuanced photographs, sym- 

bolic reminders of the people they 
represent, invite the viewer to partic- 
ipate in this last ritual. Maggs’ Notifi- 
cation 1 becomes a public site for 
mourning, a dignified remembrance of the dead, like Handel’s Fields.

The relationship of disparate ob- 
jects and ideas is essential to Patrick 
Traer’s artistic practice. Incorporat- 
ing text and neon signs Traer’s post-


minimalist aesthetic involves embroi-
dering, in a series of untitled works 
from 1997, metaphors for the transi-
tory nature of the body incarnate. 
Reminiscent of burial veils or shrouds that are fragile by nature, the 
large, visceral organisms are inter-
rupted by fluid tracings. A profound melancholy seeps from these tissue 
shrouds. The lines, based on draw-
ings, are imaged after the body's in-
eternal organs — heart, lungs, arter-
ial systems. Like scar tissue, they 
trace past histories, injuries, and loss 
in gestures of solace and grace. 

Questions about grief and healing, the re-imagining of life are raised and the latent often hidden mysteries of the 
body are raised. 

Betty Goodwin’s energetic in-
volvement in her work is heroic. Like 
the figures she deliberately renders, 
hers is an engagement, her mortality, 
is fraught with yearning.Both testify 
to the almost absurd human ability to 
sustain chaos. Though she works in 
a variety of media, drawing is what 
sustains and brings her art to life. The 
often featureless, emotionally charged, and psychologically heavy figures in Goodwin’s drawings, re-
duced in a vigorous, gestural style are 
emphasized in darkness. Often 
weightless, they float, extending into 
empty surroundings from which there is no escape. These figures 
struggle for release from life, their 
private histories are a secret. Like the 
ghosts from TS. Eliot’s Wasteland, 
or Dante’s Inferno, they are caught 
in prolonged states of existential 
angst. The Weight of Memory 
1998, depict a floating figure above a 
ground of stones. Both elements 
maintain their equilibrium. The en-
ergy field between them is carefully 
sustained. The figure does not de-
send; the stones remain their pos-
tion. All is contained.

MEMOIRS: Transcribing Loss 
provides an unusual, unsettling yet ul- 

timately provocative selection of con-
temporary art dealing with a seldom 
shown theme: (in) mortality — the 
body and spirit’s passage through 
time and space, between life and 
death.

Linda Giles