HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA

IMPRESSIONIST MASTERWORKS
FROM THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA

October 12, 2001—January 6, 2002

CHOOSING THEIR OWN PATH: CANADIAN WOMEN IMPRESSIONISTS

October 12, 2001—January 13, 2002

ERNEST LAWSON—PAINTING AND THE LANDSCAPE
12 October 2001—13 January 2002
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Never before has there been an exhibition of this many quality Impressionist pictures in Atlantic Canada. Mind you, in conventional terms, this is not a large exhibition. It consists of thirteen carefully chosen works from the collection of the National Gallery of Canada. Of these, nine are landscapes. Impressionist Masterworks includes works by Bouguereau, Cézanne, Degas, Gauguin, van Gogh, Monet, Pissarro, Renoir, and Sisley. All of the paintings are of high quality and a few are outstanding examples of Impressionist art. The outstanding pictures are, to my mind, the two Monets, the Degas and, perhaps, the Renoir.

I should qualify my choices and explain what I mean by high quality and outstanding. The latter question first: there are few outstanding pictures in any period of art history and, for that matter, not many of high quality. The term masterpiece or masterwork is used too loosely, and too often in conjunction with any work by a famous artist. Even Cézanne and van Gogh could have their off days. No artist creates a masterpiece each and every time. A good work by an outstanding artist can be very good indeed and all the paintings in this exhibition, excluding those I believe to be outstanding, are certainly in that category and very well worth seeing. An example of a good painting by an outstanding artist is Gauguin's The Call (1882), a relatively early picture by the artist. Painted under the influence of Pissarro, it is not at all typical of Gauguin's later works which have a unique style all their own. That being said, this is still a good painting which illustrates Gauguin's talent as a promising artist who had yet to reach his apex.

The two Monets, A Stormy Sea (1881), and Waterloo Bridge: The Sun in Fog (1903), are great pictures by any standard. Waterloo Bridge is breathtakingly beautiful. A friend of mine, who was at the exhibition with me, commented: "It was worth twelve bucks (the admission price to the exhibition) just to see the Monet's Waterloo Bridge." And I would agree with her. Waterloo Bridge is close in feeling to his seminal painting Impression, Fog (Le brouillard) (1872), whose very title later become synonymous with the term Impressionism. It is interesting that Waterloo Bridge was purchased by the National Gallery in 1914 just eleven years after it was completed, and a good indication how astute Eric Brown, the director of the NGC at the time, was in his taste. There is no way that today's National Gallery could afford a major Monet, if one of the quality of Waterloo Bridge was to come to market. Monet's A Stormy Sea is a different matter altogether, and a work I personally find interesting because it really does not have any central focus in regard to subject matter. It is a painting of surf along the Normandy coast. The painting is dominated by a series of waves that nearly divide the canvas horizontally. Both Monets in the exhibition are strikingly modern in their appearance and a foretaste of what was to happen in art to come.

Degas' At the Café Concert is also a very modern picture and a very good example of this artist's work. Degas' world of cafe society is very different from that of Monet, but what brings them together is the way they both forever changed the nature of painting. Some viewers might find At the Café Concert looks unfinished, but it is very much a completed picture that holds together very well. Degas lets our eyes work to complete the picture in our minds instead of relying on minute details to catch our attention. I doubt that there are many painters who do not admire the pure bravado of Degas' brushwork. There are many lessons on that subject to be learned from looking at this painting. Renoir's Claude and Renée is a very beautiful study in restraint with its muted palette and starchy contrasts Degas' brightly coloured night club scene. The subjects of Renoir's painting is his son and the child's nurse. It is a quiet picture that reflects art's love of family life and is a painting that reflects the predominantly bourgeois values of Impressionism. Let's face it, Impressionism is a comfortable art, and we all need comfort from time to time.

The Art Gallery of Nova Scotia has wisely paired Impressionist Masterworks with two other exhibitions of their own: Choosing Their Own Path: Canadian Women Impressionists and Ernest Lawson—Painting and the Landscape. These two exhibitions provide a local context for the National Gallery exhibition. Impressionism was a natural influence on Maritime art, but it took its time in gaining afoothold on the east coast. Most of the women artists represented in Choosing Their Own Path were born in Atlantic Canada and a majority of them lived in the Halifax area. All of the women in the exhibition, with the exception of Emily Carr, had a direct connection to the Maritimes. Their training was varied. Some studied in Europe and others in Canada and the United States, but one thing they all shared in common was that they were influenced by Impressionism. The Nova Scotia born American Impressionist Ernest Lawson worked in France alongside Alfred Sisley in the last decade of the 19th century. He spent almost all of his life in the United States, but he did return a couple of times to Nova Scotia. There are a number of paintings in the Lawson exhibition that were done during a 1924 visit to the province. They are very interesting and very powerful. One in particular, a small painting of Peggy's Cove, shows the influence of the French sources that influenced Lawson's art. Impressionist Masterworks will make one more stop on its national tour at the Musée du Québec. The exhibition will be on view in Quebec City from February 7th to May 3rd, 2002. Hopefully readers of Vie des Arts in the Quebec City area will take advantage of this opportunity to see these important Impressionist paintings.

Virgil Hannock

HULL, QUEBEC

THE LANDS WITHIN ME:
EXPRESSIONS BY CANADIAN ARTISTS OF ARAB ORIGIN

Canadian Museum of Civilization
October 19, 2001—March 9, 2003
100 Laurier Street
Hull, QC J8X 4H2
Tel.: (819) 776-7000
1-800-555-5621
www.civilisations.ca

A wide ranging show of Arab Canadian art that has attracted controversy when it was temporarily suspended due to the September 11th tragedy in New York City. The Lands within Me presents the works of 26 artists from across Canada. These works by artists originating from Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia evidence a wide range of approaches to creative expression. While the exhibition's organizers express that the immigrant experience is at the core of this show's purpose, the médiasse or cultural mixing evidenced can range from a tentative beaux arts style not unique to Arab or Canadian art, to some very specific and exotic stylistic fusions. Expressing their identity through words, images or objects, these artists present a diversity of Arab points of view on life in Canada, while equally reflecting their homeland origins.

Nicolas Zeitoian's ink and gold leaf on paper works are exotic, colourful and delicate like batiks. Joseph Moulhib's Montreal, St. Denis in Winter (1995) transforms this bustling downtown Montreal quarter into a souk with curvi-linear arches, onion-shaped turrets. Abd Hanafi's Rue St. Denis, Montreal (1991) likewise creates a bazar-like atmosphere of colourful crowds of people whose joyful expressions remind us of Tobissie's paintings. More mystical and spirited are Issak Saltar's textured mixed media
The two ovals mounted on the wood works Shadow (1995), Voice (1996) and Djemadj (children's hangle) (1997). These colorful compositions delight in hieratic decorative motifs that become sacred reflections on life. Mireille Aprahamian's Vondomadore II composes up the atmosphere of a fruit stall using delicate lines and height oil pastel textures that recall British painter David Hockney's decorative work.

The Lebanese Canadian artist Camille Zakharia has created an unforgettable photo collage of a woman on a magic carpet flying over the earth. A wall of stones, houses and trees can be seen silhouetted on the horizon behind her. Zakharia's photo collage is like a postcard mosaic about one woman's feelings of living in two places at once: her homeland and her adopted nation. Laila Birek's installation expresses the same sense of perpetual uncertainty over identity with Mirror, Mirror (2000). Two boudoir dressers face each other laden with domestic objects: makeup, cosmetics, candles, bowls. A pair of embroidered slippers under one dresser symbolizes, strangely, this journey from emigrant to immigrant. The two oval frames mounted on the dressers no longer have mirrors. We can see through these openings to the horizon behind her. Zakharia's photo collage is like a postcard mosaic with Mirror, Mirror (2000). Two boudoir dressers face each other laden with domestic objects: makeup, cosmetics, candles, bowls. A pair of embroidered slippers under one dresser symbolizes, strangely, this journey from emigrant to immigrant. The two oval frames mounted on the dressers no longer have mirrors.
as they were. I ate with them. I lived with them. I really wanted them to get to express what they felt. There was a lot of anger and violence below the surface that somehow had to be expressed. The work from the children and the senior artists was outstanding. I decided to make a banner and spent six weeks traveling all over Nunavut, from community to community, with this team roll, getting people involved in the collaboration. In April 1999, I presented this banner as a token birthday card to a Premier in Iqaluit.

With their natural sense of pattern and texture, as well as their unique cultural experience, a surprising range of personal and intuitive artworks came into being. Machiniq’s goal is to encourage a wholly contemporary attitude to art-making, less hampered by stereotypes and free of the southern market influence as he states. “The Inuit art market is suffering in part because their work is not being given a chance to evolve. These days you can’t show seals being hunted or anything controversial because it might offend someone, and might not sell. But I’ve seen work by Betty Goodwin and Louise Bourgeois that would offend someone, and might not sell. With their natural sense of pattern and texture, as well as their unique cultural experience, a surprising range of personal and intuitive artworks came into being. Machiniq’s goal is to encourage a wholly contemporary attitude to art-making, less hampered by stereotypes and free of the southern market influence. As he states. The Inuit art market is suffering in part because their work is not being given a chance to evolve. These days you can’t show seals being hunted or anything controversial because it might offend someone, and might not sell. But I’ve seen work by Betty Goodwin and Louise Bourgeois that would offend someone, and might not sell.

Susan Edgerley

Poetry Encased in Glass

Galerie Elena Lee
1460 Sherbrooke St. West
Tel: 864-6809

What strikes us most with Susan Edgerley’s works is their unbearable fragility. Organic, alien, almost otherworldly, her art takes the medium of glass to an entirely new realm. The use of the word ‘art’ is, indeed, conscious and deliberate, for there can be no doubt that Susan Edgerley is a brilliant and unique artist, and an ambassador for one of the most undervalued art forms. Born in Toronto, Ontario, and living most of her life in Quebec, she belongs to a fascinating group of glass artists and teachers who are pushing the boundaries of the medium. In the process they are putting Quebec in the forefront of international glass movement. What inspires and sustains Susan Edgerley is nature. Having said that, think ‘nature’ and a world of metaphysics opens up, and that is where her works take the unsuspecting viewer. Moved by the fragility and resilience of plants, she has transformed her pieces into poetic representations of the spirit that imbues them.

A great deal of physical effort goes into the creation of Susan Edgerley’s enigmatic works of art. A suspended translucent, gossamer chain made of fluid glass links, evokes both the spine and an umbilical cord. On a mirrored tile on the floor nests a group of pale opaque shells with textured, carved surfaces. They split, emanating an invisible, seductive energy that compels the viewer to kneel beside them for a closer look.

Through her undulating Beneath series, to the exotic Fleeting Glimpses, she has magically transported glass to a new dimension, combining it with everything from copper and forged steel, to paper and wood. In the Seed Sowers series, Edgerley creates a mesmerizing world of eerily alive flora inspired by her garden and its life cycle. In it, she has produced, or rather tended and brought to life, textured pods that sprout delicate copper leaves, tendrils and filaments. But Susan Edgerley surpasses herself in the following series titled Sembene... Seeds, with a collection of pieces that are pure Zen poetry. A suspended translucent, gossamer chain made of fluid glass links, evokes both the spine and an umbilical cord. On a mirrored tile on the floor nests a group of pale opaque shells with textured, carved surfaces. They split, emanating an invisible, seductive energy that compels the viewer to kneel beside them for a closer look.

That fateful morning Nichols had just come out of his hotel to get some juice and became aware of a great disturbance. Little did he know what he was to behold that day. He was soon to become a front line witness to the tragedy that unfolded. Hearing that something had happened at the World Trade Centre, but not entirely sure what, he grabbed a taxi and headed straight for the place. It was so dark after the twin towers went down at 10 am it was like night. Nichols had to walk on his knees, feeling his way along the walls of buildings and eventually found an opening. He began to climb a series of stairs upwards until the air was less thick with ash and dust and eventually came to a rooftop where he could see the immense tragedy as it was taking place. Jean Nichols photos of this event are not just documents. The way his eye has captured these unforgettable events with a sense of the urgency of the moment makes them great photography. In one image, taken at the intersection of Broadway and Murray Streets, we see the remains of an airplane engine sitting in a compressed lump on the street. A nearby sign has been bent by the engine’s fall through space. On the floor of a fire station, Nichols simply captured the remains of a missing firefighters gear: his helmet, insulated suit, pick, and oxygen tank. It is a poignant and powerful statement of how this tragedy affected so many. The scenes of bewildered people staggering through the smoke, asbestos and ash in the darkened streets, of a family with child in a stroller with their faces covered to breathe better, of a solitary ghost-like figure walking without a particular destination, as if in shock, each of these bewildered remembrances from the Trade Centre disaster is unforgettable. An image of a fire engine from Ladder 9—since destroyed—and taken a few days before has the same impact. We see the throngs of New Yorkers making their exodus from the city on foot in broad daylight across the Brooklyn Bridge. It all seems unbelievable. New York will never be the same. She has lost so many of her angels of everyday life, those firefighters who went on call September 11th to save lives, and lost their own.

John K. Grande
Doug Back: Shadow Grappling
October 20th – December 2nd, 2001
Art Gallery of Peterborough
2 Crescent St., Peterborough
Tel.: 705-743-9179

Doug Back’s weird and wonderful world of gadgets and contraptions involve recycling materials and reassembling them. The resulting interactive devices which use digital technology, hand-built machines and kinetic devices are less bizarre than Jean Tinguely’s, and more pseudo-scientific but with a human touch and message. While the rationale behind most machines is to perform a task, each of these devices simply asks us—the participants—to understand their strange and irrational raison d’être. Back doesn’t overload these works with meaning and this dedicated, fly-brained approach is part of what attracts us to them. The first thing you will see on the ramp before entering the exhibition is a series of Doug Back’s sketchbook drawings. These whimsical studies reveal the inner workings of Back’s mind and have curious notations like LM3915, Soft, Medium, Hard, along with mystifying crossbones and familiar skull and crossbones. The toxic warnings and wasp corpses make you feel just a little bit uneasy. With Internal Clock (2001) you attach a sensor to your ear. A clock on the wall ticks its seconds in tandem with your heart beat. Time takes on a completely new meaning. It is no longer the precise, quantifiable section of splitting of time but a register of our natural heartbeat. With Stranger Culture Lab! (2001), we see a close-up of a fingernail found in a Toronto subway. It sits in a Petri Dish and the image is projected onto a miniature screen video monitor that hangs in mid-air. This is archaeology as Back sees it, a found living human remnant around which a culture will grow for the duration of the show.

Outside the gallery, you can see the silhouette of an earlier Back piece titled Spirit (1985). The shadow it casts onto a material screen at night could be a person or an insect, depending on how this miniature computer controlled “puppet” changes its timing, and it does! The most interesting piece in the show, Jacob Wrestling with the Angel (1985), is the most elusive. A television monitor on a raised plywood platform projects images on what lies underneath. We can look through an opening on this two foot high “stage” to see the hidden found elements beneath. A camera on a tripod turns in a circle capturing these images in seemingly random stop and go sequences. The TV monitor images look like a live feed from this camera, but in reality the screen sequence of the same objects is pre-recorded. We question the TV appearance and real presence of these “things”. Steve (1979) involves five sticks placed so close to each other that, as they whirl around and turn kinetically, they occasionally hit each other. While the weakest of the two reverses its movement, the second continues on its circular path. Eventually the sequences adjust and they turn in harmony “avoiding” each other. Doug Back’s quasi-scientific shadow grappling show provides a welcome relief from the all too serious sociological investigations of many artists, and, it seems, has a social message nonetheless. He has a lot of fun recycling the found gadgets, electronic devices and objects he scavenges from dumpsters, yard sales, and searching the streets of Toronto. One man’s garbage is another’s gold. Created by Su Ditta, this 20 year survey of Doug Bach’s work is a must see. Kids will love this show as much as the parents!

John K. Grande

\[ \text{TORONTO} \]

\[ \text{AGANETHA DYCK:} \]

\text{INTER SPECIES COMMUNICATION ATTEMPT (JOHN GRANDE)}

DeLeon White Gallery
September 13th – November 3rd, 2001
1996 Queen St. West
Toronto, Ontario M6J 1H9
Tel.: 416-597-9466
Fax: 416-597-2495
deleonwhite@home.com

While some artists and sculptors will create site specific outdoor works to express their connectivity to nature, Aganetha Dyck painstakingly chooses objects, the detritus of consumer culture, or nocturnal elements like clothing or domestic items, and engages in a process whereby they rework them in their lives. The results are poetic, and express something of the inherent fragility of life itself. In the Survivors show at the Royal Ontario Museum, Dyck presented Hive Biodice (1994) as a response to the show’s theme of breast cancer among women. The title of the present exhibition, Inter Species Communication Attempt, is an ambitious one (particularly as bees have no concept of art) but the results are edifying. The sculptural component was previously exhibited at the Centre d’Art Contemporain in Troyes and at the Canadian Cultural Centre in Paris. We see, for instance, a pair of stereo speakers that have been all but obscured by the bee’s wax layerings. Another has a kitsch romantic figure of a woman in a long skirt, the kind that would adorn a shelf at your grandmother’s. The wax and honeycomb organically fuse with parts of the figurative. Another has a wrapped jar that looks somehow archaic after the bees have done their work on it.

Aganetha Dyck’s process is like pre-fab archaeology. The Romans went to Rome in the 18th century to discover, draw and record ancient Roman antiquities because there was a sense of mystery and lost history to them. Aganetha Dyck brings a new resonance to our society’s lost and displaced yet commonplace artifacts. She transforms them into near minimalist objects, clothed in mystery. Somehow, the process is analogous to what the Romans were doing, but the discovery of ancient grandeur is now contemporized and involves manipulating nature’s own processes. Sometimes it takes several years of careful administration, due to the bee’s brief six to ten week annual period of productivity, to produce a completed object. The bees’ markings, patterns, and traces are fascinating for and of themselves. (Some might say more than the art.) There is always something fascinating and mysterious about the way time transforms things. But is it art? By touching an energy that is not our own, Aganetha Dyck’s art brings the history of our culture back into the living dynamic of nature, and this is something today’s art world can use.

The aesthetic is rather like the way Canadian artist Eric Cameron layers paint onto objects again and again until they are absolutely transformed. With Cameron’s, we really do not know what is inside unless told. Aganetha Dyck’s leave clues,
traces, mimetic signs of their former function. Once transformed their function has changed. Once products, functional items produced out of materials from nature, they engage in a partial return to nature, but with the help of bees. We can smell the scent of the wax. In a dimly lit gallery room at Delaun White, studio remnants of the bee hive boxes; small fragments of the hives, tools for bee keeping, shoes and other objects, rest on two presentation tables while a sound composition by Richard Dyck provides an eerie buzzing accompaniment to the installation.

In the catalogue essay for the show, Virginia MacDonnell, who for several years has run her own Queen St. art gallery, comments on Agatha Dyck’s process: “She doesn’t direct the bees as such, but rather responds to their response to her work. It is—in the truest sense—a collaboration.” This show includes a new series of works that innovate by literally letting the bees transform the art, in this case small scale ink drawings. Agatha Dyck made of bees’ bodies on braille paper. The bees apparently dance on the dots (their way of communicating) and then leave their own wax markings and traces on the art! John K. Grande

**HARLEQUIN UNMASKED:**

**COMEDY TRANSFORMED**

*September 22, 2001—January 20, 2002*

The Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art

111 Queen’s Park

Toronto, Ontario M5S 2C7

Tel.: 416-586-8080

Fax: 416-586-8085

The theatre known as Commedia dell’Arte went into terminal decline in the mid-18th century, when playwright Carlo Goldoni (1707-1793) abandoned the masks that were its stock in trade. Its influence had been waned; its dramatis personnae spread stock in trade. Its influence had been waned; its dramatis personnae spread.

In the mid-century, when playwriting Carlo Goldoni went into terminal decline, the theatre scene was dominated by the oral tradition of mummers, wandering mountebanks and Mystery plays that was on the wane even in Shakespeare’s time. That they should have survived in this form of miniature is intriguing.

It's not that the figures are expressive. They're not particularly. In the age of van Dyke, arguably the greatest portraitist ever, there's little individuation amongst the figures. But they're powerfully informative: about the repertoire of gestures, costumes and their colours, hand signals (rude and otherwise), props, spatial relations between figures in groups, stock contortions and facial expressions. In a way, their lack of expressivity becomes our advantage, allowing the viewer access to the form without editorial overlay. They're a time-capsule, a souvenir in the original sense. But do you remember? Sugar, for a start, as a plastic, sculptural medium, rather than as simply the comestible it is to this day (the term “sugary” is sometimes used to describe this kind of porcelain sculpture). Also the banquet itself, as a comparison to art, at which these figures appeared on the menu. The wall projected falling, floating and weightless pleasures. An open book rests on top of what appears to be an old radio floor cabinet. An illustration on one of its pages is illuminated and animated, a strange montage of light bulbs that swirls on the page. A few feet away at the end of a black, elongated pyramid shape is a larger book with a similar animated picture. This one is created by a rear-projected video onto a translucent panel inserted into a hollowed out book. The image is of an underwater scene of people swimming in a river.

The texts that accompany the images are fragments of what appear to be pseudo-scientific records. One offers the account of a six year old girl from 30 years ago who, while watching Saturday morning cartoons, has a hallucination that would do both Stephen Hawking and Ken Wilber proud. The other text sets this individual experience within a larger cosmology, as if by meditating on any part, one could glimpse the whole unfolding of the universe.

This is a strange phenomenology that at once seduces with its promise of a unified theory of science and metaphysics, but ultimately frustrates by only offering shards of that vision.

Campbell seems fascinated with how our mundane experience often offers glimpses of a greater reality. The installation explores the possibility of enlightenment in the suburbs, that great consciousness (like great art) is not contingent on location. There are two voices here: the young girl, a most unlikely adept, and the crack-pot, amateur scientist/philosopher who lacks formal training in the area of his intuitions. He
Mindreader) is poised between science fiction and spirituality; as try to...