

## English reports

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Tree Calligraphy 2 TR Gultch

## SACKVILLE, NB

### TROUT RIVER GULCH: PHOTOGRAPHS BY THADDEUS HOLOWNIA

March 15th - April 1st, 2002  
Fog Forest Gallery,  
14 Bridge St., Sackville, N. B.  
Tel.: 506-536-9000 / e-mail  
gallery@nbnet.nb.ca

Thaddeus Holownia is mainly known for the photographs that he has taken around the Tantramar Marsh in New Brunswick. This is the place where he has lived and worked over the last twenty-five years. Holownia has, of course, taken photographs in Canada, the United States and Europe, but it has been those taken closest to home that come to mind when many people think of his work. The photographs in this exhibition are very different not only for where they were taken in Newfoundland, but also in their execution. These photographs were produced during a Gros Morne National Park Artist Residency, a program co-sponsored by Parks Canada and the Art Gallery of Newfoundland and Labrador. Holownia is the first photographer to have taken part in this residency. It has given him the opportunity to make several trips to Newfoundland to take photographs in the Gros Morne Park.

The twenty-four black and white photographs in this exhibition were taken along a sixteen kilometre stretch of road in the park between a place called Woody Point and Trout River, also known as Trout River Gulch. This is a desolate place, yet Holownia has been able to find great

beauty there. Like many of his other photographs, these were taken with his custom built large format, 7' x 17' view camera and then printed as contact prints. Unlike most of Holownia's other large format pictures, many of these photographs have a narrow depth of field. The photographer is known for his images that have razor sharp focus from foreground to background. This results from using a very narrow, or small aperture such as f64 or even f128. The new narrow focus photos were taken with the lens wide open (f8) and using 305 and 450 mm lenses. This results in pictures where the depth of field can be measured in millimetres. A single section of a branch of a tree might be in sharp focus while the rest of the photograph will be in soft focus.

A majority of photographs in this exhibition are a sub-series that Holownia titles *Tree Calligraphy*. It is an apt title, as the trees in these photographs have been twisted into calligraphic-like forms by the harsh forces of nature in this lonely part of Newfoundland. There are photographs in this series that are taken in exactly the same place over a period of several months by this method. They reveal how different the same place can look in the summer and then winter.

All of the photographs in the exhibition are beautiful. This is not surprising, as beautiful is a quality common to all of Holownia's work. Indeed, some critics claim that Holownia's vision whitewashes the reality of nature and, in turn, of life itself. This is not a criticism that I would accept, as I believe beauty to be very important, if not central to art, but I also admit to being a

romantic. Photography can be a difficult artform to criticize. A lot of people who own cameras think of themselves as photographers. In truth it takes a fair bit of vision, as well as a good grasp of technical knowledge to be a photographic artist. Holownia has both of these skill in spades.

The photographs in *Trout River Gulch* are flawless, but it is the artist's vision that makes them art. It is Holownia's ability to see beauty in places that others would pass by that makes the crucial difference. Even then there is more to taking a great picture than just finding the time and place and pushing a button. You need real skill to get it right. The exposure is one thing, and a real important thing it is, and the other is making a decent print. Holownia's prints are far more than decent. They are objects of beauty. Comparing the late American photographer Ansel Adams's photos of national parks with those Holownia made for this show in one of Canada's national parks - Gros Morne, Holownia does not fare badly. His prints are of a similar technical quality to Adams' and he also shares the American's love of

photographing the natural landscape with a large format camera. Holownia is, however, different from Ansel Adams in that he will do a number of photographs on the same subject or place over a period of time. Three sets of series photographs: *Headlighting*, 1974-1977; *Rockland Bridge*, 1981-2000; and *Jolicure Pond*, 1996-2000, were recently (September 28, 2001 - January 20, 2002) included in a major German exhibition at Hamburger Kunsthalle in Hamburg titled *Monet's Legacy, Series-Order and Obsession*. He was the only Canadian artist to be included in this important exhibition.

The Sackville exhibition is a prelude to a major exhibition that the Art Gallery of Newfoundland and Labrador are mounting in 2005 of the photographer's work. It will subsequently tour Canada after its Saint John's opening. Thaddeus Holownia is an artist whose work I have followed for a quarter of a century and during that time he has become a major artist whose work will endure. The works in *Trout River Gulch* are simply wonderful photographs.

Virgil Hammock



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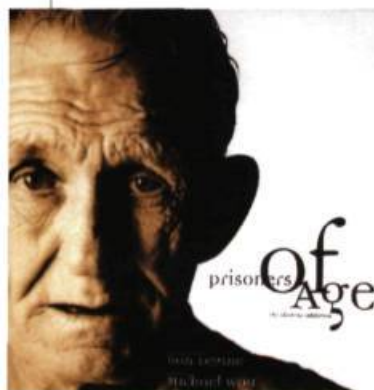


Tree Calligraphy 3 TR Gultch

## MONTREAL

### PRISONERS OF AGE: THE ALCATRAZ EXHIBITION

Photos by Ron Levine  
(Montreal: Synchronicity  
Productions, 2000)



Ron Levine's photos of lifetime prisoners in North America's prisons complete with accounts that form the basis of this book, are both revealing and upsetting, for they document a world of broken dreams, expectancies, and sheer stupidity. As the Montreal-based photographer comments in the book's preface: "In March 1996 I walked into a geriatric prison for the first time. I was expecting metal bars, tiny cells and hardened criminals ready to pounce from every dark crevice of the institution. What I found was not unlike a nursing home, but oddly juxtaposed with barbed wire and guard towers. There were men who required walkers, canes, wheel-chairs... men attached to IV drips, oxygen tanks and catheters. My first thought was 'What can these men possibly do to harm anyone on the outside while in this condition.'"

The subject of an exhibition at the Alcatraz prison (now a museum), Ron Levine's photos are incisive, with an objectivity that opens up a whole world – seldom seen – to the reader. Ron Levine's prison project can likewise be seen on the web at [www.prisonersofage.com](http://www.prisonersofage.com)

John K. Grande

### MICHAEL MERRILL: PAINTING ON THE BORDER OF DISORDER

McClure Gallery of the Visual  
Arts Centre  
350 Victoria, H3Z 2N4  
Tel.: 488-9558  
Feb. 7th - Mar. 2nd, 2002

For his latest exhibition at the McClure Gallery, Michael Merrill uses the photograph as both reference and as a medium of expression. The show consists of three large flashe-on-masonite panel paintings, one small circular work (*London*), and a selection of collages integrating photos in the work. Citing Bill Vazan's photographic reflections from the early 1970s, Alan Paiment, and Escher as influences, Merrill's paintings deftly defy gravity as they recreate sites and spaces of human habitation using 360 degree panoramic perspectives. He achieves this by rearranging the photographs into a schematic layering on the picture plane.

The show's title, *Pan-morphic* means both *pan* (denoting all) and *morph* (denoting form). So in a way these works can be considered fundamentally formalist. That said, they also work as potentially subversive representations of how mass culture can impose itself on the artist's vision and the creative process. This exhibition ushers in a new distinctive episode in Merrill's work. (Previous to this he used his own body as source material for painting on casts, extending his visual method of working by appropriating living environments as site.) This new work carries a cornucopia of traces that draw from his considerable legacy of artistic activity from the past. The resulting works arrive at an original voice.

In the painting *Ottawa (Snow-fall)*, a view from the Wellington Bridge looking deep into the heart of the downtown district, Merrill achieves a technical mastery of the

scenery, and there is a dynamic anarchy to the way he renders this scene with a panoramic 360 degree perspective. The poetic gravitational pull of the large descending snowflakes keep the painting from physically unsettling the viewer. These works are an extension of a series of similar works done while Merrill was in Paris for three months. Bringing exterior photographic documents back to his studio, Merrill set about using the reflective panorama to explore the potential of the photograph as a vehicle to discover new ways of representing space. Merrill considers his oeuvre, over time, to be an "implied self portrait." This work is self referential, even though it also explores sites in their entirety.

The work titled *Studio: St. Henri* is another fine example of Merrill's mastery of composition. Taken from rearranged photographs of a studio in St. Henri, this vertiginous spiral-



ing interior scene includes a blue stretched canvas square near the bottom of the frame. The rest is a maze of vision run riot, all done in a highly sophisticated manner.

The tight integration of architecture and composition, the overlapping of structures and spatial arrangements is analogous to musical composition. (The cacophonic, ordered chaos of Iannis Xenakis comes to mind.) And in the sublime tradition of Merrill's early Expressionist phase (especially the Van Gogh series of 1982-85), we see a scattering of tiny cigarette butt imagery on the studio floor that gives this work a punky sensibility. For its studied non-chalance, Merrill punctuates the picture as a whole with an ironic slant.

Painting is dirty stuff, and its seems, anarchic at its roots, and seems to have animated the works in this latest exhibition. Long may it rust... The spiraling of the spatial arrangements juxtaposed with a realist technique, orders our vision in such a way so as to mutate the realism. Merrill's self-implied works are evolving as purely contemplative spirituality.

Isaac Augustine

## OTTAWA

### GHITTA CAISERMAN-ROTH

Nov. 29th - Dec. 31st, 2001  
Galerie d'art  
Jean-Claude Bergeron  
150 St-Patrick  
Ottawa, Ont. K1N-5J8  
Tel.: 613-562-7836  
Fax: 613-562-1677



Long a part of the Montreal arts scene, Ghitta Caiserman-Roth is holding a rare exhibition event at the Galerie Jean-Claude Bergeron. The show consists of a wide ranging selection of exploratory print and multi-media works that demonstrate the range Caiserman-Roth has achieved in the printmaking medium over the years. Born in Montreal, as a child she painted under the guidance of Alexandre Bercovitch and went on to study printmaking in New York City with Harry Sternberg at the Art Students League. She likewise studied with the painter Moses Soyer and graduated from Parsons School of Design. It was Sternberg who introduced Caiserman-Roth to the prints of Goya, Daumier and the art of Mexican revolutionary artists Posada, Rivera, Siqueiros and Orozco. Their socialist themes excited the young artist for their novel approach to real life subjects. An early lithograph from 1942 titled *Fledgling, Mother Sending son off to War* on view in Ottawa reflects this social realist tendency, integrating elements of the industrial and urban texture of life: factory buildings, a water tower, empty streets. The forms are austere and foreboding, but there is a humanitarian warmth to the pathos and tragedy implicit in the mother and son. Another delightful lithograph titled *Dance Class* (1943) interprets the graceful, elongated and stretching bodies of dance students at Martha Graham's Studio in New York with an elegant flow of lines and forms in space. *Park Benches* (1941), a pastel and charcoal piece, recalls Philip Surrey's social realist urban repertoire with its grouping of people and distinct 1940s coloration. The earlier works from the 1940s and 1950s offer viewers a rare glimpse at original



pastel, charcoal, and ink drawings, as well as oil on paper works in varied formats and sizes.

Albert Dumouchel's class at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Montreal (1962) was an inspirational and liberating influence on Caiserman-Roth's emerging talent, because of the artistic freedom he encouraged. *Wedding* (1961) an oil on paper work from this period has a Chagall-like imagism, with its characterization of a married couple floating through the air, holding a bouquet of flowers. In the late 60's and early 70's, the Ottawa-based printmaker Jennifer Dickson encouraged Caiserman-Roth to branch out and take more chances with the printmaking medium, to use its unique characteristics to further advantage by combining plates, integrating other media and materials in her work. Caiserman-Roth comments: "Printmaking like any other art form is never *just* technique... although techniques in printmaking are difficult and demanding. What is the spirit behind the work? What is the particular quality of that artist? We can call it *content* but what we mean, of course, is the emotional content. We can also call it the emotional content or meaning. We look for a fusion of how it is done with what it says. The tradition of printmaking going back to Rembrandt and remembering Hayter is a rich brew of past and present. However, rules are made to be broken, because this is how we push the frontiers out further... through deeper self knowledge and the occasional breakthrough into new forms and ways of doing things."

Caiserman-Roth's expanded repertoire is on view for all to see at Galerie Jean-Claude Bergeron. It includes reprinting from older plates, superimposing one plate image onto another in the same print, or repeating images in whole or part as a serial image. A cavalcade of imagery: sunflowers, figures embracing, dancers, jugglers, acrobats, interior and exterior spaces intertwine and fuse together in Ghitta Caiserman-Roth's mixed media printworks. They develop internal rhythms and this flourish of forms, shapes, colours conjures up any number of unconscious associations in the viewer's mind. In the *Family series*, she incorporates painted images, symbols and decorative elements around the borders that live up the medium gesturally. Other works are literally painted on aluminum plates earlier used to print from. Dream-like images of faces and forms build up their psychological content in layerings, as if these were memories

collected and brought together from various times and places.

Among her many accomplishments, Ghitta Caiserman-Roth co-authored *Insights, Discoveries, Surprises: Drawing from the Model* (McGill-Queens Press, 1993) with Rhoda Cohen, a book whose candid dialogue, photos of drawings, discoveries and insights when they shared a studio and drew together. The book communicates a lot about the artistic process in a very personal way, just as Ghitta Caiserman-Roth's art does, awakening dormant emotions and sensations with a strong sense of colour and feeling for the tenor of life.

John K. Grande

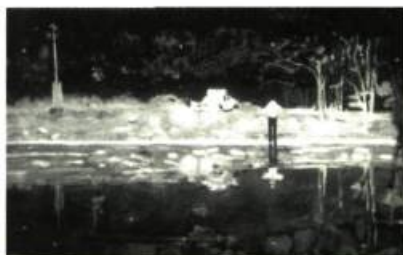
## TORONTO

### PETER DOIG: LANDSCAPES - CANADIAN STYLE?

December 8th, 2001 -  
March 3rd, 2002

THE POWER PLANT

231 Queens Quay West,  
Toronto, M5J 2G8  
Tel.: 416-973-4949



*Ski Jacket*, 1994  
Oil on canvas  
295.3 x 353.5 cm

First, let's get over *How Canadian Is It?* Sarah Milroy in the *Globe and Mail* referred to him as "the one that got away", and the gist of much discussion of this work turns on a great landscape painter that the present generation never produced inside Canada. I'd say "escaped" would be closer to the truth: having graduated from Toronto's Jarvis Collegiate, Doig surveyed the prospects for representational painting in Canada, judged them (correctly) to be bleak, and hi-tailed to England, where he's had a stellar career.

"Canada" is the putative subject of most of these paintings, but I think in a more rhetorical than literal sense. They rather take up Borges' dream-like definition of the country: "Canada is a place so far away it

doesn't really exist". Many of his stretchers follow the classical proportions that Sennelier, the famous Paris frame-maker, calls *Paysage*, but where are these landscapes seen, who inhabits them? The invitation piece is an odd, bicameral work that appears to be the same scene twice, with one side reversed, then butted against the first. In fact, it's based on a picture of a crowded skating rink in Tokyo, but its lateral expansion, combined with its colours and handling, make me think of *The Falls at Lake Memphramagog*, that 1795 icon of early Canadian art history.

Arguably the best piece in the show is *Cabin Essence*, and it's based on a le Corbusier-designed dormitory in the woods of Northern France. And why shouldn't it be? It beautifully conveys the admixture of dread and reassurance that the eye seeks in a northern place. The windows, beams, roofline create a solid, horizontal block amongst the oozing, oily green verticals that predominate in the foreground and middleground.

When he moves into explicitly *Nightmare on Elm Street* territory (in a couple of paintings), the fine psychological balance that Doig navigates tips into a fairly hollow comedy. In *Canoe Lake*, the original video image of a canoe is stretched across the whole canvas, and the person in it is transformed into a green ghoul trailing an arm in the water (the artist has helpfully included many of his source images in a showcase near the gallery entrance). In another, a man with a police car behind him shouts across a pond, as water swirls mysteriously around his ankles.

When they're at their best, though, these paintings play a local, Canadian-*ish* variant on a formal landscape model; no earth-shattering surprises, but pictures that are romantic, spatially convincing and a pleasure to look at in their expansive generosity of field.

Oliver Girling

### YOKO ONO - YES!

February 22 nd -  
May 20 th, 2002

Art Gallery of Ontario  
317 Dundas St. W  
Toronto, Ont. M5T 1G4  
Tel.: 416-977-0414

Between the icebergs of minimalism, conceptual and performance art, Yoko Ono forged a particular brand of time (e)motion study with compassion and a basic humanimal



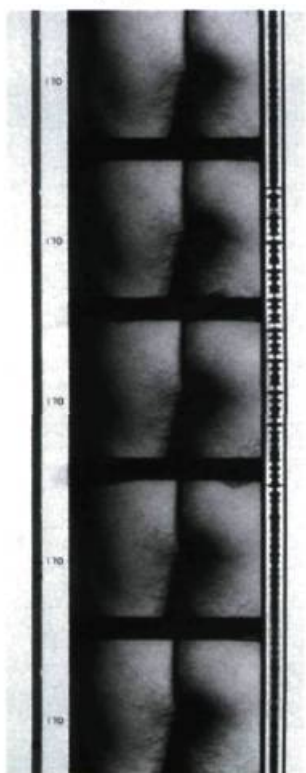
Yes Yoko Ono  
*Cut Piece*, 1965

wisdom, manifesting this in a vast array of ways: as music, performance, objects, installations, in film. "I would like to see the sky machine on every corner of the street instead of the coke machine" Ono wrote in *Grapefruit* in 1974. Chance, the fusion and unusual juxtaposition of idea and object, and an eclectic mix of philosophical and religious world-views came together in Ono's art. As early as 1961 she performed *A Grapefruit in the World of Park: A Piece for Strawberries and Violin*, and *AOS - To David Tudor* at Carnegie Hall. The conceptual bias seen in Ono's art, most evident in her early 1960s and 1970s works, were part of the tenor or fashion of art from that era. A lot of this is on view at the AGO.

The *Yoko Ono Yes!* tour, the first major retrospective of Ono's arts production ever in North America, includes 150 works. Many are Fluxus inspired, with a particular attitude to object and materiality that is highly conceptual. *Pointedness* (1964-66), for instance, consists of a simple crystal sphere with the words: "This sphere will be a sharp point when it gets to the far corners of the room in your mind." *Three Spoons* (1967), places not three, but four spoons in a plexi-box (despite, or because of, the title). Duchampian tricks of the eye and mind informed with a Zen-like sensibility were always Yoko Ono's forte. While sometimes they seem a bit obvious, in the broader scale Ono's imagination and vision helped push the London and New York arts scenes into the mainstream of Pop culture in the 1960s and 1970s. Her actions and writings liberated not only women, but men as well, from the habits and mores of the post-war patriarchy. FOR THE ROSES, NO BOMBS! We see it in

*Sky TV* (1966) a rare Ono videowork that featured a live feed of sky and cloud movement onto a gallery screen. *Water Piece* (Painting to be Watered) (1962-66) with its natural sponge, eye dropper and water, reveal that basic sensitivity to nature's energy, movements and processes. Yoko Ono never abandoned this wisdom and continues to thrive on the exchange between materials, energy and idea...

Among the objects, installations, works on paper, photodocs, and films presented for the Yes! tour are Ono's classic *22 Instructions for Paintings* (1962). Originally exhibited at Sogetsu Art Center in Tokyo in 1962 Ono displayed instructions as paintings in an attempt to push the visual art to some optimal conceptual point. As Ono said: "It would open up a whole new horizon for the visual arts. I was totally excited by the idea and its visual possibilities. To make the point that the instructions were not themselves graphic images, I wanted the instructions to be typed." (An earlier, less purist series with instructions on canvas were shown a year earlier at the AG Gallery, New York.) One Ono instruction painting: "Write five hundred telephone numbers on a canvas in a space as large as your palm. The numbers can be overlapped with one another. Also, the numbers can all be the same. Observe the drawing by enlarging it with a microscope. Also, you may take a picture of the drawing and enlarge it to the size you prefer."



Yes Yoko Ono  
Film n°4 (Bottoms), 1965  
16 mm, black and white, sound, 80 minutes

Yoko Ono's involvement with John Lennon opened up a whole exchange. She commissioned billboards stating *WAR IS OVER!* for Times Square, New York and *DER KRIEG IST AUS!* for Berlin in 1969. *Acorns for Peace* (1969) consisted of one acorn mailed to each of 96 world leaders with a request they plant it for peace. John and Yoko's bed-ins for peace in the Amsterdam Hilton, and in the Bonaventure in Montreal, the *Surrender to Peace* add they took out in the *New York Times* (1983), helped fire up a generation who lived with idealism, loved their performances, and followed their ideas and work with a passion. These interventions and actions often involved reduction, unfettering the materialist mind. Ono's comment! "Make yourself dispensable, like paper." This ephemeral (Asian?) vista view surfaces continually, in the her videos and films. *Fly* (1970) documented a fly moving across a woman's body – the commonplace event becomes epic. Her early Fluxus films *No. 1* and *Eyeblink* stretch and elongate a moment into several minutes. These Ono filmic experiments presaged Andy Warhol's later continuous real time time films. For *No. 4* (Fluxfilm #16) better known as *Bottoms*, Ono captured a body bottom from *derrière*. The shots are so close-up, it becomes an aesthetic statement.

What remains, after all the 1960s ideas, concepts, idealism and excess baggage have evaporated in thin air? The LIVE notion that these events, performances, art concepts were all about, documented in this exhibition – *Yoko Ono Yes!* – are now heavily laden with self-importance. LIKE LEAD! None of this art was ever intended to become ART! Nor was it destined for the Museum of Modern (F)Art (an early Ono performance). Even George Maciunas, that Fluxus ringleader, deplored all the later merchandizing and commodification of Fluxus art. I personally find the new turn (not a U-turn) Yoko Ono has made into installation art, with the *Wish Tree* (1996), *Cleaning Piece* (1997), and more significantly *EX IT* (1997) seems the most alive. Though these works are not in the AGO show they have the most growth potential for future Ono art. Her *EX IT* piece has row upon row of coffins. Trees grow out of holes in the coffin lids. New life emerges from these body containers. Its a powerful affirmation of the ephemeral side of life. YES YOKO breaches the divide between art, nature and society with compassion, above all, and wisdom ONO YES!

John K. Grande

## OUT OF THIS WORLD: TEXTILES FROM THE SPIRIT REALM

The Textile Museum  
55 Centre Avenue,  
Toronto, Ont. M5G 2H5  
Tel. (416) 599-5321/ Fax (416)  
599-2911

With war in Afghanistan, who thinks of the rug-weavers plying their trades amidst the bombs and tanks? Not *National Geographic*, who spent five years tracking down a green-eyed refugee with movie-star looks who'd graced their cover in the '80s. When they did find her and photograph her again, it came as a shock only to the editors and perhaps a few North Americans that she'd never been photographed in between times (or before the first time). Why on earth should she have been? The visual culture of Afghanistan, as well as Turkey, Iran, Uzbekistan, Chechnya and all around the Urals and Caucasus, is astonishingly rich beyond the camera's reach. Although traditional Islamic culture prescribes recognizable imagery, in practice the knotted silk and wool rugs, the silver jewelry, the embroidery and the paintings are rich with images of all kinds.

The exhibition *OUT OF THIS WORLD/Textiles from the Spirit Realm*, curated by Natalia Nekrassova and Max Allen, is an intriguing collection of cloths, batiks, yarn painting and jewelry, that includes an informative section about materials and dyes. The seventeen Islamic prayer rugs on view are especially captivating, not only on account of their formal beauty, but also because they reveal a connection between the motifs of the artisan and experiences of her or his society.

The "war rugs", of which there is a 1991 example, were woven by Chichatoo nomads, and incorporate such items as helicopters and tanks with traditional Garden of Eden imagery (often, though not in this show, these rugs are also partially bleached, to reveal the extent of the weaver's own family loss). Equally striking, stylized hands corresponding to the placement of the actual hands of the supplicant appear on either side of the arch that signifies the mosque in the top portion of the rug.

Lyrical, abstracted flowers represent Elysian fields on a delightful Caucasian rug of the 1870's. It might remind any western viewer of the mountain of knowledge we lack about Chechnya, which our media usually tags (following our post-

September 11 rapprochement with Russia) with a prefix or follows with the words "terrorist" or "Al-Qaeda". It's a good bet that while some Chechnyans battle the Russians in the mountains, many others maintain the oral and hand-craft traditions such as these, that keep their stories going from generation to generation.

Oliver Girling

## SASKATOON

### THE EINSTEIN'S BRAIN PROJECT: PANDAEMONIUM BY ALAN DUNNING / PAUL WOODROW.

January 11 - March 10, 2002  
Mendel Art Gallery  
950 Spadina Cres. E.,  
Saskatoon S7K 3L6  
Tel.: 306-975-7617  
Fax: 306-975-7670

*Pandaemonium* is the latest edition of Alan Dunning and Paul Woodrow's *The Einstein's Brain Project*, a series of collaborative installations characterized by plays on simulation and reality and on the mind/body problem. As described in their artist statement: "The project examines the idea of the world as a construct sustained through the neurological processes contained within the brain. It suggests that the world is not some reality outside ourselves, but is the result of an interior process that makes and sustains our body image and its relationship to a world". The success of *Pandaemonium* depends upon which side of the Matrix you inhabit.

The installation occupies a dim space lit by two video projections on either side of a blue figure that lies on a table in the center of the room. Suspended above the body is a homemade virtual reality headset – all wires, exposed hardware and chassis. A wall text offers a cautious invitation: Though meant to be touched, the work is fragile. The device (the text claims) translates brainwaves into code that alters the abstract images we see projected on the right-hand wall.

The body is a plaster cast of a young man. He is of average height, bald and fit. Because the cast is coated with thermochromic paint, its tone fades slightly in response to the warmth of your hand. Touch is key to this work. As you glide your hands over the body, sensors activate the second screen and the VR headset – both show fuzzy video images taken from what look like old movies, including some Film Noirish scenes. (In my message I found six sensors.)



ALIBI, the Einstein's Brain Project's Anatomically Lifelike Biological Interface  
84 x 34 x 30 in.  
Digital prototype by Alan Dunning  
copyright Einstein's Brain Project 2005

The thesis seems to be that memory is distributed through the body and can be activated kinesthetically. The idea is terrific, but the images the artists' chose are disappointing. Like the body, they are generic, Hollywood clips from half a century or more ago. It is difficult to develop a narrative or find anything specific about the mind/body that might have generated them. It may be that the authors are suggesting that in the media age our memories are collective, engineered by movies and television. Even so, wouldn't the images that stick in an individual mind bear some informing stamp?

The blurry projections, however, are magical and approach the uncanny sublime. They resemble a moment in the brilliant 1967 British sci-fi/horror movie *Quatermass and the Pit* (aka *Five Million Miles to Earth*). In a key scene, the hero scientist dons a strange headset that transmits mental images from one mind to another. The blurry video-like scenes are ancient alien "memories" stored in dormant human DNA – Jung's collective unconscious with a Martian twist. The activation of these memories leads to chaos as people become possessed by their alien aspect. Woodrow and Dunning's *Pandaemonium* has an equally engaging form but the content is not compelling.

It is important to see *Pandaemonium* as part of a greater whole, *The Einstein's Brain Project*, which includes other installations and a website (<http://www.ucalgary.ca/~einbrain/>). If you cruise the website you are likely to be more sympathetic. There is much poetry in this collage of ideas. The voice is that of a mad (computer) scientist who has overdosed on continental philosophy and cyber-hype. The voice is convinced that it inhabits the threshold of

a new paradigm. If you suspend your disbelief (logic and lived experience) and engage in the text's enthusiasm, you realize that the work is in the traditions of conceptual art and fiction. The play (of ideas) is the thing. If you immerse yourself in these solipsistic musings as a form of serious play, you are more likely to appreciate the alchemy. If not, the work may appear as mimicry. Woodrow and Dunning are like the Matrix's Morpheus and it is up to the viewer to choose the red or the blue pill.

Missing from their website is a consideration of what may be the "real" content of *Pandaemonium*. The installation sets up a situation where men, women and children are invited to grope a faux, naked, young man in the dark. I observed some uncomfortable people – particularly young men caught between technological curiosity and homosexual panic-searching for his erogenous triggers!

David Garneau

## VICTORIA

### VICTORIA BLOCK: SURFACES

Nov. 22 - Dec. 23, 2002  
Galerie de la Ville  
Centre des arts de Dollard  
12001 de Salaberry  
Dollard des Ormeaux  
Tel.: 684-1012

Galerie St-Laurent + Hill  
333 Cumberland  
Ottawa, Ont. K1N 7J3  
Tel.: 613-789-7145

Exposition permanente  
Beaux-arts David Astrof  
3650 rue McTavish  
Tel.: 262-9212

For her latest show, Montreal artist Victoria Block has brought together a selection of recent ceramics and paintings. The latest paintings markedly contrast the large scale pas-

tels depicting atmospheres of water and sky for which Block is renowned. As the title of this show – *Surfaces* – suggests, these new works involve the surface of things – be it on a flat two-dimensional surface or the three-dimensional surface of a ceramic piece.

Victoria Block has worked with ceramics for years, not exclusively for exhibition, but more out of personal interest. The ceramic works vary from gourd-like shapes to tiled surfaces to pots. They all draw on forms and patterns from nature. Influences on her ceramic work include Anasazi pottery from New Mexico, and the ceramist June Kaneko. The visual effect of the surface patterns is mesmerizing. The overview and abstract patterning carries over from the flat two-dimensional "tiling" to the three-dimensional pot forms. The effect of this black and white patterning is almost hallucinatory, like looking down at the topography of a landscape from the air. The materiality of the three-dimensional dissolves into pure pattern.

In *Slipstream*, there are sinuous, undulating patterns in black and white on the surface of both the three-dimensional pots and the flat tiling that unify the piece. These patterns recall the rhythms of nature and the forces that shape the world around us. They can inspire us with a sense of mystery and above all – beauty. A *trompe l'oeil* effect is achieved by disguising the dimensionality of the three clay pots. Linear design patterns effectively camouflage the pots into the flat surrounds of a tile designed representation of the chaos and rhythm of nature's design. Questions of appearance and reality, and the illusory nature of life itself – whether in a micro-cosmic or a macro-cosmic scale – are left hanging in the air. Block uses a natural and flowing Op art style that contrasts the rigid linear geometries and patterns seen in Bridget Riley's work.

*River* comprises one clay pot and 84 tiles. The design aspect is stronger.

(It even recalls the decorative experiments of the Omega Workshop in Great Britain). A myriad of forms in bright yellows and blues surface on the surface. They can be imagery – like the fish – painted in a freehand way like traditional painted pottery from the Mediterranean. Or it can simply be effect – that is the effect of looking at a landscape with river flowing through it from the air. It is as though, with these large ceramic floor installations, Victoria Block is recreating a partial vision of the earth as a unified living breathing organism. Playing with visual and spatial effects together, Victoria Block develops a dialogue on the "thing-ness" of matter itself.

Several paintings from Block's older *Open Road* series in this show remind us of the east coast painter James Spencer's work, for the clear open vistas on nature they present us with. The horizon and space distorts and stretches, but towards, not away from, the viewer. The recent paintings are altogether different and have a gritty textural surface effect from mixing sand in with oil paint. They are often mid-ground views of nature, that flourish with an array of colours, blossoming in distinct areas of each scene like flowers. This feeling for the mystery of nature, akin to Odilon Redon when he dealt with the theme, is enhanced precisely because the surfaces are rough, inexact. The textures are wild with contour, and our sense of depth is distorted by the powerful surface effects found in these works. This *hors focus* effect paraphrases – in a visual way – how our memory of a place or experience can become generalized or flattened out.

The gritty resonance, Block achieves in her recent paintings likewise leaves us in a dilemma over surface and content. We can't read further into these works and the ambiguous surface textures merely reify the independence of the painting as an object from that which it represents... Block's *Journey* triptych, for instance, recreates a scene one might see looking out of a cabin window



Block Slipstream

into nature. The window effect establishes an immediate parameter or frame the viewer looks through or into. A tension is established between the landscape scene depicted and the painterly surface effect. For its very inexactitude, and *laissez faire* depiction of a landscape scene, the *fourney* triptych recreates the visual/optical effect of being there. It is more about the sensation of things, than the recording or depiction of "what reality represents". *No Gold Frame* builds the same textural surface effect, recreating a landscape scene from near the Rivière Rouge region of Quebec. Victoria Block's art has a spiritual dimension. This displacement of that sensation of the wilderness or landscape experience, transformed from memory, onto the surface of things – builds a new world of tactile effect and visual sensation. It has a life of its own.

John K. Grande

# **CONTOURS: EXTENDED PAINTING IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST**

December 7, 2001 - March 3, 2002  
Art Gallery of Greater Victoria  
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*Contours*, an exhibition that extends the language of painting, examines the work of ten artists – five from Victoria, five from Seattle. Based on past curatorial moments at the AGGV, *Contours* recalls solo Seattle artist exhibitions from the 1950's and 1960's initiated by then director, Colin Graham i.e. *Mark Tobey: Recent Paintings* (1957), and *Morris Graves* (1959); and *Seattle Now*, a group exhibition from 1984 curated by Greg Bellerbey. The most recent incarnation pairs the talents of Lisa Baldissera, Curator of Contemporary Art at the AGGV, and Matthew Kangas, guest curator from Seattle. As Lisa Baldissera notes, this exhibition is not intended to be a survey of Pacific Northwest work, but instead focuses exclusively on the production of ten artists' work.

Tom Burrows' polymer resin paintings (four diptychs), are beautiful objects – minimal and seductive. *Milky Way* (2001), pairs two panels – one a deep, smoky aubergine and the other black. The latter has "Alphabits" that cluster in suspension, forming constellations reminiscent of the night sky. Like the paintings of Vija

Celmins and Paterson Ewen, Tom Burrows' works are elegiac meditations on life and its passing. *Victoria Arrangement* (2001-2002), a painting installation by Seattle artist Susan Dory, articulates the wall. Seventeen panels of various dimensions employ a complex technique of sprayed enamel and wax on birch. Stenciled patterns emerge and dissolve as though viewed through the lens of a microscope. The randomly organized abstract patterns resemble structures found in nature. Three works by Isabel Kahn, a Seattle printmaker, reference traditional textiles such as kimono and prayer shawls. Kahn combines intricate layers of handmade mulberry paper mounted on muslin. She works small sections of alternating prints, mounting them together into architectural pieces like *Grass Ladder* (2000). The structure of this scroll is composed of twelve sections that combine ink wash painting with printmaking techniques. *The Space Between Us* (2001), a wall-sized mural in two sections has a rhythmic surface, organic, and punctuated with Hebrew text. Isabel Kahn's art is heroic and formal, with an abstract language. In the spirit of Duchamp, Patrick Holderfield combines found objects – toys, car parts, and trophies, with painted poly-urethane foam. The protruding elements, like bloated organs, refer to the body and its hidden functions. *Untitled (Bumper)* extends the metaphor of road-kill into the realm of the absurd!

Seattle based Jesse Paul Miller's *Unknown Collaboration* (2001), paints the wall casually with an image borrowed from computer programs. The patterns are repeated on the floor in organized collections of debris scraps found on the streets of Victoria. Miller's other installation, *7 Light Drawings* (2001), is a sound and laser light piece. The viewer "gets it" through the simple act of listening. Physical action – pouring, dripping, and tilting, dominate the art practice of Mark Takamichi Miller (Seattle). The multiple layering of colour and image are skillful. Two of the six acrylic panels are titled: *The Beginning of the World* (2001) and *The Origin of the World* (2000), titles that seem to show how curious about time and place Miller is. Takamichi Miller's paintings contain themselves within their contours. Like Takamichi Miller, Brian G. White (Victoria), immerses himself in the physical act of painting. *The Beginning of the End* (2001-2002), is a site-specific stripe painting that extends across the entire length of one wall: it is the wall. White's practice is rigorously conceptual and relies for its effect on the viewer's physical re-

sponse (often described as vertiginous). Stephanie Aitken's canvases are quiet places where nothing happens. Her imagery is private and poetic, obscured, and at times altered. Imagine a Jules Olitski canvas in which moths and butterflies or seed clusters and spheres of light are suspended. Imagine a lot of space in which these forms hover between opacity and transparency, between being and becoming. *Parish* (2001), and *Trappist* (2001), are tiny fields of colour, fragile, barely there. We are attracted to their beauty. For all their delicacy, Stephanie Aitken's paintings are resilient, and possess a tenacity for life. They nurture, and like prayers, protect us.

Jeremy Borsos' Salon-style painting installation appropriates imagery from numerous sources. *Susanna and the Elderberries* (2001), is a spoof on the original and on its feminist revisions. *Jenny, After Boucher* (2001), and *To Forgive is Human, to Err Divine* (1999), further scramble our notions of painting and its traditions. Borsos' audacious irreverence does not hide the brilliance of a mind that is constantly pushing the limits, demanding (of himself), new forms of expression. *Twentieth Cen-*



Patrick Holderfield  
*Untitled (bumper)*, 1998  
metal polyurethane foam and acrylic paint  
Courtesy of Artist and James Harries Gallery,  
Seattle

*tury Limited* (2000), a deceptively delicate oil on canvas, hung in isolation, depicts a steam locomotive, the little engine that couldn't, derailing into an indeterminate landscape. Framed by a device that resembles a dysfunctional chandelier (light source), this painting is apocalyptic! Derailment as a metaphor for art and life is a frightening and an exhilarating thought. If we continue to believe art is necessary for civilization to continue, then derailment, creative or spiritual, or both is welcome and necessary. *Contours* as an exhibition, supports this notion.

Linda Giles

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