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HALIFAX

THE DUPLESSIS COLLECTION

Art Gallery of Nova Scotia
www.agns.gov.ns.ca
June 21st-Sept 14th, 2003

For the first time ever, the Duplessis Collection from the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec can be seen outside of Quebec. This interesting exhibition presents 54 of the 65 paintings in the Quebec museum's Duplessis Collection. These are mainly 19th century landscapes and genre paintings by European and Canadian artists including Eugène Boudin, Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot, Johan Barthold Jongkind, Cornelis Krieghoff, Joseph Mallard William Turner, Frederick Simpson Coburn, Allan Edson and Horatio Walker.

Most readers of VIE des Arts are well aware of the political career of Maurice Duplessis, the long-term premier of Quebec, but may not know of his interest in art. This collection results from that interest and, on his death, Duplessis willed the collection to the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec. The works in this collection reflect Duplessis' conservative tastes, but are, nevertheless, first class examples of these artists' oeuvre. A cornerstone of Canadian art, landscape painting was so popular in the past, it could be said there where probably more landscape paintings than trees in this country (and we are a country with a lot of trees). The Group of Seven made its nationalistic statement in landscape paintings, but the paintings in this exhibition generally pre-date the Group. Instead, they reflect, even in the Canadian work, European tastes.

A fine example is the painting by the Canadian artist Horatio Walker (1858-1938) titled Turning the Harrow. This work clearly reflects the influence of the Barbizon School and Corot and these same influences were rigorously rejected by the Group of Seven.

Edna, Allen A 1846-1888
Le temps est à Fonge, in Men of the Magog

As for Corot (1796-1875), three of his works are in the exhibition and include a very late work from 1872 or 1873 titled One Fine Evening, Souvenir from Italy. Corot was clearly the master who influenced many Canadian and European artists in the 19th and early 20th century. The Barbizon School was very different both in its intent and methods from Impressionism although the two movements paralleled each other in time. History has rewarded the Impressionists and pretty much left the painters of the Barbizon in its wake. It is a good time to take another look at Corot and his followers and this show provides the opportunity to do so.

Many other types of painting can be seen in this exhibition such as the Canadian Impressionist James Wilson Morrice who worked closely with Henri Matisse. To my mind, Morrice is one of the finest Canadian artists in the 20th century. There are also a number of works by the Dutch born artist Cornelis Krieghoff (1815-1872) who spent a good deal of his active career (1846-63) in Quebec. Krieghoff painted many, many pictures of rural Quebec life and there was a small army of imitators. It is hard to place Krieghoff in a particular school, as he was largely self-taught and worked in isolation, but his work is an important part of Canadian art history.

This is one of the first AGNS exhibitions under the stewardship of director Jeff Spalding who, served at the University of Lethbridge Art Gallery and, most recently, as director at the Appleton Museum of Art in Ocala, Florida. A balance in the exhibitions selection at the AGNS, from its permanent collection to challenging exhibitions of contemporary art, to historical shows like the Duplessis Collection is being achieved by Jeff Spalding. In on holidays or business on the East Coast the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia is always worth the visit!

Virgil Hammock
Laurent Bouchard, an artist whose origins are in north of Quebec, has created a series of unusual landscapes that use wood sections from the landscape to depict nature views. While Bouchard has exhibited in numerous galleries including Elia London, Simon Dresdner in Toronto, and the Century Gallery in Los Angeles, he is less well known to audiences in Montreal where he actually lives. Bouchard's landscapes come in many sizes and they innovate with wood grain, making it an element in the composition. The wood being used for the art is actually recycled from ends and rejects of logs from a furniture factory.

The most imposing artwork in the Geo-Landscape exhibition actually consists of two large circular agglomerations of many of these mini-landscapes Laurent Bouchard creates. Each singular piece depicts a nature vision in microcosm. They can be of mountains, rivers, forests or a detail of nature. Out of many landscapes the artist has created an abstract object-like wallscape that is actually a conceptual work that plays with the dual aspects of object metaphor and representation.

The show includes others mixed media works by Bouchard that are more like interior self-conceived landscapes of the mind. These abstract and multi-faceted works look more formal. They could even bring to mind Russian Utopic painters and sculpures of the early 20th century in the way they play with geometry. Signs and symbols in acrylic are juxtaposed to the artist's obvious enjoyment of playing on and with formalist language in art. One such piece has integrated two forms made from tomato plant holders. Joined together they look highly sculptural and strangely symbolic. Placed above and below a stylized oval (or kayak-like) painted form they bring a certain tension to the piece. Beyond the matter and materiality of Laurent Bouchard's Geo-Landscape representations, there is a spiritual sense of awakening to the endless transformations we experience in nature and, in this instance, art.

John K. Grande

ROBERT LE GRESLEY
Galerie d'art d'Outremont
outremont.ville.montreal.qc.ca
to April 27th, 2003

An inveterate collector of antique ephemera, and objects from the past, Robert Le Gresley reassembles and collates all this nostalgia into some very amusing artworks. All the Duchampian tricks possible are taken out of Le Gresley's kitbag to create compositions that speak out to us, for they use objects of the everyday with wit and wisdom. It is because these assemblages collage elements once practical and part of the ordinary, that makes them so fun for we have personal associations with some of them and are curious about others.

There is the magic we find in American Joseph Cornell's tiny box assemblages in Le Gresley's art, but they are more linear, thematic, and follow a straight line of reason usually, even if they are eclectic. For instance one such work includes an...
John K. Grande

TORONTO

IAN LAZARUS
OUROBOROS
DeLeon White Gallery
1096 Queen St. W.
Tel.: 416-597-9466

LILY OTASEVIC
Burston Gallery
1092 Queen W.
Tel.: 416-526-1232

CAROL CONDÉ & KARL BEVERIDGE
CALLING THE SHOTS
A-Space Gallery
401 Richmond St. W.
www.aspacegallery.org

Ian Lazarus
Ouroboros

agglomeration of old picture frames whose re-composition becomes its own artwork. De la parée au mensonge the artist assembles potato mashers into a César-like assemblage, and Car serv à quoi d’autre le plus beau petit chapeau si l’as rien dans ton garde-robe does the same with coat hangers (and an angelic face). Without a doubt Le Gresley delves into objects from the past with a passion for nostalgia. From old books to comic books, from metal grills to angels, carved bits and pieces, even enamel wall plaques, and with a passion for personifying history Le Gresley turns everything into art.

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Ian Lazarus
Ouroboros

flattened by the general anomic that is the art world in 2003, the good news is: Shapeshifting, or biomorphism, by its proper name. Another way to put it is moving on: sculptors finding their way into oil paint and digital imaging, designers turning to metal wall-relied and polemicists turning to portraiture. These transformations aren’t universally popular, but changing form is always a threat to the peace, and if not now, when?

IAN LAZARUS is a well-known Toronto sculptor whose work combines metal, rock and earth in both interior and landscape installations. In his first painting exhibition, Ouroboros at DeLeon White Gallery, he is showing a group of eight oils and one image reproduced photographically from Photoshop. This has apparently caused consternation: should sculptors paint? (For that matter, should Giacometti have written that critique of the ‘58 Studelbanker for Studio Magazine?)

Ouroboros, as H.P. Lovecraft fans and others know, is the worm that eats its own tail, symbolizing for us the circle, the cyclic nature of the Universe, as well as movement and continuity. Yet in spite of the unashamedly lush paint handling, and the microscopic and macro-cosmic subject matter, the feeling of the work is neither abstract (although there are no figures here) nor entirely organic; there are clear geometric elements and perspective space.

By moving from a mathematical, 3-D computer model into real space and the more improvisational medium of paint on canvas, these paradoxal works reverse the sequence that culminated in the fixed optics of Renaissance perspective, starting from the tactile, improvisational pictures of the Middle Ages.

At the same time, they juice up the perspectival model, repositioning it as a system for mapping both deep, inner and wide, outer space.

The circular motif was also present in the work of Lily Otasevic at next-door Burston Gallery a month earlier. A graphic designer as well as a sculptor, Otasevic has deployed metals in the fabrication of a number of wall-relied sculptures. She begins with an emblematic, circular shape, then complicates it through the use of texture and volumetric continuity. There’s a great sprightliness to this work, like the metal bricolage you see adorning Brazilianian favellas or Mexican shantytowns. It also put me in mind of early modern sculpture, Gabo, Pevsner, Barbara Hepworth, in the way that the artist invests the metal with a light plasticity: sheet copper, aluminum, nails, scratches, nail-heads, wire on wooden supports. Yet the work is not nostalgic, which is a huge relief in this RetroArt era.

At A-Space, a project by the photographers Carol Conde and Karl Beveridge is part of the annual Mayworks festival that celebrates working people. Like Lazarus, they use Photoshop as an essential part of their toolkit, but to very different ends. For the past many years they’ve produced work in collaboration with unions and community groups, here in four sequential series of photographs. These deal with the history and present of the health care system, the fourth with globalization.

Notwithstanding the artists’ disclaimer, many of these images function autonomously, as powerful images and compositions. This is especially true of the series All Wind, whose subject is health-care workers, and Calling the Shots, the piece about an anti-globalization demonstration. If these images succeed in their pedagogic ambitions, their success comes from the faces they photograph. It’s a remarkable catalogue that combines real people on the job with actors who give the scene a suitably artificial patina. This raises the question: why should psychological affinity with the viewer, on which portraiture has always rested, be more interesting than vocational affinity between subjects, the shadow of the job that resonates in their faces?

OLIVER GIRLING

VANCOUVER

VESSNA PERUMOVICH
WHOLE
TAG (Third Avenue Gallery)
Tel: 604-738-3500
www.tag.bc.ca
April 3-26, 2003

Yugoslavian-born Vessna Perumovich juxtaposes metaphors while fusing them together in two very different media: video and installation. Unconscious and conscious associations fly back and forth, fuse, merge, and seem to defy any reasonable explanation. Somehow, there is this combination of violence and domesticity, of the familiar and banal and the horrific and terrifying. This makes for a very abstract and far away kind of artistic message. These tensions could be part of your everyday experience when your life becomes shattered by war, or domestic violence. Imagery of an A-Bomb expanding into a mushroom cloud and of things being blown apart into fragments definitely cannot reassure us of much. These stunning images, (re-edited for this show) gradually shift into micro-cosmic nature patterns of grasness and the sounds likewise become subtler, softer. This imagery wall is juxtaposed next to a metaphorical house made of stretchy, sensual black elastic you can enter and exit this house at will. This is a construct more than a reality.

The images shatter our sense of the ordinary and are as upsetting as the house is reassuring. The video images, even the violent ones, are strangely beautiful, even have a hypnotic effect. The gentler kinder close-ups of green grasness offer a note of hope, of rebirth after destruction; contrasts are intentional and graphic.
The basic dumbing down of themes with a mask becomes a series of that effectively. A paradoxical figure conflicting and muddy symbolic paintings in this show are laden with very strategic and self-conscious illusion meets reality. W(Hole) is a conscious, personal meets social, iljuxtaposed with video images. Highforms, guities of the human condition... not code. I guess they play with ambi­message layers that I cannot de­

Unfortunately the mixed media paintings in this show are laden with conflicting and muddy symbolic message layers that I cannot decode. I guess they play with ambiguities of the human condition... not that effectively. A paradoxical figure with a mask becomes a series of lines and primitive constructive forms, ... The installation that follows echoes the first. This hybrid has a bed (also made of elastic - black this time instead of white) that again suggests domesticity, again juxtaposed with video images. Highlighting a place where Perunovich believes the "conscious meets uncon­scious, personal meets social, ilusion meets reality" W(Hole) is a very strategic and self-conscious show. It simplifies what can be an exciting subject - conflicting forces inherent to the human condition. The basic dumbing down of themes makes me, for one, suspicious. A more essential creative potential and dynamic has been reduced to stereotypes and platitudes we all know and have seen a priori - in the media.

John K. Grande

STEPHEN HUTCHINGS TOWARDS ARCADIA Jennifer Kostuik Gallery www.kostuikgallery.com Tel.: 604-737-3969 April 3–27, 2003 Arcady, as opposed to the real Arcadia, which is a mountainous region in the south of Greece, was a subject painters obsessed about, and painted in the Romantic era. Arcady was an ideal, rustic paradise populated by peoples living in harmony with nature. Stephen Hutchings Towards Arcadia show has scenes that are not overviews and they have partial glimpses of nature. These paintings unsettle us because there is something strangely unnatural about this nature-based world. The nature Hutchings paints looks culled, edited and cultivated with no animals or people, just isolated elements like trees and leaves, a road and flat skies. Indeed if this is nature, it is a postModern one; nature is edited down, even unnatural and with a reduced colour scale and arrangement of elements.

Is this nature a fragment of something larger? Has it been reduced? In a way nature is idealized and sterilized, yet aesthetic and beautiful at the same time. It is an image of nature most urban dwellers would like as they no longer experience unbridled nature. We could never recognize where these scenes are and they look synthetic. Indeed they could be many places, and they are infused with a misty ambiguity. The painterly quality of these images seem secondary to the graphic assemblage composition, the reduction of elements and even the chromatic scale. We see this in Tree with Road (2003), Towards Arcadia (2003) and Veil (2003) all charcoal and oil on canvas works. The reduction of colours and selection of details is analogous to the computer methods of altering scale, hue, even cut and paste in composition but in this case it is done by a painter working in an age old medium. The hazy, almost photographic quality of some works only adds to that sense of nostalgia for a world where humility was purported to be more in harmony with nature. It is achieved by a painterly process involving applying layers of oil glazes to an original charcoal drawing, thus building up a luminous surface effect.

For all its Romantic pretense or nostalgic flair, Hutchings art is absolutely postModern in sensibility reconfigures, adapts a scene, and reconstructs its elements. A series of small graphite details of nature from 1998 are sensitive natural details captured as a glimpse. Leaves #2 (2003) has a Japanese calligraphic quality for it plays with leaf patterns on a flat background with a Haku-like poetry. Though idyllic, these scenes no longer adhere to any specific reality or context. Nineteenth century Romantic painting was fascinating because the beatific Arcadian scene suggested it could be part of a reality. In a sense Hutchings painting mirrors the process of denaturation our culture is now experiencing. He paints with a flair for what art and nature should look like and this is good, for these paintings depict scenes of beauty in a world transferred on ugliness.

John K. Grande

WASHINGTON DC

GERHARD RICHTER FORTY YEARS OF PAINTING Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden http://hirshhorn.si.edu Gerhard Richter's mercurial career as a painter is controversial and contested by many in the art world. Yet while his paintings may be said to occasionally stretch themselves too thin in terms of diversity of style and content, they likewise have great pertinence for the political and aesthetic questions they
Richter's art is most interesting, to my mind, when it seizes on the effects of electronic, photo-based and screen production of imagery in contemporary culture. Parallels can be drawn between Andres Serrano's photos of victims of violence in the morgue and Gerhard Richter's paintings of the dead bodies of youthful idealists turned terrorists of the Baader-Meinhof group found in prison in Germany. Were they victims of police espionage or genuine suicides? One is still not sure, but what surfaces in Richter that is distinct from Serrano is his ability to turn back to an older medium, namely painting, yet use contemporary imagery as source for this. This effect achieves very different results depending on the subjects, whether a snapshot of Richter's Uncle Rudi in Nazi uniform, media images of Cold War fighter planes in combat, or Jacqueline Kennedy in mourning.

The Colour Charts such as Six Colors (1966) which is a Pop art version of a paint merchant's sampler and 256 Colors (1974) which has something to do with mixing paint colours are the most dubious in terms of their significance. Though these appear as "abstracts", their spirit is more Duchampian. The later works from the 1990s vary from abstraction to exercises in repainted landscapes based on photo imagery. Even more self-conscious are the memento mori with their skulls and flickering candles painted with a Baroque naturalism that reminds one of Georges de la Tour and Francisco de Zurbaran. Seeing a retrospective with such a repertoire draws one to consider Richter as a philosopher, dabbling here and there with visual codes and image signifiers. The questions his art raise have a lot to do with freedom of thought in an age of mass reproduction and technological innovation. A splendid show!

John K. Grande

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