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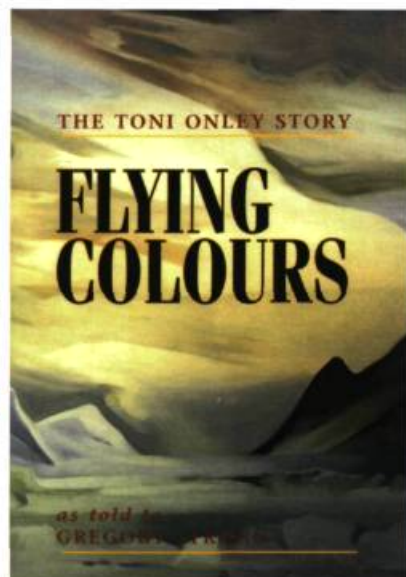
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## FLYING COLOURS

THE TONI ONLEY STORY

Harbour Publishing, 2002, 336 pages, illustrated, \$36.95  
www.harbourpublishing.com

Media attention came to Toni Onley not for his aesthetic or artistic practise, but instead for threatening to burn his own art and prints in protest of Revenue Canada 1983 decision it would tax artists on unsold paintings at the end of each year. Revenue Canada ultimately changed its policy. A succession of Toni Onley books have come out over the years (one might even say almost religiously) the most noteworthy undoubtedly *Walls of India* (1985) for which lifelong friend, Canadian man of letters and Orwell biographer (*The Crystal Spirit*) George Woodcock wrote the travelogue/text. Other were equally rewarding for Onley's remarkably evocative post-Turner-esque watercolours achieved over the years in diverse regions of Canada and the world. These include *A Silent Thunder* (1981), *Onley's Arctic* (1989) and the most recent *Toni Onley's British Columbia* published by Raincoast Books in 1999.

The latest book recounts adventures, anecdotes and real life stories surrounding the myth and reputation of Onley. It begins with childhood on the Isle of Man where he had a job cleaning a huge printing press, and include the air crash on the Cheakamus glacier from which Onley and photographer John Reeves miraculously survived. They hung in their Wilga plane in a crevasse overnight in a blizzard before a chopper saved them from near certain death from exposure. Onley's numerous adventures are

marked by one salient characteristic which is his ability to see the bright side of misfortune, and persist despite the odds.

Born on the Isle of Man, Toni Onley came to Canada in 1948. He first came to Penticton where his parents lived with his two daughters in 1955, after the sudden death of his wife, Mary. Working as a draughtsman and designer, and with an application for a scholarship to attend the Art Institute of San Miguel de Allende accepted, he held an auction in the Knights of Pythias Hall in Penticton in 1957,

where 250 works sold, many for a minimal \$5. Thus raising \$1,300 he went off to Mexico with his two daughters. The Mexican sojourn was a watershed experience for his art. A year later (1958) he held a one-man show at the Vancouver Art Gallery. The rest, as they say, is history.

Now 75, Toni Onley achieved artistic success in 1980 when more than 1,200 of his works sold for close to \$1 million to an anonymous buyer - the "Fraser Valley Phantom." International public collections like the Tate Gallery, the National Gallery of Canada, the Museum of Modern Art (New York) and the Victoria & Albert Museum (London) include Toni Onley art in their collections. The best reading in this book, to my mind comes with Onley's personal reflections on his experience as an artist; exhibiting at Dorothy Cameron's *Here and Now Gallery* in Toronto; being told by Sir John Rothenstein that he is quintessentially English in style after living in Canada for 15 years; hearing Guido Molinari criticize the great Jackson Pollock; meeting "Pope" Clement Greenberg at the Emma Lake Workshop; visiting the Franklin cenotaph on Beechy Island in the Arctic or Mount Fuji in Japan. All these anecdotes and many more such as the public reaction to Onley's huge abstract mural (1961) being installed at the Queen Elizabeth Playhouse (now Vancouver Playhouse) are most amusing enough!

*Flying Colours* is a rewarding and remarkable for the way it documents one Canadian artist who, with considerable talent and gumption, made a go of his life as an artist despite the odds.

John K. Grande

## HALIFAX

### THE DUPLESSIS COLLECTION

Art Gallery of Nova Scotia

www.agns.gov.ns.ca

June 21<sup>st</sup>–Sept 14<sup>th</sup>, 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 34 of the 65 paintings in the Quebec museum's Duplessis Collection. These are mainly 19<sup>th</sup> century landscapes and genre paintings by European and Canadian artists including Eugène Boudin, Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot, Johan Barhold Jongkind, Cornelius 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 the collection reflect Duplessis' conservative taste, but are, nevertheless, first class examples of these artists' *œuvre*. 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 statements with their 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 Barizon School and Corot and these same influences were vigorously rejected by the Group of Seven.

Edson, Allen A 1846-1888  
*Le temps est à l'orage,*  
lac Memphrémagog



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 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Barizon 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 Barizon 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 20<sup>th</sup> century. There are also a number of works by the Dutch born artist Cornelius Krieghoff (1815-1872) who spend 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





Tania Girard-Savoie, 2002  
*Paysages morphologiques*

## VICTORIAVILLE

### TANIA GIRARD-SAVOIE

#### MORPHOLOGICAL LANDSCAPES

Colisée

Paradoxically full of life these beautiful morphologies, a crazy-quilt or tapestry of nature in microcosm by Tania Girard-Savoie derive from X-Ray of the cancer that took her own father's life. As an homage to someone she loves, these landscapes present contrasting fragments of what looks like an abstract world where forms are perpetually in transformation.

These huge (10ft. by 10ft.) works are contrasted by the black walls they are exhibited on. Lively and colourful, each "tableau" has 25 individual squares. Each is painted and adapted using image transfer techniques. Are they monotypes? While the sources for these "paintings" are objective and scientific (the X-Ray), a strange poetic harmony emerges from the dislocation and juxtaposition of these images when seen together. Ironically, the cancer that takes a person's life actually is an altogether different life form itself. We look into each section of these works only to discover a beautifully abstract world that is equally an illness. Five works were created especially for Victoriaville's 2003 Festival International de Musique Actuelle.

What is most unusual about this Quebec-based artist's presentation, as seen in two large paintings titled *Vision nocturne* (each is 8 works on canvas, one predominantly blue, the other red) is how she juxtaposes elements within nature, presenting their textures, variations and contrasts on flat reflective surfaces, and in so doing presents a vision of a world where nature's power to transform is a powerful and abstract metaphor for infinity.

John K. Grande

## MONTREAL

### LAURENT BOUCHARD

#### Geo-LANDSCAPE CONFIGURATIONS

Espace 200

Feb. 22<sup>nd</sup>–March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2003

Laurent Bouchard  
*Geo-Landscape Configuration*  
(Installation view)



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 Elca London, Simon Dresdnere 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 sculptures of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the way they play with geometry. Signs and symbols in acrylic are juxtaposed to create unusual accidental looking configurations. In some of these materials as diverse as plexiglass and aluminum, and plywood are combined. The variation in sizes and shapes of each work testify 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 ogival (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 27<sup>th</sup>, 2003



Robert Le Gresley, 2000  
*Chaud d'hier Froid demain*

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



agglomeration of old picture frames whose re-composition becomes its own artwork. *De la purée au menu* assembles potato mashers into a Césaire-like assemblage, and *Ca sert à quoi d'avoir Le plus beau petit chapeau si t'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.

John K. Grande

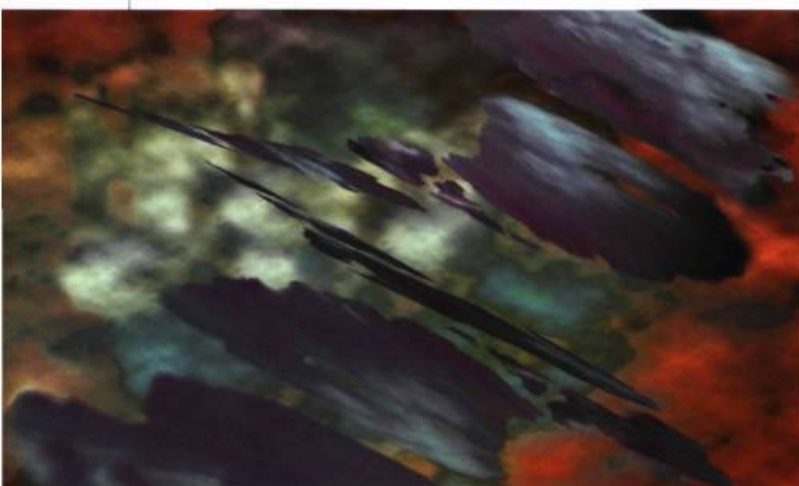
## TORONTO

### IAN LAZARUS

#### OUROBOROS

DeLeon White Gallery  
1096 Queen St. W.

Tel.: 416-597-9466



Ian Lazarus  
*Ouroboros* 9

### LILY OTASEVIC

Burston Gallery  
1092 Queen W.

Tel.: 416-516-1232

### CAROL CONDÉ & KARL BEVERIDGE

#### CALLING THE SHOTS

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www.aspacegallery.org

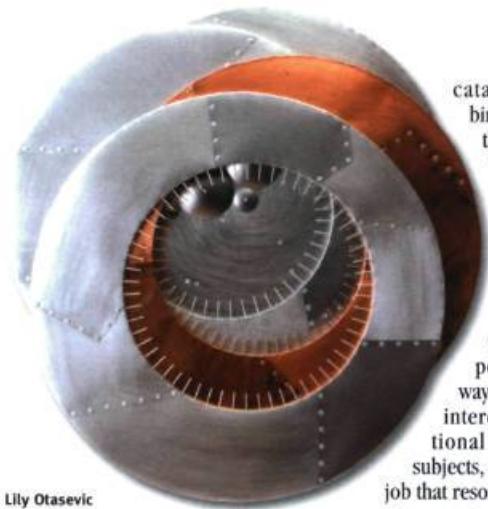
In Toronto this spring, masked against the stranger breathing SARS, besieged by Egyptian mosquitoes, sitting on herds of live cattle that can no longer be sold as hamburger,

flattened by the general anomie 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-relief 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 Studebaker for Studio Magazine?) The deed is done, and the results are surprising, even for painters.

*Ouroboros*, as H.P. Lovecraft fans and others know, is the worm that eats its own tail, symbolizing for Lazarus 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 paradoxical works reverse the sequence that culminated in the fixed optics of Renaissance perspective, starting from the tactile, improvisational pictures of the Middle Ages.



Lily Otasevic  
*Pique*

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-relief 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 Brazilian favelas 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 Retro/Art era.

At A-Space, a project by the photographers Carol Condé 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. Three 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 *Ill 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 PERUNOVICH

#### W(HOLE)

TAG (Third Avenue Gallery)

Tel.: 604-738-3500

www.tag.bc.ca

April 3-26, 2003

Yugoslavian-born Vessna Perunovich 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 grasses and the sounds likewise become subtler, softer. This imagery wall is juxtaposed next to a metaphoric house made of stretchy, sensual black elastic you can enter and exit this house at will. This house 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 grasses offer a note of hope, of rebirth after destruction; contrasts are intentional and graphic.





Vessna Perunovich  
*W(Hole)*

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, illusion 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](http://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 element 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 humanity 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 Haiku-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 denaturalization 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 transfixed 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

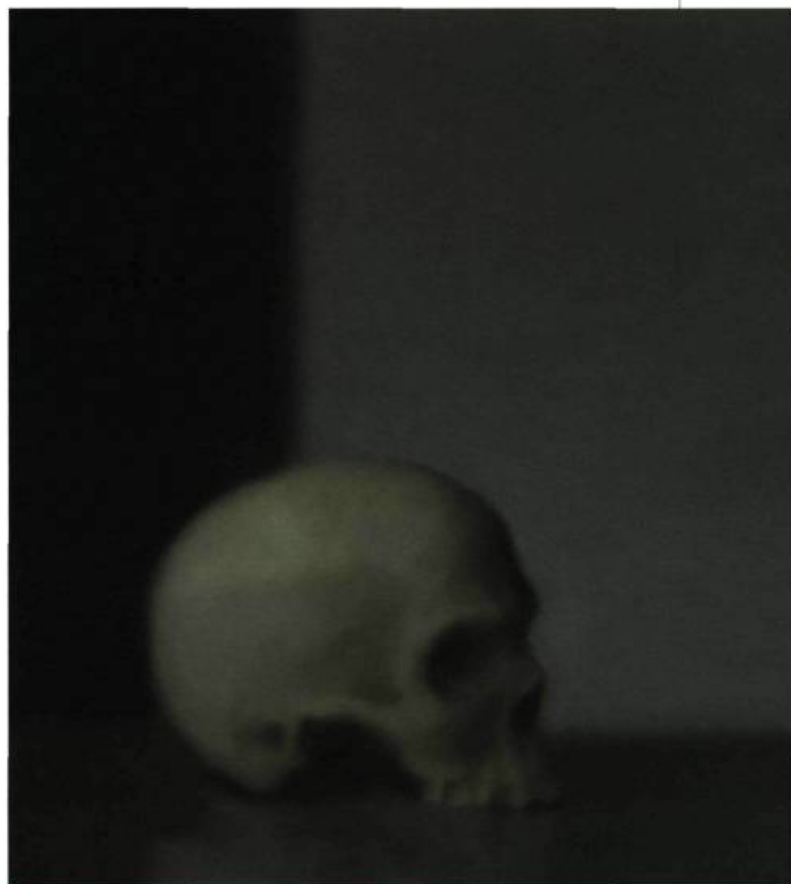
#### Gerhard Richter

"Skull [Schädel]," 1983.

Oil on canvas, 21 11/16 x 19 11/16 in. (55 x 50 cm).

Private collection. © Gerhard Richter.

Photo courtesy Gerhard Richter.



# DES vie ARTS

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raise. 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 this 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 to my mind 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 Zurbarán. 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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