Tony Urquhart’s Life Passages: Inside + Out

An Interview with John K. Grande

Born in Niagara Falls, Ontario in 1956, Tony Urquhart was known for his abstract landscape style in the 1950s. Associated with the London group of painters that included Jack Chambers, Walter Redinger, Ed Zelenak, Paterson Ewen and Gregory Jurkow, Urquhart was a co-founder of CAR (Canadian Artists Representation). In 1965, Urquhart began integrating surreal, mythic and symbolical elements into his art, using a variety of combined media. Tony Urquhart’s “box landscapes,” containers with landscapes inside, drew a lot of attention when they were first exhibited. Universal themes, all meticulously interpreted with an eye for real life detail, all make his art an invaluable part of Canada’s art scene. For Tony Urquhart, life is the ultimate source for all thing(s).

He was awarded the Order of Canada in 1995.

JG: Did you show with Dorothy Cameron in Toronto in the 1950s?

TU: Never formally. She used to visit Niagara Falls in the mid - 1950s when I was still in school. I used to call her aunt Dorothy. She was so good to me. People from Toronto came with her and bought things. In 1956 I went with the Isaacs Gallery. When she opened a gallery (1959 - 1960), she tried to get me to exhibit with her. I would have loved to, but Av Isaacs wouldn’t split my output.

JG: Tell me more about your early works?

TU: By accident I went to the Albright School in Buffalo rather than OCAD in Toronto. A friend of the family had some ruled lettering, some advertising design from the Albright. It amazed me because it was all done by compasses. We didn’t have Letraset then. I said “Oh! Wow! It must be a great school!” It was a great school, but mainly because they had good people, and the Albright Knox Art Gallery was right across the street so I had first hand experience of all this abstract expressionist stuff. They were purchasing De Kooning, Rothko, Gorky, everything was there, even a Francis Bacon, which I initially thought was terrible. Two weeks later I was painting away and found I was producing a “Bacon”. I now think Bacon is by far the best painter of that era. The Albright was strictly a painting school. No sculpture. No printmaking.

JG: You were one of the few Canadians to show in New York early on weren’t you?

TU: I did exhibit individual paintings in New York, including at the National Academy of Art and Design in the late 1950s. They purchased a Francis Bacon-like piece of mine that I have never seen since and I was in the Guggenheim International with Jack Shadbolt, Jean-Paul Riopelle, Graham Coughtry and Charles Gagnon (1958). We won the prize for the best group of paintings.

JG: There is often this fusion of natural forms and human built structures - sometimes archaic - in your art.

TU: When I started out, I was an abstract landscape painter, especially as a student. Everybody was keen on the Group of Seven, but art school and a trip to Europe sort of knocked that out of me. The first trip to Europe I saw old Masters in the “flesh”. All the paintings that I saw in art history class I now saw in reality. I had my first works with Isaacs Gallery in 1956, a solo show there in January 1957, and another in October of 1957 because I sold so well – mostly oil paintings – landscape with some abstraction.

JG: In the 1950s you were producing some remarkably abstract landscape work possibly under the influence of Franz Kline and William de Kooning.

TU: I am quite eclectic. I always counseled my students to steal from at least five different artists. Then people say you are original. I found out in The Crisis of Abstraction (paintings from the 1950s) show everybody worked on the surface a la prima (with opaque paint). But my works were glazed so they looked old masterish.

JG: Gradually you moved into the 3-dimensional works, sculptures with your Landscapes in a Box sculptures.

TU: The 3D started in 1964 when I came back from Europe. I realized when I saw Fra Angelico or Duccio they had carved frames, gold leaf, they had substance. So when I came back I started doing 3-dimensional stuff. I didn’t actually do boxes. The first thing I did was a papier mache head with plastic flowers and I painted it all up in oils. Then I started doing landscape sketches on little boxes. They didn’t open and got bigger and bigger. One at the National Gallery of Canada is 5 1/2 feet in size. Soon all four sides and the top were painted. In 1967 I cut one open with a sabre saw and hinged it. Now I could hide things. Or I could change colour. I could change volume. I could change gesture. You could open it and close it. You could change the texture. One was very rough on the outside and had black velvet for its inner lining. There was nothing in it. With some, you open a door and cannot see inside. It is just black.

JG: Tombstones, sarcophagi, coffin shapes, all with a light dark contrast. These are things one sees in Europe. Did a member of your family work in a funeral home?

TU: My grandmother ran a funeral home. So it is not surprising that coffins are in my work. But I didn’t start with boxes... Part of it was seeing Baroque and Rococo churches in Germany with no differentiation between the 2-dimensional and 3-dimensional, between painting and sculpture. Looking up on a church ceiling you could not tell whether the putti were 2D or 3D. This seemed to give me leave to do this kind of sculpture.

JG: Your paintings are so different from your drawn pen and ink sketches. The colours are so vivid they could be called Baroque or Rococo... Some of these paintings have a figure in the landscape. Are they autobiographical?

Hughey and Jim, 1999
Oil and collage
Collection: Mike Bevelander, Toronto
80.7 x 182.7 cm
in your painting as well as the more actual sculptural structures you have been commissioned to do... this amalgam of metal sculptural passageways, freestanding sculpture structures, and living gardens elements are all part of the art. Magic Wood (1987), at the MacDonald Stewart Art Centre has an archway, something we also discover in your paintings.

TU: Actually my Figure in the Landscape works were the subject of a recent solo show. Joyce Zemans found some early works from 1961 and 1962. These included a single figure cut from a photographic reproduction, a predecessor to my recent figure in landscapes. The My Gardens series from the mid-1960s revealed a love of Italian frescos, of Duccio and Fra Angelico and the Italian primitives. The Italian painters spurred me on. I had them all framed with a nice kind of silver leaf for a 1962 Isaac gallery show. In 1999, I rediscovered an unfinished My Garden among my souvenirs. The sky was painted but nothing else. A photo that had been in it had gone - so I put myself again in another location in the painting... I made the frames, insisting that the painted frames and coloured sections were a part of the art just as they were for my heroes Fra Angelico, Giotto and Cimabue. I am still inevitably blurring the boundaries between painting and frame, and painting and sculpture.

JG: The recent My Garden series relate to that 19th century tradition in portrait photography. You are re-sitting a photo portrait within a larger photo like William Notman did with group portraits. Your studio is likewise situated in a beautiful garden and Stratford has very special public gardens near the Festival. We can see gardens have developed into a theme

Korean born Canadian painter Jinny Yu is new to the Maritimes. This is her first Atlantic Canada exhibition since moving to Sackville last year to teach at Mount Allison. Place, it appears, plays an important role in her work. Prior to moving to Sackville, Jinny Yu’s paintings reflected her city life in Montreal and Toronto. These paintings were all done since moving to Sackville and reflect her new very non-urban environment. A key to all her work that I have seen is that her art is a reflection or meditation on what surrounds her. As Yu says: “I find that I am very susceptible to the environment I am put into both visually and mentally.”

There are five large mixed media paintings on paper in the exhibition mounted flush to the wall or, to be more precise, sections of the gallery walls the same size as the paintings are cut away. The paintings are set in the cut away section. These paintings cast no shadow and become one with the gallery’s walls. The result brings new meaning to the word illusion, as it is difficult to place these paintings in traditional space. Normally paintings are hung on a wall and remain separate both psychologically and physically from the wall space. In this show those differences disappear, causing one to think more about their inner content than their physical presence.

SACKVILLE

INTERLACE: PAINTINGS BY JINNY YU

12 March – 10 April 2004
Struts Gallery

TU: When I visited the MacDonald Stewart, I was told there had been a 100 year old driveway there - since gone. So I designed to build a 45 feet long, 25 feet wide and 15 foot high structure. Magic Wood is an homage to trees and Romanesque cathedrals. It has an abstract tree in its centre that moves ever so slightly. You are encouraged to walk through it - but of course it is a walk through nature.

JG: I like the way your sketches capture a universe in the small details drawn from life. One feels a spiritual intimacy, but your scenes are very contemporary, even if history permeates them. We sense that in your small scale ink, watercolour, multimedia pieces. This process begins with the real and becomes art!

TU: The ornate French graves are beautiful tombs, knocked down if no family has visited for 3 years. Underneath these very old tombs are caveaus that go down about 8 or 10 feet. Here you find three coffins on top of each other. That is what exists beneath these wonderful monuments. I made various works based on the French caveau the size of a grave that I called Thresholds. Installed on a wall, they resemble an opening or threshold and I also made some miniature ones. I use my drawings as primary research – almost replication - although no one really replicates ever, Alex Colville, the Pratts, each has their own very distinct style. I sort of experience the object in the initial drawings. Then if I continue I will reconstruct it or totally change it in the subsequent sculpture or paintings.

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The results were quite beautiful and these paintings are about beauty. Beauty is a word seldom used to describe today's theory-driven art. And yet beauty is central to Yu's vision and has been since she was a student. Beauty for Yu, is a window into content and meaning. Her work does have meaning and is more than just pleasant to look at. The title of the exhibition, and of the works, Interface, can be understood as an intricate intertwine. As well, the horizontal lines of interference are like the lines you sometimes see on a television screen. I had this impression of a TV screen on first seeing these paintings, but the intertwining aspect is closer to the real meaning.

The Tantramar marshes surround Sackville, New Brunswick. They are a powerful landscape that is impossible to ignore and they are central to these paintings. It is a flat landscape of dyed land covered with grasses that stretches for miles around Sackville. It is this landscape that Yu overlays with horizontal lines of interference. It creates an odd and visually ambiguous vision. The paradox is between the flatness of the lines and the depth of the underlying landscape. It is an equivocal vision where the eye jumps back and forth between the two fields: the grid and the landscape. One is drawn in and pushed back at the same time. Nothing is quite as it seems. Indeed the nature of the Tantramar Marshes is itself man-made (albeit done over two centuries ago). This is land reclaimed from the sea and turned into pasture and farm lands. These painting are about the complexity of the relationship of humankind to nature.

It may be that these paintings are most about the act of painting itself. In spite of the fact that Yu is still in her twenties, her art is firmly rooted in the traditions of modernism. In a talk on her work she said: "A large part of my interest in painting lies in the formal and visual elements and the materials. In my works, the medium of painting takes a significant part. In that the medium serves not only as a material, but becomes a part of, or a means to the content. More and more I see a balancing of formal and conceptual elements in my works." Statements like this that indicate Yu's interest in making beautiful objects places her outside the mainstream of contemporary postModernism.

Of course Jinny Yu is still a woman and artist of her time. How could she be otherwise? Art may be less about linear progress (modernity to postModernism, etc.), and more an ebb and flow, perhaps a circular history. I would prefer to gauge art on quality which is not only old fashioned, but based on an assumption that I know what I am talking about and can define quality. I know it when I see it and I see it in Yu's paintings. She takes care in the application of her materials and her formal concerns are self-evident. There is a sense of pleasure in this exhibition. Jinny Yu, if she continues to march to her own drummer, is a painter with a great feature.

Virgil Hammock

MONTREAL

AN IMPROMPTU ART PARK!

A new art park full of recycled sculpture, has gradually been growing and evolving. Located in the Mile End district of Montreal, the Art Park is on the north side of Van Horne, east of Park Ave. and west of Blvd. Saint-Laurent. Created by Glen Le Mesurier, the art park has become a place where factory workers in the building next door can now relax, and that passers-by can enjoy. Any number of object parts, and elements, many nostalgic refuse and found old things, combine to make up these sculptures. Many are kinetic and move if there is a wind, and they are colourful and whimsical, even childlike. We see door parts, air vents, bells, horns, industrial components whose function and use have long ago been forgotten, just as their lost technology has.

The art park is a place to dream, if just for a moment, in an open space. This is an amusing amusement park with a real eclectic and home-made folksy atmosphere. An inveterate bricoleur and recycler of materials, sculptor Glen Lemesurier has built a surreal world on this previously unclaimed space. These sculptures, whether kinetic or stationary catch our attention and lift our spirits up. Some of them whirl around if there is a breeze, and many are painted brightly. You can sit on a bench with a heart on it. There are traces of lives lived, of personal or forgotten experiences in the time worn refuse used to make these sculpture works. It has all been done without any state help. This park embodies a craftsman's practical sense.

The park is a delight for people who use the area daily, and brings colour and life to a once desolate patch of unclaimed Montreal land, transfixing between roadways and railway tracks. Some of these sculptures are child-like and Beatles-like delight in the everyday excess with a visionary sense. This is a sculpture garden made for, by and with people of all ages in mind. Time feels different here. The atmosphere is less rushed and you can leave the daily grind behind, if just for a minute. Lemesurier's art park is worth seeing, if only for the fun of it. He will be creating a sculpture for the balcony at the Maison de la culture Cote des Neiges in the near future.

John K. Grande

FRANCOISE ISSALY:

ET TOUT A-T-IL UNE FIN....

Galerie Port Maurice
January 7th - 31st
Tel.: 514-328-8400

A modern well lit space with an open architectural feeling, Galerie Port Maurice suits Francoise Issaly's presentational art. Her wall works comprise collections of tableaux with open spaces between. This grid layout builds a visual correspondent between the art and the linear characteristic of the architectural interior: a visual dialogue develops. Issaly's art is simple, abstract, and the forms rendered in a gritty textural way. The

content of her panels is biomorphic. Clusters of painted panels on a wall, with "missing elements" - the space between - suggests a randomness. There is a sense of mystery but what is the artist's intention?

The presentationism of Issaly's work resembles writing - but visual writing. The way each panel of papers intersects, almost in a mathematical way, in the exhibition, makes them look like markers or indicators. They hint at a broader scale, the suggestion being that there is a greater picture we cannotathom in its entirety. Issaly assembles images, whether with papier marouflé applied onto wood, or on canvas, the way an ancient would when trying to develop a language of writing. We cannot decode this visual language, just catch a glimpse of its hieratic meaning from fragments. The actual painterly style is rigid in its abstraction but the general idea of grouping panels with parts missing is very clever - and the real art is in this gesture of assemblage design.

In the large scale horizontal Configuration pieces we fill in the gaps to imagine the broader composition. The viewer actively interprets the work, and the biodesigns are connected by our conception of the work. These groupings of paintings seem to exist as part of a larger potential presentation. Configurations become a kind of sublime incantation on the contemplative aspect of representation. Any representation whether "figurative" or "abstract" draws us into broader questions about appearance and reality.

Inspired by the Buddhist philosophy of the middle way, Issaly says that she "creates a visual space where realities overlap each other." This notion that there are layers of
SHIRLEY KATZ: LES DEMOISELLES
February 10 to March 5, 2004
Espace Trois at the Saidye Bronfman Centre for the Arts

Death is the unlikely muse in Les Demoiselles, an exhibition of works by artist Shirley Katz. Death both extremely personal, and public. The underlying theme of this innocently titled show is the nightmare of the Holocaust and the ocean of people it swallowed forever. It included many of the artist's family members, making this a particularly poignant undertaking. Focusing on images of women and girls, Katz based her portraits on photographs she found of her own family, her friends, relatives and other families, as well as those taken from contemporary publications. The challenge was clearly formidable. How does one translate such horror into a work of art? What more can possibly be said about that frightening chapter in our common history? Going out on a limb, Katz approached the exhibition with particular aplomb and courage, softening the pain by bringing to life moments far removed from the encroaching evil.

While in her previous works the artist focused on skin texture and tone, in this series the accent is on fabric, and expression. Expanding her palette, from the trademark cool blues to a wider range of pastel tones, Katz has clearly moved into a new phase in her career. Used to working with live models, she managed to transform the photographs that served as material for this exhibition into portraits at once realistic and beautifully painterly. With emotional discipline and artistic exploration, Katz brings to the public a suitably honorable remembrance of the dead. She transforms nameless martyrs into the loving im­mortalized beings they once were, whether delighted in the simple joy of gathering wild flowers or trying on mother's shoes.

By juxtaposing images garnered from old photographs, mainly from Eastern Europe, with those taken from contemporary North American magazines, the artist removed the concept of time and space, for, indeed, both beauty and horror respect neither.

Dorota Kozinska

QUEBEC

... LA DISPARITION...
PHOTOS DE BELGIQUE,
POLOGNE, DU QUEBEC
Jan. 16 - Feb. 15, 2004
Galerie Vu
Rouje
Oeil de Poisson
Galerie des arts visuels
de l'universite Laval

Co-organized by the centre de diffusion et production photo Vu in Quebec City, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Warsaw and the Liege Biennial Committee in Belgium, this show which has been touring is making its final stop in Quebec City. The artworks, seen at Galerie Rouje, Vu, the Galerie des arts visuels de l'universite Laval, and Oeil de Poisson, reveal a broad range of responses to the very essence of what imagery, or the image is and can represent. A video clip at Vu by Charles Guilbert from Quebec, seems to endlessly reconfigure itself in a process of line drawing in film (slightly reminiscent of William Kentridge). At Vu again, the extremely sensitive dark/light, ephemeral/spiritual photo imagery of Stanislaw J. Wos from Poland is among the highest points in this wide ranging exhibition. While the images are drawn from nature, and could be as simple as a tree stump, or a field, they shift and blur, evoke feelings of presence and absence, even of lost histories. The notorious Natalia II from Poland has presented a series of portraits that have their surfaces edges manipulated, so much so that the artist/subject begins to look like a funerary mask! At Oeil de Poisson, the Quebec photographers include partially occluded and shadow images (Now you see it, now you don't!) by Jocelyne Alloucherie and Patrick Altman's images loaded in situ, literally on top of one another, as homage's to a material culture, Belgian Pol Pierart's narrative photos take real life documentary in surreal Magritte-like sets that are partly incongruous but in ordinary looking places. At Rouje in the Bas Ville... beautifully textual yet naive reminiscences by Polish photographer Wojciech Prazmowski from a middle Europe heavy with history. One such image has a folky angel in a child's wagon and another crosses applied onto a wall, and a tin drum on a sculptural primitive assemblage, an homage to Gunter Grass. Let's hope for more exchange exhibitions like this one!

John K. Grande
OSAWA

1953

Robert McLaughlin Gallery
Nov. 20, 2003 - Jan. 25, 2004

Art Gallery of Mississauga
May 20 - July 18, 2004

Mendel Art Gallery

Co-curated by Thor Holubidzky and Robert McKaskell, 1953 is an exhibition that literally presents a brief slice of history. This approach cuts through strata and reads culture from a specific chronological point in time. 1953 was a year marked by post-war optimism and generally the arts were a minor blemish on the urban landscape of Toronto. Robert Fulford, a dean of Canadian culture, gave a lecture on the 1953 show and provided some insight into the period stating: “Culture was more probably enacted in churches than in art galleries in the 1950s. As art critic for a Toronto paper, I could cover the entire city in one week with three reviews.” In his lecture Fulford went on to say that there was no Big Bang in south-west Ontario when modernism arrived. Jack Bush the ad executive was the only member to really become known in New York. This said, the influence of hard edge abstraction and colour field theory, Clement Greenberg’s effect can be felt throughout the show particularly in works by the Painters 11, a self made group. Their first exhibition was at the Roberts Gallery Feb. 13, 1954 and not a single painting sold. Ingenious curating for this show enabled objects and implements, design award winners, to be included alongside the art: a chunky Admiral TV stacking chairs, an electric fan, roller skates, Rogers TV tubes. There is even a jazz trumpet that Michael Snow played in his first trip to Europe and an album cover for Jazz at Massey Hall designed by photographer Arnaud Maggs. From pages from the Globe & Mail hang as banners, providing some context for the show. Some great paintings in the show: Goodridge Roberts Standing Nude (1951), and some characteristic 1950s abstract art: Tom Hodgson’s Yellow Hydrant, Harold Town’s Fat Lady, William Ronald’s Slow Movement, B.C. Binning’s Little Seascape, Alexandra Luke’s Golden Glory and Lawrence Panton’s Atlantic Fugue, Oscar Cahen’s Candy Tree and Michael Snow’s Smoker. Catch this time capsule of a show at the upcoming venue...the Art Gallery of Mississauga this summer (2004), followed, by the Mendel Art Gallery. Time accumulates. Modernism did not erase the past. It lives on...

John K. Grande

MACHINE LIFE

Agnes Etherington Art Centre
Feb. 6 - April 18, 2004

www.queensu.ca/ageth

Time accumulates. Modernism did not erase the past. It lives on...not that interesting. Lori Andison’s camouflage 2, like Doug Buis’ Grass Machines from years ago, mechanically motivates wild grasses to move back and forth. The rhythmic “natural effect” though construed and machine made, is quite beautiful. One of the most amusing sculptures is Andison’s maid of the mist (presumably named after the famed Niagara Falls tourist boat). This futuristic looking mannequin is some Mama with holes in her clean white head out of which mist vapos exude. This maid of the mist blows off steam straight into space this way, and she does it especially when you get close to her. A veteran of the machine age art epoch Doug Buck’s Frantic is a politically correct anomaly, a strangely shaped object that one can carry around the gallery. This creature sculpture bleeds out an alarm sound – like child safety devices do when it is more than 30 feet from its surrogate receiver Mom.

As Norm White says “The precious truths which we carry along from year to year, never changing, are among the hard, brittly gears of our personal machines...our technology is nothing after all but a reflection of human anxieties, prejudices, lusts...humour and haphazard wisdom.” His precocious robot kids will get together for their own solo show at the Koffler Gallery in Toronto this summer.

John K. Grande

NORM’S ROBOTS

Koffler Gallery
May 13th - June 27

www.bjcc.ca

When McLuhan’s Understanding Media was first published in 1964 it ushered in a whole new era. The vision was of a global village culture enmeshed in and by technology. McLuhan’s comment “the medium is the message” became a mantra for the 1960s generation. Art and technology, the way human culture and mores change in response to technological change is even more pertinent an issue now than it was in the 1960s. Machine Life organized by the Koffler Gallery in Toronto and the Agnes Etherington Art Centre in Kingston is a group exhibition that brings together artists, sculptors, and new technologists who have consistently applied their creative juices to kinetic, robotic, and new media sculpture. Norman White, whose Helpful Robot sculpture encourages visitors to relocate it on a swivel mount in the gallery entrance and utters pre-recorded voice fragments. Mr. White is a leader in the field of machine art, and organizes the Ontario College of Art’s annual Sumo Robot Challenge for the art school each year. Bellerose, another White automaton on view actually disguises itself as an abstract painting.

Simone Jones in collaboration with Lance Winn projects images that rise and fall via a motorized tripod mechanism, seemingly erasing and creating the image as it loops up and down. Peter Flemming’s Manual is a wholly domesticated robot that makes its circumnavigated deposits of dust piles on the gallery floor. The patterns and circular piles are quite beautiful in and of themselves. A broom attachment then sweeps them up in an intentionally meaningless action. The repetitive doing and undoing of this robot’s actions is a horizontal version of Sisyphus eternal hill climb. This robot is a distant cousin to the servant robots designed to do human tasks, even robot pets, but a human technician still has to reload the dust into this machine at times, and adjust the broom device here...

Jeff Mann’s Adult Contemporary projects a seemingly innocent pre-Las Vegas 30 second clip of Celine Dion singing. Viewers can participate by shaking a tambourine that alters sound and image speeds. David Rokey’s n-Chat(n)I configures a community of verbal processors. This community of screens form a network. They speak simultaneously, producing a verbal and visual chanting effect. The seemingly random selection of words and the chaos of it all is definitely not poetry. This gathering of machines, orchestrated by word and sound fragments seems a highly resource intensive way of demonstrating a concept. The results are simply

John K. Grande

MUMMY UNVEILED!

Chatham-Kent Museum
Jan. 16th -
75 William St North
Chatham, Ont N7M 4L4
Tel: 519-360-1998

Forensic sculpture can involve reconstruction of the human face and body, and is more often used in police work than by artists. Working with the human remains of the 2200 year old Sulman mummy, Christian Cardell Corbet, has brought this ancient lady back to life for the first time since she walked the shores of the Nile River in Cleopatra’s time. The Chatham-Kent Museum, was given the mummy by the family of George Sulman, who bought it in Cairo before the First World War.
Rebuilding this Ptolemaic-period Egyptian lady involved not only facial reconstruction but also adding hair and jewelry to complete the work. As Corbet, an artist whose portrait subjects have included Margaret Atwood and the late Queen Mother, comments: "The sun came through the window and she came to life."

The initial process involved scanning the mummy twice. A three-dimensional laser mapped her outside, while a CT scanner explored her within. This allowed Cleo the mummy to remain intact in her ancient wrappings. The resulting scans enabled the piecing together of a virtual skull at London's Integrated Manufacturing Technologies Institute, one of the best virtual reality centres in the world. A plaster skull was then machine made in Mississauga. The plaster recreation of the mummy's skull was then handed over to sculptor Christian Cardell Corbet. Corbet commented that the sculpted mummy is "90 per cent accurate". Its features were added layer by layer, a sculptural process that involves aspects of both art and science.

Osteobiographical analysis has proven the mummy was at least 35 years old when she died and her vertebrae showed she had osteoarthritis. Lines on her tibia suggest her growth started and stopped around the time Alexandria, Egypt, was the most advanced city in the world. Alexandria housed the Great Library and was considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, with a lighthouse whose mirror could be seen from 50 kilometres offshore.

University of Western Ontario anthropology professor Andrew Nelson and his experts, who initiated the Cleo project, are now at work on the reconstruction of another mummy at the Royal Ontario Museum Egyptian who dates from AD 100. The latter mummy is affectionately referred to as Our Lady of Hud's Bay because she is lying on a blanket that resembles the store's famous coverlets.

John K. Grande

TORONTO
SKIN: DIEGO SAMPER
Feb. 5 - March 14
DeLeon White Gallery
1096 Queen St. W.
Tel: 416-597-9456

Diego Samper, a Columbian who now lives in British Columbia, has chosen the tangible subject of skin for his first show at Toronto's DeLeon White Gallery. The exhibit uses skin as a metaphor for the physical body and likewise the earth's skin. Some of his works look like living tissue. Their borders are less defined, and their content/subjects are textural, with a variety of constituent parts including ink, beeswax, and the like. Referred to as the Codex works these hand made parchment pieces include mineral, oil, and drawings. Near abstract, they are like maps with shapes that look animal or human within them. The Codex works at DeLeon White Gallery, are made of parchment, used since ancient times to document the human experience. Its skin-like quality makes it a stable medium for commemorating the soul's journey, the myths and deeds of humans and gods. The Codex series are made over goat skins. Nature provides the support for a human reflection on our place in nature, both in the microcosm and the macrocosm. They have layers, strata, and like skin, they are an epidermis. The vegetable and mineral co-mingle in the surfaces of the works, and permeate, change, transform, decay eventually.

Samper, who lived rough in the Amazon jungle, published a superb book of photographs of this experience titled Las Voces de la Tierra. With a foreword by William Osborn, this book again presents images of the natural, physical world. Samper's Codex parchment works, like his photographs (published in National Geographic and the book Makuna, portaiti of an Amazonian culture published by The Smithsonian) reflect a sense of belonging to the earth, that it is our home. The identification with earth becomes a universal metaphor, a vehicle for presenting these emblems of spiritual renewal - the Codexes. The allusion to mapping could just as easily have to do with biological coding, genetic mapping. The surfaces of his Codexes, now on view, can also resemble territories, as if seen afar.

When viewers look into the container/vessel Samper has made for the show at DeLeon White, they are surprised at its contents. Life here is presented as a fragile vessel - hand made of parchment - in the centre of the exhibition. This "container" is filled with red seeds collected in the Amazon region of South America. The seeds inside are not shocking, not violent, nor avant garde, nor dangerous. They are simply there - rich and red and lustrious. The container is light and at odds with its apparent size. The lightness of the vessel is a metaphor for air and light, our life support systems, and the fragility of life.

An actual section of fuscus tree bark from South America extends across a gallery wall. An artist's book has been placed under the tree bark. This bark is used by a tribe in the Amazon for communal healing, to bring them back into balance with the nature that is so essential to their survival as a society. Parchment pieces hang from the ceiling, and float in space like illusions. They are very much like ritual objects. The titles like Codex Pulowi, Codex Aarash, Codex Amazontica, are ascribed to the art before it is made, and they reference sacred sites and nature spirits' names. For Samper the parchments are: "an offering to the spirits of the Earth, and a transmutation of the animal into a cultural artifact."

On view at Montreal's Biodome, are Diego Samper's At The Heart of The World photos from the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, a mountain range in the tropics known for its rich biodiversity until April 16th. The aboriginal population of Kogi and Arhuaco people who inhabit this region live in a sacred balance with the natural world. In Samper's own words, the act of gathering these photos provided him with an "opportunity to explore in depth territories and cultures. Travel has been for me a way of life, but also an art form by itself. A pilgrimage."

John K. Grande

TORONTO INTERNATIONAL ART FAIR 2003
www.tiafair.com
November 13 to 17, 2003

In its fourth year, Art Toronto 2003, Canada's once prestigious art extravaganza, was a picture of grace and genteel eclecticism, with 77 international galleries rubbing shoulders in Toronto's spacious Convention Centre. Less shock and awe -- unless you count the grimacing little men in Richard Stjep's installation Sleep of Reason (Christopher Cuuts Gallery) -- than creative exploration, the fair had a lot to offer, in a variety to please any buyer. There was the regular stable of famous artists from Marc Chagall, Picasso and Jean Miro, to more contemporary icons like Mapplethorpe, Hookney, and Malcolm Liepke, not to mention the ubiquitous Joe Fafard whose work found its way into every nook and cranny of the exhibition floor.

Montreal galleries were well represented by the likes of René Blouin, Simon Blais, Lilian Rodriguez, and again this year, Galerie d'Avignon, to mention but some. Their popularity could be marked by the lineups forming in front of Galerie de Belleville, and all this can only be good for Montreal and its artistic comunity. But was there really anything outstanding, you may ask? The answer is a definite yes. It could be found in the cultural mosaic of the exhibition, with artists like Alessandro Papetti at DJschehel Mowatt Galleries. An icon on Italian contemporary scene, chosen to represent that country at the ever-pres­tigious Venice Biennale, Papetti is a true painter. He produces murals, monochromatic interiors, and sensuous, languid nude, as well as portraits and images of swimmers. His style is like a whip of fresh air, bold and assured, and clearly honed on solid exploration of the medium.
Galeria Moro from Venezuela also harboured a jewel in its small booth, a series of portraits by Adriana Duque. Strikingly expressive, painted in rich reds and ochres, with an unusual sensitivity, these faces spoke of a distant culture, and a pathos that can only be found in a Latin soul. Positioned at the entrance to Argentina's Gradiva Galeria de Arte, tall monolithic columns made of rose Portuguese marble by Pablo Atchugarry showed a different side of contemporary Latin art. Smooth, abstract, tactile they shot upward, glistening in the spotlight like alien sentinels. Argentina was also represented by Alejandro Boim's portraits of loners and clowns at Galerie Orange.

Almost lost in all this kaleidoscopic diversity were the magnificent works of Canada's northern people represented by Feheley Fine Arts and featuring the talent of such great carvers as Piseolak Ashoona, Kenojuak Ashevak and Toonoo Sharky. On display were complex works of Canada's northern peoples, figurative and mythical. Imaginative, pained in rich reds and ochres, transformation masks carved with faces spoke of a distant culture, and a pathos that can only be found in a Latin soul. Indeed these "walls" have a defensive or protective quality while the opening in the centre of the piece is smooth, light sensitive. This inner basin catches and bounces light off its interior walls. The directional nature of the two pointed ends of the sculpture, its placement within a white cube gallery space, recalls the early days of minimalism, and Brian O'Doherty's essay Inside the White Cube, originally published in Artforum that defined the minimalist moment.

Channel Pass is one of Zelenak's larger "ground bound" 9000 pound stationary sculptures. It could be a boat or vehicle embarked on a journey, but its interior form and mass make it more intuitive, a metaphor for an inner journey as the titling of all the works in the show do. As with many of Zelenak's works, sculptures can be markers that visually direct or define our sense of space making them a classic and physical kind of sculpture. I say classical because in a screening world of DVD, internet and video, the 3-dimensional is less current in arts dialogues in mainstream museology than the fleeting ephemeral electronic or digital image.

Zelenak's Still Life With Divining Rod is a 2 1/2 ton square sculpture, literally a table with a concave bowl in its centre. The monochrome nature of the steel table, with a branch/twig shape that both obstructs and protects the bowl space inside suggests a search, perhaps the artist's, to find a meaning. The source - water - and the meaning - are quite literal, and direct us towards the natural and physical, not the temporal world. The bowl could be a metaphor, or the actual container that sustains life. There is a tension in Zelenak's sculptures between an austere mass-volume minimalist emphasis on scaling down, reducing elements, and a more intuitive, feminine sense that unseen forces guide us in maintaining a balance in life. The divining rod is a device that directs one towards an invisible source, an unusual and potent one. Other forms reference the container or vessel, an archaic emblem that carries water or reserve material.

The 16 small wall mounted plywood pieces have pierced in sections. The sun filled areas, like the "inner bowls" in the larger works, are areas of containment, that complement stylized and simplified landscapes. Childlike, these wall placed landscapes are metaphors for a natural world, inscribed on gallery walls. The panels rephrase the temporal and spatial preoccupations dealt with in a more abstract manner in the "ground bound" sculptures Table and Channel Pass. The wall pieces with their hieratic and symbolic markers cut from tin, its painted clouds, its land and sky equations, is entirely intentional. The fact they are arranged in a sequence and play off the weighty steel sculptures animates, builds a sense of variation on the show's theme. This work has to do with life, and the vessel or bowl shapes we see, are symbols for a sense of direction, like markers but on a grand scale in the case of Channel Pass. This "vehicle" should move on water, and it directs us outside the parameters of this gallery space. This redirection towards an inner self, towards an inner vision presented in Still Life With Divining Rod. Nature plays a seminal role, and the journey is a metaphor for our life journey. It is an uneasy equation, never resolved, only intimated and intuited. As this show evidences, Ed Zelenak continues to evolve with an acute sense of sculpture's physical and tactile essences.

John K. Grande

WOMAN AS GODDESS: ROBERT MARKLE & JOYCE WIELAND

Nov. 29, 2003 - Feb. 29, 2004
Art Gallery of Ontario
317 Dundas St. W
Website: www.ago.net

In those protoan days of feminist liberation - the 1960's - guys could be macho and chicks could be sensual. Two Ontario artists one male and one female were part of that process. Curator Anna Hudson had the ability to recognize that these two different artists "were not opposites," and that each contributed to "an interesting kind of chemistry.

Robert Markle figured as the ultimate life painter, capturing Yonge St. strippers, combining neon and acrylic on wood..., working with charcoal, tempera and inks on large scale paper capturing the sexy side of life. Joyce Wieland was already renowned for her nationalistic Canadian stance on art (as the staff beaver from her personal collection or the famed Reason over Passion quilt in the National Gallery of Canada collection testify!). In the days before Nancy Friday and Judy Chicago's Dinner Party, Joyce Wieland was already integrating traditional female arts - like stitching, quilting - into contemporary art discourse. While books like Our Bodies, Our Selves marked a movement towards women reclaiming their own bodies, Wieland, as a woman of her time, wove an admirable narrative on male stereotypes of women in Art History. Her paintings like Untitled (murderous angel) (1981-1984), more abstract Rodgasm (1960), Artist On Fire (1983) or hilarious Untitled...
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fabric and crinkled, transparent gesso showing through veils of
what. For the record: Haeseker paints
Alexandra Haeseker collaborate
the sequential presentation of nar­
er interest in animated film and
died tragically in

donned denim jean jacket is on view.
Even Markle's embroi­
nude confiscated long before art
An infamous 1965 police raid on the
dorothy cameron Gallery saw a
Robert Markle black-and-white nude confiscated long before art was banal and mainstream in Cana­
dian society. Even Markle's embroidered denim jean jacket is on view.
Robert Markle (1936-1990) was in the process of rediscovering his native Mohawk identity when he died tragically in 1990, while Joyce Wieland (1930-1998) expanded her art interest in animated film and the sequential presentation of nar­
ratives before Alzheimer's took its toll. This show tells the 1960s like it is, with the age of Aquarius being a 24-hour happening.

John K. Grande

REGINA

JOHN HALL & ALEXANDRA
HAESEKER
PENDULUM / PENDULA
Rosemont Art Gallery
February 4 to March 4 2004

From 1992 to 1998 John Hall and Alexandra Haeseker collaborated on the twelve large, photo­realistic acrylic paintings that make up Pendulum/Pendula. It takes a discerning eye to sort out who did what. For the record: Haeseker paints in washes. Her light is the white of the gesso showing through veils of colour. Her method is especially suited for the representation of sheer fabric and crinkled, transparent plastic. Hall builds up paint in opaque strokes. His colours are solid and his
does not glow from below but glints on the surface. His method best suits the rendering of bright, hard plastic, polished metal and stone, and a particularly meaty kind of flesh.

In their non-collaborative paintings, Haeseker is more drawn to people and Hall to things. Haeseker is best known for dreamy landscapes populated by shaggy show dogs and their hovering, legless masters. Hall constructs rich, claustrophobic still-lives crammed with the lustrous, playful and sentimental tokens of middle-class opulence. They meet in Pendulum/Pendula over a mutual attraction to surfaces, and a pleasure in representing things and bright colours for their own sake. They delight in displays of small, sensual, cheap, manufactured things: toy animals, vinyl, plastic bags, Barbie dolls in cellophane tubes, photographs, comic books, and jello, lots of quivering, electric jello. Apart from the artists' partially revealed heads and an occasional dog, theirs is an inorganic world.

Hall and Haeseker have much in common. They are close in age, straddling sixty. They both married painters. And, for a long time, both taught art in Calgary for half the year and spent the remainder in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. Their collaboration is not a struggle of opposites as much as it is a meeting of like minds with slightly different temperaments.

Such partnerships are rare in 20th century painting. Partially because painting labours under the ideal of the isolate genius, partially because coauthoring can lead to a struggle of egos that often result in an inesthetic pissing contest, as with the awful Basquiat/Warhol tag team. Finding common ground on which to base an association can lead to simply settling on the lowest common denominiator. In this case, the artists seem so agreeable and so polite that the result is a democratization that leads to nearly anofcal and flat picture plane. The paintings have a space from as deep as a dresser drawer to as shallow as a pile of overlapping photographs. Hall and Haeseker have split the real estate fairly 50/50, but have paid for it in often confusing compositions. The less cacophonous works, such as Across Waste Ground and Comic Strip are the most engaging.

Perhaps the best result of this conjunction is that Hall, who is known for his cool portraits of his friends by proxy of their shiny things, shows a much more human and vulnerable side here. His and Alexandra's heads appear in most of the paintings: she peering from behind a shiny wrestler's mask or a Mexican Dia de Muertos mask, he wrapped in plastic or bursting through torn paper. While the two seem to be playing-artifices among the artificial-there is a strangeness to haeseker's grinning teeth and hall's suffocating open mouth. Haeseker seems caught in a moment of sometimes coy, sometimes carnal, sometimes awkward, eroticism. Hall's head might evoke John the Baptist to a few, autoerotic asphyxiation to most.

Haeseker and Hall have never been big on messages and reasons. Their work is usually just about lus­
cious surface and opaque references, signifiers on a holiday from specific meaning. However, when they team up, the delight in just-so stories of appearance is challenged by hints of a disruptive emotion, a barely contained sensual tension that is breaking through in one place and being smothered in another. It is a new dimension for these artists that excites their surfaces and threatens composure.

David Garneau

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