Vie des Arts

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CARAQUET, NEW BRUNSWICK
FESTIVAL DES ARTS VISUELS EN ATLANTIQUE (FAVA)
June 29 - July 3rd
Carrefour de la mer
Tel: 506-727-7726
fava@nb.aibn.com

To mark its 10th anniversary of existence the Festival des Arts Visuels en Atlantique brought together a remarkable spirit of community and enthusiasm with the help of a remarkable crew of volunteers. Invited sculptor André Lapointe held centre stage with his exhibition of in situ nature installations recorded as photo-works and an actual stone installation within the Carrefour de la mer. New Brunswick’s commitment to the visual arts scene was likewise enhanced by the presence of art critic and Governor General of New Brunswick HerméneGilde Chasson. This year’s winners of the francophone Visual Arts competition were Georges Goguen, Pauline Bujold and Raymonde Fortin...

The title for FAVA’s summer 2005 event, Rouge Vivarium, orchestrated a vision of the visual arts as a lively forum where life and art co-exist. The event, at the Carrefour near the harbour in Caraquet was in an environment not so unlike an aquarium. This aquarium/vivarium brought together a full range of diverse artists’ output, among them Carole Bherer, Georges Goguen, Pauline Bujold, Nicole Haché, Johanne Duchaine, Gaetan Doucet, Denis Lanteigne, Muriel Faille, Nicole Haché, Derek Letoumeau and Bob Belliveau-Ferrin Lemieux. The event was truly ignited into a place where multi-talented sculptors, painters, printmakers, photographers and multi-media artists collaborated, exchanged ideas, presented workshops and exhibited their works. Groupe Existe, for example, played a major role in assisting with this event as did many visual artists from Caraquet and the region. Rouge Vivarium sought to highlight the need for humanity to look after what few resources we have left, to safeguard future life on our planet earth.

Above all, Rouge Vivarium succeeded in re-generating a community interest in all things cultural, and awakening inspiration among younger members of the Acadian community. The Acadian passion for life and all things was likewise reaffirmed by the special presence of the renowned invitee Ousmane Sow from Dakar, Senegal – a very rare visit to North America.

John K. Grande

HALIFAX, N.S.
CHRISTO AND JEANNE-CLAUDE
THE WÜRTH MUSEUM COLLECTION
11 August - 16 October 2005
The Art Gallery of Nova Scotia
1723 Hollis Street
Tel: 902-424-5280
http://www.agns.gov.ns.ca

This is the only Canadian venue for this important exhibition of the work of Christo and Jeanne-Claude. These two collaborative artists are well known for their large scale projects, particularly those that wrap landmarks like the Pont Neuf in Paris and the Reichstag in Berlin, but there is much more to their art than just wrapping things. Their most recent project was the installation work The Gates in New York City’s Central Park in February of 2005. This exhibition is an opportunity to see the creative process that makes their very large scale works possible. It includes small preparatory sketches, large collages and drawings, maps, scale models, and even some small scale early wrapped objects. There are eighty items in all. In addition there are also videos which show the artists working on their projects.

This is an opportunity to see the thinking process of this pair of exceptional artists. As I have stated, the drawings are beautiful and Christo could have had a decent career as a conventional artist, but he and his wife have achieved something much more. They were environmentalists of the first order long before it became fashionable. Their work drew, and continues to draw, attention to both the urban and rural environment in striking ways that go far beyond the wall of art galleries which can so often limit an artist’s production. Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s last project is in documentation as their actual projects are only up for a limited time. The Running Fence was up for fourteen days, The Gates (all 7,503 of them) for sixteen days, and Valley Curtain (1970-72) for a mere 28 hours. The curtain project which placed a very large cloth, 12,780 square metres with a width of 381 metres, between two mountains near Rifle, Colorado, should have lasted a bit longer, but high winds forced its removal. When a project’s time is over all traces of the work is removed and the site is returned to its natural state. The artists also recycle their project material. We are left with the drawings which led up to the projects, and photographs and films of works in place.

Fortunately, as this exhibition demonstrates, the quality of Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s documentation is first rate. Their attention to detail is exquisite. There are many drawings in this exhibition relating to The Gates that are stunning. Perhaps I was drawn to them because some of Christo’s most recent drawings prove he is getting ever better as a draftsman. It is wonderful when an artist continues to grow. I might be missing the point because Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s work is an equal partnership and their completed work is more than the sum total of its parts. Drawing is only one part, but having taught drawing myself for thirty-seven years and I do know a good drawing when I see one. I do have this idea that drawing is the basis for all visual art, but I freely admit that I am biased.

The work of Christo and Jeanne-Claude raises questions of the very nature and purpose of art. Is art, to quote the title of Harold Rosenberg’s book, The Anxious Object, awaiting the verdict of history or is it in the realm of idea, remote of the necessity of being a unique object? As a traditionalist I favour the former, but being realistic at the same time, I understand that art, particularly today’s art, can be the latter. The art of Christo and Jeanne-Claude is a bridge between these two definitions of art. What I like most is the sheer beauty, be it in the thing itself such as wind on the cloth of the Running Fence, or the drawings leading up to a project. Both have the ability to invoke awe. It is not often that we have the opportunity to view the thought processes of artists in such detail as this exhibition does. It is a shame that the exhibition will not be seen in Canada outside of Halifax. I would go so far as to say that if you read this review before the exhibition closes in mid-October that it is worth a special trip to Halifax – you will not be disappointed!

Virgil Hammock
VIE DES ARTS

MONTREAL

MARIA GIULIA ALEManno

September 19th - October 3rd
Beaux-arts David Astrof
Thomson House
3650 McTavish
www.arttap.com

For the first ever Canadian showing of Italian artist Maria Giulia Alemanno's paintings, Beaus-arts David Astrof has brought together an unusual body of work. In a sense these large scale paintings share something in common with Stanley Spencer, for they carry the signs and symbols of religion through their main emphasis is on the art. The similarities, however, end there. Maria Giulia Alemanno's paintings embody the personas of the Orishas from the Santèria religion. Her visual interpretations are part imagined and part based in this religion that is so relevant in Cuba, Brazil and other parts of South America.

The Orishas, considered to be emissaries of Oludumare or God are believed to have powers to rule over the forces of nature and humanity. This in and of itself makes Santèria interesting as a religion for the interesting as a religion for the visiting of Italian artist Maria Giulia Alemanno's paintings embody the personas of the Orishas from the Santèria religion. Her visual interpretations are part imagined and part based in this religion that is so relevant in Cuba, Brazil and other parts of South America.

When she first started to make watercolour renditions of the Orishas after a visit to Cuba (where it's because the soul of Caribe has invaded her heart) and then due to a for-}

There is an atmospheric bomb of serendipity and chance to this. She is clothed playfully, has a mask and carries a walking stick.

What makes Alemanno's interpretations so revealing is that they are her very own readings of what these Orishas represent. She does not copy other people's visions or renditions of these highly personalized Gods. In so doing the artist communicates to us, just as the dance and music that are part of Santèria something of that homegrown sensibility and cultural vitality. With colour and cadence, these vividly charged depictions intuitively communicate the lively wisdom, the living traditions, often unrecorded in written form, and kept alive through the vernacular of the Santèria religion whose fusion of voodoo and Christianity, even ancient Yoruba African culture feels strangely post-Modern for all its hybridity.

John K. Grande

DISTANCE POINT:
PAINTINGS BY LEOPOLD PLOTEK

June 7th - August 20th
Maison de la culture
Cote-des-Neiges
5290 Cote-des-Neiges
Tel.: 514-872-6889

A simple and unpretentious presentation of ten paintings by veteran Montreal painter Leopold Plotek at the Maison de la culture Cote-des-Neiges continues to reveal this artist's incredible adeptness and dedication to the painterly process... Plotek is definitely not asleep at the easel these days! Visitors to the show saw some very compelling paintings, among the best this critic has come across in years. Assembled in a kind of preoccupation with life altering moments in the lives of artists and philosophers throughout history, Leopold Plotek's recent exhibition dives into the themes of his subjects with a poetic versatility and unpredictable prowess.

What is evident from this show is the artist's recent return to all things representational, particularly over the last two years. This marks a change from Plotek's more often seen interior landscapes. The present foray is specifically into works that make reference to (a) history. These paintings are very similar to J.M.W. Turner in their atmospheric embellishment. Their ambiguity is resolved by the titles these works have. Their surfaces are covered in smoky hues and carry an elegiac solemnity.

In referring to the "distance point" that this show draws its title from Plotek states: "...This is a point in perspective geometry whose purpose is obscure to the viewer but important to the painter. The key thing here is that it does not occur within the picture itself, yet helps determine almost everything in it. Just like inspiration." Entering the gallery the first painting one sees is a painting that depicts William Blake as a young boy lying in bed, receiving his first vision of God. As the boy nonchalantly gazes at the apparition of God's munificent face peering inside Blake's bedroom, all is still and suspended in time. The scene offers the viewer a portrait of God as an invited guest, a presence that the young Blake would later pay for with a beating by his father for divulging this anecdote out loud.

Another painting shows the great American poet Hart Crane in a frozen mood - leap into the blue sea on the journey by ship he took to New York from Cuba. This moment in time is captured eloquently as Crane leaps from the bow above the green waves. We see a lifesaver at the bottom corner of the work. Perhaps this is an ironic metaphor for what the poet was ultimately trying to escape. Again, the element of time is suspended as if from the depths of a dream. Lastly, we see a painting that depicts jazz saxophonist Sonny Rollins ascending the stairs to the Williamsburg Bridge to practice his music undistracted by fame and fortune. East River Blue; Sonny Rollins on Williamsburg Bridge is a mass of black and blue brushwork articulating the night sky above New York. The picture has a peaceful ambiguity, an atmosphere that resonates as if from the depths of a dream. The patina of antiquity marries even with passion. This is what makes for a compelling work of art. The theatrical element is most evident. The paintings develops a dialogue with silence. It reverberates like an effective monologue might do on stage. In fact, these paintings seem to represent states of consciousness that call to mind the stage. Although some of the works are unrelated by subject, their common ground is the anecdotal moment brimming with poetic mime. The role of the artist as underdog is highlighted, and Plotek embraces the accident, the vulnerability that underlies much of history's great ones.

See in the context of a time largely dominated by meat and potatoes realism in painting, a genre based form designed for commercialism in poetry in painting seems like a discarded bone buried in some cold, cold ground. Despite all this, Leopold Plotek manages to breathe fire back into the picture.

Isak Elliott Augustine
GORDON SHEPPARD
WATERVISIONS
Aug. 11 - Sept. 11th
Salon Bibliocafe
4231 boul. Saint-Laurent
Tel.: 514-277-7778

WaterVisions show a defense of nature and a cry to re-generate our links to nature. We may ignore nature in this technology saturated culture but this has not lessened our ability to read and inuit something from the incredible forms and life around us. This is not conscious but unconscious but the result of habits, behaviours developed through the use of our latest developed tools and machines.

Just as our links to nature are embodied in these large scale colour photos works, Sheppard does not take it all too seriously, presenting these photos in beautiful presentation frames that have a twist of Duchampian irony to them. After all, the museological presentation sometimes takes precedence over the culture, rather like nouvelle cuisine, as the presentation does with food. And so Sheppard shows how well he understands the notion of art as a presentation everyday life, even a replacement for old fashioned theatre. He likewise leaves us with a sense that these underwater images of algae and water weeds, or lilies that resemble a curious humanoid bird, the tip of its metal beak resting on the floor.

As if belonging to the same family, Lead foot Annie is an avian creature on mismatched feet made of shoe forms, one metal, the other wooden. Despite its bulbous parts and featureless head, Valyi’s irreverent creation emanates a mixture of coquetry and defiance. It is, indeed, the inherent personality of each piece that takes the viewer beyond the tactile and the visual, but the artistic value of the works lies in Valyi’s eye for the quirky. Without sacrificing the aesthetic, or giving in to parody – with the exception, perhaps, of Amine, a hapless hammerhead creature – Valyi’s 3-dimensional composites offer an unusual visual experience. They are uniformly organic, given to odd postures and stances, and best appreciated on their own, separate from their fantastic family.

Dorota Kozinska
OTTAWA

DANIEL RICHTER: PINK FLAG WHITE HORSE
National Gallery of Canada
June 25 - Sept. 10th
www.nationalgallery.ca
Tel.: 1-800-319-2787

There is none of the certainty we associate with paintings that deal in fabled stories, epics or history in general. In Dream South, we see naked dancing figures in the distance, a partially constructed house, Pop pink Day-Glo trees, gnome-like person and a stooped green-nosed man (a gardener?). The cacophony is delectable and amid all the decadence of Zurbarans (2000) we sense that this crown of masked men and monkeys amusing themselves to death are nearing the end of their party. A crowd huddled together in an bright orange inflatable life raft, suggests a loss of meaning in Bas (2002) are there by necessity. Unlike Gericault's Raft of the Medusa this group of survivors are not heroic, just lost and drifting and floating in a dark sea of uncertainty about their potential present. Lost in a loss of context(s)...

Various codes of behaviour are reinvented and we recognize traces of symbolism in the ghoulish caricatures of these post-human masks-like faces that populate these paintings. In another painting the figures look like they are literally dematerializing, either from some disastrous and invisible force or because of the death of substance. Tefzen (2004) has a bear and a clown and a dog... what could be gloomier in a Kate Kolwitz kind of way, becomes painful and hard earned fun. The masks we see conjure up images of Ensor, and the solid figures (alienated and solemn) and skull calls to mind the Norwegian Edvard Munch's The Scream.

Above all, it is Daniel Richter's love of painting for and of itself and his willingness to challenge our assumptions about style that truly make these works live. They do not bore us, and he is truly gifted. Phoeniex is a situationist scenario with a sense that rational history is headed for the garbage dump. More grating and unpleasant is Richter's image of men beating a horse to death in Das Recht (2001).

Daniel Richter's paintings do not make it easy to accept any singular and clear vision of the world we live in. He adopts as many styles as he needs to achieve fabled post-Nuclear effect. From drip, to abstract, to figurative, to cartoon-like annotation, all these stylistic maneuvers are held together by a strong sense of what exactly the artist intends to communicate... that is angst, and a sense of density, compaction and simultaneous dematerialization of the body/object. Pink Flag - White Horse is herosim gone awry in an era of abundance. It's a folkloric maelstrom where the signposts have shifted.

John K. Grande

TORONTO

SOPHIE JODOIN: DIARY OF K
Sept. 8 - October 3
Edward Day Gallery
952 Queen St. West
Tel.: 416-921-6540
www.edwarddaygallery.com

Sophie Jodoin's latest studies of K, his mother that numbered in a generation or two away from fellow German painter Anselm Kiefer, who sought out ancient legends like Siegfried, Isis and Osiris.

Richter construes his visual stories with his paintbrush. And they are replete with everything abstraction was against in the post-WW era - symbolism, allegory, human angst, even a magnetic social expres­sionism, albeit hedonistic in post-millenium times. It is the ambiguity that makes these works so unsettling.... hard to read. As art, they sit on a proverbial wall where meanings are never fully explained or understood. Basic historical assumptions are taken for granted, are no longer fully understood....

The contexts have shifted and boundaries of behaviour have too. Richter reinscribes history painting but gives it an almost folkloric aura of abandonment and decadence. There are distant cultural echoes of Bruno Schulz's Street of Crocodiles or Gunter Grass' The Drum or of George Grosz and Otto Dix but this is a politically correct era where emotions are sanitized, even packaged.

Diary of K, #2 (detail), 2006
oil on canvas
Size 32 x 24"
words these works are... “The result of watching and making annotations about someone on a regular basis is quite similar to the work of an entomologist... K's particular dichotomy fascinates me—a strange mixture of monumental grandeur, fragility and vulnerability.” Jodoin captures the details. Some fragment like a face, or a hand, or a foot, become a paraphrase for the sentiment of being there at a moment in time. Arms are folded for a moment, or the standing figure stretches proudly, even defiantly. One is reminded of Toulouse-Lautrec who sought out the unusual personalities for his pastel works, or of Velasquez who likewise had a fascination for the unusual detail, that became a reflection of some greater sentiment, disguised and lacquered over, but nevertheless accurate in depicting the state of the world, even if so intimate. In Jodoin’s case, the world is invented, and the private becomes public and vice versa. Even more surprising are the larger charcoal sketches that accompany the more intimately scaled pieces. The larger charcoal works give us a sense of how Sophie Jodoin achieves these renditions of form in space, albeit on a flat surface, and arrives at the more intimate, smaller and more glisteningly polished studies of K. There is something of the austerity of Kathe Kollwitz, and something like spots of clarity in suspension amid a more generally aestheticized and clinical atmosphere. It is intimate, and vulnerable, and vulnerable space Jodoin has brought to us viewer/voireurs. This landscape is the body, a persona under intense scrutiny like a moth by a flame, is in a dance with light in the shadow of time.

John K. Grande

ANDRÉ KERTÉSZ
Stephen Bulger Gallery
1026 Queen St. W.
M6J 1H6
Tel.: 416-504-0575
www.bulgergallery.com

André Kertész, long considered one of the best “straight” photographers developed his work to become something of an anomaly, and less stereotypical of that tendency than most. One is reminded of numerous of his classic photographs from Paris and New York, after he moved there in 1935 and worldwide, when viewing this intimate and truly representative showing of his work.

Born in Budapest in 1894, Kertész’s legend as a photographer arises from his particularly human view of the world, and the European sensibility he brought to urban scenes, the still life and subject portrait. There was more than a little tinge of romanticism to his approach, as is evident from an early view of Budapest dated 1924. This was something that endeared his work to later post-war generations of people. As recondite a personality as you could meet, Kertész was preoccupied with freelance commercial work in New York with magazines like Harper’s and Look. He became known for the commercial work, and it hampered his experimental artistic side to a degree until he abandoned it for art photography.

Seldom seen in Canadian galleries, Kertész’s photograph on view at Stephen Bulger’s Gallery include his vision of the Toronto skyline called Smoke in Toronto (1979), and Washington Square in New York (1986) from an aerial perspective. There are also a series of small contact prints (which was how Kertész liked to print his photos in the 1930s). Works from the Paris period include well known still life’s like Mondrian’s Glasses and Pipe, and Fork (both from 1956).

Kertész’s renowned image Satiric Dancer is as immersed in the atmosphere of its era as any photo could be. Kertész’s New York close-ups of architecture and the urban landscape likewise bring a warmth to their subject. Kertész could be considered a precursor to photographers Angela Grauerholz and even Lee Friedlander, for the way he personalizes the particular, adding a dash of history and personal poetic style to the everyday. Stephen Bulger Gallery deserves praise for bringing this selection of some 50 Kertesz photoworks to Canadian audiences. A modest grouping of original Kertész photoworks, this show is well chosen. It provides viewers with a concise bird’s eye view of this remarkable photographer’s work.

John K. Grande

ARNOLD SHIVES;
QUEENSLAND
Engine Gallery
1112 Queen St. West
Tel.: 416-531-8905
www.enginegallery.ca

Vancouver-based Arnold Shives’ latest show at Engine Gallery draws on his experience visiting the Queensland region of Australia in 2004. As time passes, Shives who studied with Richard Diebenkorn and Nathan Oliveira in San Francisco is becoming one of a rare coterie of artists still working in their original visually expressive and colorist language unexposed to the vagaries of contemporary visual fashion. Indeed it becomes increasingly clear that many artists no longer draw on their individual experience or the external world for their source content. Indeed a layer of pre-existing visual auditory or filmic material has increasingly served a theory driven, heavy ballasted overlapping of visual language. And so it is a relief to see an artist drawing his narrative consistently and with a pure subjectivity from his own real world visual tactile reality.

The Queensland series is visually eclectic, and develops a kind of aerial perspective, integrating fragments of relief printworks, adding them onto the surface, and painting with line and colour, in the overall composition. This child-like naiveté with line and colour, in the overall composition suggests a journey from one world to another—assertive and definitely related to Jack Shadbolt’s approach to landscape, but without the allusions to a pure abstraction one sees with Shadbolt. Indeed as Shives himself states in an exhibition note for the show, “The Engine Gallery exhibition, then, is a tribute to Australia, as well as to Aboriginal art, but the references are rather tangential...I’ve employed as a unifying stylistic device stamps, that is, relief printing. The stamp technique harkens back to my decades-long involvement in printmaking. From time to time, the question has arisen: how do I mine those fruitful years of experience transferring images from matrix to substrate? I have used Queensland as an opportunity to explore that challenge.”

Above all Arnold Shives’ Queensland show evidences how art is evolved into an artist who style, his Matisse-like simplicity, is truly his own. The search for origins, for a kind of home, in various wilderness settings recalls another artist—the writer Malcolm Lowry who resided in nearby Dollarton, not far from Shives’ North Vancouver studio. The simple graphic language of his art

VIE DES ARTS N°200 77
Rick Rivet's Spirit Boats

August 1st - September 1st, 2005

Alcheringa Gallery, 665 Fort Street
Tel.: 250 393-8224
www.alcheringa-gallery.com

Rivet has now split over from his print-making work for which he is renowned as one of Canada's most senior and gifted, into painting.

John K. Grande

Victoria, B.C.

Rick Rivet's Spirit Boats

Rick Rivet was born in Aklavik, NWT, in 1949. He has studied, worked and taught art in communities across Canada. His signal iconography has naturally incorporated and synthesized cross-cultural themes and motifs, stylistic forms and philosophies. An abiding theme is that of the spirit journey—a migration of consciousness with its own iconographic lexicon and symbol set. It includes masks, shaman figures, pictographic ciphers, handprints, labyrinth schematics and animal forms. The recurring boat form seen in Rivet's visual peregrinations can appear as if seen from above, or as a sectioned manor (or 'almond') shape. It even could be a boat hull seen from the side. The boat images function as windows, portals or doors, as shield images, or as funerary insignia. In Rivet's most recent series of small images, the Beothuk Mound series, it is this last aspect that emerges.

The Beothuk Mound series is a suite of monoprints in green, brown, or black inks. It is as if we, along with the dead, are looking out through the walls of the tomb or burial vault, bringing the viewer into its cubic heart, where the signs and signals of the honoured dead have been supplied as grave offerings. Foremost among these pictographic images is the boat hull motif, an allusion to traditional skin boats used on the McKenzie River. The boat hull sign glows white or glowers darkly, depending on Rivet's shifting of the values. It looms out of the far wall of the tomb, itself a 'starry vault' in Rivet's geocentric cosmology. Though planted deep in the earth, in the cosmological underworld of death and rebirth, the 'ceiling' panel, in many of the images, is strewn with stars. The ship form, supplied here, offers a vehicle or vessel for the dead. Like so many travellers in the afterlife before and since, they may safely embark upon their eternal soul's journey.

One is left with profound questions when one sees Rivet's work firsthand. Did the indigenous people of Newfoundland of the Beothuk Mound bury symbolic ship hulls with their honoured dead? When faced with an extinction event, did they, like Vikings, Celts, Anglo-Saxons or ancient Egyptians, inter their best hopes for cultural and personal reanimation with the spirit travellers? Or is Rick Rivet, here and now in the 21st century, providing signs and symbols for a safe passage on the journey to rebirth, while also bringing these long-dead souls to life in our collective, Canadian memory?

Yvonne Owens

BOOK

The Figurative Sculpture of Magdalena Abakanowicz: Bodies, Environments, and Myths

by Joanna Inglot, University of California Press, 2004 154 pp, with index, illustrated. www.ucpress.edu

This highly detailed account of Magdalena Abakanowicz's emergence out of communist Poland to becoming an international sculptor is both a rewarding read and provides some context of the context with which the sculptor was working. As Abakanowicz once stated, infuriated that she was considered uniquely as a weaver early in her career: "I was weav- ing because it could be rolled up." The difficulties of pursuing a career in communist Poland often meant that artists had to disguise their protest or contestation in an underground language of art.