

English Reports

Dorota Kozinska, David Garneau, John K. Grande, Virgil Hammock et Melissa Lam

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RON MUECK

2 March – 6 May, 2007
National Gallery of Canada
Ottawa
national.gallery.ca

GIANTS FASCINATE.

PERHAPS IT IS OUR INSIGNIFICANT SMALLNESS VIS-A-VIS THE VASTNESS OF THE UNIVERSE, THE SHEER, OVERWHELMING EXPANSE OF SKY THAT'S AT THE ROOT. THE SILENT GRAND STATUES OF EASTER ISLAND, THE MAGNIFICENT PHAROES OF ABU SIMBEL AND THE ENIGMATIC FACE OF EGYPTIAN SPHINX, ALL ATTEST TO OUR CONTINUAL, UNATTAINABLE QUEST TO CREATE GIANTS IN OUR OWN IMAGE. FEW GIANTS POPULATE OUR CONTEMPORARY REALITY, THERE ARE NO NEW STATUES OF DAVID, NO NEW GIANT BUDDHAS.

OR ARE THERE?

In the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, a gargantuan man squats in the corner of the hall, while in another room a giant baby holds court. These disturbingly realistic sculptures, many times the human size, are the work of Australian-born, London-based artist, Ron Mueck. Dwarfed by these enormous fibreglass and silicone 'humans', we are at once disturbed and mesmerized, faced with our unbearable frailty in front of our own, overwhelming reflection. Mueck is a master illusionist. His figures are frighteningly lifelike, with moles and body hair, drops of perspiration and sagging skin. It is not, however, the artist's intention to re-create reality. Mueck, who began his career making marionettes, confuses our senses by distorting not only the proportions of the figures but also their body parts and postures. Mueck's artistry lies first and foremost not so much in the scrupulous representation of the body but the emotional, psychological dimension of each sculpture. Some seem vulnerable, some apprehensive, some half-asleep, others strikingly alert, and every one pulling at our emotional strings.

There's a touching subtlety in the execution of the works, invested as they are with the artist's personal experience, and, by extension, our own. The incredible precision employed in the rendition of the pieces only further accentuates their vulnerability. Their

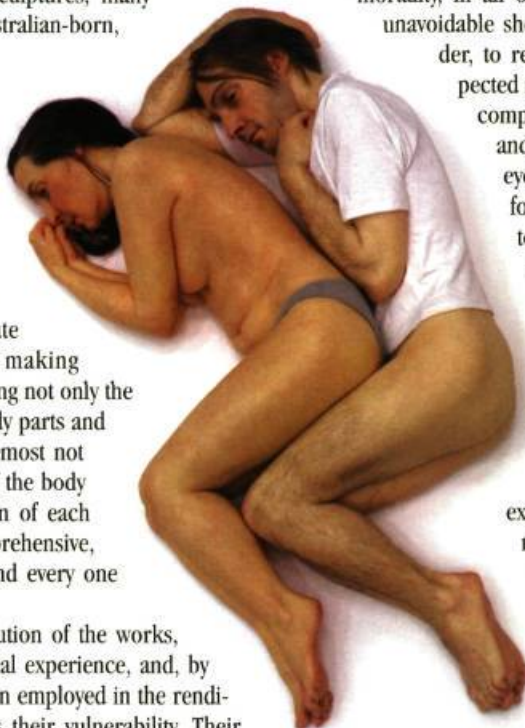
nudity seems not only accidental but perfectly normal. There is nothing to hide, and nowhere to run. We are in front of our physicality and mortality, in all our greatness and smallness. After the initial, unavoidable shock these works provoke, we are left to ponder, to reflect, surprised as we are by our own unexpected reaction. An instant sense of understanding and compassion takes over and we are at once troubled and fascinated. We peer into the wrinkled, swollen eyelids of a newborn baby's giant face, looking for echoes of our own birth, our ears straining to catch that first plaintive cry that seems to be welling up in our chest.

We respond with a startled look at the stern, questioning stare of a naked, bald giant crouched on the floor, that stops us in our tracks. The power of Mueck's works reaches beyond artistry and artifice, straight into our psyche, making him one of the most interesting of contemporary artists, and the exhibition one that cannot be missed, and will never be forgotten.

Dorota Kozinska



Head of a Baby, 2003
silicone, fibreglass resin, and mixed media
254 x 219 x 238 cm
National Gallery of Canada
Photo © NGC



Spooning Couple, 2005
mixed media
14 x 65 x 35 cm
Private Collection

SASKATCHEWAN

MOBILE STRUCTURES

Dialogues Between Ceramics
and Architecture
in Canadian Art

January 27, 2007 to May 13, 2007
MacKenzie Art Gallery
3475 Albert Str.



Jeannie Mah
Iznik Tiles and Portuguese Sidewalks, 2007
paper grolleg, porcelain, inkjet prints,
plexiglas shelves
Collection of the artist.
Photo: Angela Beck

Regina, Saskatchewan

Art historians will some day designate the moment when ceramics saw itself as, and therefore became, art. While this event happened before *Mobile Structures*, the complexity and conceptual inventiveness of the works in this exhibition testify that the transformation has occurred and that, for ceramic artists, there is no going back.

When a material practice is not primarily functional or decorative or bound to ritual and engages (and questions and even undoes) its formal heritages (while still inhabiting it) and also engages worlds beyond its medium and métier, it is a particular expression of consciousness—it is art. While art is a special conceptual category, works of art are always manifested; they

are inseparable from their material form and that medium's history. In fact, some of our most intense intellectual pleasures with works of contemporary art come from seeing how they engage their histories and meanings rather than how they are just composed by them.

Jeannie Mah's "Iznik Tiles and Portuguese Sidewalks" consists of three large colour inkjet murals of Ottoman Empire era Iznik tiles. Below these are three smaller inkjets of Portuguese tile sidewalks with patterns that echo those above. Hovering on brackets centered on the Iznik images are three Minoan inspired ceramic vessels decorated in homage to her two sources. Mah exceeds mixes media so she can speak from beyond the pot in order to speak back to the pot. These few signifiers trigger a wealth of information and ideas that originate in ceramics but also suggest a more expansive history and philosophy. The

installation describes the exchange of visual vocabulary, materials and methods not only among the Turks and Portuguese, Muslims and Catholics, but also with the Chinese. Mah seems interested less in short term narratives of colonial oppression than in the long term fact of métissage, the rich and inevitable exchange, mixture and hybridization of everything in multiple directions. There is no sense of loss here, because the question of origins and authenticity are themselves questioned.

Ruth Chambers's filigree arches hover like ghosts. It is a spectral architecture, a return of the Modernist repressed: the feminine, the Romantic, abundance, nature. Chambers' ceramic architecture (rather than architectural ceramics) imagines a new ornamentation, but because it is offered in this drained and fragile form that literally depends from the host building, it appears less utopic than melancholic. Jeremy Hatch's porcelain

cast of a tree house yearns for the moment when everyone designed and built their own shelters. This impulse is less nostalgic than it is human. His tender apparition recalls but protects a childhood memory; the artist has the pleasure of making the house but denies us the pleasure of playing in his fragile fortress.

Rory Macdonald has invented clever a portable kiln that can fire a glazed pattern on to a brick wall. The resulting tattoo reminds us of ceramics and architecture's once intimate liaisons: from ceramic tile on Islamic temples to art deco office towers. This relationship took a blow with the strain of Modernism that saw decoration as not just superfluous but as a crime (Adolph Loos). Macdonald's gesture, if actually performed, might actually be criminal. His ceramic graffiti has a similar relationship to ceramic decoration that conventional graffiti has to murals. Both actions express a desire for aesthetic intervention, for decoration, for colour, for public participation in the design of the built environment. But there is also evidence of decay, loss and late-coming. Macdonald uses a Blue willow pattern that mumbles in translation: the design blurs and drips. Perhaps the kiln needs tinkering, or maybe the wall resists the application. In any case, the concept (desire) outstrips the design: the expression, possibility and inspiration is more important than the literal image.

If this show can be relied upon as a bell-weather, contemporary ceramics continues to be a hybridized activity. Most of the works in the exhibition mix ceramics with other media; most are non-functional or not only functional. And all seem to address not only another discipline (architecture) but also seem self-reflexive. Even though there is no architecture here for ceramics to dialogue with, if we take the exhibition's title seriously, what would a renewed dialogue look like? If ceramicists were to re-engage architecture as artists, the result should transform both fields. While Frank Gehry's architecture has been seen as a meeting of architecture and sculpture (strongly aided by engineering), it is a sculpture of some vintage. While art mediums

and histories may be somewhat stable sources of inspiration, real collaborations with contemporary artists who are in flux about the identity and meaning of their practices would be much more dynamic. What would it mean to have architects engage with contemporary ceramic artists? I am looking forward to *Mobile Structures II: Architectural Vessels or Mobile Structures II: Takin' it on the Road*.

David Garneau

MONTRÉAL

ANDREW LUI

PURITY AND HARMONY

Han Art
4209 rue Ste-Catherine O.
Tel: 514 876-9278
www.galleryhanart.com



Pilgrimage – mixed media on rice paper

Describing Andrew Lui's creative process is like taking a page from the *I Ching*. For it is as much Chinese philosophy as the vast artistic tradition of that culture that imbues his paintings. Sparse and strikingly contemporary, Lui's compositions proclaim their own visual territory while his brushstroke harks at the fluidity of eastern calligraphy. Admittedly at "the crossroads of post-modernity", he has found his own voice, and from the plethora of personal and artistic experiences produced a series of works that opt for the lyrical and the aesthetic. Having honed his art over three decades, he is in a new phase, and while the pilgrimage continues uninterrupted, the pilgrim has changed. Highly sensitive, and enomoured of quality, this artist has no trouble attracting collectors. His acrylic

and ink on rice paper paintings are unusually accessible while remaining of the highest artistic calibre. Forever the humanist, Lui has not lost his interest in higher ideals, and the duality that lives in all things continues to be present in his paintings. Whether it is the dialogue between east and west, or between anguish and bliss, the artist's internal confrontation expresses itself on canvas in images of profound sensibility and mastery of plastic demands. Like most artists fascinated with the passage of time, Lui's choice of title for his series is self-explanatory. We are witnessing emotions in movement, fleeting before our eyes in a colourful parade of oblique forms, at once animal and alien. And there is no point seeking references to other artists and styles, for having absorbed it all, Lui is in full command of his own unique visual lexicon. His eponymous *Pilgrimage I* leads as it were into the series, a horizontal composition dominated by a stylized turquoise horse and rider in the company of earthy abstracted forms. A perfectly composed visual discourse is taking place between the lines and strokes of colour, a signature found in all of Lui's works. This harmony amid chaos also marks the painting titled *East, West* which picks up the visual equestrian theme but breaks the composition into two without actually splitting the image. A subtle tension underlies this otherwise colourful picture, a deeper message, perhaps a longing for union. In *Triumph*, what we feel is in fact what we see: a joyous swirl of movement, a vertical explosion of pure colour, and all held in check by a delicate network of lines, the artist's indelible imprint. Lui's true sophistication shines through most, however, in his abstracted paintings, compositions that entrance and soothe. With poetic titles like *Graphia Mongolia*, *Spring Rain* and *Woven Love*, they invite the viewer into a realm where the delicacy of gesture embraces the strength of vision. These works speak in a soft yet decisive voice, they weave a unique tapestry where light and shadow follow the brushstroke in quiet unison. To the untrained eye, Lui's canvas is a dance of shapes and colour, a concerto in subtle tones, engaging the

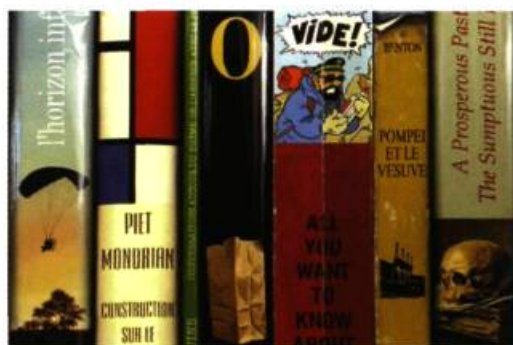
visual senses in a poetic seduction. But deeper, beyond the prancing horses and sensuously entangled forms, behind the palette of turquoise and ochre lays the emotional world of Andrew Lui. A landscape marked by both suffering and ecstasy, and infused with a profound understanding of the human experience.

Dorota Kozinska

PAUL BÉLIVEAU

WORDS INTO ART

Galerie de Bellefeuille
1367 avenue Greene
Tel: 514 933-4406
www.debellefeuille.com



Books are magical. Pure and simple. Ask any bibliophile and they will soon embark on a paean to the unassuming collection of pages we have cherished for centuries. From being revered to being burned, books have accompanied the human history documenting its falls and rises, and despite the advent of technology, are holding their ground to this day. Paul Beliveau is enamoured of books. He reads extensively and spends great many sybaritic moments discussing them. But Paul Beliveau is a painter, and his love affair with literature has in addition a completely new dimension. Books offer the artist a visual pleasure, a tactile journey into abstraction, they tease with their colourful backs, jostle and push for attention, leaning into poses ready for canvas. And so, almost with a weary ease, Beliveau began his series *Les Humanités* where the models are the books, dressed in real and imaginary titles, they wear their eclectic covers as the finest robes. At times they offer a peek into their content, by focusing on a face that looks back

at the unsuspecting viewer. A tired Tintin hiking in the Himalayas and Mao with a Mona Lisa smile, are framed between a tattered tome on the humanities and blinding with primary colours dictionary of modern art. In another work a dying David slouches next to botanical flowers, almost pushed out of the frame by a Pleiades of titles. A familiar trio greets the viewer in yet another painting, a poignant pairing of Charlie Chaplin, Woody Allen and Frida Kahlo. These are no trivial works, although at first glance all we see is a stack of books, placed horizontally exposing only their backs. Mostly hard-cover, some news, some less so, they speak of no owner, stoically awaiting an

Les humanités CCLIV
Acrylic on canvas
Courtesy: Galerie de Bellefeuille

outstretched hand. They are tactile, almost real, but their configurations are far from quixotic Beliveau is a master at composition, his choice of colour and texture creates a unique tapestry, and each painting tells a different story. Literally. There is nothing haphazard in the selection of titles, they converse in some unknown language, spinning a fragmented, enigmatic narrative. Some speak in bold print and bold images, vying for attention, large and stable. They hold fort like a silent wall hiding behind it unfathomable treasures. Other paintings hark to antiquity, to the classics, the books torn at the edges, their back broken from frequent leafing, they are soft and tired, their fading lettering and smudged catalogue numbers like vestiges of a time past. Muted, romantic, these tableaux are the artist's testament to the unparalleled joy of reading, to the gift each of these covers holds, and to the endless inspiration they provide.

Dorota Kozinska

TORONTO

PETER HOFFER

ELEMENT

January 4th – 27th
Nicholas Metivier Gallery
451 King Street West
Tel.: 416 205-9000
<http://www.metiviergallery.com>

Art galleries are so full of recycled conceptual, photo and image-based schlock, that it truly is hard to discover an art with a genuine enthusiasm and direct link to experience. Experience, it seems, is secondary to image transfer and digital processing in much of what we call art today. The mechanisms of technology build new truisms that will eventually be outdated and thrown away just as the tools of technology that create these new objects of production are. Hoffer is enthusiastic, dedicated and actually enjoys the process he is working with in a different way than all that! His art is less about the diatribes and dogmas of image cloning and design, more about walking that fine line between what we see (representation) and what we do (the process of art). Interestingly, Peter Hoffer is one of a few Canadian painters who has reworked, rephrased part of a long tradition of pastoral landscape painting. One need only be reminded of Homer Watson, who hailed from Doone, in the same south-western Ontario region Peter Hoffer grew up in, to realize that these two artists share something very Canadian in common. It is that rural agrarian heritage that fuelled much pre-Group of Seven art that was not portraiture. Oscar Wilde, who collected Homer Watson's painting referred to him as "the Canadian Constable", for Homer Watson could capture that atmosphere of land and sky with considerable painterly and atmospheric effect, right down to the mud, the brown bracken, the field and the towering oak tree, so much so that Watson's were collected by Queen Victoria and the railway magnate Lord Strathcona to name but two of his admirers. While Watson captured the farm, the agricultural and long settled land with an Eden-like repose, it was the atmosphere, the



Parallel, 2006
Oil and resin on board
24 x 96 inches

weather subtleties that made these works visually so salient for his collectors.

Peter Hoffer can likewise charge a landscape with the atmosphere of time, and it is one where the painterly cues and atmospheres rely on the act of construction, the fabrication of a sense of place. Actions such as to allow a field or sky area to include paint drips, swaths of brushwork to enhance the landscape subject remind us that these are indeed just metaphors for places we intimately identify with, even if we live for the most part in city or suburban environments. The landscape thus becomes an island, that exists as a metaphor in and of itself. These landscapes are ultimately separate from reality that exists within a private place in our own (collective) imagination. Landscape becomes a state of creation, where memory interacts with the action element, the assembled paint and surface effects. And so even while landscapes are constructed, layered onto by Hoffer they are not just constructs, more idealizations that visually promote a state of being. The actual context or place being represented is unimportant. Place exists as a generalized icon for something that supersedes any realist, or photorealist agenda. While these works are painted in oil their surface is covered with a thick layer of clear resin that furthers the visual reading and depth of the subject. The shiny surface resin effect attracts us like magpies to Peter Hoffer's art, just as photographs do. We seek to look through these surfaces to discover what is beneath, these landscapes frozen in time, as it were, like leaves under the ice on a lake in winter.

What people really like about Peter Hoffer's painting is the way he can capture weather, light, texture, and do it through painterly style, the brush work effect, whether it is a copse of trees on a horizon, or an illuminated sky. Surface becomes surface... *Hamlet* (2006) has a colour and light effect reminiscent

of the Hudson River school painters or the Eastern Township painter Allan Edson from the 19th century. *Opening* (2006) literally opens up the sky with effects of vertical painterly brushwork. The suggestion is of a higher, and transcendental scale and purpose to that which the painter is representing is his accomplished eclectic way. In some of these painting actual background grain of the wood being painted on shows through, and a tension is achieved through accidental marking, strokes, that are less controlled, and rely on the accidents that can bring an artwork to life. In *Emblem* (2006), a spray of growth in a field can be seen, while there are indistinct copses of trees along a horizon line. At times the brushwork and lines break into a style where the painting itself becomes the subject and the visual readable landscape recedes beneath all this contemporaneity, causing us to re-view the painting. We discover its artificial, constructed nature, and that it is our perception that ascribes a value or weight to all this.

Other Hoffer paintings likewise enable the shrubs, fields, trees, to break apart into pure painterly effect. The confected nature of the scene, the artificial context, makes it delightful for the eye as we follow what is a field, or tree, only to re-discover it is all just paint and style, not an image at all. And the surface and material plays an essential role in all of this. *Parallel* achieves a balance between a formal 19th century academic style of landscape rendition and a pure painterly play with surface. It is this combination of old and new effect that make these idioms catch our attention, for representation, as the paintings in Peter Hoffer's *Element* show at Nicolas Metivier at its best captures the inner essence of beauty.

John K. Grande

SACKVILLE

ANTHONY FLOWER

THE LIFE AND ART OF A COUNTRY PAINTER

1792-1875

12 January - 25 February 2007

The Owens Art Gallery, Sackville NB
61 York St., Sackville, NB E4L 1E1.
Tel.: 506 364-2475

This is a wonderful exhibition of the work of a 19th century amateur New Brunswick artist. The exhibition provides an insight into the life, and the art, of early Canada. Anthony Flower emigrated to Saint John, New Brunswick from England in 1817 and soon afterwards moved outside the city to start farming. He remained on his farm for the rest of his long life and for the whole of this time he painted. It is not clear if Flower ever had any formal art education prior to coming to Canada, but, according to the co-curators of the exhibition and the authors of the exhibition catalogue, Laurie Glenn Norris and Ann Catherine Lowe, it was unlikely. What is clear, however, is that Flower was not what could be termed a primitive or folk artist. He took his art seriously and had in his possession at his death a number of instructional books on painting and drawing. We do know that he came from a solid middle class family, although he may have been estranged from his father, and that he was educated and literate.



*Mary Green Born 1794,
Wife of Anthony Flower Born
1792., 1867*
Ink with watercolour
over graphite on paper.
New Brunswick Museum,
Saint John, NB.

There are a few works by the artist in the exhibition that predate Flower's arrival in Canada including a delightful water colour plant study of a rose bud done in 1804 when he was twelve. These works do illustrate the artist's lifelong interest in art. It is likely at another time in our history that persons with a talent such as Flower's could have made a living as artists, but in early 19th century New Brunswick art was a luxury and full time artists were few and far between. Life was difficult and at least as a farmer you could eke out a living on what you grew and raised. Soon after Flower roughed out his far from the St. John River fronted wilderness he married, in 1820, and his wife, Mary Green, was to become a frequent model in his art. These studies to my mind are the centrepieces of the exhibition. In spite of their sometime starkness you can see that he clearly loved his lifetime partner. In fact, he continued to paint pictures after her death in 1867 based on earlier works that he had done. One of this *Mary Green Born 1794, Wife of Anthony Flower Born 1792. 1897* is an amazing portrait study that show an insight of the subject that can only come from the artist really understanding, and in this case deeply loving, the sitter. Curator Laurie Glenn Norris states in the catalogue that we don't know if Flower's portraits really 'looked' like the subjects, but that he really wasn't important to the over all

quality of the work. I tend to agree to this premise, but I think that it was certainly important to Flower that his paintings looked like his sitters. Amateur realists artists of the time, and even today, put great stock into getting it right in making their picture as close to reality as they can. It is their effort that makes their work at times more interesting than so-called photo-realism or even photographs.

There are awkward passages in some of Flower's portraits where he attempted to show more than heads and shoulders of his subjects such having the head much too large for the body or faulty perspective. One portrait of a Mr. Richard Wells, who was a Saint John church rector, painted in 1824 has all these faults, yet it is one of the most interesting pictures in the exhibition as, like the paintings of the artist's wife, he shows a deep knowledge of the sitter. Flower like many artist of the period copied the work of other artists usually from illustrations in popular magazines and hence there are painting in the exhibition of people such as Lord Byron, Jinny Lind and King Louis-Philippe of France. I would like to think that he did these pictures just to keep up his hand and it likely a good way to pass the cold dark winters of New Brunswick. There is nothing to suggest that Flower was interested in the progress of art during the 19th. century. He, as Norris states, reached a level of artistic competence early on and remained there through out his life. Of course, Saint John was not Paris and art galleries and the art scene were not to be found in the 'Port City' the mid 1800's much less than having the opportunity of sitting in side walk cafes chewing the fat with other artists.

Flower was also a reasonable landscape painter and there are many good examples of the genre in the exhibition. In particular, his views along the St. John River which at the time served as the main highway for the province in the absence of half decent roads. When one thinks of early Canadian art one thinks of landscape painting indeed even into the 20th. century and the Group of Seven our art seems to be more about where we are rather than what we are. The landscape of the St. John River valley remains to this day picturesque and Flower's paintings of the area ring true to what is still there. As far as it is known Flower painted hundreds of pictures both in oil and watercolour throughout his life and never sold his work. What remains of the work is in the hands of family and some has found its way into the collections of the New Brunswick Museum in Saint John and the Beaverbrook Art

Gallery in Fredericton. He was in the best sense of the word an amateur artist who painted because he had the drive to so. He also had talent. The Beaverbrook Art Gallery, who organized this exhibition, has had to dig deep to put it together. They are to be congratulated. It is a very nice show.

Following the closing of the Anthony Flower exhibition in Sackville it travels to the Rooms in St. John, Newfoundland from 16 March to 13 May, the New Brunswick Museum in Saint John room 4 June to 3 September and, finally, to the Confederation Centre of the Arts in Charlottetown, PEI from 23 September to 2 December. If you happen to be in one of these places when this exhibition be sure to catch it. It is worth your time.

Virgil Hammock

NEW ZEALAND

ROBERT HOOD

November 24th 2007 –

February 16th 2007

Christchurch Art Gallery

Address: corner of Montreal and Worcester Boulevard, Christchurch New Zealand

"Out of Erewhon" at the Christchurch Art Gallery in New Zealand features thirteen young artists, among them young sculptor Robert Hood who constructs a wooden building situated atop of the

entrance to the carpark directly across from the gallery. Hood is the newest recipient of the Olivia Spencer Bower award, a national prize in New Zealand deserving of much regional and national fame. In "Sentinel," Hood uses the entrance to the carpark as an impromptu gray plinth for the work. At night, there is a warming quality to the empty building, as the work is filled with rich and mellow light, beckoning. Hood elaborates: "I like the idea of collective memory and how now it exists in some photos and the memories of the people who saw it. The light in the building always seems to provoke the question what is it?"

Hood is a part of a young group of New Zealand artists that have all become increasingly concerned with larger themes of abnegation, cultural alienation and melancholia. "Sentinel" reflects these lonely themes, acting as both outpost situated in the extended regions of the world (what could be further than New Zealand?) as well as beacon, exuding warmth and light throughout the dark night. "Sentinel" implies a type of sinister surveillance, as well as the idea of standing on guard, or enforcing protection. Hood's outdoor installation deliberately challenges traditional concepts of permanence and longevity in public sculpture—"Sentinel" is only shown for a couple of months before it's painstakingly dismantled. Hood has deliberately constructed the installation based on this impermanent principle, stating further that the 'visual impact of the sculpture will only last in people's memories...albeit impermanently, of course'.

Melissa Lam



Sentinel
Oregon Pine, fluorescent lights, plywood.
Gallery: Christchurch Art Gallery

HONG KONG

THE IKIRO PROJECT:

TAKAHIRO SUZUKI IN HONG KONG

1a space, Hong Kong
Unit 14D, Block C, Cattle Depot
Artist Village, 63 Ma
Tau Kok Road, To Kwa Wan, Kln.,
Hong Kong

Exhibited recently in the form of an installation at Hong Kong's contemporary 1a space, Suzuki's participation in Ishiro Murakami's group show "Strangers," is the knockout exhibit of an otherwise humdrum show. The premise is based on 4 Japanese based artists arriving as foreigners in Hong Kong and given 6 weeks to create site specific installations.

For over fifteen years now, Japanese artist Takahiro Suzuki has installed more or less ephemeral renditions of Ikoro, obsessive repetitions of the Japanese word for "be alive". Suzuki's projects began in Tokyo, installations largely consisting of various forms of the word Ikoro written in Japanese characters on rice paper, distributed in a post office in Berlin (2000) or in Washington Square Park in NYC (1996). The project has traveled all around the world, varying from city to city, always including the obsessive scrawl of the same two characters, or the same English word interrogating the process of meaning and preservation.

The Ikoro installation at 1a space is particularly moving. It consists of a complicated sheltered room, one only enters when a small blue light seem through a peephole begins to glow—signaling the beginning of the video sequence in the room. Objects in the darkened room consist of a wicker suitcase, a metal case with a black telephone nest and a white box covered in white cloth. A tap drips into a sink on the right hand wall. A television set glows fuzzily in the opposite corner—the lovely fuzziness eventually turning into a naked figure strolling. An uneasy/unsettling feeling accompanies the atmosphere in the dark room. A telephone rings in the corner and the conversation continues in Cantonese.



Ikiro
Mixed media
Gallery: 1a space
Hong Kong

This contrasts with the abandoned derelict quality to the outside of the installation, Akiro is scrawled on the left hand corner over the entire outside wall. Teetering between play and construction, the play of signifier and signified aesthetics and morality, Suzuki's project moves on, to reinvent itself in a wholly new direction to be alive.

Melissa Lam

BOOK REVIEWS

AUDREY NIFFENEGGER:

THE THREE INCESTUOUS SISTERS

Published by Harry N. Abrams, Incorporated, New York
www.abramsbooks.com
Can \$38.95



Audrey Niffenegger
Levitator Lesson - aquatint

Whether it is true or not that a picture is worth a thousand words, it was exactly what happened with Audrey Niffenegger's book project. What began as a literary endeavour, soon turned into an art album, as

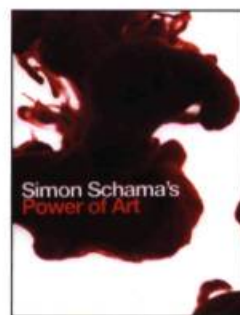
the words slowly gave way to the images, disappearing from the pages one by one. Maybe that's why the pages are not numbered, for the words are still finding their place. Or maybe because this is truly a work of art, a collection of colour plates, aquatint images of great sophistication and power of expression. With an elegant economy of means, Niffenegger creates illustrations that resemble the colour planes of the Nabis, in solid, muted tones. The artist chose the format to reflect the quiet sophistication of Japanese prints, telling a poignant story of sibling rivalry in breathtaking, static images. The players are caught in emotional moments, suspended in fear or anguish, struggling with inner confusion. Their faces remain expressionless; everything is in the gestures, in a theatrical dance of bodies and limbs. Niffenegger's aquatints are like visual haikus, so simple yet so complex, and so strangely mesmerizing. An air of mystery permeates these works, and the laconic phrases, at times but a word or two, barely hint at the turmoil hidden behind the half-closed eyes of the heroines. Each colour plate stands on its own, a story onto itself, and together they weave a tale as old as the world, with dimensions of a Greek tragedy. Niffenegger's fantastic imagination creates unique, surreal compositions, as when representing one of the sister's headache as a flock of birds pulling at her hair. A child yet to be born floats in a starry firmament like an embryonic astronaut. The book, with its dark trappings evokes our common childhood, its fears and magic, drawing from some

Jungian collective unconscious, speaking in a language we all understand. "This is a book of my heart, a fourteen-year labour of love," says the author in an afterword, and that uncommon, gentle persistence shows in every plate. There is nothing to add and nothing to subtract, and the sparse text accompanying the illustrations becomes yet another graphic accent. The meaning is all in the pictures that call for an equally uncommon appreciation.

Dorota Kozinska

SIMON SCHAMA'S POWER OF ART

Viking Canada, 2006, 448 pages,
illustrated with index \$60.00



Old wine in new bottles, but what bottles! *Simon Schama's Power of Art* refreshes discourse, and an historical view of art, doing this with the paraphernalia, and lingo of our times. Rembrandt, for instance is compared to an E-Bay addict, and the list of media and Hollywood metaphors goes on and on. This is discourse on steroids, post-historical reconfiguration according to the new conservative agenda, as art, we are told, has power. What kind of power? Whose? Why? Such questions are conjured up by Schama's spin cycle hyperbole... but what is ultimately in the wash.

As Picasso once stated, "Art is a lie which makes you realize the truth," and therein is the rub. Indeed it is this sensitivity to the mind set of our times that makes Schama a particularly skilful vulgarisateur of art. His best success *Landscape and Memory* word tome captured the imagination of a far broader public than usual for art, and this in an era where new media, and computer

generated this and that are drawing all the kudos... Art may be a circus these days, but it still requires its interpreters. In this fascinating book Schama, who is a Professor of Art History at Columbia University, sometime culture critic for *The New Yorker* and essayist for *The Guardian*, puts a spin on everything, but the real game is the word play, not the facts, events, personages being brought back into being. Enthusiasm is Schama's best suit and he wears it well. We learn of Rembrandt's courage in the face of rejection of the commission *Claudius Civilis* during his final years, his consummate self portrait in the face of despair is truly a dialogue with history itself, rather than the mundane patrons, and powers that be. The same goes for Bernini who Schama captures this way... "Before Bernini, sculpture's preoccupation had been with immortality (...) Bernini took the stat - the Latin for their usual condition of "standing" - out of statues." *Simon Schama's Power of Art* deals with eight art world personages from the pantheon in all... Caravaggio (Painting gets physical), Bernini (The miracle worker), Rembrandt (Rough stuff in the halls of the rich), David (air-brushing the Revolution), Turner (Painting up a storm), Van Gogh (Painting from inside the head), Picasso (Modern art goes political) and Rothko (The Music of Beyond in a city of glitter). The titles are as alluring as a Slushie! The weakness of popularizing is likewise its strength... over-simplification and caricatures of meaning result. They draw you in, then leave you standing... Interpretation makes way for the power of word play, for and of itself. Sometimes Schama takes it all too far as when Rembrandt's nudes are seen to be "symphonies of cellulite" Or Van Gogh's famous *A Pair of Shoes* (1887)... "The boots were an emblematic self-portrait of the pilgrim still tramping that long, lonely road between earth and heaven - only now that he had abandoned formal religion, Van Gogh was after a heaven here on earth." Art does have a relation to power, and much of history is forgotten adulterated by the powers that be. Regardless of the wordspeak this book is a great read!

John K. Grande

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The superior man bends his attention to what is radical. That being established, all practical courses naturally grow up.

— Confucius (551-479 B.C.)



Wang Tiande with his work, 2005

How to move forward when anchored in a centuries old tradition? How to break free on wings laden with overwhelming expectations? Wang Tiande did it with head bowed in respect for his ancient culture, and with his eyes set high on the firmament of contemporary art. Without forsaking traditional Chinese tools of brush, ink and paper, he has transcended established parameters—both conceptual and physical—creating a body of work that is at once a testament to one man's unwavering vision and spirit of commitment, and an illustration of the astounding changes transforming China, including its art.

Tiande's use of Chinese paper has taken the ancient material into a contemporary realm, presenting echoes of traditional art in a new form, punctuating as it were this important expansion without losing

touch with the past. Deeply rooted in the mastery and finesse of Chinese aesthetic, Tiande produces series of works that speak a sophisticated and unbearably subtle visual vocabulary, each a transformation in both time and space. He is working against a backdrop of profound discussions on the place of art in modern China, and the pull of tradition is powerful. Yet with artistic diplomacy, Tiande's transforming process is taking place with great fluidity and avoidance of

dramatic gestures. His spectacular *Chinese Garment* series is both an homage to traditional Chinese dress, and an evocation of the spirit of the future in a pattern of seared symbols. Delicate and monochromatic, Tiande's paper dresses were born of a simple and most unusual process; one that was both intentional and accidental. While the format of the works had as its matrix the straightforward shape of the dress,—they were actually sewn in a factory by

young women wearing similar garments,—the rice paper they were made of, however, was subjected to a more sophisticated treatment. The lettering in Tiande's works is achieved with ash gently and patiently dripped onto it, the words forming like burnt offerings. It is fascinating to imagine the contemplation involved in the process, the controlled physicality of the gesture, the smoke and the scent, all prerequisites of an altar.

The sacred is further accentuated in the *Digital Series*, where vertical sheets of paper recall ancient scrolls, and whose title has little to do with technology—although the connection is undoubtedly fortuitous—and all aptly to do with the *digit*, hand-made as they are. The same method is used to produce these works, with two sheets of Chinese paper forming a beguiling three-dimensional space. Without the aid of help this time, Tiande paints and burns ancient poetry in barely decipherable symbols onto the paper that gently undulates, shifting and altering the image. These works, like the previous series, are the young artist's continued statement speaking of respect for the past, for calligraphy in this case, and for the importance of finding a place for it in the ever-changing, globalized reality.

Few contemporary artists invest their creative process with such complex and difficult issues, as do those in modern China. Tiande's brilliant fusion of the old with the new, combined with his involvement in the intellectual and academic discussion of the day, imbues his art with a unique spirit. Beyond the unavoidable analysis that his works provoke, lays the magical realm of beauty and aesthetic, and in this, too, Tiande has no equal. The scrolls in *Digital Series* present art at its finest, perfectly balanced, almost classical in its geometric, traditional form, teasing the eye with the seared edges of Chinese symbols through which other fragments of verse appear, ever so briefly. The texture of the paper, enclosed behind glass like a frail relic, offers its own universe, and the whole rests in quiet harmony, the mark of Tiande.

Dorota Kozinska



Digital Series
No. 5, 2005
Xuan paper, ink on paper, burn marks
134 x 66 cm

Xuan paper, ink on paper, burn marks
134 x 66 cm