

## Dubious Views. *Subversive Souvenirs*, online exhibition by Gallery TPW, Toronto, ongoing

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Number 77, 2007

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/20484ac>

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### Publisher(s)

Les Productions Ciel variable

### ISSN

1711-7682 (print)

1923-8932 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

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### Cite this review

Garneau, D. (2007). Review of [Dubious Views. *Subversive Souvenirs*, online exhibition by Gallery TPW, Toronto, ongoing]. *Ciel variable*, (77), 52–52.

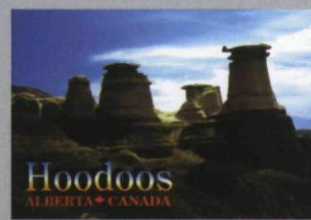
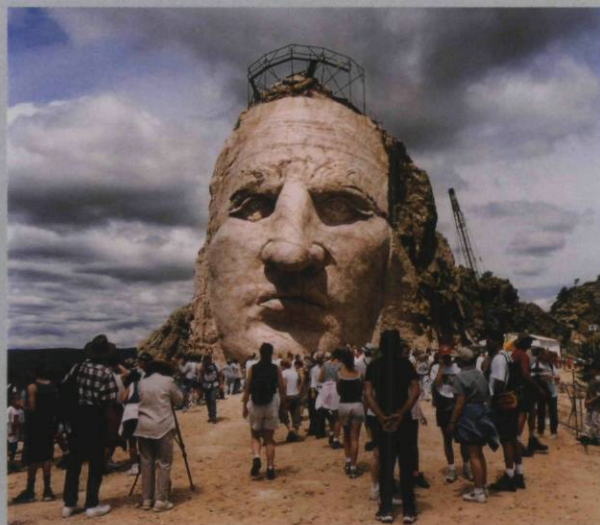
His books – especially his *Language of Vision* (1944), *The New Landscape in Art and Science* (1956), and the seven-volume *Vision and Value* series (1965–66), for which he was editor as well as contributor – were enormously influential at the time, and are remembered fondly still (and treasured as collectibles) by artists and designers for whom his spirited erasing of the lines between fine art and science spelled creative liberation.

Kepes was a superb photographer. Like Moholy-Nagy, he was a restless and relentless experimenter with the camera, pushing its

limits by shooting through screens and distorting glass, choosing odd and often dizzyingly elevated angles from which to make images, capturing unlikely shadows and unusual textures, creating inventive lighting effects, and generally attempting to extend the boundaries of the photographic act. And like Moholy-Nagy (as well as Man Ray), Kepes also made photograms (of which there are several in the Epstein show): cameraless photos produced by placing objects on photo-sensitive paper and then briefly exposing the paper to the light.

Kepes's beautiful *Juliet's Shadow Caged* (1939) is typical of his work: here, his wife, Juliet Appleby Kepes, is recontextualized by a structure – part solid and part shadow – that confines her even as it tenderly redefines her. There were twenty-five works in the Epstein exhibition. Some of them were vintage prints. Most were gelatine-silver prints dating from 1930 to 1973, printed by Kepes himself and gathered into a few exquisitely produced portfolios. All of them were the product of Kepes's invigorating quest for pictorial invention and new imagistic meaning.

Toronto writer, critic, and painter **Gary Michael Dault** is the author, or co-curator, of ten books. His art review column appears each Saturday in *The Globe and Mail*.



**Jin-Me Yoon**  
*Rocky Mountain Bus Tour*, 1991  
From the *Souvenirs of the Self* series  
Chromogenic print  
10 x 15 cm  
Courtesy of the Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver



**Roger Minick**  
*Viewing Day at Crazy Horse*, 1999, C-print  
40,6 x 48,3 cm,  
Courtesy of the Jan Kesner Gallery, Los Angeles

**Mitch Robertson**  
*Original Copy: Hoodoos*  
Postcard, 2002–2003  
and Chromogenic print

## Dubious Views

**Subversive Souvenirs**, online exhibition by Gallery TPW, Toronto, ongoing

The emerging phenomenon of the virtual exhibition is creating both tremendous possibilities and challenges, particularly for photographers. Virtual venues offer new ways to disseminate and consider pictures, but current formats tend to privilege the curatorial imaginary.

*Dubious Views* houses two online exhibitions produced by Gallery TPW. *Subversive Souvenirs* presents artists' alternatives to institutional representations of tourist sites. *Subversive Cartographies* does the same for mapping. The well-designed bilingual site features two essays that scroll along the left as the corresponding artworks appear on the right. The images can be clicked on for more information, and the essays' hypertexts lead to definitions and art projects.

The artists are well chosen. Canadian favourites include Mitch Robertson, Janet Cardiff, and Shelly Niro. Jin Me Yoon's self-portrait with a Lake Louise backdrop plays with the stereotype that Asiatic features in Banff are coded "tourist" and "foreign" and challenges us to examine our unconscious hierarchical ontologies of Canadian-ness. N.E. Thing Co.'s highway, marked with signs reading "start viewing" and "end viewing," comments hilariously on the commodification of landscape.

Unfortunately, the essay is heavy on the theory of the spectacle and light on considering the works beyond this narrow filter. The unnamed author is more intent on convincing us that we are living in the Matrix than on unpacking the artworks. The viewer constructed in the curatorial essay is a dupe who believes tourist brochures and government propaganda and has no access to competing images and stories. This ripe fiction is a straw man designed to make the artists' achievements uniformly and vaguely subversive (subversion as simply an alternative to the dominant). The author is not convinced that one version of reality is truer than any other – there are only competing versions. The text develops a strong thesis, then finds strains of it in the exhibition. This is firm essay construction, but perhaps curators should be more open to the greater complexities in the works that they tend.

If the essay simply accompanied the show it might not interfere with its reception. However, in the virtual format, it does intervene and is symptomatic of a general increase in the curatorial colonization of art. Curating is becoming more creative, more like art. In the conventional gallery, curators' texts can be ignored; our experience with the art will usu-

ally overwhelm textual meanings anyway. However, current institutionally designed and funded virtual exhibitions tend to push the shift toward curatorial centrism.

If traditional spaces privileged things made by artists, virtual exhibitions privilege images and the curator's words. Virtual exhibitions are a boon to virtual works. Artworks designed for the screen are not generally diminished by an online showing. But works with a primary, prior, non-Web identity are affected by the translation. There is an ontological difference between a tiny jpeg and Yoon's large original. Too often, the miniaturization ends up becoming a quotation that serves the text meant to serve the artwork.

Current virtual gallery formats often have the curatorial voice share equal space with the art. In *Subversive Souvenirs*, the essay subtly overwhelms the art. At the top of the "exhibition" column are three images. The first juxtaposes the Eiffel Tower with firefighters responding to the recent Paris riots. The idea is that tourist images do not represent all of reality. The next picture shows people taking photographs of the pope's funeral. The message is that people prefer to mediate their experience rather than get it directly. There is no line between the three essay illustrations and the art that follows. In fact, the Paris pictures might be a contribution to the exhibition by the author: they closely resemble Mitch Robertson's work. This trespass renders the exhibition images into illustrations for the essay and the whole project more closely resembles a book format

than an exhibition. Instructively, these problems are not as significant in *Subversive Cartographies*, in which much of the art is digital. In many cases, what we see (or search for, following the prompts) are the works themselves rather than small copies. Where the *Souvenirs* essay screens the art through Deborian theory and keeps only what it recognizes, the *Cartographies* essay is more porous and constantly overwhelmed by the art.

Ironically, the *Subversive Souvenirs* essay closely resembles the machinery that it critiques. The essay explains that dominant industry images – because they are visually appealing, government funded, authoritative and well distributed – displace competing versions. *Dubious Views* is a visually appealing, government-funded, and well-distributed set of images offering an authoritative version of certain artworks. Perhaps a text that deploys old-fashioned, oppositional, conspiratorial theory cannot afford to be blind to its own complicity in the image-making and contextualizing Matrix. Curators are more likely to produce new ideas if they follow the lead of the works rather than looking for theory matches that convert art into illustration.

**David Garneau** is an associate professor of visual arts at the University of Regina. His practice includes painting, drawing, curating, and critical writing. His solo exhibition *Cowboys and Indians (and Métis?)* toured Canada (2003–07).