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[See table of contents](#)

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HALIFAX

JERZY KOLACZ

January 28 - February 16
 Studio 21
 1223 Lower Water St.
 Tel.: 902-420-1852
 www.studio21.ca

Polish Canadian Jerzy Kolacz's paintings, along with sculptures by Wojtek Biczysko, form the basis for this two person exhibition in Halifax. This is the first time that these artists have exhibited in Atlantic Canada. Kolacz is also a well known graphic designer having taught that subject at the Ontario College of Art for some twenty years. Other than formal concerns such as colour and composition, it is difficult for most people to see a relationship between Kolacz's paintings (he is foremost a formalist and modernist) and his graphic works, but, in reality there are links between these two areas of interest. All of the painting in this exhibition are non-objective works and, of course, graphic design, by its very nature, normally has some sort of representational subject matter. Poland, where the artist was educated, has a rich history in graphic design. Posters that came out of Poland during the Communist period were particularly strong but some of the best painting in the late Communist period tended to be non-objective. By the mid-1970s social realism was a dead issue in Polish painting and young artists looked to the West for their role models and, further, to Abstract Expressionism in particular.

Kolacz's paintings in this exhibition are about beauty. In an interview with the Polish Canadian writer and poet Edward Zyman, Kolacz comments: "In visual arts, in painting or sculpture, truth (beauty) is felt, not read, as we perceive the message contained in a book." Certainly the concept of feeling beauty is at its most basic in the visual arts, particularly with non-objective abstract works that need not be filtered through the subject matter as post-Modern art can be. This is not to say that non-objective art is better than subject-laden postModern art. Rather, the subject of modernist non-objective is beauty, or to put it

more simply *l'art pour l'art*. In viewing one of Kolacz's paintings in this exhibition music immediately comes to mind, classical music to be sure, but music nonetheless. His titles are enigmatic such as *Haiku XI*, *High Priest X*, and *Land-ing*. All seven paintings in the exhibition were completed in the last year or two. They are reasonably large, ranging from 60" x 42" to 66" x 72", and are mixed media on board or canvas.

Somehow, and I think it is because of their ability to draw you in, these paintings seem to look larger than they actually are. An example would be *High Priest XI* (2004) a 60" x 42" mixed media on canvas. Looking at this vertical canvas I was unaware of its borders and became total immersed in the work – its colours, its textures – and this is when I hear the music. I do not hear a particular work of music, but rather get the same feeling that I often have listening to classical music, such as chamber work by Schubert. *High Priest XI* is not a brightly coloured work. If anything it is somber tending to grey. The surface quality, the texture, of this painting, and the others in the exhibition, is also an important part of the viewing experience. I wanted to touch the painting and run my hand over its rough surface. I did not, but if I owned the work I would. In my viewing of Kolacz's paintings I was reminded of my experience of looking at the paintings of Mark Rothko and the non-objective works of Philip Guston which invoked similar feelings.

There is no doubt that Jerzy Kolacz's painting are High Art and for many younger artists could represent an elitism that, from their point of view, is to be avoided. This is too bad because it misses the point of his art. Kolacz is capable of making political points and he has done so with his graphic art. Non-objective art was the revolutionary art when he was beginning as an artist in Poland. Social Realism was the stuff with content and it was supposed to be one with the people. By the mid to early 70's Social Realism was pretty dead in Poland, but it was freshly buried and some of the stink remained. Poland, at that time, was still not a great place to live and it was possible to go to



jail for your ideas. Abstract and non-objective art was a way to thumb your nose at the state as many of those in charge had no idea what the artists were up to and, besides, beauty was a fine place to escape to even if it was only in your mind.

Kolacz is an interesting painter of the old school which is the same one that I belong to and, with that caveat in place, I believe that he still has things to show us. Beauty is more than skin deep, at least where painting is concerned. Jerzy Kolacz's paintings in this exhibition are about nothing and, at the same, about everything. These paintings to have the ability to move you, if you take the time to stop and look.

Virgil Hammock

MONTREAL

MARK LANG:
IN AN INSTANT

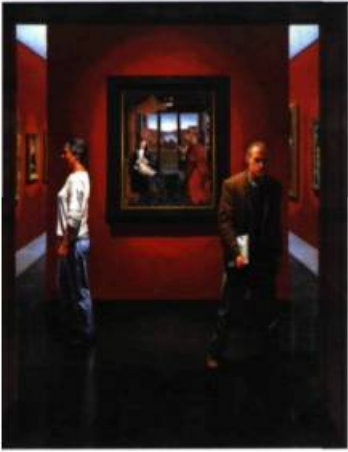
February 3 - 14, 2005
 Galerie de Bellefeuille
 1367 avenue Greene
 (514) 933-4406
 www.debellefeuille.com

There is a theory which maintains that everything is happening at the same instant; the past, the present, the future, are in fact just a speck, a blink of an eye, all in one and one in all. Mark Lang's recent canvases are the visual accompanying that theory, an aleph, as it were. Epoch and people wander in and out of time in his imaginary museum, where old masters encounter each other in front of their own 'ancient' works. The viewer is instantly transfixed by these fictional scenarios, inadvertently taking in an art history lesson for which there are many

interpretations. Lang's latest paintings at Galerie de Bellefeuille seem surreal with their juxtaposition of eras and artists, while the execution is pure realism. It is fascinating to have followed the career of this talented painter, from his early canvases of mysterious interiors occupied by equally enigmatic characters, to the latest works that astound by their maturity and subject matter.

Rather than copy old masters, Mark Lang has incorporated early masterpieces into his vast halls hung with paintings that most of us recognize. His compositions resemble snapshots from a museum, eerily realistic while created entirely by the artist's imagination. There is de Kooning's dancing painting titled *Composition*, providing a backdrop to a wonderful portrait of a laughing girl; as is Géricault's *The Raft of Medusa*, its ancient drama echoing the troubled features of a female viewer seated on a bench, her back to the enormous classic.

With admirable handling of the medium of oil, Lang paints the difference, the separation between his contemporary sitter and his rendition of famous masterpieces. They are instantly recognizable, but remain in the realm of the past, while the visitors to Lang's imaginary museum are indisputably of our era. Equally intriguing are several portraits of famous personages in contemporary guise, as in the work titled *Retrospective*, featuring Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin. The two famous artists are wearing today's clothing and seem lost in a discourse in front of what looks like Millet's *The Gleaners*, throwing the unsuspecting viewer into a time warp with a twist. In *Portals* another play on time and space is taking place, where a couple of imaginary characters have stepped off the canvas to carry on in an empty museum hall. The title of this work suggests that art is, indeed, a key to other dimensions, to a realm of endless possibilities in which we all can play. Well, maybe not all. It takes the talent of an artist like Mark Lang, his audacious self-assurance as a painter, to appropriate great works and use them as setting. It takes even greater mastery to paint them into vast oils, whose



Perspective, 2004
Oil on panel 152 x 122 cm

uncompromising format would intimidate a lesser artist. With that same mix of modesty and hubris, Lang paints himself into several of the works... in the guise of a weary museum janitor oblivious to the great art that surrounds him. His latest works present a new way of looking at and using art, in a time where everything has been done it seems, and painting is dead in the opinion of some, and where the success of an exhibition depends more on the curator's selection, than on the power of the works themselves. Lang's paintings are putting in doubt all of the above.

Dorota Kosinska

3 X 3

January 14 – February 19, 2005
Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery
Concordia University
1400 de Maisonneuve ouest
Tel.: 514-848-2424 #4750
www.ellengallery.concordia.ca

As the title suggests, 3 x 3 at the Leonard and Bina Ellen Art Gallery is an exhibition consisting of three major works each by three seminal American Minimalists: Donald Judd, Dan Flavin and Carl André. Drawn from the National Gallery of Canada's collection and curated by Diana Nemiroff, 3 x 3 draws attention to the aesthetic impetus that fostered minimalism in the 1960's. As a purely logical conclusion to the open-ended dialogue resulting from Abstract Expressionism and Post-Painterly Abstraction, minimalism was a natural answer to a reductive aesthetic. If minimalism didn't exist, they would have had to invent it.

What is surprising on viewing this show firsthand is how varied both the method and intent was among minimalist artists: they worked less as a group and more as individuals solving a puzzle to which they were all respondents. Despite the seeming naked methodology of the placement of common materials in space (Flavin's commercially available fluorescent lamps, Judd's and André's factory-fabricated galvanized steel and copper plates), each had their own aesthetic parameters to which they rigidly adhered.

Carl André's work was guided by the prefabricated settings and measurements of his materials. From there, the inherent properties of his 'units' would be assembled to interact with space. *Lever* (1966) is a line of common bricks laid on the floor in 'a header course', a bricklayers' term, that dissects the space and emphasizes a horizontality at loggerheads with common notions of sculpture at the time. *Pile* (1977), is a neat stack of 277 copper plates (all André's groups of units add up to be a prime number, divisible only by itself), each 12 inches square, and piled to the height equivalent of an average person. The piece nestles itself compellingly into the corner of a wall.



Dan Flavin's transformation of the prefabricated fixture into an aesthetic and incisive object is exemplified in his strangely dramatic *Monument 4 for those who have been killed in ambush (to PK, who reminded me about death)* (1966). Another corner piece by Flavin puts four standard-issue fluorescent lights in a spatial arrangement that looks like a cross-bow jutting out into the gallery space. Suspended at a certain height, this bow basically points at the viewer's head. The colored light, a standard-issue fluorescent red, gives off a glow that dematerializes

the structure and points the viewer towards the more sanguinary theme indicated in the title.

Donald Judd, also not adverse to notions of beauty in classical modernism, takes a painterly eye to his reductive form. With a uniformity characteristic of modern consumer production methods, and simple scaling according to aesthetic priorities, the piece engages the space. Composition, texture and color differences become barely perceptible equations. As Judd said, "One or four boxes in a row, any single thing or such a series, is local order, just an arrangement, barely order at all." Judd's *Untitled* wall piece of rectangular galvanized steel boxes, each spaced exactly to emphasize a relationship with negative space, engages the viewer with its vertical emphasis. Like André's *Pile*, it recalls the transcendentalism of Brancusi's *Endless Column* rather than the cheeky irony of Duchamp's *Fountain*. Visiting 3 x 3 reacquaints the viewer with the minimalists and their fervent search for visual and aesthetic truth that was as empirical as it was deductive.

Cameron Skene

GUERINO RUBA

Gesù – Centre de créativité
1200, rue de Bleury
Montréal
Tel.: (514) 861-4378
www.gesu.net

Guerino Ruba's art tells a story of a life and of life in general. Memories of 20th century anguish, of the trauma of war, of silence and the violence that lies behind, beneath, or buried, and yes, of death. A tomb-like structure that is surrounded and placed on a flat platform floor of copper patinated black. We cannot "enter" this space or approach this archi-structural metaphor for the death of imagination. A set of descending stairs in this ghost-like white tomb-like container lead downwards. The stairs are "built into" this enigmatic form. The forms suggests a kind of social hierarchy is in place, and that everything is immovable, cannot be changed. Within the structure and after a brief spatial interlude, yet another, even smaller set of stairs, leads still further down-

wards. This seamless scenario is not just a crafted enigma, more like an autobiographical recollection given wings of experiences Guerino Ruba, who was born in Pola (formerly part of Italy, now in Croatia), lived during childhood. Before the war Pola had the idyllic ambience of an ancient city. Buildings were made of stone and a square had a shade tree where elders could sit and tell stories. The simple village quietude was rudely broken apart by war...

The "cage" or container metaphor is a structure that other sculptors, notably Alberto Giacometti have exploited. Guerino Ruba has created a series of three miniature cage-like containers. Within one we see five women standing in a circle facing each other. The second has five men. The third has a solitary individual seated in silence. The sculptural wall-mounted triptych carries a social message. We imagine these groupings – male or female – as more varied in their communication and character than people in a society that thrives on the individual image or the image of the individual.

A social message pervades all of Guerino Ruba's sculptures. It is a noble, even classical one, and very civilized, particularly in a society increasingly invaded, barraged by materialism. These figures in their cages seem to float before our eyes. Their inner freedom may exist, but physically they are confined and delimited by their own definitions and mores of social behaviour. Maybe pure pragmatism, a logic of practical behaviour has seized these people en masse..., any signs of nature, or something natural have sadly been removed, discarded like old clothes, as has any memory of other times, of this place with a history where these people's lives have taken place.

There is an innate sense of tragedy, and of the fact that there are very few witnesses to the tragedy, indeed even a feeling of the death of theatre as we knew it, in Guerino Ruba's art. Like the stairs leading downwards in one structure, a metal ladder that leans against an empty wall has acute, receding angles that suggest infinity or distance, a perspective seen from afar. Where does it lead to? Does the destination matter, or is it simply about arrival

and departure? Those cardinal points could be very similar for the estranged person who migrates, or is in exile. Another of Ruba's sculptural integrations contains a collectivity of figures. Each is following the next, walking in a line. Are they migrating? They do not look ahead too far, and the leader of this migrating group is out a balance. He is falling over to his side. Will they ever find another home? If they do will they be accepted? Without an ethical basis for determining the value of life, Ruba's art infers, we may find we are simply objectified like that ghostly section of meat that hangs from menacing hooks within another of Ruba's containers. Is it a human torso? It is hard to tell... things are quantified, measured, abstracted from any source or context *ad nauseum*.

We can see a life-size window in white plaster on one wall. It is closed, shuttered and has two boards. The two boards form an X sealing up the (imagined) building. Wartime memories of abandonment, of removal, a detail that a child would typically see and ask questions about. This is the kind of experience Guerino Ruba formed his world vision out of as a child. The incapacity of people to communicate the most elemental of emotions and feelings, and of a rampant fear... Common wartime experiences that cannot be erased. A tiny wall placed sculpture building typical of those from the village Ruba grew up in has a boarded up window similar to the life-size plaster one in the show. The door has a pile of rubble and a muse-like oval shape, ambiguous as life itself, can be seen in the shadows of another very tiny window in the house. An unreality persists. It is unsettling, but very real. It is the hidden face of humanity. Beneath the mask we find it in Guerino Ruba's art.

John K. Grande



Souvenir d'enfance n° 7 (detail)
Bronze, fer
142 x 10 x 17 cm

AFSHIN MATLABI: ANXIETY APOLOGY

January 14 – February 19
Optica
372, Sainte-Catherine Ouest
Suite 508
Tel.: (514) 874-1666
www.optica.ca

Afshin Matlabi is a multidisciplinary artist whose current presentation at the Galerie Optica consists of a video installation and a large drawing respectively. Serious and yet dressed up in a shroud of irony and wit, these works that comprise this show do not only speak of the anxiety fueled state of affairs in a world largely being shaped and determined by the United States of America, but also about another phenomena that could have more to do with the character of culture these days.

Citing the guilty who have recanted their crimes against humanity during the 20th century, ie. the Pope for the Church's complicity in the Holocaust, the Japanese for treatment of their prisoners of war, and the Americans for their decision to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki, for example, Matlabi has made a large drawing in multi-media titled "I'm So Sorry That" depicting 44 "nude from the waist up" male figures running across a field.

These cartoonishly drawn figures run across the green verdure with blood dripping from their hands, all in a race to redeem themselves at a fountain of pure water which awaits them. They are all uniformly guilty and democratically unified in their collective mandate.

The effect of using a cartoon style of drawing in *I'm So Sorry...* is profoundly disturbing in the face of serious world issues. It implies that a vision worthy of the world's redemption is only possible under the most banal of adolescent banners, namely the cartoon. It seems that once true maturity enters the the field of political change, war breaks out, or the art dealers start creating taste.

The video piece, titled "*United Fuckin' Nations*" is composed of two monitors that face each other on opposite walls. One monitor screens Matlabi's crudely rendered drawings of all of the flags belonging to the United Nations, interspersed with



I am so sorry that..., 2003
mixed media.
Photo: Paul Litherland.

"United Fuckin' Nations" every ten seconds or so. The other screen flashes all the states of the United States' flags interspersed with the text phrase "United F_____ States of America." Flashing at hyperspeed, the artist's screenwork seems to invoke the use of subliminal advertising, a hallmark of the American entrepreneurial spirit.

On the opposite wall, all of the State flags of the United States individual states are presented at the same hyperspeed, in a flash. Again, the metaphor of the flag serves to speak of darker things beneath the facade. Matlabi has said he has a "love/hate relationship" with the U. S. A. Its clear that he represents a multitude of perplexed lovers of America.

What is interesting is that Matlabi's indictment of the present "Utopia" is based on the sense that bestial self interest, rather than compassion, rules world policy. Artists and writers such as Gunther Grass have echoed the same opinion of the government of the United States since 9/11.

Finally, Afshin Matlabi's *Anxiety Apology* reminds me of Joseph Beuys' work *I like America/America likes Me* (1974). This seminal performance work spoke of America as the hope of the world, the place where the spiritual power of art might be used to heal the world, as it were. The title itself is rife with irony just as Matlabi's works are, and though Beuys' work was in part a critique of American actions in Vietnam, it also signaled how the hegemony of American art had dwarfed European voices that were every bit as pertinent... When Beuys created this in 1974 he was in part challenging the materialist bias of American minimalism, and the self evident phraseology of their art. His *aktion* took place in the so-called

heart of America's big apple – New York City. The Wall Street Journal, delivered each day to the René Block Gallery and part of the installation performance were dutifully placed in stacks. The coyote caged with Beuys would usually urinate on these Donald Judd-like stacks of paper soon after they were delivered.

Just like Joseph Beuys did in his era, Afshin Matlabi likewise raises vitally relevant issues about cultural identity in the artistic arena and on the political plane respectively. Matlabi accomplishes it with a sense of humour. This in and of itself is a worthy achievement.

Isak Elliott Augustine.

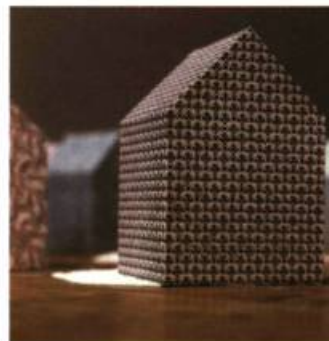
QUEBEC CITY

IN MY LIFETIME

February 3 – April 24
Musée national
des beaux-arts du Québec
Parc des Champs-de-Bataille
Tel.: (418) 643-2150
www.mnba.qc.ca

Issues of identity and territoriality have often been the subject of contemporary native art shows that have included *Land Spirit Power* at the National Gallery of Canada and *New Territories: 500 Years After* in Montreal. What is most interesting in this show guest curated by Lee-Ann Martin is the way these concerns have evolved as a language that expressed native concerns within the forum of contemporary art.

What strikes one the most in the current show is not the explicit political and minority rights flag waving, (though David Garneau



Hannah Claus
unsettlements (détail) 2004
Serigraph on kozo paper, balsa wood,
pearls, needlepoint, electronic
components fibre optic cables, LED

engages in this with his comic caricature like paintings about Métis culture in the midWest), but instead how attached to material and structural discourse these artists are. With Hannah Claus' un-settlements, the issue of resettlement and shabby pre-fab housing common to many native communities are expressed through a simple alignment of box-like identical houses whose exteriors are covered with patterned wallpaper samples from the 19th and 20th centuries. While the patterns are colonial in spirit, the art is postColonial and makes it point through rational, not instinctive discourse. Frank Shebageget's *Beavers* is a hilarious take on the Beaver aircraft and its significant role in communication and supply delivery in Canada's northern native communities. Here, Shebageget has 1692 (the exact number of Beaver planes manufactured by DeHavilland between 1947 and 1967) meticulously crafted multiples of beaver planes that seem to literally fly out of the wall at you. The planes look like a swarm of shadflies than an effective mode of transport. Herein lies the irony... Neal MacLeod's expressionistic paintings reawaken old Cree legends like the evil spirit *Wihitkow* giving these narrative sources a wholly contemporary twist. *Wihitkow II* (2001) has a masked or painted native personality bare from the chest up clasping a cross in his right hand. Word phrases and fragments are painted at random and read... ate our souls, a new light on the light, progress, and still others are in native Cree script. MacLeod's wild painterly abandon is refreshing and the scripts, the frightening "bad" spirit and the Christian reference, are all about ambiguous and tragic religious "conversion", "coercion" or "conditioning" of native peoples in their own territory.

Sonia Robertson's *Refaire l'Alliance* is a 21st century wampum belt. Historically made of quahog shell, these belts were clothes and also documents on which alliances, wars, treaties were recorded. Robertson's four suspended wampum belts made by the women from Mashteuiatsh are a metaphor for spiritual healing. Projected images and sounds from nature "outside" the gallery recall

Arboretum (2000) another work that went outside the gallery walls for inspiration at the Maison Hamel-Bruneau. The images projected here include rolling plains, tall old trees and a flowing river. Faye Heavyshield's *Aapaskaiyaawa (They are Dancing)* (2002) has the feeling of a community of floating spirits. Ephemeral, ghost-like, the forms move ever so slightly. Everything can move in and through these forms. They are near invisible, a presence. Heavyshield says: "They dance...because they feel great about where they are, they are grateful to the maker, they are moved by the wind... their home, they're home." Nadia Myre's elegiac and sensitive *Grandmother's Circle* (2002) uses wood to build a narrative that suggests shelter, an inner circle, or even wishbones. The figural vertical wood pieces separate from the central grouping suggest a sense of being separate from, or isolated from, the grouping nearby. Rebecca Belmore's *blood on the snow* (2002) seen in a solo show at the A.G.O., projects a sense of violence. We cannot enter this bad dream-like death zone. A white ground cover blanket or quilt disables us from getting closer to the chair. The blood seems to be rising up its legs silently. An aboriginal women's tragedy, enacted in this installation, as in life over centuries. *In My Lifetime* reinvigorates public interest a very vital and lively area of contemporary arts practice: art by First Nations Canadian artists.

John K. Grande

MISTISSINI

GLENNA MATOUSH: WALL OF PERSONALITIES

Museum Lodge
Tel.: (418) 923-3253 #228
www.nation.mistissini.qc.ca

Comprising a series of 8 large 4 x 8 feet mixed media on canvas works, *Wall of Personalities* by Montreal-based artist Glenna Matoush comprises a series of semi-abstract portraits of people from village of Mistissini. These big Matoush pictures tell the whole story of a community that has undergone dramatic change over time



Wall of Personalities (detail) 2005
Photo credit: Jan Larson

yet holds onto its traditions. *Wall of Personalities* does so with an all inclusive energy and vision. Not only do the personages depicted in these paintings traverse the Cree generations from very young to elders – one even gets a sense of the passage of seasons and time in general. We see women hand washing clothes in a tub, some hunters home for the summer relaxing on the front steps of a home, a person with a bear cub, a tipi structure... One painting has an elder man fishing while a woman stretches moosehide. Youthful faces – a reminder of the future – are also there. Interspersed throughout these textural multi-media paintings are sensitive and intricate abstract details, lines, colours and that raw textural feeling that Glenna Matoush has always excelled in.

The most striking of Matoush's new series is the one that depicts a marriage some 55 years ago in Mistissini, which is located north of Chibougamou. We see all the people staring out at us from the canvas larger than life. Other contemporary personages can be seen wearing a blanket, decorated costumes, and there are ravens – a harbinger of good luck. Another diptych from Glenna Matoush's *Wall of Personalities* (this actually covers two walls at either end of the Mistissini Motel/Museum) has an ancient feeling for the forest and rocks of the north. An ambiance is projected simply through the colours, texture and details; a reservation puppy, and the faces of individuals that make up the community of Mistissini populate this piece. Seen

together these large scale paintings are a positive homage to this Cree community. More than anything they project a sense of inter-generational life and historical truth.

The latest of Glenna Matoush's projects the *Wall of Personalities* was preceded by another engaging and equally ambitious sculpture work created for the international *Shore/Lines: responding to Place* exhibition at the Maclaren Arts Centre in the summer of 2003. Produced in collaboration with Jan Larsen, *Beaver Tree* (2002) comprises a steel sculpture with a tree stump form at its base and a beaver skull as its crown. When this incredible 7 foot sculpture was installed in its present location at Little Lake in Barrie, red streamers were hung from adjacent trees. This traditional and symbolic act accompanies the hanging of a beaver skull in a tree in Cree society. The moving red streamers brought the environment surrounding the sculpture to life.

John K. Grande

LA SARRE

BER LAZARUS: EX LIBRIS: ESPACE AGRANDI

January 14 – February 13, 2005
Centre d'art Rotary
195, rue Principale
Tel.: (819) 333-2294 #236

With an ingenious twist Ber Lazarus has introduced narrative into box assemblage art. Poetic and with an intimate feel these intriguing mini-scaled shelfworks recall earlier prop works in the object oriented world of pop and minimalism of the 1960s. The shelves carry nostalgic echos of an earlier time by taking books with a history and reinventing them as objects, containers and 3-dimensional props in the mini-theatre-like settings. The histories reflected are collective and social, and there are warnings embedded in the subtext of these works that are political, social, and definitely not politically correct.

The Rich are Different (Di's Eyes) 1997, for instance is a shelf work we look through an eye hole to see a background image of Lady Di (known for her work on helping



to ban land mines) and a we see a one-legged black child in the foreground. Beside the book are the shaped cut out text pages (once the book's contents) that are a sculptural adjunct to the rest. A source of information and knowledge or culture these reconstituted books are a metaphor for the way these knowledge containers are now being replaced by other media. The book, once information, becomes an object, a sculptural element. Lazarus' inventive use of books speaks of how radically the way information is transmitted has shifted due to technological change. Largely intuitive in his approach Ber Lazarus says: "These box assemblages are not intention driven. There is no plan before I begin making one of them" The book, now deconstructed is given a new function as an element used to construct a narrative, almost like mini installations.

A volume of Encyclopedia Britannica has had its interior cut out to become a sort of spiritual space shaped like the interior of a church. Lit within it had tiny doll-like miniature figures. The shelves in these works function like altars, almost comparable to the Shinto shrines in Japan and often the books are literally nailed down or riveted to them. Small lamps further the sense of an intimate Joseph Cornell like assemblage conception. Tiny, magical, a place to study or focus on the subject. There is even a copy of *The Statutes of Quebec* (2000) to emphasize the nature of knowledge redundancy in an age of rapid-fire, mass communication overload. Tiny colourful plastic babies dance amid text in the space within.

What is interesting about these works is their open accessibility: ordinary people can understand their message. And what is the message? Seeing these tiny figures encased within containers that once held knowledge, on fragile tempo-

rally feeling shelves one gathers a sense of the ephemeral and fragile nature of life itself, and that we are all merely passengers in this world. History itself seems as subjective as these situations, set ups for a narrative. In *La Femme Pressé* (2003), a book by Paul-Loup Sulitzer has been cannibalized. Looking in through a peephole we see a woman with two faces back to back rendered in a Picasso-like line drawn style. A gold thread leads from the foreground to this "drawn" woman. A page from Sulitzer's book rests adjacent and we can read... "Elle c'est Kate Killinger. Indépendante, belle, passionnée..." A mid-life sense of humour pervades the shelf situation that holds a copy of Balzac's *Les Illusions Perdus* (2003). Looking into this book we are confronted with a total void save for a series of line of remaining text that recede to a vanishing point. The space is totally empty and existential... an allusion to mid-life wisdom or transitions?

Ber Lazarus has refurbished books on science, law, fiction, biology, all to rearrange this world of literature and information in a series of shelf sited 3-dimensional constructs – always with a sense of irony and humour. An entire set of the *Illustrated Home Library Encyclopedia* (1999-2000) in red leather has had its entire informational guts filleted like a dead fish. The vaulted interior has men in miniature who float above train tracks, and one sees a Red Cross First Aid symbol and a puppy dog. This industrial scene seems as if from another time. Compartmentalized, these spaces present fragments from narratives that have their own inherently absurd logic. Sure its surreal!

John K. Grande

SASKATOON

HUMAN / NATURE

January 14 — February 26
Kenderdine Art Gallery
University of Saskatchewan
www.usask.ca/kenderdine

The Kenderdine Art Gallery is the final stop on human/nature's international tour (Shanghai, Hong Kong and Edmonton). Remarkably, the show's four Alberta artists –

Liz Ingram, Amy Loewan, Lyndal Osborne, and Laura Vickerson – organized the exhibition, catalogue and tour themselves. Friendship made the expedition possible; a mutual interest in the relationships between people and nature makes the show a harmonious success.

A light, woody, and insistent scent like the dry, aromatic odor of a walk through prairie tall grass radiates from Lyndal Osborne's installation. Two sets of nine square, waist-high wooden tables are arranged in grids, presented like a museum display or farm sections. *Accretion Tables* has 360 smaller boxes, each filled with thousands of things collected during walks around Osborne's rural home near Edmonton and along the beaches of Australia. Then there are the muted colors: earth tones and a beige parcel of dried leaves, grey-to-light ochre seeds and bones, river smoothed stones speckled like eggs, pearly and chalky shells, and dusty sienna tree fungi along with surprising pinks and turquoises and flashes of red. Osborne is a collector, not a naturalist. She also squirrels industrial detritus: wire, plastic bird tags, and rotting fishing floats. And she is not adverse to meddling with nature by applying dye, stain or paint. Lyndal Osborne's collections are elaborations of the human drive to notice, collect, order and share, more an expression of human-nature than human/nature.

A second installation, Laura Vickerson's *William's Carnations* consists of the dry, familiar tone of dead roses, a lot of roses. This floor to ceiling, arched curtain is made entirely of rose petals pinned to what looks like like theatrical drapes. Contrasting the deep blood

ground and shimmering spray of straight pins are lighter red petals that follow a curving pattern based on a William Morris carnation design. The decoration begins sketchily at the top and becomes more elaborate at the base. It evolves from abstract design to imitation to actual flower, blending from pattern to petal. The velvety curtain of flattened, bruised flowers envelops the viewer with its presence yet one cannot forget all the labour that went into it. This is less about nature than about human work and we revel in this display of human imagination, ingenuity and craft.

Liz Ingram's installations are poetic evocations of the lived relationship between people and environment. *Fragile Source* is a twelve-panel photo intaglio and silkscreen print on wood. Ambiguous ruddy body parts flank blue water that flows down the center. In a dark curtained-off space resonant with the sound of running water, *Sacred Stream II* consists of two light images of hands moving thorough water. These hands play, swim through, or dissolve into that primal liquid. Such elemental experiences suggest a wordless spiritual connection between bodies and nature. The connection is underlined in *Fragile Source* by the a text floating across the panels... "succulent, soul, skins, sanguine, source, fragile flesh...."

Amy Lowen's *A Peace Project* radiates optimism. Six floor-to-ceiling hangings made by weaving long strips of folded rice paper are suspended in a row. Some strips are printed with words in many languages; others are made from fragments of brush calligraphy. The



Lyndal Osborne

artist's goal is to "intertwine world languages and symbols to express my deep appreciation for the diversity of cultures and beliefs." And the woven words reflect these sentiments: "compassion, kindness, respect, understanding, patience, tolerance, gentleness and forgiveness." The viewer is meant to circle the installation like a Zen garden. Below the hangings, instead of sand, one sees a wide band of rice – an offering. This meditative work appeals to the best of human nature and like all the human/nature works is sincere and positive. Rather than use irony to show our mistreatment of the environment and each other, this exhibition uses gentle persuasion to awaken our better nature.

David Garneau

BERLIN

CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHIC ART IN CANADA: THE SPACE OF MAKING

Jan. 14 — February 27
Neuer Berliner Kunstverein /
Vox Populi
www.voxphoto.com

Photography forms part of the language of our times and images are a veritable well that we draw from in apt out of curiosity and also to help form our understanding of place(s) and beingness... Canadian photographers are particularly well versed in the art of drawing from the well of images, particularly before these are fixed in place, and as contemporary life. *Contemporary Photographic Art in Canada: The Space of Making* is an ambitious exhibition/presentation curated by Marie-Josée Jean and presented at the Neuer Berliner Kunstverein early this year. Among the photographers who visual and pertinent perspectives on place, and identity we can find Stan Douglas, Louise Noguchi, Isabelle Hayeur, Michael Snow and Nicolas Baier.

The urban idiom can likewise be a landscape, a vista and Alain Païement's view from above of a studio/loft interior is fascinating if only for the way it presents an everyday world from a point we never see it. We sense how space(s) is organized,



Isabelle Hayeur
Nuit américaine (Ritz Plaza et Liquidation), 2004
diptych, digital prints, 124 x 185 cm (each)

lived in, almost as an anthropologist from Mars might. Carlos and Jason Sanchez's *The Gatherer* (2004) and *8 Years Old* (2003) are in the tradition of many situational photographers who build an image, detail by detail – to illustrate a meaning, or develop a narrative sense. In the latter we see a boy in his bed. His roadrace kit sits on the floor nearby. This room is littered with the standard accouterments of today's suburbia. John (2002) is actually very funny, a scene of a taxidermist smoking amid the plastic models and fur are quite funny. Scott McFarland's *Inspecting*, Allan O'Connor *Searches for Botrytis cinerea* like all his gardening, trimming, clipping apparent photos have a quirky, catchy sense of the botanical and the domestic. These are garden photos your aunt or uncle could appreciate but there is always an extraordinary, extra-terrestrial feel as if these participants were denaturalized as the gardens themselves are "introduced" phenomena. Who is this tool equipped man? Where does he come from? Where is he going and what is in the cage he is holding? Whether re-establishing a fictional narrative on the suburban or even the urban white man's myth will be understood or appreciated 50 years from now is not certain. As illustrations of the ambiguity inherent to any stereotype these photos work well.

Nicolas Baier's photos are particularly fascinating for the way they seize abstract elements from the everyday by digitally scanning the surfaces of things. These photos reify worlds in microcosm with a vital visual vernacular taken from real phenomena and physical effect. From computer keyboards, to scratchy paint surfaces, these worlds are cosmic photo containers full of flavour. Louis Noguchi's recreations of the western cowboy myth replete

with costumed fill-ins are situational scenarios that look like sets – intentionally fake and slapstick – a bit like Buster Keaton's films once were. Slapstick has become a post-genre, an Oceans 11 phenomenon, where the stereotypes themselves are recycled and re-contextualized to make a fake. Maybe less imaginative than the originals from the silent film 1920s the nuances, for the fact they seek to mimic other places, other visions, are amusing. We visually glean it all at a glance and out of the corner of an eye! Vid Ingelvic's literally documents the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York with a series of seemingly innocuous photos of the inside terrain of presentational museology; security guards, a fire extinguisher under an ornate stairway, signology, an encased wall-placed Mondrian! Most amusing are Lynne Cohen's set up scenarios. They expose the dichotomies of contemporaneity with a sanctuary sense of Pop iconic meaning. We read these works as nostalgia now, for the cut-out characters on top of a pile of tires, or the intrinsic generic office with no way out, or the hermetic sealed up statuary from the Pop style all are documented, captured as part of our world. Humour abounds in a humourless world! Isabelle Hayeur's illusionistic visual topologies encapture city and desert nature vistas with a beatific sense of scale in colour photography despite the desolate content. Stan Douglas shows a still from the artist's own *Journey into Fear* (2002). Unlike the original film by Norman Foster this "scene" is a film set in transition, a domestic room structures contained in a built structures that for all its temporary sense is a site within a site. For Douglas the decontextualized reconstruction of a film can reveal something of the era it was made in... hence his rephrasing in this photo still.

It is these photographers' recognition of all things urban and rural, of aspects of wilderness and civility, set in a non-space that is wholly contemporary, a tentative "space of making" that comes through as the thematic link for all of them. Canadian contemporary photography it appears is at an apex of creative production. These photographs, for their sense of distance, of imagistic contemplation, and the clarity of their nuanced, sequenced, questioning vision(s) are truly inquiring and well worth the look.

John K. Grande

VICTORIA

MILES LOWRY & DAVID FERGUSON: (SUDDENLY DANCE THEATRE)

NATURE ECSTASY
January 13 — 22
Open Space
510, Fort Street
Tel.: (250) 383-8833
www.openspace.ca

Suddenly Dance Theatre's multi-disciplinary production *Nature Ecstasy* privileges the visual components of video, dance performance, and art installation more-or-less equally. This interdisciplinary approach is a signature feature of the ensemble's collaborative ventures mounted successfully as perfor-



Miles Lowry
Nature Triptych, 2004
acrylic on rice paper & chalk

mances. Their multi-media work, *Opium*, will soon be seen on Bravo. This Victoria-based partnership was founded by Miles Lowry, David Ferguson, and Lori Hamar. The artistic partnership has unfolded its fundamentally Neo-Romantic perspective through scores of venues, cast ensembles and performances, regularly bringing Modern Dance and ballet luminaries from across Canada and drawing large crowds. *Less concerned with traditional conventions* (except in the folkloric sense), they freely mix 'high' art with digitized video fragments equivalent to *plein air* painting, and location shots with fantastic settings achieved by combining art with digital effects.

There are four principal roles in the video component of *Nature Ecstasy*. These are performed by Ferguson, Korean-trained dancer Jung-Ah Chung, a small, antic cipher/mark digitally inserted into the dance action, and by the landscape itself. Ferguson created a loose choreography for the video sequences with Jung-Ah Chung. The pair then dance the piece in filmed episodes, sometimes on site in nature, other times before a blue screen. With collage and editing magic, the series evolved into an abstract, even episodic "story without narrative." The danced "non-story" veers among many moods, all of them married to landscape representation. The duo ritualistically describes the "ecstatic" dance of nature's celebrants, earth spirits or elementals. From an initiatory baptism in calm, glassy water, through Eros, terror, consummation, and bliss, Ferguson and Chung paint an abstract narrative of tempestuous union, surrender, and relinquishing. The culmination of the piece occurs when each frees the other's long, bound hair into the streaming wind in a gesture of release. Lowry filmed sequences staged, alternately, *in situ* on the precipitous Irish cliffs of Inis Mor, or grafted into his own painted images via editing: a ruined tower, a verdant patchwork landscape glimpsed through an ivy wreathed rupture in the stone, and carved spirals in archaic ruins – all reflected in the dancers' twining limbs and hair, are but a few.

L.A.'s Eclipse Quartet performed twice on the opening night of the installation's 12-day run at Open Space with intense soundscapes that veered between Romanticism and jagged edged New Music interpretation. The musicians responded to the visual imagery and participated with a preternatural speed interpreting the movements, gestures and rhythms. *Eclipse Quartet's* sound reified the dancers fluid and jagged movement resembling the rocky precipices and prehistoric structures of a landscape. Their tense, tempestuous improvisations became a Romantic and 'sublime,' response supported by staccato, rhythmic base notes. This bottom-heavy accompaniment seemed appropriate as Ferguson stuck closer to the grass and stone of earth than is usual for him, eschewing the aerial leaps and gravity-defying moves of past repertoires.

Nature Ecstasy's comprehensive visual concept was 'through-designed,' with all aspects reflecting parts of an integrated vision. Ferguson's urge to embody his interaction with the landscape through 'sublime' or ecstatic responses are perfectly expressed through the labyrinthine danced shapes. The visual art works that make up the concrete installation component of *Nature Ecstasy* also reflect the illusory weightiness of a natural world that science and magic more accurately recognise as a quality of movement. Ferguson's paintings, rendered on cast cotton panels have thick impasto paint and built-up surfaces yet, for all their tactile bulk, the visual impact is light as air. Lowry's wall pieces exemplify the paradoxical, illusory weight of a spirit-imbued world of matter. We see this in *Nature Ecstasy*. *The View Down*, *The Black Kesh* and *Nature Tryptich*. Painted on rice paper, they appear substantial as granite until you notice the tissue-thin edges of the filmy, delicate paper moving in the slightest breeze. The paintings look as if they are breathing, as if about to come alive. This trick of the senses exemplifies the lyrical, fey spirit and that keen sense of a living world that Suddenly Dance has conceived, ritualized and invoked in *Nature Ecstasy*.

Yvonne Owens

NEW YORK

CY TWOMBLY: FIFTY YEARS OF WORKS ON PAPER

Whitney Museum of American Art
January 27-May 8, 2005
945 Madison Ave.
1-800-WHITNEY
www.whitney.org

Looking at a Cy Twombly work on paper is to discover some lively, enigmatic, curious details that have become paintings in and of themselves. The eighty four works in this show collected from the artist's studio to celebrate his 75th birthday are at once High Art and yet maintain a lively interest for their open, almost childlike interest in the act of notation, the perceptual quotient of recording that one can never truly capture. Less angry than Dubuffet and just as naive, Twombly is an artist who works with visual enigmas, with the character of words, of markings, and all this on the flat dimensional space that painters will work with. *Cy Twombly: Fifty Years of Works on Paper* at the Whitney Museum of American Art reveals Twombly's incredible pulse for the scribbles, the notations, the visual detail as an omnipotent gesture – above all a gesture. Some kind of coded response to layers of history and knowledge, to the very readability of things, Twombly draws on themes like ancient mythology, epic poetry, classical battles. The gestural, textual and painterly are Twombly's painterly language. From the early 1950s works to Twombly's chalkboard 1970s period, and including works from 2002 this show, organized by Julie Sylvester, Associate Curator of Contemporary Art at the State Hermitage Museum in



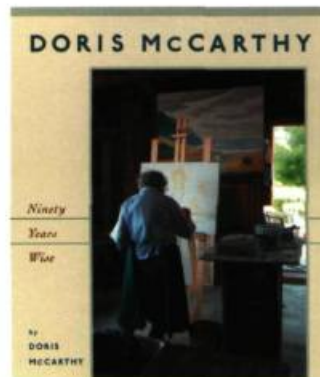
St. Petersburg, Russia will travel to The Menil Collection, Houston (May 27 to September 4, 2005). It is a celebration of one man's eclectic and original art, not at all ancient, wholly contemporary.

John K. Grande

DORIS MCCARTHY: NINETY YEARS WISE

Second Story Press, 120 pages, illus.
www.secondstorypress.on.ca

Doris McCarthy is the quintessential Canadian artist. Taught by Group of Seven artists Arthur Lismer and J. E. H. MacDonald, McCarthy's art treats nature as more than an idealization, increasingly as a spiritual metaphor. The paintings, watercolours she has produced in her advanced years are remarkable for their youthful sense of place and their identification with the mystery of life in all its myriad forms... the rocks, trees, water patterns, the sky...



As a teacher at the Central Technical School in Toronto and since her retirement, Doris McCarthy has been a mentor for younger artists. A gallery has been named after her at University of Toronto's Scarborough campus, not far from Fool's Paradise, the home near Scarborough Bluffs where McCarthy lived in rustic style and painted close to the city. As *Doris McCarthy: Ninety Years Wise* proves, McCarthy with its admixture of personal anecdote and artistic conviction, an artist who truly believes in what they do will not be dissuaded by the latest fads, fashions or propaganda, and can continue. The great personal reward, McCarthy seems to say is life itself. What a simple formula! This book

celebrates the artist's love of life, of our place in the natural universe, and the personal friends, some of whom figure in this book. Following in the footsteps of earlier Canadian artists McCarthy made a trip up north to paint the icebergs, and fantastic surreal landscapes of the north, to Lancaster Sound, Resolute and the shores of Greenland in 2002. The patterns, shapes, and rhythms of ice, snow and water are testament to the energy inherent to nature in the north. In McCarthy's paintings reproduced as colour photos in this book they express a personal cosmology of nature and spirit, as do the images of McCarthy's daily life at her Georgian Bay cottage. A respect for life, an understanding of the individual's place in the world, all served up with comments from this wise woman make this an entertaining read... for the cottage or in the city!

John K. Grande

ART NATURE DIALOGUES: INTERVIEWS WITH ENVIRONMENTAL ARTISTS

by John K. Grande, State University of New York (SUNY) Press, 2004, 251 pages.
www.sunypress.edu

If the entire art edifice collapsed tomorrow, it may well diminish us as a culture but it will save some trees. *Art Nature Dialogues*, a collection of interviews with 21 environmental artists by writer and critic John Grande, without saying so explicitly, edges our thoughts toward a similar conclusion. There is an understated imperative that defining artmaking as patterns of thought rather than visual events is the best direction for art.

Art Nature Dialogues is steered by Grande's adroit questions and deft responses to artists' ponderings. The author's own thoughts in the interviews make up a good share of the book – it is less a series of interviews than a platonic dialogue with artmakers around the environment as both model and source for art. Grande embarks on this dialogue with both noted and obscure environmental artists – David Nash, Betty Beaumont, Alan Sonfist, Pat Dougherty, Bill Vazan, and Michael Singer to name a



few – who work with nature to create ephemeral or permanent large-scale pieces. Other interviews in the book sketch the motivation of artists who take their craft to its furthest end, despite considerable aesthetic and professional risk.

Grande brings the reader through some of the more interesting processes and paradoxes of cultural production in the environmental niche. From British performance artist Hamish Fulton (who eschews the 'production' part of artmaking in favour of the more directly experiential act of walking great distances) to Betty Beaumont, who directly and almost provocatively interferes with natural processes, thoughtfully revealing the nature of human intervention in the landscape. Best known for her *Ocean Landmark* (1978-80), where 500 tons of processed coal waste were dropped into the Atlantic Ocean to paradoxically become a fish habitat, Beaumont is, like a number of artists throughout, a revelation in the thoughtful complexity possible in the subject matter. Notions of 'environmental' in relationship to art multiply and conventions are challenged by Grande's constant theoretical nudgings and plain curiosity in his dialogues.

The book is also a nuanced and varied tussle with the dance of intention between artmaking and nature. Where one veers close to an almost Wagnerian romanticism – like the sapling assemblages of Bob Verschuere, another veers too far away – exemplified by the monstrous, hybridic mechanical musings of Doug Buis. Grande avoids polemics by using the dialogue format to jostle ideas to the forefront. The author selects or

centers the interview almost purely on method, so that the artist then riffs on his own working process. The result is not only a heightened sensitivity in the reader to the role of the environment in the thoughts of a certain segment of the art world, but an expanded awareness of the possibilities inherent in considering nature as the hub of all things. This is an indispensable book for anyone interested in the processes and paradoxes of environmental art, and a useful addendum to the currents of thought in contemporary artmaking in general.

Cameron Skene

THE BOW: LIVING WITH A RIVER

by Gerald T. Conaty, Toronto, Key Porter / Glenbow Museum, 2004, 160 ill.

The Bow: Living with a River gives an exceptional viewpoint on the transformations, encroachment and natural beauty of the Bow River

valley in Alberta. Done through and with artist's interpretations and 100 historic and documentary photographs, this book tells the story of a river that is ever changing and eternal. Over time engineering projects, urban growth, bridge building, human and natural history and nature itself affect the Bow River. Among the artists' visions of the Bow Valley we find A. Y. Jackson, Frederick Verner (renowned for his scenes of buffalo on the plains), A. C. Leighton, Frank Johnston, and W. J. Phillips. The Glenbow Museum in Calgary exhibited these artists works and other including Roland Gissing's Group of Seven-ish forest of trees and Dorothy Knowles's pure watercolour impression rooted in nature. Margaret Shelton's colour and black and white woodcuts, for their graphic pre-war feel are great. And there are many other intriguing artists we have never heard of in history books: James Nicoll, Lars Haukaness and Richard B. Newitt. All in all quite a discovery!

John K. Grande



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