

English Reports

Volume 50, Number 204, Fall 2006

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/52548ac>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

La Société La Vie des Arts

ISSN

0042-5435 (print)

1923-3183 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

(2006). Review of [English Reports]. *Vie des arts*, 50(204), 81–86.

INTERVIEW WITH A GUERRILLA GIRL

JOHN GRANDE & FRIDA KAHLO

JG: Do you feel that the place of women in art is very much a reflection of the place of women in society and its historical structures?

FK: For sure. For a long time art was defined as a male activity. The art world was set up to keep women out. Women couldn't go to art schools, or belong to academies, paint the nude, legally sign a commission... Art became a male thing because only males could do it. Women weren't to affect the definition of what Western culture was about.

JG: And often objectified by male artists within their art as well. Ingres is one example, and there are many others. Didn't the whole Guerrilla Girl movement begin as the result of a single event?

FK: There was a show in 1985 at the MOMA and it was called *An International Survey of Painting and Sculpture*. There were about 167 artists in the show and fewer than 14 or 15 were women. The statistics were bad enough but the curator said that 'Anyone who was not in the show should re-think his career.' Wasn't that a telling statement! It just made a bunch of us really angry.

JG: Is it true you threw bananas outside near the entrance to the museum show...

FK: You can fantasize whatever you want but we did not have bananas at that point. We do have Kynston McShine to thank for starting the Guerrilla Girls. She and I were artist buddies, good friends at the time. We went to a very standard

protest at MOMA. We spent the whole day at the museum talking to people going in and out of the museum. And at the end of the day we hadn't accomplished anything but make a lot of people very angry. At that point we realized that most people really believed that the art system was a meritocracy, and whatever museums showed, whatever curators chose had to be the best or most significant., no questions asked So we made a pledge that day to figure out some way to make this issue something that people would talk about.

JG: And Guerrilla Girls books are actually in art history courses now... How ironic!

FK: After doing one-line posters for a number of years, we decided to try forms that looked at issues in greater depth. So we started a news letter, *Hot Flashes from the Guerrilla Girls*, and we wrote an art history book, *The Guerrilla Girls Bedside Companion to the History of Western Art*. We never really expected our books would become textbooks but they have and we are really happy about that.

JG: The role the Guerrilla Girls play is essential. Not so much has changed yet within the museological establishment from when you started out. I am sure the statistics are better than when you started out.

FK: They got better and then they are weaker again. Right now at the Whitney Biennale, a show about collaborative art and the marketplace, only 25 % of the artists are women. I



don't know whether that has to do with the fact that the curators are European. I don't know. I think each generation has to ask it's own questions.

JG: Do you have women from many backgrounds in the Guerrilla Girls?

FK: Over the years lots of women have been in our group from every ethnic group, age group, sexual orientation, ethnic group, and all levels of art world success.

JG: The Guerrilla Girls remain immensely popular, and what you have been working for is so self-evident. Change is so slow despite the progress...

FK: Today, at the entry level, women and artists of colour have to be part of the art discourse. As you start up the ladder, there are fewer

and fewer women, a crushing glass ceiling at the level of museum shows, major collections, inclusion in history books. A recent *New York Times* article followed a male and a female artist of the same age, with parallel careers, parallel exhibition records, and parallel collection records. At auction, a comparable work of hers sold for less than a 1/10th of the price of his. Artists, curators, collectors don't put their money behind women artists. For women artists to be truly equal, they need access to the same means of production as men. If all of the money goes to guys, that says something about the art system.

JG: The same goes for Sonia Delaunay who its seems was so much more gifted than Robert Delaunay.. and Sophie Tauber-Arp... and of course Frida Kablo.

FK: Then there is also Elaine de Kooning, and Lee Krasner, who worked next to Jackson Pollock. Rather than say Lee Krasner was developing something simultaneous with Jackson, she is never given credit. And then there's art criticism. When you read criticism of women artists' work, they are almost always compared to other women, not to men. Is this a conscious or an unconscious prejudice?

Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?

Less than 5% of the artists in the Modern Art sections are women, but 85% of the nudes are female.

GUERRILLA GIRLS CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD
www.guerrillagirls.com

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MONTREAL

TREE HOUSE

Linea & Danny Taran Gallery
Saidye Bronfman Centre for the Arts
www.saidyebronfman.org
Tel.: 514 739-2301



Rachel Echenberg & Sebastian Worsnip,
Boat House, 2006. photo credit: Bettina Hoffmann

Trees are for the birds to nest in, but humans likewise build tree houses, to amuse and for the sheer adventure of it. Children play in tree houses less than they used to, but you can hear the sound of children's voices laughing and playing as you stare up to stare up to see an orange mini-hut/bird house perched in a tree whose title is *Treescraper* (by AMMA). A ladder that leads upwards is made of corks. While exceedingly fragile, the piece engenders a feeling of a child's fantasy world, something fleeting and far away... More unsettling is the tree grafted form affixed to an intersection point of tree branches by Jacques Bilodeau. The shape is ambiguous but the allusion is as much to healing, or of a wound being treated as to any structure in a tree *per se*. Designer and architectural researcher Michael Carroll have achieved the most truly sculptural piece in the show, with a fan that activates an admixture of luminous flagging tape, and plastic, the piece exudes an ephemeral light sensibility something likewise alluded to in the artist's poem *I Am A Bird Now*. As a mish-mash of materials it challenges our imagination. *Boat House* by Rachel Echenberg and Sebastian Worsnip

actually situates sensitive boat hull and arched mini-wood forms. As light and delicate as a cloud on a sunny day amid a tree's branching structures. These structures achieve a fluid flux feeling precisely because they are so fragile, but equally of a boat craft that provides stability and security in uncertain circumstances, as a tree house does. Axel Morgenthaler's *Photonic Tree House* is like a pupae in a tree, with ever changing colour light sequences, the form acquires a different tonality according to the light in the darkened environment it hangs in.

Rest Area by NIP paysage (five professional landscape architects) affix a rectilinear fibreglass wrap form around a central tree branch shape. Imprinted images of generic men and women, akin to those we see at highway rest stops can be seen on this material. The rest stop thus becomes the tree house, one can likewise rest in. As a quasi-artificial yet organic dependent sculpture NIP paysages *Rest Area* achieves a syntax wholly appropriate for the nature/culture interchange that is an ongoing process in today's world. — these artists are the medium for all of this... Michael Robinson's has built a painstakingly labour intensive de-constructivist/re-constructivist tree house. Replete with fake birds, a cane, a bagless upright vacuum cleaner, a broom Robinson builds into this space with an inveterate eye for the core discourse that the nature/culture division entails. The structure includes a mini-structure inside it that builds space in a very tentative way, something reminiscent of Michel Goulet's best early sculptures. The tree that bisects the piece and travels through it becomes a foil for all manner of materials derived from nature including "artists" easels and stretcher bars, even music stands, all these elements inverted, turned upside down. Hats off to Michael Robinson! Naomi London's amazing *Climb-Up-Seating Situation* is the most domestic, homely and habitable of all these pieces, and has a sense of the social like no other work in this show. The seats on this tree have beautiful stitched dot patterns and can actually be used. Next to these tree installed seats are polka dots painted on the wall that liven it all

up, and build a visual context for this sensitive artwork. May tree houses continue to inspire, as they did the Medicis and Victorians, future artists, just as this show's fanciful artists' work do!

John K. Grande

PASCAL GRANDMAISON

Musée d'art contemporain
de Montréal
Until October 9th
185 Ste Catherine West
Tel.: 514 847-6226



Verre 2 - 2004-2005
Digital print
182,8 x 182,8 cm
Courtesy Galerie René Blouin

Pascal Grandmaison displays a gift for balancing both thematic concentration and mechanical suppleness. Contemporary museum installation (some photo-based work, some industrial noise, some closed video rooms with their attendant semaphore of iconic banality) is given a new breadth and poignancy (through Grandmaison's approach). The rough unsteady camera work, the fleeting hair stuck on film, the overly slick veneer of video and digital work — all the clumsiness of past investigations into new media have been tightened up, and what remains is the artist's deft touch in balancing the feel of film with the ease of presentation that digital media allows. The artist weaves a dialogue between rooms in the installation, which at first glance, look like a retrospective. Each room has a different series — whether large-scale photos or video presentations — with overlapping elements between that suggest a narrative thread. But each room is also a

meditative space, leaving subtle impressions that trail to the next phase of the installation. Persuasive reflections on portraiture and the film medium echo the work of one of the artist's influences and stablemates at Galleries René Blouin — Geneviève Cadieux.

Diamant (2006), a video installation, serves as one of the focal points of the exhibition. A close-up of a cut diamond spins on top of a reverberating background of industrial noise. The image unfolds into an edge of glass, reflecting a face. Deftly edited back and forth between portrait and object, more meditative, abstracted forms emerge. The shadowed edge of a cheek and forehead against a wall, a play of light and dark, diamond and glass reflections comprise different pieces of the installation narrative. Filmed in 16mm with a 70's camera, *Diamant* displays the artist's sensitivity to the texture of film: its translucency, graininess, the rough edge of the visual veneer. This particular roughness is referenced in the video by a macro of the minutely chipped edge of a sheet of glass

— glass that happens to be the same sheet that is held up by the figures in another room of the exhibition. That series, *Verre* (2004-5), features acquaintances of the artist holding up a sheet of industrial glass with one hand. All stare expressionless (as one is wont to do after the 60° shot) at the floor in front of them. All portraits and hints of a coherent story are diffused in the subject's state of semantic abstraction. The film is the thing, the hanging sheet of glass that adds dimension to the composition and (almost literally) invites reflection.

The room on the other side of *Diamant* holds another photo series. *Ouverture* is a motif plucked from the video: straight-ahead, large-scale head shots (again created by old-style film and a telephoto lens), black on a warm silvery grey background confront the viewer exiting the video room. With a palette reminding one of Warhol's series of electric chairs, the deep black void of a head suggests to the viewer that portraiture is not so much personality study as meditative object. That view is even further reinforced by the next room with its series of photos

in roughly the same scale and central motif of used drum skins placed on a white background. *Manner* (2003), another portrait series includes the remnants of a musician, serving as creative Inukshuk, a crude icon for a head, and a film-like skin with the impressions of previous endeavors. The rest of the exhibition, with its mantra-like manifestations of meditation on medium, showcase an artist with a singular gift for combining the structural with the evocative.

Cameron Skene

ANNE LEWIS: FIELD HOSPITAL

October 18 – November 12
Galerie de la Ville
12001 blvd. de Salaberry
Dollard des Ormeaux
Tel.: 514 684-1012 xt 288
www.centreatdollar.com



Newscuts Monday May 30th, 2005
Mixed media

The title of the exhibition is both misleading and accurate. Anne Lewis's works have nothing and everything to do with human casualties, and this unusual show at Dollard des Ormeaux Centre for the Arts is bound to strike a cord with the public. Wearing the double mantle of an artist and medical reporter, Lewis has found a way of weaving the two careers into a profound and poignant comment on our present times. Seeking a release from the barrage of distressing news we are all subjected to on a daily basis, she approached the issue in a direct way, by literally excising the negative information

from the pages of newspapers. Once she was done, Lewis was left with a mere skeleton, a frail outline which she soaks in plasticized medium, giving it "life support" as it were, before placing it on delicate archival tissue. The resulting image has its own unique visual aesthetic, and combined with its inescapable emotional component, transcends from conceptual to narrative.

At first glance Lewis's *Newscuts* resemble somewhat abstracted graphic compositions, but that impression quickly gives way to an uneasy feeling that something much deeper is taking place beneath the frail web of strips of newsprint, twisted, almost contorted in the creative process. Suddenly, the gaping empty spaces where articles once appeared, become echoes of unknown horror, of pain and suffering that lives just outside our comfort zone. *Newscuts* are being shown together with Lewis's series of video-cassette boxes titled *Knowing Too Much*. An integral part of her *Field Hospital*, these original bas-reliefs are yet another attempt at transforming the bad news contained on the tapes the boxes once held. Placed side by side, either *in situ*, or in a gallery setting, they are like tiny universes filled with myriad objects and images aimed at uplifting and inspiring.

As with the newspaper cuttings, the boxes are both messengers of hope, and art objects with their own visual vocabulary. A dispassionate compassion may best describe Lewis's approach. At once engaged and impartial, she has created a fascinating body of work, a powerful visual commentary that imparts its message without sacrificing the artistic, plastic demands of the compositions.

If the above-mentioned series leave the viewer longing for a sense of resolution, some kind of emotional closure, Lewis has the answer, and it can be found in the final component of her virtual *Field Hospital*, the magical *Water Drawings*. Unwilling to discard the negative articles cut out from newspapers, she decided to use them in a healing ritual cum performance art, by gluing them onto a roll of wax paper. She then floated the thus created 'banners' on waterways, from Irish laughs to the Hudson River. Some 200 feet long, they follow the currents, disappearing into the

horizon, releasing, cleansing the terrible message their lettering hides. Conceptual art with heart is a rare phenomenon, indeed.

Dorota Kozinska

FABIEN JEAN: DEFERRED MOMENTS

September 28 – October 9
Galerie de Bellefeuille
1367 avenue Greene
Tel.: 514 933-4406
www.galeriedebellefeuille.com



Interior with Girl and Ping Pong Table
Courtesy: Galerie Bellefeuille

It all started with Paul Fenniak. In 1996, he burst onto the art scene with his first solo exhibition at Galerie de Bellefeuille, thus marking the advent of a new school of young figurative painters. He was soon joined by such international artists as Stephen Conroy, Dan Hughes and Scott Owles, to name but a few the gallery has exhibited since.

Fabien Jean's art carries on this great revival in contemporary painting. Spanning the last two years of the young Montreal artist's career, they chart his impressive creative development, both in terms of visual impact and technical proficiency. Jean has returned to the great tradition of portrait painting with an acute personal vision and approach. The figures in his works are but a pretext for a painterly exploration of the highest caliber. With painstaking precision and delicacy of brush stroke, he creates mesmerizing textures, spaces imbued with frail light, translucent colours that meld into a

gossamer fabric.

Clearly enamored of the art of painting, Jean beguiles the viewer with an overwhelming sensuality. Gentle and melancholy, his compositions are fragments caught in time, emotions deferred, hidden behind sideway glances and quiet hands.

In *Interior with Girl and Ping Pong Table*, a young woman stands in the centre of a room playing with an invisible yo-yo. Or she could be holding her hand over a pet hidden from view. The blue ping-pong racket lies still on the table, a closed book hovers on the corner. This is the magic of Jean's works. That subtle, seductive mystery behind the seemingly innocent activities. The quotidian is transformed into the mystical. The same stillness permeates a portrait of *A Woman Pouring Coffee*. She is alone, suspended in motion, focused to the point of inertia, her whole being coalesced into a single moment. Her high-collar jacket glimmers with Jean's signature turquoise blue, a translucent hue reminiscent of Chinese porcelain, sweeping the viewer into the realm

of colour. As we peer closer and closer, a plethora of tones opens up before our eyes, tones of such incredible subtlety as to take one's breath away. The experience is highly sensuous, in contrast to the simplicity and austerity of both composition and sitter.

Jean's interiors are closely tied to his portraits. These are the same spaces, and the light that lives in them is familiar, caressing the inanimate furnishings with the same touch it bestowed on the human figures. In an oil painting simply titled *Interior*, Jean allows himself to be entirely seduced by colour, creating a tableau of exquisite visual nuances, a mosaic of translucent shades blurring the edges. Look closer at the back of the wooden chair and a dance of colour begins. Focus on the wall, and it starts to undulate with light as if it were liquid. The rumpled tablecloth is itself a canvas. Don't miss this exhibition!

Dorota Kozinska



SHAWINIGAN

JEAN HALSTEAD AND SVETLANA SWINIMER: LE TEMPS DANS L'ESPACE

Corporation culturelle de
Shawinigan
2100 boul. des Hetres
www.cultureshawinigan.ca

Jean Halstead and Svetlana Swinimer have been collaborating on sculpture/installation projects exhibited at, among other venues the Museum of Nature and the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Gatineau. They have been innovating with forms, images and objects in three dimensional space that allude to advanced particle physics, mathematics, language, superstring theory and Einstein's theory of relativity. Their first freely interpretive *Time in Space* exhibition was held at Galerie l'Imagier in Gatineau (2004). As with the l'Imagier show, the dynamic Swinimer/Halstead duo sought to challenge the viewer's understanding of the universe in Shawinigan by presenting a series of highly experimental works investigating prismatic, spatial, refractive light and material effects. It is as if these artists were seeking to advance the cause of perception of physical Spacetime in a world caught up in static digitally correct images by building hologrammatical and interpretive hypothetical models that challenge us perceptually to investigate more abstract n-dimensional and visual notions. Clarity is less of a goal, but intent is

an absolute for these artists, for it provides the linkage between theory of object, light and matter and transforms it into a demonstrative highly visionary approach to artmaking, less caught up in symbols than in the raw physics of it all.

The images on the wall – close up photos of Sculptured Time – represent a contiguity of thought and literally draw in space and through time as if art itself were a conjecture, an element that encompassed the surface of hypothetical space, less as image and more as projections of a hypothetical inner world or alternatively of an absolute cosmos. They are not models for creative interpretation, nor speculative science, but artists' collaborative experiments involving holographic, mirrored, effects amid black walled space. Halstead and Swinimer are not seeking to exact or demonstrate specific theories but bring their own notions of spacetime (a concept that refuses to separate space and time but brings them into a continuous immediacy and of relation) into the realm of art, and in a gallery.

Viewing an eight by eight foot image of spacetime on a wall is to witness the transformation of imagery by successive media, and a changeability of meaning that results, as changeable as our theories of quantum physics, super-string theory, an n-dimensional universe and so on. We are brought back to constructivist thoughts on the role of art, and forward to notions of a multi-dimensional universe as yet unaccounted for, even if the conscious lens of science has the capacity to examine them. The effect of this show is ultimately to witness the intangible world of physics and energy fields, whose forces are ever present yet hard to measure. It is a world largely beyond our perception, but one that influence so many aspects of our daily life, even if we are not cognizant of this. Three particular images of Spacetime consisting of particles in accordance with Lee Smolin's "loop quantum gravity" theory particularly capture this sense of a "hidden universe", and physical cosmology.

The sculptural component of the show, largely presented in the centre of the gallery, has four 3 foot by 6 foot semi-circular mirror that

circumvents these 3-dimensional allusions. The effect is distorting and brings it all to life, animating while it likewise distorts, refracts, and reflects an altogether *ad lib* world of Spacetime. Two circular mirrors rest on the gallery floor inviting speculation and incredulous imaginative interpretation. Lines and grid patterns traverse these, and again, there is the mini-wall of mirrors that transform the simple arrangement into a kind of low-tech Superstring universe, and one entirely conected by these Ottawa-based artists.

A video titled *The Beginning of Time* presents Swinimer and Halstead's interpretation of the Big Bang and beyond... What becomes evident is that Halstead and Swinimer's art envisions little or no separation between Realtime and Spacetime, as if there were no gap between the flux of time, and this brings us closer to earlier models of the universe, before we measured it all with a clock, and when the cosmos played a more significant role in the way we envisioned it all on a daily basis. Yet these artists are fully cognizant of the latest scientific theories, that include one where cosmic expansion has continuously slowed due to gravity, possibly leading to collapse, or that there could be continued expansion instead of collapse, or even a hyper speedup called the big rip. What these inquiring artworks bring us to, is the realization that there are mysterious forces at work in our everyday existence that we may not comprehend entirely, including the suggestion that three-dimensional space hides an associated tiny six dimensional space. On a more subtle level, these prototypes lead us to ask broader spiritual questions raised by contemporary science. Art thus plays a significant role as science in the human equation, guiding us to interpret through vision, and thus conceive of Spacetime, and our place therein altogether differently.

John K. Grande

SASKATCHEWAN

CROSSFIRING: THE CLAYBANKS PROJECT

September 2, 2006.
Claybanks National Historic Site

A recent census reports that Regina is home to more artists per capita than any other Canadian prairie city. Saskatoon isn't doing badly either. But one of the best things about this province, culturally, is that artists and funders have community consciousness, they are concerned that culture gets to and rises from the grassroots. As a result, a lot of art in Saskatchewan tends to be participatory and site specific. This attitude is expressed in inclusiveness, especially of Aboriginal artists, support for cultural activities beyond the big cities, work that addresses the local, and for events that mix the arts. Recent events of this sort include the *Weyburn Project*, a performance and installation event held in the massive historic mental hospital (2002), and, most recently, *Crossfiring: The Claybanks Project*, another huge performance, installation and sound event produced, like the *Weyburn Project*, by Knowhere Productions, a sprawling network of Saskatchewan theatre, performance, sound and visual artists.

Claybanks is an abandoned brick factory, now a National Historic Site, about an hours drive south west of Regina. The site begs for an artistic intervention. At the plant are numerous walk-in circular kilns. The domes make terrific chambers for sound art (Charlie Fox), for drumming (Keith Bird), and other instruments and voices that benefit from the incredible reverberance. Most inventive was Sean Whalley and Rory Macdonald's adaptation of one of these miniature Pantheon's into a camera obscura. Other mysterious buildings became screening rooms (Ken Wilson and Christine Ramsay) and performance sites.

While you could go out and watch the installations evolve over several weeks, for most viewers, *Crossfiring* was a one day, dawn to dusk event. The adjacent eroding clay hills are semi-arid badlands (complete with cacti and hoodoo-like formations). Relic machinery



Joan Scaglione
Ritual of Desire
Photo David Garneau

and railroad tracks litter the landscape, as does evidence of small-scale strip mining. Many artists chose to comment on the negative human impact on the hills. Chris St. Amand's *Land Sewing* is an earthwork consisting of a small hill that was previously carved through the center to let rail cars through to the clay banks. Amand stretched numerous evenly spaced ropes across the top of the rent as if to highlight the missing part of the hill, or to suture the wound. One of the most magical installations is Joan Scaglione's nearby *Ritual of Desire*. Twenty five rough hewn ladders bridge the land and sky.

There are too many *Crossfiring* events, installations and artists to list here. And, because they were spread out over such a long period and terrain, I was not able to see everything. If Knowhere Productions puts on another extravaganza – and I hope they do! – they might consider a more condensed program, less confused program guide and more complete signs. Nevertheless, this was a terrific day on the prairies!

David Garneau

TORONTO

SUSAN SZENES: SITTING IN A TIN CAN

Aug. 31st – Sept. 19th, 2006
Engine Gallery
1112 Queen St. W.
Tel.: 416-531-9905
www.enginegallery.ca



Sky Dancing
Mixed media
2006

Susan Szenes is an artist who uses materials to communicate feelings in a very poetic and direct way. We see airplanes like moths circling and tracking across a blue painted sky, trains and cars. There are many levels to these panoramas whether a parking garage or an aerial walkway ... These icons of movement and transport prescribe a world in motion that Szenes freezes into a hierarchic story. Its a very particular way of looking at things that may be vanishing in today's troubled times...

A rear view mirror is at work in Szenes art. All that memory involves some erasure and some reconstruction. Memory is in the materials and its as elusive as a butterfly.

These paintings spring out of a society perpetually in motion, amid an ever changing network of roads, cars, houses, transit, and transition. The city becomes an organic body with various modes of circulation, and physical structures, but memory is in the very immediate detail(s) we know in each tableau. There are intimate sections where the applied paint has been scraped and removed to expose the underlying wood. The effect catches us like a visual burr and so we read each scenario personally as experience. Like diagrams, visual maps that exist on the surface of things these paintings carry memory associations that are different for each of us, yet the vernacular is common to all of us. There are electricity lines – the old styles ones – that draw lines in the sky and stand like post-War sentinels in the land.

These paintings are paved with images and textures that conjure up something of the spirit of a world that is building itself, and where people seem miniature facets of something vastly larger, endlessly

transformed by technology. These paintings are about the way time changes things, and captures us all in its process. A tinge of nostalgia lingers like a Tom Waits song, or a forlorn old Ferris wheel. Its in the materials Szenes uses – old wooden crates, signs, bits and pieces of old wood. Elements are burned into the wood. The wood can even be an agglomeration of pieces (recycled à la *Arte Povera*). This tableau of pieces accumulates fragments of a once real world, to become art – a key or a packing case from Holland – for example. We see words like WOODS or GREEN painted on wood.

Progress moves us all along Szenes paintings seem to say, but we all need a muse and some human trace to carry us in the wake of such tremendous social and economic

change. Cirrus trails, for instance, made from sandpaper and paint – some removed, some added bring us back to the personal in such a simple way. Words are inset into the paintings, and like images, become places where our inner self collaborates with the external reality. As a body of words that are images – not words at all – these paintings layer the confusion in a process that awakens an immediacy to things. This anthology of matter, confected, painted, assembled, has a folkloric persona. Szenes captures a childlike whimsical world and visually synthesizes it with great tactile humility.

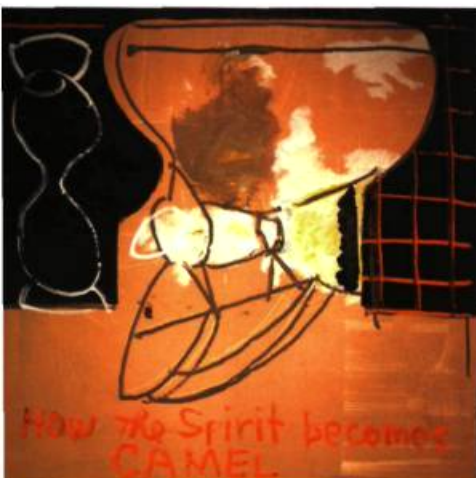
John K. Grande

HAMILTON

TABLE SCRAPS: NEW PAINTINGS BY GARY MICHAEL DAULT

Transit Gallery
230 Locke St. South
www.transitgallery.ca
Tel.: 905-522-1299

Gary Michael Dault is a Toronto-based art critic whose place in the *Globe & Mail* as visual arts writer is well known. Less well known to the general public is Dault's ongoing passion for painting and poetry, *Flying Fish and Other Poems* published by Exile Editions comprised poems and ink illustrations by Dault. Not only has Gary Michael Dault been preoccupied with creative writing, and he is no slouch as a wordsmith, but his most recent exhibition in Hamilton finds him emerging back into that world he writes about and has always dabbled in – painting. Earlier experiments with paint included the *Iron Men: New Painting* show that involved three person collaborations between Dault, John Scott (of TransAm Apocalypse renown) and Matthew Vary at Peak Gallery. The collaborative paintings carried a certain tension within them between figuration and abstraction, even surface effects. *Salt Poems* comprised new pictures and writings by Dault exhibited at the Pteros Gallery formed a natural bridge to the latest series of playful works in acrylic on canvas. With their origins in the



How the Spirit Becomes Camel
acrylic on canvas 2006

typical telephone pad scratchings and doodles, Dault's latest paintings form an inner cosmology and *laissez faire* action figuration. The diffuse painterly eccentricities that are part of Dault's persona catch something metaphysical and describe the inner workings of an art critic's mind, when not a slave to the keyboard.

This brings Dault into the company of Paul Eluard, Roger Fry and many others in art's pantheon of art writers who moved into creative endeavours in various media. Each of the new paintings includes individual or groupings of words that integrate poetry as painted word with candid phrasings that become the titles of each works and these include *The Pigment Form of Privacy*, *How the Spirit Becomes Camel*, *Ice Cream for Art*, and *Flaneur...* The general painterly approach is associative, and elaborates on a basic form, to then expand, scumble, scrape, smooth, and move the brush... These albeit exploratory paintings capture allegory with wonder and draw on the everyday, something Dault's poetry likewise does. Onwards, Gary Michael, on towards!

John K. Grande

MONCTON

VISAGES MAIN STREET MONCTON: PHOTOS BY RICHARD WILSON

Alliance Française
241 St. George St.
Until October 31st

This is an exhibition of photographs of portraits by artist and graphic designer Richard Wilson of Moncton along with a history of the city. These are in your face photographs rather than candid pictures as the photographer wants the works to be a partnership between the subject and the artist. Wilson has made a choice to use black and white rather than colour for these pictures even though he is using a digital camera which can as easily produce colour. Wilson says that for this project colour is a distraction. There is something that is classical in black and white photography that is often lacking in colour photography. It could be simply that the black and white medium reminds us, in this day and age, of art and less of snap shots, but there is more to it than that as even I can remember when box camera pictures were all black and white and colour photographs were a luxury. No it is because black and photographs force us to look differently.

Black and white is an abstraction although I would argue that colour photography is not natural as the colours in photographs are a long way from what we actually see, but we 'think' what we see in colour photographs are actuate, but that is a subject of many books on visual psychology and not one for this short review. The people in Wilson's photographs are posing which means that they are putting their best face forward. It is interesting that people have been posing for

photographs in the same manner since the invention of the medium some one hundred and fifty years ago; the self conscious gaze into lens, or eye, of the camera which stops time forever in a moment of history which will never be repeated. Photography has made us all immortal.

Wilson has set out to record the people and faces of the central core of Moncton literally Main Street which is the unimaginative name of the city's major street. That is not to say, however, that this Main Street is a dull street. In the last several years Main Street in Moncton has become



an active hub of sidewalk cafes, bars, hotels and interesting shops. It is a people place where people parade to be seen and, in turn, to see others and these are the people that Wilson has captured with his camera. He tries, as he has stated, to use photography to create: "... a common world that joins us." and I believe that he has succeeded to in this project.

We are presented with photographs of people at work, such as firemen, at play, or someone walking their dog. There are ordinary people, unusual people, the young and the old. In short all the types of persons that go to make up a modern Canadian city. The camera

is a great democratic tool as prior to its invention only the rich could afford to record their likeness for history through such means as portrait paintings. Now, of course, everyone owns a camera and records their life and the lives of those around them. However, everybody that owns a camera is not an artist. Wilson is an artist.

What makes photographers artists? It's the eye or should I say, eyes? To know a good picture when they see one and, what is more important, take the opportunity to take the picture. We all know the story about a thousand monkeys typing

who could eventually end up with Hamlet, but it would take a very long time and I assume monkeys could take pictures as well, but like their typing namesakes a coherent exhibition would be a long time coming. A photographer such as Wilson can, and does, put things together that results in a message that both tells a story and is art. The art of Richard Wilson is not elitist. The story his pictures tell are obvious to all viewers. The message that he wants to get across is what he said in a press release: "... we all just want to be happy". This may be viewing the world through rose-coloured glasses, but so be it. Picking up a newspaper or watching television news in this day and age is very depressing and

yes, I, and every body else I know do just want to be happy.

This exhibition is the prelude to the more ambitious book which, judging from the quality of the work in the show should very worthwhile. Wilson is an artist of the people in the very best sense of the term. It's nice to see an exhibition that not only speaks directly to the people, but portrays the same people with dignity and compassion.

Virgil Hammock