

English Reports

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OXFORD, U.K.

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RETROSPECTIVE

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Several years ago, Charles Saatchi, the most successful and equally controversial collector of modern art in Britain, put together a show of recent discoveries that he called, what else, *New Blood*. According to him, those were the voices of the future; an eclectic contingent of action sculptors and instant painters, mostly from Germany. The show had a slow run and few took notice of its so-called stars.

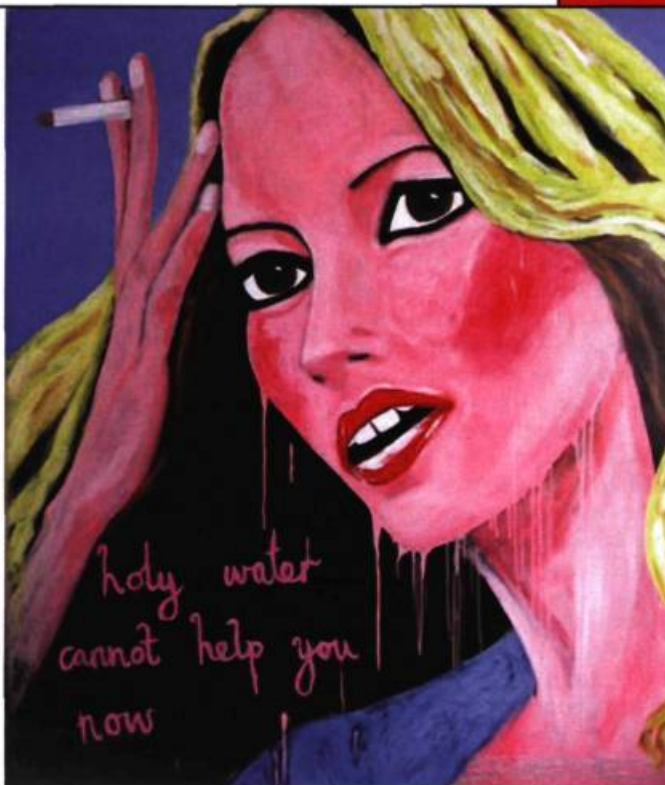
Until they came upon Stella Vine's paintings.

Like previous Saatchi protégés—Tracey Emin, she of the unmade bed installation that received the 1998 Turner Prize much to the horror and chagrin of art-connoisseurs, and Damien Hirst whose latest creation, a diamond-studded skull, recently fetched \$100-million—Vine has become the artist everyone loves to hate. But unlike Emin's vapid sexually charged installations, and Hirst's vulgar excesses masquerading as talent, Vine actually puts brush to canvas.

One of the Young British Artists, as they are known, she rose to instant fame when Saatchi bought two of her paintings in 2004. One was of Princess Diana, and the other depicted heroin addict Rachel Whiteread, whose death was a media sensation in Britain in 2000. Both were controversial images, with the parents of Whiteread pleading for the image of their daughter not to be displayed in the 2004 *New Blood* exhibition.

The Diana controversy was even fiercer. Vine's portrait of the Princess, with words scribbled in red lipstick across her picture, spelling: "Hi Paul, can you come over. I'm really frightened..." (a reference to her butler, Paul Burrell), shocked the public. For the Brits, this wasn't merely bad art.

"This was treason", in the words of one reviewer.



Holy Water Cannot Help You Now, 2005.
Courtesy Modern Art Oxford

What she is, is a contemporary figurative painter, her paintings, however, are far from being stuck in some kind of revisionist back-tracking. She is undeniably modern and original, and very much the voice of the times.

Her models aren't always heroin-fuelled pop stars. She also does portraits from photographs, among them paintings of mother and child and a series of images of Princess Diana. The exhibition also includes portraits of the artist's family.

Hung salon-style on the walls of the gallery, they form an unusual pantheon of figures, a tragicomic mutual-admiration society.

Vine's detractors are many. To most her art is tasteless and immoral, but to others she is a breath of fresh air, even if a tad fetid.

In her introduction to the catalogue accompanying the exhibition, Germaine Greer writes: "As a woman paints her face everyday, Stella Vine paints the painted face, the mask behind which celebrity females take cover even as they flaunt themselves. Paint cannot lie. Every brushstroke threatens disintegration."

The paint in Vine's works seems to be alive. It does not sit on the face, it drips and dribbles in the form of running mascara or blood-red smeared lipstick; what is dead are the eyes of the subjects, veiled with drugs or apathy, despair or elation, belonging to people trapped without realizing the tight circumference of their public persona.

Dorota Kozinska

Now, ten years since the death of Princess Diana, the media are once again abuzz, and that's a good thing for Stella Vine and her retrospective.

When Saatchi purchased the painting, Vine was the media's favorite topic and aspects of her life story became fodder for the merciless British tabloids.

For it is not just her style and subject matter that shock and provoke. Stella Vine herself is an outspoken and colourful figure.

Born in 1969 in Northumberland, she studied painting part-time at Hampstead School of Art in 1999, but what the press likes to draw out time after time, is the fact that she earned a living as a stripper before giving it up for art.

Lost in all this juicy gossip is Vine's art. She paints in a raw, naive style, using bright, at times sweet colours, subverting the portraits by caricaturising the features, turning them into graffiti-like or poster art reminiscent of Andy Warhol's unabashed appropriation of famous faces. Vine uses thickly textured and brightly coloured paint that sometimes looks as if it is mixed directly on the canvas. Her paintings are loud and exuberant, at times funny, and quite often tragic.

Recent paintings on show at this, her first ever retrospective incorporating some 100 works, in-

clude portraits of fashion model Kate Moss, cigarette in hand, with the inscription 'Holy water cannot help you now', as well as her sometime boyfriend, musician Pete Doherty, both performers famous for their drug addictions.

"Diana and her demons, Kate and cocaine, Jose Mourinho and his dog. Is any subject too raw for this notorious artist?" wrote Waldemar Januszczak in *The Sunday Times*.

The answer is "no", and that's great, for Vine's nonchalantly irreverent take on society's fascination with celebrities, no matter how insane their antics, is strangely apt and entertaining. She selects images from newspapers and magazines that capture the facial expressions and emotions that are often very personal, mirroring the torrid stories of these fleeting pop stars.

Vine's free, loose application of the paint adds rawness to her works, and combined with an element of self-portraiture, makes them impossibly irresistible. One cannot be bad while looking at art.

"I'm not interested in being a shocking artist and not interested in being a celebrity myself", Stella Vine is quoted as saying.

Pete Doherty, 2005
Courtesy Modern Art Oxford



VANCOUVER

DALE ROBERTS

NEPTUNE'S CHILDREN

1–25th August 2007

Jeffrey Boone Gallery
140-1 East Cordova Street
Vancouver, BC V6A 4H3
Tel: 604-838-6816
www.jeffreyboonegallery.com



Distort # 75/100
Crocheted cotton, found object
(mixing whisk), driftwood, paint
11" x 6" x 4.5"

Dale Roberts creates sculptural works that span a great range of scale and expression, fabricating his pieces from a variety of unlikely materials, including wood, hemp, rope and twine. Utilizing rope- and net-making skills learned during an early life spent in the Maritimes, Roberts uses nautical objects and textiles to create delicate, complex forms resembling aquatic plants, corals, shells, and sea creatures. These forms are knotted, woven, crocheted, strung or twined into shape and often incorporate scavenged cloth and found objects, including delicately coloured fabric, glittering beads, glass orbs, antique lace, cascades of fringe, and gleaming metal. Contrasts of surfaces and textures, combined with exquisitely balanced complements of colours and shapes, create grand, symphonic patterns that resonate throughout the show.

The works appear to be organic in that they look as if they grew in nature and not simply from the hands of Dale Roberts. Some resemble the more exotic fungal growths that adorn tree trunks in the North Western rain forest, their ruffles and fringes the gills of delicately hued mushrooms. Some blossom into their shapes and contours like tiny arboreal entities. Seen in terms of the vegetative realm of their materials' primary origin—the cultures and industries of the sea—they evoke intensely expressive seaweed growths, or some of the more flamboyant underwater plants that furnish the aquarium environments of tropical fish. Placing them into the aquatic realm of animal life might interpret the forms as the mineralised accretions of brilliantly coloured coral colonies, or the coiling extravagances of mollusc shells and sea anemones. Undersea geology might provide a visual reference more along the lines of deep-sea mineralizations or lava flows—or the decorative flanges of unfathomable thermal vents. The actual craft of human exploitation of the sea lies behind those works that suggest fishing nets, crab baskets, and lobster pots—each with their precious, beguiling cargoes.

Some pieces are distinctly erotic, suggesting intimate anatomies or delicate, vaguely recognised genital organs and erogenous zones. Curling, coiling, wrapping, folding—the sculptures are embodied inscriptions of strength and vulnerability, tactile sensitivity and desire. They seem valorously trusting in their labial display, putting it out there in celebratory magnitude. One focuses on the individual pieces one by one, after first being dazzled by their legion numbers upon the wall, a fiesta of carnival colours and jaunty fetishes, like those that festoon the headpieces of Mardi Gras celebrants or *Cirque du Soleil* trapeze artists. A few pieces describe the timeless classical symbolism of mysticism: mandorlas, lemniscates, spirals and parabolas.

Overall, the distinct 'personalities' of the one hundred *Distorts* are found to be likeable, all convey a confident positivism and humour—a certain jaunty cachet. Each packs a potent, if tiny, wallop in terms of 'stage presence.' Their collective charisma can only be described as quixotic,

composed of a hundred, small, heroic gestures—salutes to the infinite variety of form attainable from modest, cellular, elemental foundations.

Yvonne Owens

EDMONTON

ALBERTA BIENNIAL OF CONTEMPORARY ART 2007

LIVING UTOPIA AND DISASTER

October 27, 2007–January 6, 2008

Walter Phillips Gallery
107 Tunnel Mountain Drive
PO Box 1020, Station 14
Banff, Alberta T1L 1H5

Tel: 403.762.6281

Fax: 403.762.6659

walter_phillipsgallery@banffcentre.ca

June 23–September 9, 2007

Art Gallery of Alberta
2 Sir Winston Churchill Square
Edmonton, Alberta
T5J 2C1

www.artgalleryalberta.com/

In 2005 the Edmonton Art Gallery became the Art Gallery of Alberta and announced plans to replace its 40-year-old Cold War "bunker" with a post-modern bauble. The "greenhouse" collides the boxiness of the old design with flashy new snowdrift swoops and a whole lot of glass. The ostentatious design seems more L.A. than Edmonton—a city with a taste for the severe, plain and utilitarian—but is sure to satisfy its primary goal: to drive Calgarians crazy.

In the meantime, the sixth edition of the Alberta Biennial is housed in a nicely renovated site nearby. "Living Utopia and Disaster" collects work from 22 Alberta artists. As always, the show is uneven, crowded and well worth a visit. There are topical works, such

as Paul Freeman's pastel drawings of distopic elk with more than the usual compliment of antlers. Julian Forrest's indifferent renderings of website photos of soldiers in their barracks and David Janzen's large painting of a collapsed water tower bearing the words "Welcome to Arcadia" are terrific images but unnecessarily transcribed into paint.

However, Sarah Adams-Bacon's 36 drawings of class pictures, although awkward, are handmade translations that read like a dialogue with memories rather than a transcription. The effect is greatly assisted by handwritten accounts of the author's relationship with, and the later fates of, the documented people. The matter-of-fact stories of bullying, cliques, intolerance, early pregnancies, alcoholism, and suicide will resonate with anyone who had a childhood.

Flying the flag for abstract painting this year are Mark Mullen and Geoffrey Hunter. This inspired pairing pits Mullen's confections against Hunter's workman existentialism. Mullen's three large and lovely canvases squeeze patterned frosting on to blurry grounds. Dozens of canvases piled in two stacks accompany Hunter's less cheery trio. Perhaps he wants the viewer to recognize the labour behind the finished work. Perhaps the casual stacks express an anxiety about the value of the activity.

Mary Kavanagh's six mini-DVDs of her trip to the White Sands Missile Range feature sunbathers with umbrellas and beach towels and a fashion shoot. Wonderfully surreal, these moving postcards are about our ability to adapt and find touristy pleasure anywhere. or, our obliviousness (or adaptability) to the well-advertised coming calamity.

Chris Flodberg
Recollections of a Trip to Paris, 2007
Oil on canvas
8' x 16' x 6"



Kay Burns' installation invites us to stand on platforms that vibrate in response to our motions and look at a blurry video that does the same. The mildly interesting *technovelty* does not quite square with the relational aestheticish hype in the artist's statement.

Terrence Houle's pastoral photographs of a suburban park, a baseball game and pow-wow dancers each show the artist—nearly naked, except for a loincloth and some pow-wow regalia—lying face down in the grass. At once shocking and funny, Houle has us struggle with him to figure out how an urban Indian fits into the urban and Indian scenes. He fits the ambivalence of the exhibition title best. An iconoclast, Houle offers no solutions, only problems.

David Garneau

TORONTO

AURORAS/TESTIMONY

ATOM EGOYAN AND
KUTLUG ATAMAN

June 1–10, 2007

Artcore Gallery
Distillery District
55 Mill Street
Toronto, ON

Tel.: 416 920-3820

www.artcoregallery.com

An intense storytelling was in progress in the darkened Artcore space away from the torpor of Toronto's Distillery district in full summer party mode. On three walls of the gallery, seven room-high projected faces of young women shared the narration.

Presented as part of Toronto's Luminato festival and in conjunction with the Art Gallery of Ontario, the world premiere of *Auroras/Testimony* provided the opportunity to be touched by the chimera of the Armenian genocide. The two-room project brought together Canadian-Armenian director and video artist

Atom Egoyan and Turkish video artist Kutlug Ataman.

The seven young women of various ethnic origins are recounting an incident in the life of Aurora Mardiganian, whose personal story, told in 'Ravished Armenia,' was made into a Hollywood film in the early 20th century.

This is not a cinematic experience. Egoyan wants you to come up close and pay attention. Yet your participation must be a struggle, head twisting and body turning to keep up and follow the voices coming from the side and behind. The narration is swirling around the room. The challenge is magnified when the women's voices start overlapping.

It's a multi-track cineplex, where each actor's stripped down language is choreographed to a climax. We are learning about brutalities: forced marches, soldiers, rape. The choreography leaves time to absorb the story as it unfolds. When the emotion breaks, just one character carries the show. The others stand by. We are witnessing them as they witness for us. It becomes obvious why Egoyan chose to use the plural form of the name Aurora in his title. These women are part everywoman and part tragic Greek chorus. (Geographically we're not that far away and the epic proportions of the Armenian slaughter are consonant with tragedy.) Egoyan cast actors whose faces conjure other genocides, Rwanda, Darfur, Bosnia. These women could be testifying at the Nuremberg trials or in The Hague.

Leaking into this whirling drama come cackling sounds from elsewhere. They are the voice of Ataman's piece, entitled *Testimony*, playing in the next room. The Turkish language penetrates into the Aurora's accounts. This is where Ataman supplies another face to fill out our experience.

Shot in a simple home video format, Ataman, a 2004 Turner prize nominee, is interviewing his former nanny, Kevser Alba, a 105 year old Armenian woman. He has brought

pictures to show her, but she remembers very little of her past. It turns out that she has no testimony to give. This has the potential to disappoint.

While she looks in confusion at the pictures, the accusations from the Auroras gallery are audible, but Kevser Alba cannot or will not remember.

She's not pathetic, nor is she anguished; in fact she's good tempered. "God knows when I'll remember"

The point is that Kevser Alba was herself a witness to slaughter. She's the genuine article, whereas the seven faces who construct a compelling story are hired stand-ins. And here any glimmer of dissatisfaction evaporates.

About his film entitled *Ararat*, which also addressed the enormity of the Armenian genocide, Egoyan asked "How does an artist speak the unspeakable? What does it mean to listen? What happens when it is denied?"

One of the messages of *Auroras/Testimony* is a warning not to invest too much in seeking out the "real thing"—this case Kevser Alba—because it may provide no intelligence, while a constructed reality should never be underestimated.

For an artist this notion provides consolation. And for those trying to remember, it offers release.

Anne Lewis

MONTREAL

ALFREDO BRUSORIO

RECENT WORKS

Galerie Lydia Monaro
34 St. Paul St. W.

Tel.: 514 849-6052
galeriemonaro@sympatico.ca
www.galerielydiamonaro.com

The latest works by Alfredo Brusorio at Galerie Lydia Monaro are the quintessence of conceptual art. They hark to the naissance of Modernism and continue in the esoteric tradition of *movimento spaziale*, or spacialism, that originated in Italy in the 1940s.



Sensualita, 48x48
Photo: Ralph Thompson
Photomagerie Inc

Born in Milan, Italy, 1939, Brusorio studied with and under its greatest proponents, artists like Lucio Fontana, Roberto Crippa and Carlo Carra, who formed a group of highly original thinkers preoccupied with spatial relativity and attuned to the advancements in science and technology. Their art, in the true sense of Modernism, was not merely avant-garde but also aimed at reforming existing artistic norms.

Matter, colour and sound in motion were the focus of this "new art", as they were to become for Brusorio. His style evolved and developed over a 40-years career that spanned continents, to border at this point on craft, so precise and meticulous are his works. Nothing is left to chance, and everything is born of the mind.

Elegant and enigmatic, his paintings are inspired as much by an inner landscape as they are by the art of Southwest Hopi Indians.

Equally open to a mathematical analysis (it has been attempted), as to a metaphysical explanation, his compositions are based on the harmony between the many elements, each in its designated spot.

Within this rigid spatial system, a narrative of esoteric proportions is unfolding. Each composition begins with the circle, (the only element in the painting made with the aid of a tool; the rest is all drawn and painted by hand), the sign for life's eternal cycle of birth and death.

Atom Egoyan
Auroras
Credit: © Ego Film Arts, 2007
Courtesy of Artcore/Fabrice Marcolini
Artcore/Fabrice Marcolini



Across this giant round surface float two 'umbilical cords', the twin strands of good and evil, extending beyond the frame of the painting, into infinity. Suspended against this backdrop is a cluster of colourful nodules, oddly organic forms symbolizing humanity.

That, 'grosso modo', is all the artist will divulge about his paintings. The rest is up to the viewer to decipher. With a little hint, the stylized form of the Indians' sacred bird, the condor, may appear, its wings extended into abstracted ribbons of colour, transporting us into a mythical realm, but ultimately what is captivating is the perfect balance of the spatial arrangement.

From a period of exploring quiet tones, and after a self-imposed hiatus, Brusorio is back propelled by an explosion of pure colour, his acrylic paints never mixed, the canvas pulsating with a raw vibration. As in the composition, so in the choice of palette, nothing is left to chance in Brusorio's stylized paintings. Every line, every dot, resembles a musical note in a visual modernistic symphony.

It ends just so. At a very precise moment, with the placement of a final red line, the painting is done.

Dorota Kozinska

E-ART

NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND CONTEMPORARY ART

Ten Years of Accomplishments
by the Daniel Langlois Foundation
September 20–December 9, 2007

The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts
Jean-Noël Desmarais Pavilion
1380 Sherbrooke Street W.

Tel.: 514 285-1600
www.mbam.qc.ca

Marie Chouinard
Cantique (2004)
Photo courtesy of the Compagnie
Marie Chouinard

I have to be honest; I was skeptical about the new exhibition at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. To begin with, it seemed to me that e-art somehow did not fit within the institution's hallowed walls, and secondly, I still get more of a thrill looking at a good painting or sculpture than technology.

I was wrong. *E-art, New Technologies and Contemporary Art*, the brainchild of the fabulously successful Daniel Langlois Foundation celebrating its tenth anniversary, is presented as part of the Museum's contemporary art department curriculum and therefore aptly suited for the space. It is fresh, it is hip, it is definitely contemporary, and in the words of the MMFA's director, Nathalie Bondil, it has transformed the museum into a virtual lab; one of ideas, images, sound and movement, and animated by a huge dose of imagination.

Works ranging from installation to video to a patent application for a fantastical apparatus are presented by ten artists from Canada and abroad, all funded by the DLF and commissioned especially for this event.

Leaving all artsy prejudice behind, I entered the exhibition space with an open mind only to be instantly seduced by a sensual, multi-tentacle installation by UK artist Philip Beesley. Titled *Hylozoic Soil*, it exuded a disturbingly organic presence; its delicate white filaments floating on currents of air, fleetingly brushing against the visitor's face, bridging what is artifice and what is nature with its undulating structure composed of fine synthetic mesh the artist calls "geotextiles".

Montreal choreographer and dancer, Marie Chouinard reaches beyond the world of dance with a video installation of talking heads, a marvellous combination of image and sound that moves from humorous to intense depending on the visitor's

input. In her *Cantique 3* (2004), two faces in profile, a man and a woman, are grimacing at each other while uttering sounds and sighs that ebb and rise as we press the buttons on a console accompanying the video screens. Depending on which buttons are pushed and in what order, a symphony of sounds begins to form, as the faces continue their absurd dialogue.

It's all great fun, but just as I was beginning to wonder whether this is actually art, the shimmering projection screens courtesy of David Rokeby put that doubt to rest. Admitting to having an ambivalent attitude to technology, this Toronto artist employs its potential to illustrate emotional, transient states, and his installation *Seen* (2002) is lyrical almost to the exclusion of its technical workings.

Composed of four large projection screens showing the Piazza San Marco in Venice, it is both painterly and poetic, quiet to the point of being static, with images suspended in time while still in motion. More memory of a place than the actual site, Rokeby's work offers a highly aesthetic sensory experience.

One of the most important media arts figures in Canada, this artist has numerous exhibitions to his credit, and his imagination does not rest on video projections alone.

In *The Giver of Names* (1991), also shown at the MMFA exhibit, he employs complex processes involved in formatting objects into human and computer linguistic systems to construct an interactive installation, quirky and brilliant. To put it more simply, Rokeby's creation analyzes objects placed in front of a camera and projected onto a monitor, and then attempts to describe them drawing from a lexicon of words the artist coded into its memory banks.

The resulting run-on sentences are surreal and oddly poetic, and there is something anthropomorphi-

cally touching in the machine's tentative attempts at putting words to pictures. I felt a kindred soul in there. And just to see how *The Giver of Names* would see me, with the artist's tacit encouragement, I placed my head on the stand while the camera took my picture. It soon began to transform on the video screen as the machine broke it down into fragments, forms, colours, outline. It became a moving painting, changing rapidly, transforming incessantly while remaining within its borders.

Words, mostly disjointed and nonsensical, started running like subtitles under my fluctuating reconstituted portrait, too fast to recall but greatly entertaining in their irreverence.

The artists in this large in ideas but small in scope exhibition have made friends with technology, incorporating it into their creative environment with a particular panache, giving reign to their imagination and original talent, and inviting the viewer to interact with their creations.

The exhibition is free, as are all the shows at the MMFA until January 27, 2008, and a treat for anyone open to "the brave new world" of art.

Dorota Kozinska

ELAINE DESPINS

THE SEA INSIDE

October 10–November 11, 2007

Galerie Dominique Bouffard
1000 Amherst, suite 101
Montréal, Québec
H2L 3K5

Tel.: 514 678-7054
www.galeriedominiquebouffard.com

Elaine Despins first caught my attention with her *Presence/Emergence* exhibition several years ago, in which she showed a series of 10 large format oil paintings (198cm x 143cm) examining the human body. Suspended against an



inky black background in the upper part of the painting, horizontal nude backs provoked an unforgettable visceral reaction. Vulnerable, oblivious to the viewers' curious stare, these embryonic shapes stood for the artist's exploration of the strength and fragility within each one of us.

Despins latest production, *The Sea Inside*, continues this inward/outward journey, as she analyzes that which we see and that which we don't, hidden within the human form.

First titled *Listening*, this new production follows the *Presence/Emergence* and the later *Virgin Mary* series, and emerges, as it were, from them, giving birth to a new visual landscape and symbolic lexicon. Gone is the contrast of the ebony background and the translucent skin, gone is the sharp light that seemed to envelop the curled-up body. In their place we have a shimmering, greenish space, and a new set of models.

It is still a body suspended in space and time, but this is very much an active participant in the composition. Young boys, several women, are quietly lying down on a transparent, reflective surface reminiscent of ice. They all face the viewer; eyes wide open but looking beyond, lost in a deep reverie, or perhaps, as the original title suggested, listening...

No more dark meditation, these works are infused with colour, albeit somewhat unnatural, adding a surreal touch to the otherwise

straightforward composition.

The cool, quiet mood and economy of colour in Despins latest works have echoes of Edward Hopper's silent landscapes, but her models are less alienated, and their gaze is difficult to ignore. These oil on canvas paintings are striking in their simplicity, and all lies in their masterful execution. It shows that Despins has come into her own with her latest series. There is a touch of play and experimentation in these works, as if the artist's has finally allowed herself to turn around and face her inner vision.

No need for deep analysis when looking at *Antoine or Simon*, portraits of young boys lost in their own world. Realistically executed without being saccharine, these wide-eyed children make mesmerizing models. We cannot help but stare into those dark eyes that seem to see something we cannot, something beyond, or perhaps within, as they lay quietly on their stomach, cheek to the cool, translucent surface that just barely reflects their features.

In some works, the bluish-greenish space enveloping them begins to form its own universe, folding upon itself, creating just barely recognizable contours. Could this be the harbinger of a new series in this young artist's career? A foray perhaps into the world of impressionism?

For now Despins remains fascinated with the body separated from its environment; there are no natural elements in her works, no adornments, just the body in a larger space, body "as vehicle", in the words of the artist.

The question behind these compositions: What do these eyes see? The answer is up to the viewer.

Simon
Oil on canvas
38 x 42 in.



With great originality in handling the medium, this intuitive and versatile artist has breathed life into these quiet portraits with delicate yet assured brushstrokes. They slowly sink into our own visual unconsciousness, speaking to our senses from within. Cool and serene, at times sombre, these faces are at once real and surreal, as are the paintings themselves.

Dorota Kozinska

HUGO WUTHRICH

THE ZIG AND THE ZAG OF ART

September 6-30, 2007

HAN ART

4209 St. Catherine St. W.
Westmount

Tel.: 514 876-9278

Fax: 514 876-1566

Words could describe Hugo Wuthrich's art, but they can never recreate the experience of witnessing his art firsthand. There is a sense of joy, of exuberance and abundance. His art is open and accessible, whether the medium be set and costume design, painting or sculpture. Wuthrich's works are not trapped in time. On the contrary, they capture that sense of the moment we experience as children. There is something so simple and direct about these forthright paintings.

The way he uses colour, orchestrates to embellish these personalized scenarios he paints is brave, extravagant in a good way.

Ironically, there remains a tinge of the folk art gesture, of its hand made craft character in Wuthrich's paintings on view at Han Gallery that range from 1984 to 2007. The large scale painting titled *Three Heads* (2007), has an introspective, yet playfully sensitive tinge of humour to the expressive facial gestures of the heads, which are variations on a theme.

The whole Han Gallery Hugo Wuthrich show could be considered as a collective homage to an informal, essentially humanist perspective on life. Wuthrich's compositional style, catches our interest because it never takes itself too seriously, and when autobiography enters into these paintings, it is as if the artists were flirting with time, capturing moments with a mimetic abandon, as if all the world were a stage and the subjects within a paintings perpetual



Duo-logy II (2006)
Oil on canvas
18 x 24 in.

tourists with their props. *Toscana* (2007) for instance has a man with a beret adjacent to a whimsical woman's breast, and there is a leaf-like shape below, a Delaunay-esque rectangle set into the lower section, and other pseudo-mechanisms, two other vertical face portraits. It's a jumble of associations we all like to see, and spontaneous, which is a rare commodity these days... These painterly hieroglyphs are worthy of le Douanier Rousseau.

Working in a highly spontaneous way, Hugo zig zags amid the artifacts of life animating the creative spirit, infusing his art with a social temperament and persona. He builds visual maps of unconscious associations, and when it comes to painting, they are intimate memories of a place, not at all realistic, instead personalized constructions replete with faces, figures, buildings and nature. This is a contiguous and complete cosmos. The humour is in that collision of expressive volition and materials that takes it form in a roll of the dice, for Wuthrich is a painter whose associations spring directly from the mind onto the canvas. *Journey to the East* (2007) is a perfect example of this with its perambulating associative figures, always joyful, each emblematic, a sign to the others, and these painted personages, objects, micro-architectures all seem to breathe in the neutral softly coloured spaces between them.

These paintings are built in a space that is always unidentified, a mimetic place, imagined and then brought into being.

Permeated with an immediacy that is child-like, these paintings reveal a painter endlessly collaborating with, reinventing himself amid a language that transmits itself out of a paintbrush as if it were a divining rod, capturing the most memorable,

intense feelings, and transmitting or communicating them to us all. We have mostly sensed, felt, heard, envisioned similar experiences, and here at Han Gallery, they conjure it all up as if it had just taken place a moment ago... As Hugo Wuthrich comments, "It has to come from me. It comes naturally."

The primitive, *art brut* character of Hugo's art is analogous to every person's search for a deeper purpose, but all this in a world overpopulated by masks, artefacts, on a planet that is over-producing.

Hugo Wuthrich's art is a testimony to the human spirit and the way the creative spirit can outdistance itself at times. Nothing is too smooth, too confectioned, and the texture of life invades it all. This is an anthropologist's dream—artifacts from the present constructed or painted with a sense of urgency and this, in an era when the immediate tactile reality subsides, and the iconic media-based image predominates amid the informational barrage and the electronic ticket. Art is more than all this, and chance is a key one might use to unlock that inner world of expression, and nourishes a poetry of chance. As Dubuffet once wrote: "There are an infinite number of accidents in a painting." Hugo Wuthrich's art describes an infinity inherent to life, and does so with a simply vigour and raw beauty. The exuberance we feel, that resonates throughout this comprehensive exhibition at Han Gallery is reminiscent of Niki de Saint Phalle. The wheels and cogs that turn are metaphysical ones, and the narrations are.

John K. Grande

POINTE-CLAIRE

EXPO 67 REVISITED

July 8–Aug 26, 2007
Stewart Hall Art Gallery
176 chemin du Bord-du-Lac
Tel.: 514-630-1254

Revisiting Expo 67, and the sculptors who exhibited there 40 years after the event, curators Joyce Millar and Serge Fiset has brought the present and past together through photos, maquettes and actual sculptures to give us a sense

of the continuity of these Quebec-based artists' careers. Included are works by Anne Kahane, Robert Roussil, Yves Trudeau, Mario Merola, David Sorensen, and Armand Vaillancourt that give us a sense of how these artists' works have evolved over the years.

Most surprising are Anne Kahane's recent aluminum cut-out personages *Les Amis* (2006) and *Seated Figures VIII* (2006). Slight folds and almost photo-like 3-D imagery situates her work much as the interlocking carved wood sections of the 1960s art did. There is something photographic, instantaneous and reverential about these cut-out forms. They could even recall the colourful paper cut out pieces the bedridden Henri Matisse created in large scale at the end of his life. Mario Merola's totemic *Tree* (1992) sculpture has a folkloric character reminiscent of Gauguin's carvings, and there is a joyful naïveté here. The sculptor Merola, seems to have achieved a more human perspective and scale with his recent works. The concrete and enamel Expo 67 piece *Kalena* looked almost sci-fi or Soviet (or both) in its large scale, somewhat austere, designed character.

David Sorensen, who exhibited cast cement and bronze sculptures as part of Expo 67's Youth Pavillion with its discotheque and amphitheatre located at La Ronde. Some of the cement pieces were cast at his St. Henri studio while the bronzes were cast at a foundry on Long Island in New York. The egg forms that were part of the *Growth series* recall Brancusi's *The Beginning of the World* (1924), but evolve this universal form, moving it into the language of minimalism of the 1960s era. Eggs were some of the first ancient sculptural forms uncovered by archaeologists and have been an unconscious motif we recognize since primordial times. The *Millennium Stele* series on view for this show are miniature bronzes play on and with the totemic form with an intricate playful, even musical sense of line, and form. These works recall one of Sorensen's early influences, the artist Bill Reid with whom he studied early on.

Renowned for his *Tree of Durocher St.*, an ongoing public artwork that was a tree carved in

situ n the McGill Ghetto in 1954, Armand Vaillancourt's large scale *Ecran d'acier* was installed on the MacKay Pier at the Expo Theatre Mall, and represents one of Canada's most sophisticated abstract sculptors work at its apex. Not long after Vaillancourt would create the Embarcadero Fountain in San Francisco. *Nous irons jouer dans l'île* (2000), a found sculpture is fascinating for the diversity of spatial relations existing between its composite forms. *Aux premières nations* (2005) made of wood, glass and steel is another sophisticated homage to the Native peoples of North America. The hanging wood branch sections are like bones, the painted hieroglyphics lively symbols of an ancient cultural heritage strongly linked to nature, while the formal structure has an architectural character. Yves Trudeau's sculptures are beautiful, if somewhat hierarchic, a sort of Catholic modernism, elegiac reconstructions of cathedral elements. These small scale works on view have a sense of mystery, and capture our imagination. Above all, they have that lyrical sense we likewise see in Roland Poplin's sculptures. Robert Roussil, a force of his era in the field of sculpture, who now lives in France created a surrealist cast iron sculpture titled *Migration* for the Garden of Stars Plaza at Expo. Perhaps more than any other of these sculptors, Roussil has stayed close to his origins as a sculptor, as an archaic, lyrical looking *Untitled* bronze from the 1990s attests. Seen for what it is, *Expo 67 Revisited* is a show that brings some context to an ever changing arts scene, in that we emerge from this show more aware of the continuity of these artists' careers and aesthetic preoccupations. In knowing this, we likewise sense the same for the upcoming generations of artists that have followed these now senior artists. As well, we sense Expo 67's effect as a cultural motor in the Canadian scene, whose reverberations echoed on for a decade or two. Calder's *Man* sculpture, the second largest Calder *Stabile* in the world, still stands close to the original Expo 67 site and the Biosphere created in Buckminster Fuller's geodesic dome site on Île Ste-Hélène attests to this great global cultural event.

John K. Grande



Mario Merola
Tree (1992)

STOWE, VERMONT

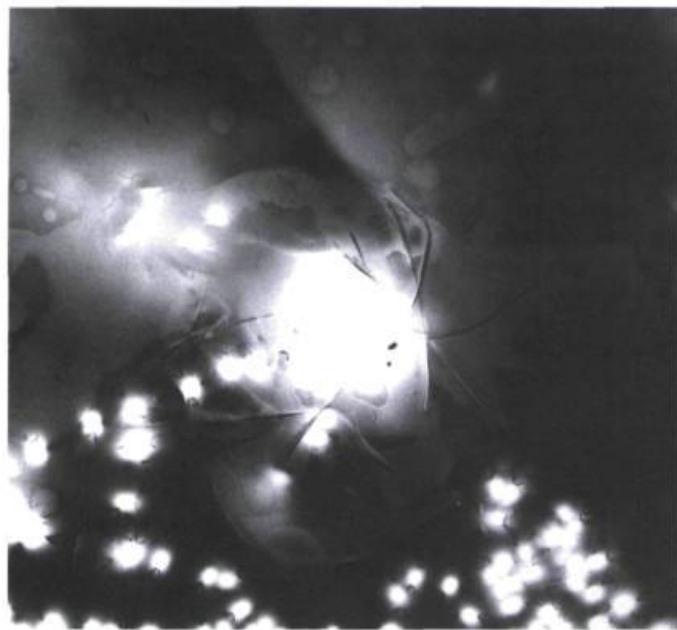
MICHAEL FLOMEN

INTERPRETING NATURE

June 15th–August 25th
Helen Day Art Center
Tel.: 802-253-8358
www.helenday.com

Using light sensitive materials such as Agfa photo paper or Mylar painted with emulsion, Michael Flomen has evolved his own language of photography, particularly with respect to its relation to nature and natural phenomena. The process is one where nature enacts its physical, climactic and light effects as in a laboratory out of doors. The event of nature thus becomes something of a nature theatre played out on photographic film or paper. The results are fascinating, and as varied as one could expect. Some of them look downright extra-terrestrial, or abstract, but this abstraction is what nature is all about in its diversity.

Never certain of the effects that will be achieved, Flomen produces unique single images with photo



Two Step, 2005
Edition 4
91 cm x 91 cm
Gelatin silver toned print

paper, and small edition photos, usually no more than four, with the negatives. Created *in situ* on photographic paper, usually at night, when the effects of the moon produces the imagery as it interacts with water, wind and diverse natural species, Flomen lets weather interact with the surface. The remarkable abstract, physical and phenomenological effects are on view at the Helen Day Art Center in large format works that remind one of the history of photography, and while respecting the past, Flomen's photos compose themselves ontologically within the continuum of nature. Henry Fox Talbot's photos of plant species, and the surrealist Rayograms of Man Ray with their own unconscious twist have led on to the works Flomen has created. They are, in a sense an encounter with God, for the effects come from outside.

A Brassai of the backwoods, whose streets are rivers, and stoplights are trees, Michael Flomen generates imagery in all seasons, whether in Vermont, the Laurentians or elsewhere. Flomen's activity produces remarkable documents, in part abstract, and equally dynamic and they rely on nature for their force. Nature's design interacts with the artistic gesture most amazingly in Flomen's visual night recordings of a firefly's path in darkness with *Two Step*, for instance.

The results are unpredictable, and nature plays as important a role as the photographer in the final composition. The analogy in art could be to Andy Goldsworthy's Snowball Drawings, where the melt of ice and snow, combined with pigment results in surprising and interesting patterning on paper. These recent Flomen photos, enacted over the past few years, are surprisingly different than the urban studies, the human body and the situationist scenarios in black and white seen in Flomen's book *Still Life Draped Stone* published by the Paget Press in 1985. Born in Montreal in 1952, and the master printer of J. Henri Lartigue's exhibition for America in 1975, Flomen continues to evolve the language of his photography. Interpreting Nature as a show combines the phenomena whether the actions of water, light, air or external physical elements with an ingenious sense that surpassed the photographic role of documentation, and equally is less egoistic in its sense of the photographer's role actually is in relation to our place in the universe ... As Michael Flomen says "I make photographs of things we do not see, but know are there."

John K. Grande

VENICE, ITALY

THE INDEX

DAVID ALTMEJD AND CANADA
AT THE VENICE BIENNALE

Pavilion du Canada
Biennale di Venezia
Giardini di Castello
Venezia

July 10 to November 21, 2007

Stepping into David Altmejd's cryptic fantasy world is like entering a savage but somehow friendly nature park. In this year's Venice Biennale, after hours of wandering through cartoon skeletons (Korea), portraits of fruit (Hong Kong), accusatory love letter debris (France), and multimedia reiteration (everybody), we happily reach the oasis that is the Canadian Pavilion featuring the mirrored shrubbery and monstrous horror of David Altmejd's "The Index".

Altmejd has been quoted as calling his sculptures "open ended narratives" replete in symbolic potential. The savage beast, the domineering outdoors crisscrossed amidst the panoptic enormous mirror in the middle becomes instinctively familiar to this Canadian and not only because of the sudden appearance of my own reflection amidst glass. Bewildered passerby step gingerly around the mirrored wilderness. From the Pioneer Tales of Susanna Moodie to the *Wilderness Tips* of Margaret Atwood's first book, every Canadian is well versed in the subject of primal nature as a key part of our identity narrative. "Giant II" is a barely recognizable hairy Leviathan reclining languidly on the pink speckled marbled floor. Its limbs deflect you with broken mirrors patterned on top of its hairy skin acting as a hideously discernible comment on our own reflection seen in the monster. All of a sudden it comes to me. As I gaze at the Giant pulsating amidst the smell of green pine trees and haphazard logs, I realize, this feels like Canada like nothing else.

In a recent interview, Altmejd emphasized the instinctual nature of his work, much had to do with intuition. Referencing animal heads at the Public Art Fund to the mirrored, geometric installations at the Guggenheim, the narrative of Altmejd's work has always focused around the celebratory nature of Canada's savage wilderness. After almost one hundred and fifty years of a country struggling with identity politics, "The Index" has grasped Canada's post-modern concerns in the most eloquent manner—Altmejd's aptitude for proliferating signifiers amidst the wilderness has created original dialogue regarding Canadian identity. Altmejd has contained the savage wilderness of Canada in an enclosed marble space of a crystal atrium. Logs are discarded everywhere. The overwhelming grandness of Canada's hinterland is contained in a flurry of lounging monsters.

Hope and love are rare in the art world, especially when you're using werewolves and giants as a medium. An artist like Altmejd who brings resistant forms to us shakes up notions of complicity in art creating new dialogues and a richer understanding of the world around us—whether it be natural or supernatural.

Melissa Lam

The Index, 2007
Bronze, steel, polystyrene, resin, paint, wood, glass, mirror, Plexiglas, lighting system, silicone, naturalised birds and animals, synthetic plants, branches from a synthetic tree, pine nuts, horsehair, synthetic hair, jute, leather, glass fibres, chains, wire, feathers, quartz, pyrite, other minerals, glass eyes, clothing, shoes, fishing wire, jewelry, glass pearls, etc. 333 x 1297 x 923 cm
Photo: Ellen Page Wilson
With kind authorisation of the Rosen Gallery, New York, and the Stuart Shave/Modern Art, London.
© David Altmejd



FREDERICTON, NB

MILLER BRITTAIN

WHEN THE STARS THREW DOWN THEIR SPEARS

20 April–16 September 2007

The Beaverbrook Art Gallery
703 Queen Street
Fredericton, NB

It is about time that there was a critical look at the work of Saint John artist Miller Brittain (1912–1968). The Beaverbrook Art Gallery exhibition, Miller Brittain, *When the Stars Threw Down Their Spears*, does just that. The exhibition, curated by Tom Smart, places the artist in his rightful spot in Canadian art history and is aided, in

no small measure, by the curator's excellent essay in the book length catalogue. I have often thought that the history of Canadian art in the first half of twentieth century, because of the Group of Seven's stranglehold on the public's imagination, could be subtitled: the tree in art. Brittain was not in that forest. He was rooted firmly in urban life and that is why he is sometimes a forgotten figure in our art history.

Brittain's best work, to my mind, was done in the 1930's and mirrors the Depression. There is some argument to whether or not he was a real social realist in the American model of social realism, but there can be no doubt that he had a real sympathy with the people who were the subject of his art at that time.

I would certainly call him a social realist. His education at New York's Art Student's League during this period, and his strongly held Christian beliefs, place him firmly on the left. Indeed, many of the artists he studied with, and those with whom he was friends in the United States, identified not only with Socialism but flat out with Communism, through such groups as the John Read Clubs. The Depression was a hard time both in the United States and Canada and many artists believed that Capitalism had failed. The answer, they thought, was to be found in a Socialist future. Their artistic models, and surely Brittain's as well, were the Mexican muralists such as Diego Rivera, Jose Orozco and David Siqueiros.

Like his slightly older colleague, Jack Humphrey, he returned for economic reasons to Saint John during the Depression, because it was home and a place to ride out the storm. Unfortunately for Canadian artists such as Brittain and Humphrey, Canada did not come up with a plan to use art and artists as a tool to fight the Depression, as did the Americans with their WPA programme. Saint John was a hard place to be and Brittain's art at this time reflects that fact. His street scenes and portraits of this period, such as *Longshoremen Off Work* (1938) and *Head of a Man* (1932), are not gloomy. Quite to the contrary, he ennobles his subjects. Brittain saves his scorn for a series of drawings, such as "*D'Ye Ken John Peel?*" (1937) and *Three Little Maids* (1937) that show the rich in an ironic light, which was akin to showing them fiddling while Rome burns.

Smart, and it is repeated in another essay in the catalogue by Saint Thomas University professor Allen Bentley, postulates that Brittain was strongly influenced by the images and words of William Blake. The subtitle of this exhibition, *When the Stars Threw Down Their Spears*, is drawn from lines by Blake. I might differ in detail on the subject, but the influence is there nonetheless. Smart also makes a case for comparing Brittain to the hero, Gulley Jimson, of Joyce Cary's 1944 novel *The Horse's Mouth*. Certainly, there are similarities, and Brittain knew of the book, but if I were to compare Brittain to another artist it would have to be the real-life English artist Stanley Spencer. Mind you, Spencer might very well be the model for Joyce's fictional Jimson. Both Brittain's and Spencer's late religion-based paintings are odd and strange, but they are profound at the same time. It would be nice if the work of all good artists, and Brittain is more than a good artist, continued to improve throughout their lifetime, however this is not the case here. Sometimes their work stagnates and other times it just becomes, as in Brittain's case, odd.

I believe that *Miller Brittain: When the Stars Threw Down Their Spears* is one of the most important exhibitions of this year. Fortunately, after it closes in Fredericton, it embarks on a national tour. It will be at The McMichael Canadian Art Collection in Kleinburg, Ontario from November 10, 2007–February 10, 2008, and The Art Gallery of Nova Scotia in Halifax from April 12 to June 15, 2008. The exhibition is also scheduled at later dates in Saint John, New Brunswick and Charlottetown, PEI.

This exhibition needs to be seen by as many Canadians as possible, as it will certainly change minds about the place of Miller Brittain in our art history.

Virgil Hammock



Head of a Man, 1932
Graphite on kraft paper
49.5 x 36.0 cm
National Gallery of Canada (no. 28891)