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Shore/lines
Responding to Place

Denis Longchamps

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Stevenson's two sculptural forms, *Flame*, and, *Egg*, co-habit with the drawings. One black nylon mesh piece reached from the floor toward the ceiling, the other, rested in a horizontal position on the floor. The strong lines of the forms were shaped by the yards of gridded mesh seamed together along its plastic rod armatures. The transparency of the mesh fabric allowed the gaze invisible entry inside the forms. Insides became outsides, however, as the emptiness of the gallery space was echoed back when attempting to look through the layers. The physical space inside the sculptures was therefore not separate from its outside, but rather appeared as a co-extensive interior in relation to the outside.

A resounding strength of *Between Line and Form* was reflected in the artists' intense encounters with their materials. The way that inside-space works in Stevenson's pieces, reflects her focused engagement with the limits of material and architectural boundaries. Not seeming to connect directly with the strict linearity of the white page or the sculpture's ribs, her imagery and shapes linger above their grids. Martha Townsend's suggestive shapes similarly occupy transitory and emergent spaces, as do Kai Chan's poetic constructions, and Ed Pien's graphic installations with Chinese tissues. Approaching the limits of their chosen materials, these artists replace the crossing lines of those limits and teach us about resistance within contemporary experience. By re-drawing the limits, they give shape to where limits define becomings.

Between Line and Form is a thoughtful and intelligent exploration into the spaces «in-between.» Reverberating between the languages of drawing and sculpture, the artworks shift disciplinary boundaries in order to generate endless spatial and experiential becomings. Revealed in the moments of these poetic unfoldings are a few of the infinite contemporary states of being, acting and living. ⇐

Between Line and Form
Kai Chan, Ed Pien, Sarah Stevenson and Martha Townsend
Ottawa Art Gallery, Ottawa
January 16–March 16, 2003

Shore/lines: responding to place

DENIS LONGCHAMPS

The concept of *ArtCity* — a city that is encompassed by and devoted to art in a multiplicity of voices, expressions, and forms — is the vision of the MacLaren Art Centre's Director, William Moore. A city with a population of 120 thousand, one hour north of Toronto, and perceived as the gateway to the north, Barrie, Ontario, is the optimal location for this transformation.

The first major initiative under the umbrella of *ArtCity* is the environmental art biennial *Shore/lines*. From May to October 2003, the first edition of *Shore/lines* (plans are already underway for 2005!) not only offers its participants the opportunity to explore the nature theme and its relation to culture and humankind, but also references Barrie's own historical development as part of the city's sesquicentennial celebrations. Barrie embraces one end of Lake Simcoe, known as Kempenfelt Bay, and sits on what was the shore of the ancient Lake Algonquin. Kempenfelt Bay is the starting point of the historic Nine Mile Portage, used long before colonization by the First Nations to reach Georgian Bay, and the Bay also played an important role in the Fur Trade and the war of 1812.

On the basis of such a rich history, *Shore/lines* proposes to examine the real and imagined boundaries between land and water as well as their relations to each other.[1] Following the advice of Montreal-based independent curator and writer John K. Grande, the MacLaren invited sixteen artists from across Canada, the United States, and Europe — six of them working in teams of two — to choose a site within Barrie and create a response to the social and geographical terrain. This summer, fourteen such sites offer an equal number of responses. Some reference the impact of humankind on the environment, while others recreate what they envision to be idyllic, pre-civilization landscapes within the actual contemporary topography; some explore spiritual connections with nature, while others question the concept of history itself and its position toward the environment. Above all, each response stems from the premise that "nature is the art of which we are part,"[2] consciously or not, in communion, in colonization, or in rebellion. While most of the material used by the participating artists is found in or around their chosen site, some do include man-made materials to formulate a critical contrast with the bounty of nature. In environmental art, the natural world is both the subject and the object. The ensuing installations are intended to be ephemeral in order to emphasize the changing qualities of the real and imagined boundaries between land and water, the core theme of *Shore/lines*.

ALFIO BONANNO, *Between Land and Water, Shore/lines*, 2003. MacLaren Art Centre. Photo: Andre Beneteau.

Newfoundland artist Will Gill has constructed a structure reminiscent of the lighthouses that have guided boats for centuries on waterways around the world. Erected on Georgian College's property, his installation references these buildings with its tall and slender column covered with the required warning stripes. It has no light, however; instead, it is topped with three radar-like dishes covered with straw. Gill's work combines his personal experience of the rugged Atlantic coastline (in Halifax and St. John's) and Barrie's topographical and agricultural history. Such lighthouses are still found in the region of Simcoe County bordering Georgian Bay, the earliest of which was built in 1834 on Simcoe Island at Nine Mile Point. In his work, Will Gill strives not only to question, but also to find a healthy balance between progress and nature — if such equilibrium exists at all. To create the wooden lighthouse Gill used dead pine trees removed from the local parkland in Barrie. The final trimming was done with various electric hand tools — a chainsaw, a sander, and a grinder —, leaving marks on the main body, the scars of industrialization on nature. Inspired in part by an oak tree twice as old as Barrie itself, the artist created a protection device usually situated on the physical boundaries of water and land. Traditionally a lighthouse's purpose is to warn of nature's destructive force — to protect people from danger; Gill's lighthouse is intended to do the opposite. His creation can be perceived as a warning sign to protect the old trees, a natural heritage, against industrialization, as well as suggesting a historical link connecting Simcoe County's past, its present, and its future.[3]

Although incorporating a more spiritual approach, similar links are found in the work of Alfio Bonanno. Founder of Tickon (Tranekaer

BILL VAZAN, *Belly Button of the World, Shore/lines*, 2003. MacLaren Art Centre. Photo: Andre Beneteau.

WILL GILL, *Lighthouse*, *Shore/lines*, 2003. MacLaren Art Centre. Photo: Andre Beneteau.

International Centre for Art and Nature, in Langeland, Denmark), Bonanno chose a site on the south shore of Kempenfelt Bay. He describes his work as "born of collaboration between man and place,"[4] and his participation in *Shore/lines* is a fine example of the statement. His installation, *Between Land and Water*, includes five very large organic forms inspired by milkweed pods found growing nearby. The giant pods, measuring approximately 1.5 to 2 metres in height and 4 to 6 metres in length, are made of maple, dogwood, and willow saplings tied onto a skeletal steel form and filled with river-bed stones evocative of the seeds found in real pods — the source of life. The large organic structures are placed on the slope of the beach, across the shoreline and down into the lake,[5] the weight of the rocks keeping them in place. Their disposition emphasizes the meeting point of water and land and creates a dialogue with the immediate surroundings. At dusk on the final day of completion of Bonanno's work, fires emanated from the openings of the large pods for a brief moment in a ritualistic manner — traces of this ritual still remain on the rocks and charred saplings, symbols of the passage of time and of history itself.

Our general perception and recording of history is often linear, following a chronological order. Barrie artist Derek Martin, also working on Georgian College property, explores this linear notion and raises our awareness of the uneven progression and "development" of an urban environment, through a 150 foot walkway — one for every year of Barrie's evolution. Delineated by tall maple saplings, creating expanding and contracting spaces, the poles suggest both boom times as well as more difficult ones. In the context of the biennial, this wave-like symmetrical construction references a shoreline, where water reflects land and flows in, out, and in between without restraint, similar to the way history is "represented", lost and repeated. Hence Martin's work, *Reconstructing Provenance*, speaks to the fact that the linear construction of events in sequence is inherently disruptive and emphasizes the diversity of community by referencing various voices including that of nature itself.

For ages, even long before industrialization, societies have left traces of their existence on the landscape. Inspired by the ancient Greek belief and ensuing ceremonies revolving around the Centre of the world — the omphalos —, long thought to be in the city of Delphi, as well as by "the all too frequent human frailty to take ourselves too seriously... *pour le nombril du monde*,"[6] Quebec artist Bill Vazan created Barrie's belly button. The artist cut and removed the grass turf in Sunnidale Park to reveal a long umbilical cord-like design. The city's belly button — its life source — relates to his series of stone engravings. Vazan's earth-work is part of an on-going worldwide series. Here, metaphorically, he refers to the heart of the city, which was historically by the water, the highly navigated area contributing to the development and sustenance of the community. It evokes also the crisscrossing paths of the First Nations and the pioneers that fed the embryonic city before its birth in 1853.

One planned installation is not specific to its *Shore/lines* site. The work, *Babylon (and the Tower of Babel)*, by Canadian artist John McEwen, was re-installed, on loan from the McMichael Canadian Art Collection. Created in 1991, its title refers to the biblical story of Babylon, the dislocation of people, and the multiplicity of languages. Not site-specific in nature, *Babylon* is context-specific however. The work deals with the idea of communication and with the difficulty of comprehending our surroundings. The context of *Babylon* acts as a possible model for defining the cultural envelope through which we view nature, an envelope with a language difficult to decipher — a *Tower of Babel* lost in cacophony.

The *Shore/lines* exhibition offers differing responses to the theme of water/land boundaries, as it does, in social and historical terms, to the Barrie community. Additional installations include a boat filled with metaphorical meanings, by French artists Gilles Bruni and Marc Babarit, while First Nations artist Glenna Matoush, in collaboration with Jan Larson, constructed the *Beaver Tree*, or *Amiskutuk* in Cree, to pay tribute to an animal that once was source of food, clothing, and trade. Other participants in *Shore/lines* are Canadian artists Iain Baxter, Lance Belanger, Kitty Mykka, Mike MacDonald, and American artists Betty Beaumont, Patrick Dougherty and Alan Sonfist. This first edition of the MacLaren's environmental art biennial is about a community — its geography, its history, its social fabric — through which these nature-based art installations will force us to reconsider our own relationship and response to the environment and our sense of place. ←

Shore/lines Biennial
Barrie, Ontario
May to October 2003

NOTES

1. Mary Reid, "Roughing it in the Bush", *ArtCity*, May/April/May 2003, vol. 6, issue 1, p. 8.
2. John K. Grande, *Balance: Art and Nature* (Montreal, New York, London: Black Rose Books, 1994) p. 36.
3. William Gill, *Shore/lines Proposal*, emailed to Mary Reid, March 26, 2003.
4. Alfio Bonanno, *Where Lizards lose their Tail-A Celebration of Place*, artist statement, Denmark, May, 2000.
5. Alfio Bonanno, *Shore/lines Proposal*, January, 2003.
6. Bill Vazan, *Shorelines Proposal: The Centre of the World*, October 17, 2002