

English Report

Volume 50, Number 202, Spring 2006

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/58820ac>

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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 Report]. *Vie des arts*, 50(202), 70–76.

NEW YORK

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG:
OFF THE WALL COMBINES

Metropolitan Museum of Art
Dec. 20th, 2005–April 2nd, 2006
1000 Fifth Avenue
www.metmuseum.org

Made from life and its so varied objects and products, transforming life into an artform that was off the wall, Robert Rauschenberg's incredible assemblages and environment tableaux assaulted the 1950's audiences and were largely not accepted initially. Now they have become as American as apple pie, like Jasper Johns' *Flag* paintings, and the recognition in hindsight that Rauschenberg moved abstraction off the wall and into a field where sculpture had once dominated, achieving a representable reality that was part autobiography and part painterly excess. For to witness a stuffed angora goat with its nose painted like a de Kooning is to realize that painting had forever changed its syntax. (The goat incidentally was bought at an office-supply store on Eighth Avenue in New York for \$35.00) Bobby Rauschenberg fused it with an incongruous rubber automobile tire as if to say there is irony in reality, and a true sensation of intensity in materials drawn from the street that communicates something direct to an audience. This artist's imagination challenged the canons of Clement Greenberg's post-War 1950's abstraction, but more importantly gave art a new lease on life. Nature morte turned over in its grave to become a colourful animation that paralleled the arrival of television in American society. No longer was representation a static flat planar dimension. It could likewise be 3-dimensional!

In a work titled *Broadcast* (1959) a painterly enough tableau has three hidden radios, newspaper fragment, printed reproductions and a plastic comb. What surprises us is how early on these works incorporated light bulbs, neon, detritus from the industrial world and nostalgic cliché objects from junk stores. *Levee* (1955) integrates a Lucas Cranach reproduction *Portrait of Princess Elizabeth*, some fabric, paper and a necktie, but it all



holds together like some ingenious, and even more tactile Hans Hoffman. What strikes one, is that Rauschenberg builds these pieces with an intelligence and sense of what he is doing. Whether a sheet, socks, a recycled landscape painting truck driver's wheel, tattered clothes, old newspapers, postcards, comic strips, an umbrella, or a bowling ball, each fragment builds a narrative that is object-based and tells its own cumulative story through the relation of each element to the others.

Above all, it is the accessibility to materials and all media, the fluid application and interpretation that catches one, and these works still look so alive! One of the most gutsy is a taxidermied bald eagle that literally leaps out of the canvas unsettling the planar security that abstraction had been. We see a black shadow, a baby photo, ever so black paint strokes worthy of Tapes, and areas of colour, even exposed wood, and cardboard. Rauschenberg synthesizes it all... even the photo of space from a magazine, and an appliquéd stick holds a pillow that hangs from a cord below the rest of it all. Wherever he lived it must have been littered with boxes and industrial debris. The nostalgia for the absolute is absolute!

There is a story that Joseph Albers taught Rauschenberg at Black Mountain College and the young student would go out searching for examples of accidental art—tin cans and stones—something that served him incredibly well as an

artist but ultimately annoyed Albers. Obviously the Surrealists New York presence left its mark decades later in Rauschenberg's approach, even if Clement Greenberg's abstract dictum was in the air to control the chaos of the artistic impulse at any cost. One can see how the paraphernalia Rauschenberg incorporated into his Combines would one day be a stepping stone for Andy Warhol and New York Pop, because Pop was already there, albeit somewhat worn and relic-like. We see it in the elements in *Gold Standard* (1964). Some are *trompe l'oeil* like the wooden box that projects outwards that is attached to a cardboard box, while the screen that is the environment/painting tilts and moves accordion-like painted predominantly yellow. A *His Master's Voice* dog is tied to the piece (a humorous quip typical of Bob R.) while shoes hang, a Coke bottle and tie are "tied" to a city works prop. And so it goes... on and on... with everything connected to everything else, yet edited, selected and arranged with a clever impudence. Courageous or simply deluded. Obviously the former!

The Tower (1957) referred to as one of the freestanding combines presages installation beautifully... and there is a poetry to the brown umbrella, a life-like painting in which the letter S has been taken out of place—resituated unnaturally as if in a typographer's dream. Letters and fragments from printing shop recall the Constructivist Vladimir Mayakovsky and others letter and

design games... Rauschenberg is less interested in the way letters build a design in a composition as the Constructivists were. Instead these works are inspirational, hopeful, poetic, even nostalgic to a degree...

Rauschenberg's paintings and combines become a kind of visual alliteration, even autobiographic. With their elements drawn from the everyday they presage performance art, and display a sense that art can find truth by drawing of reality for its cues, something very American for sure. We even sense artists like Louise Bourgeois with her hanging legs and rubber sculptures, may in the long run have owed some debt to Bobby R... *Inlet* (1959) has a strong painterly abstract facet, compositionally akin to Paul-Emile Borduas in Quebec, but the freedom and confidence is striking. There is even a hybrid box assemblage integrated into the piece that, with its stuffed bird, its light socket, magnetic compass, zipper, and corkscrew looks like a strange hybrid that exists somewhere between one of those magic Joseph Cornell box assemblage and the old Victorian curiosity cabinets—but this one is postwar and quintessentially modern as modern was at that time. Robert Rauschenberg emboldened it all—brought the unconscious and crazy world to the level of widow shop presentation which is the scale and street experience he largely lived.

In *Winter Pool* (1959) it is a ladder that holds the two sections of the composition together. Proverbial, metaphorical, it is all couched in ambiguity but likewise there is such an ambitious leap of faith undertaken for this epoch by Rauschenberg... a dreamer for



sure. *Empire II* (1961) has a trolley with metal wheels - the kind used to transport goods in a 1950's warehouse. On top of it, an air duct stands looking like some old fashioned spaceship confabulation, and one roller skate (wheels on wheels) stands on the trolley, with a pile of paper stacked on it. An unusual allegory, and albeit humorous even.

The one question in viewing these works, is about the artist Rauschenberg's own perceptions and expectations as a person. Did life live up to his early artistic dreams. Ultimately he seems to have been so positive and ambitious with these works from the 1950's and early 1960's that one senses a certain sadness in his expectations. *Magician II* (1961) has a brick in front on the floor with a tenuous wire leading to the main painting. A propagandistic American "Serving our Country" flag hangs out from the surface of the work. And the rest is just wild, but still all there, and retains a sense of composition. The paint taches, splotches, striations... We must remember this is all in the early stages of TV culture... Another *Untitled* assemblage from 1959 calls to mind Christo Jeanne-Claude's early small scale wrapped pieces. It is an old pocket watch that hangs off a tin can. What a poem! What ideas Rauschenberg had! The visual jokes were insider art, or outside society, or hybrid curious investigations, not quite a creative anthropology of the present, nor just a visual extemporization of how dull abstraction had become... a balance is there in the *Combines* collage compositions. Seeing one of these is like walking a tightrope blind into deep space!

Organized by Paul Schimmel of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles this show is one of the best of 2006 even though the year has just begun. Comprising some 67 works created from, 1954 to 1964, Robert Rauschenberg's *Combines* will travel on to the MOCA in Los Angeles (May-September), the Musée nationale d'art moderne at the Centre d'art Georges Pompidou in Paris, (Oct 2006-Jan. 2007) and the Moderna Museet, Stockholm (Feb.-May 2007).

John K. Grande

MONTREAL

ANSELM KIEFER: HEAVEN AND EARTH

Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal
February 12th-April 30th
185, rue Sainte-Catherine Ouest
Tel. 514-847-6226
www.macm.org

At first glance, the exhibition's title, *Heaven and Earth*, seems more an attempt at clearing an acceptable thematic niche for a catalogue than what the exhibition really is: an exceptionally rare and ambitious overview of an artist whose aesthetic cosmology is too broad and deep to be encompassed in a catalogue text. The exhibition seems more to illustrate how Kiefer the artist-like all seekers-falls short of heaven more often than not; his works display the visual remnants of how gargantuan a struggle it was. The Wagnerian heroism that he is accused of by the more bureaucratic of aesthetic camps stands clearly as a visually effective delivery system for the breadth of Kiefer's investigations: how are we to portray the breadth of the post-holocaust, postwar German zeitgeist if not by a wide girth of painterly scale, a weighty, leaden heaviness, a nuclear ashen memory of Nazi architecture churned back into an immense painterly fallow of wasted, disused modern material?

Weighing in at no less than 4500 pounds, *Meteoriten* (1998-2005) (*Meteorites*) dwarfs gallery-goers, like children suddenly walking from the playroom to the adult living space. After the initial entrance to the exhibition-where Kiefer's earlier, less monumental works from the 70's are hung-*Meteoriten* abruptly greets the viewer as a giant steel bookshelf, made from thick slabs of hot-rolled steel. Oversized, rippled-edged books made from lead sheets line the shelves. The material itself-the uneven rolling of the lead sheets, the large, lumpy lead balls jammed in between-has the feeling of being drawn with a large, sketchy hand. The balls attest to a cosmic disaster in the making of the work, as if in the act of creative literary allusion the sky had fallen, the work pummelled and interrupted by the same material. It is here that the tone is set for the exhibition as a whole:



Anselm Kiefer
Himmel auf Erden 1998-2004 (*Heaven on Earth*)
oil, emulsion, acrylic on canvas with razor wire
280 x 560 cm
Private collection

history turned back upon itself, material transformed and churned like a furrowed field in the manner of a heavy-metal alchemist. The stars have fallen from the sky of the artist's own retributive cosmology. After *Meteoriten*, we've entered the adult world: a world where history has consequences and the artist attempts his escape, transcendence or, in Kiefer's case, his atonement.

Barring the escape in the ironically titled *Himmel auf Erden* (*Heaven on Earth*) (1998-2004) is a massed tangle of rusted razor wire on a huge fallowed field, with the ghost of two tire-lined roads weaving away through the cracked ashen surface. The scrambled bunch of razor wire (one can only think of the unfortunate studio assistants in such a case) clings to the canvas. Obscure numbers faithfully written on little pieces of paper meekly assert themselves, despite the hostile historical environment. Are they the numbers tattooed on the arm of the holocaust victim, or are they, like the painting opposite (*Your Age and Mine at the End of the World* 1996) the numbers of distant galaxies-DM-15477930-a marker of one's space in the cosmos, when the observer has run out of names and is reduced to numbers to keep track of the infinite? Kiefer's fascination with the frail (and necessarily tragic) human urge toward an ordering of the cosmos is evident throughout much of the show: hierarchies of angels are named, Kabbalistic levels of transcendence are marked, star systems itemized and numbered. In one piece, separate heavens are suspended in their own cages.

Allusions to German history, especially seen in light of the anniversary of the bombing of Dresden (February 14th), add a psychic

urgency to the painter's work. In *Ash Flower* 1983-1997, an immense canvas of a Nazi ceremonial hall by architect Albert Speer is presented as a ruined, ashen backdrop to an added collage element: a 14 foot-long dried sunflower bisects the image, seemingly re-seeding the canvas after a psychic disaster the painter was unable to shake.

The prevalent greyness of much of Kiefer's work acts in some ways as the final act of burying a memory after a painterly ploughing, an ancient ritual of sprinkling one's head with ash as a sign of mourning. Stated in a recent article by critic Donald Kuspit, "In" Poe's tomb, the dead are buried alive, but in Kiefer's tomb there is no body, only an idea-the idea of Germany, a never-never land of the morbid imagination." Originating at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, *Heaven and Earth* will travel on from Montreal to the Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (June 18th-September 10th) and then the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (Oct. 15th 2006-Jan. 14th, 2007).

Cameron Skene

CATHERINE FARISH: NEW PAPER WORKS

Galerie Simon Blais
March 29-April 29, 2006
5420, boul. Saint-Laurent
Tel.: 514-849-1165
www.galeriesimonblais.com

Catherine Farish once said of her work: "The elements of my pieces come together in a way that I don't always understand. They fall into place according to a certain logic..."



Breastplate
Photo credit: Catherine Farish

Indeed, everything seems to fall in the right places, perhaps now even more so, as she hones her admirable talent with each new series of prints. Her latest production, on display at Galerie Simon Blais, attests to this. Elegant, abstract works on paper—a signature with this English-born artist—continue the visual dialogue initiated in her earlier *Salisbury Plain* series. Monochromatic universes are divided into rectangular panels and converse in a quiet language of mixed media. At times these works are busy but they are never obtrusive. Perfectly balanced, they guide the eye this way and that. The visual effect is like trying to decipher a set of alien hieroglyphics.

An apprentice of one of Canada's best graphic artists and a highly respected printer with the Montreal's Atelier Circulaire, François Xavier Marange, Catherine Farish has developed her own unique visual lexicon. In *Dans le bois* (2006), one of her latest works, she builds a poetic image that is all quiet sepia with touches of black here and there scattered across the print like tiny birds in flight. A dark rectangle hovers above, holding the composition in check without burdening the delicacy of the scratches and squiggles that mark the lower part.

A highly intuitive artist, Farish allows the image to form itself, a tiny gesture at a time, one small step after another, only to finish it with the audacity and assurance of a master printer. She knows exactly when to suspend the movement, leaving wonderful empty spaces, like wide, silent respirations. *October 28, 2005* echoes the rectangular divisions,

this time horizontal rather than vertical, but presents the composition in brick red, with wide swaths of dripping colour that flows down like bloody rivulets from the signature darkness above that seems to be the birthplace of many of her images. The stillness of the dark rectangles marking the top of the composition transforms into a murmur of colour in this marvelous mixed media print. It is at once earthy, organic, and a sophisticatedly regimented graphic.

One of the strongest works in the new series departs from the other prints in both palette and form. *Breastplate* at first glance recalls Betty Goodwin's seminal *Vest* series, but it is entirely original in its visual impact. Executed in cool bluish green and grey, it presents what looks like a medieval metal jacket, sleeveless with a stiff Mao collar. At once torture instrument (think *Iron Maiden*), and protective armor, it brings to mind the militarized technology of Fritz Lang's silent film *Metropolis*. Stylized, powerful, strangely emotionless, it is not an easy work to decipher or absorb. Punctured as if by stitching or bullets, it presents the viewer with a fascinating enigma. Farish, a one-time theatre costume and stage designer, seems to have reached into an entirely different creative niche here, producing a work that is highly sculptural, almost three-dimensional. This show must be seen!

Dorota Kozinska

MICHAEL SMITH: WRESTLING VISION

McClure Gallery
January 6th–28th
350, avenue Victoria
www.visualartscentre.ca
Tel.: 514-488-9558



Specifically designed for the gallery space, Michael Smith's three constructed large format acrylic paintings, and additional six small preparatory studies of the paintings

are on display at the McClure Gallery. These are very precise works in terms of the artist's approach to subject and use of scale. The choice of only three paintings tends to indicate that this exhibition is a contextualised summing up of the artist's past preoccupations with a dialectical approach to painting that involves narrative, text and the corporeal nature of paint.

Of the three works, two of them remain in one's memory as representative of Smith's legacy and there seems to be a dialogue between both. One work titled *Cradle of Words* is an anarchic swirl of beautifully sculpted paint on the surface of a vague seascape. We see quotes from the artist's own poetry written beneath the surface. They are barely decipherable, but ever present. In reference to the title, one wonders if Smith is placing language in a subordinate relation to the surface image, putting the fragile poem under the careful wings of a benevolent natural force. There is a certain Arcadian grandeur that reveals a lot about Smith's consideration of the relationship between the written poem and the chaotic forces of nature that poetry can connect to.

Across the gallery is a similarly large scale painting called *The Burial*. It references a battle scene (devoid of bodies) and is simply monumental. The painting works as an abstraction, and it articulates some of the recurring themes seen in Smith's past oeuvre. Simplicity is the key here, and it echoes J. M. W. Turner's renowned and elegiac scenes of warfare. Smith likewise included battle scenes in his earlier works, perhaps because of the connection between the immortality of the image and the transitoriness of the body that perceives and executes the image.

Almost everything involved in these three paintings works on more than one, and at least two levels. History seems inescapable here and the postmodernist denial of history and proclamation of the death of painting comes to mind. It is as if the very declaration of such a thing prompted true believers like Smith to come to the rescue of paint and explore its many attributes. Once a former poet influenced by Ted Hughes and Peter Redgrove,

Michael Smith is no stranger to the power of the word, yet excels at showing the world the power of the brush. Even the title of the show, *Wrestling Vision* brings to mind a parallel conjuring of an Arthurian figure heroically struggling to pull his paintbrush out of the proverbial anvil of postmodernism!

Does this type of work indicate that Smith is a purist, disavowing the fragmentary accumulation of a paradigm in favour of a return to basic values? Not necessarily. It may prove that not only is Michael Smith a deft handler poetry and paint, but is a kind of alchemist, who pares down the monumental in art and rendering all in a comprehensive way.

Isak Augustine

TORONTO

GEOFF FARNSWORTH: JANUARY 18th–29th

1080Bus
1080 Queen St. W.
Tel.: 416-536-6719



Geoff Farnsworth
Tea Girl, 2005
Mixed media
Courtesy the artist

Geoff Farnsworth's recent paintings explore portraiture as a vehicle for stylistic innovation. These bright, lively paintings rework a Vermeer, and an Ingres *Odalisque*, with other contemporary subjects painted direct, and each works to animate a multi-level experiential direct approach to the action of painting. The results are visually challenging. Using surface and painterly effects, and bright Pop colours and brushwork that recall the works of Larry Rivers and

Robert Rauschenberg these painting work on two levels. The first is that if representation and the subjects they portray whether classical or contemporary. The second level is the interplay between the abstract and painterly and figural outlining. The portrait figures become abstract devices for expressing the energy of the act of painting. They likewise build a landscape of psychological and meditative states, using brushwork, layers, visual effects, while respectfully maintaining the subject and portrait theme. Using a silkscreen base, gesso and then layers of acrylic and oil, and occasional marker lines that recall the work of Toronto illustrator and artist Harold Town, Farnsworth achieves a level of intensity that makes these works sublime, almost mystical meditations on the artist's approach to art and life. A clue to the artist's current evolved style rests in earlier commissioned work. Hired by a filmmaker at Canon to create a large painting including 40 employees heads, capturing this process on film while working, and finishing it in a short time frame, Farnsworth was forced to work at a rapid pace in capturing multiple likenesses. Large canvases stapled to the walls were worked on much as if they were mere scraps of paper. Drawing became an extremely rapid exercise with an instinctive, unconsciousness approach to painting as process. A series of small paintings with the title *Head and Letters* in the Toronto show repeats a painted image a young woman who sits calmly with her legs crossed. Farnsworth's comment: "I tried to get the energy of sitter" through the device of repetition and recreation in this thematic work. The overall effect is meditative...

While began his art training in Vancouver at Capilano College, Emily Carr, and The Federation of Canadian Artists, Farnsworth then went on to The Art Students League in Manhattan, New York from 1997 to 2002. He had begun his career by drawing and painting full-time from the human model but the influence of abstract painters William Scharf and Frank O'Gavin with whom Farnsworth worked, caused his painterly style to develop in new

directions. Recent shows have been held in New York, Washington DC, Vancouver, and Toronto, and a new series of paintings will be shown in Stockholm, Sweden later in 2006. As Farnsworth states: "My paintings explore a relationship between figurative and abstraction in an attempt to meld unconscious probing and emotional automatism with a meditative figural base. I have rarely felt an inclination to abandon figure and form in searching the unknown; it is in relation to presence and identity that wonder, dream, and impulse are most given shape. This dialogue between the two is what drives me." An artist to watch, and who continues to grow as a painter.

John K. Grande

DAVID MILNE WATERCOLOURS: PAINTING TOWARD THE LIGHT

Feb. 25–May 21
Art Gallery of Ontario
317, Dundas St. W.
Tel.: 416-979-6660
www.ago.net



Dreamland Tower, Coney Island—1912
Watercolour with bodycolour over black
chalk on illustration board
49 x 37.6 cm
Collection The British Museum, London
Purchased 1993

Returning to Canada after successful shows at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the British Museum in London, *David Milne Watercolours: Painting Toward the Light* builds its exhibition out of one of the strongest media Milne worked with—watercolour. While Milne lived out a spartan Thoreau-like existence near Boston Corners in upstate New York and

Ontario, what is less well known is that he was very much a New York artist who arrived in 1903 to study at the Art Student's League while supporting himself as a sign painter and commercial illustrator. From a farm family, Milne was born in 1882 near Paisley, Ontario and found his art exhibited alongside Marcel Duchamp in New York's famous Armory Show in 1913.

What truly stands out with Milne's watercolours is that he dared to leave empty white space in his paintings, and to explore line and colour in a sparing, almost Japanese manner. He innovated with dazzle spots, expanses of emptiness, while likewise building a feeling of the sheer beauty and quietude of nature. And so it is fascinating to see urban scene on *Fifth Avenue, Easter Sunday* (1912), *New York Roofs* (ca. 1912), *Three Hansoms* (ca. 1912) and the *Dreamland Tower, Coney Island* (1912) all works that draw on the effects of light, colour and space, yet theatrical in an early 20th century way, particularly when one realizes the leap of faith from farm boy to urban artist Milne had made, so much so that New Yorkers will claim him as their own, if you do not let them know his background. The show likewise features some of those somnolent lake, forest, porch and cabin interior scenes as well, the ones Milne is perhaps best known for. To have gone from a near hermit like existence in nature straight to the record the war was, undoubtedly for Milne, a great shock, and yet to look at works such as *Loos on the Trenches on Hill 70* or *From a German Gun Pit at Bailleul, East of Vimy* (June 3, 1919) is to sense that Milne achieved a distance from together, never overcrowding it, always observing with a critical eye, and likewise building a rhythm throughout, something that resonates in these more than 70 works to this day. Subject, from landscape, from still life, that was entirely his own. On until May 21st, this show is a must see whether for the art, the nature, the urban scenes or painting in general. What an artist!

John K. Grande

WATERLOO

FRAGILE NATURE: BRENT BUKOWSKI & KATHRYN WARD

Canadian Clay & Glass Gallery
25 Caroline St. North
Jan. 15–Feb. 12, 2005
Tel.: 519-746-1882/Fax: 519-746-6396
www.canadianclayandglass.ca

An unusual juxtaposition of two artists who work with glass—both contemporary—and both with an idiosyncratic approach to their medium. What characterizes these artists' works and brings them together thematically, is precisely the way they embrace their medium and manage to make it of our times. *Fragile Nature* is dedicated to the late Mr. Gertler, whom Virginia Eichhorn, curator of the gallery states: "... had great respect for the natural world, so we thought it would be fitting to dedicate this exhibit to him."

Kathryn Ward's delicate and extremely fragile looking collections of part nature, part synthetic works, recall nature in their formal arranging of man-made and natural elements. As such, they become a statement on the intertwining of these two—the human cultural aspect and the natural cultural feature. It all seems so fragile.

Even more significant in terms of the way these works raise the stakes on contemporary glass art. These works confound us, for traditional distinctions between the purity of the glass medium and the other-worldly real can no longer be applied to judge or assess their particular manufacture. They become as sculptural as they are craft-oriented, and seen in another light, they could almost be like paintings in three dimensions. A tree section becomes the pedestal on which a nest-like form rests, but just as a bird would gather both natural and synthetic materials if they were available to fabricate their nests, so does the artist Kathryn Ward, for there is human hair around this nest and milkweed seeds set inside the undulating glass form. Found elements likewise play a role in other delicate and tenuous *Untitled* Ward compositions, whether from nature as with wild vines, bulrush seeds, or even autobiographical elements like



Adam's woven hair dreads, or the artist's shredded pants (something that adds a touch of humour to these works for each element is designed). The theatre of nature thus becomes part of the human theatre of experience, as with *Untitled III* where all manner of material from pink felt, to mud and soil, sticks and weeds. The wrapping and delicate assembling of the elements whether brilliant and synthetic or quiet and natural, reconstructs a sense of the classic in the way it composes its subject out of the apparent random, abstract chaos of nature and nurture.

With Brent Bukowski's installation *A Piece of the Pie*, glass can be broken, or it can be thick and impervious, and it forms a window with its multiform collaged effects and distinctly industrial borders. These interesting sculpture/structures are a statement of sorts on the rapacious character of global resource consumption for Bukowski contrasts global resource statistics from the present with those of 50 years ago. We sense how resources, labour and capital can be wasted, and if so, have long lasting effects on the environments we live in and our children will depend on for their survival. As pie charts, these sculpture objects look almost science fiction, imaginative, even utopian, and involve layers of broken and cut glass. Contained as they are in metal frames from discarded hot water heaters, they build a dynamic that visually carries a tragic sense of the power and destructive

capacity of consumerism over what is actually a brief period of time (50 years) in historical terms revealing, as they do, gross domestic product figures, world water consumption, greenhouse ozone depletion statistics. Brent Bukowski's bricolage carries with it the marks of time, and industrial use, and his use of materials is confident, and innovates. Looking at the cogs, wheel sections, metal chains, metal screens, nuts and bolts, and found glass, even mirror fragments, they make singular and impressive arrays. What each composition tells us, is that we seem to have lost any sense of consecutive time, of a lineage of cause and effect, and as timepieces, for they could be, they seem to be stopped by physics, the violence of impact, or even simple deterioration. Stopped in their tracks . . . and as such they give us cause to reflect on the state of global culture, over-production and the consumer ethos that drives technology forward. British Columbia-based Bukowski does it all by treading lightly, with a profound sense of the limits to resources, and to culture if those resources run out.

John K. Grande

OSHAWA

ARNAUD MAGGS: NOMENCLATURE

Jan. 19–March 26
Robert McLaughlin Gallery
72 Queen St.
Tel.: 905-576-3000
www.rmg.on.ca



Documenting the document, Arnaud Maggs has for some time adopted a serial approach to his subject matter as for instance with recent projects such as *Travail des enfants dans l'industrie* (1994), and *Notification i and ii* (1996).

Whether the subject is drawn from headshots, or *Hotel* series (1991) or Jazz recordings and other historical printed materials, Maggs systematizes real world and 3-dimensional signs, symbols, artifacts with an anthropologist's flair. Maggs' methodical approach to photography makes his work a meditation of the way our built reality or the items, accoutrements, and any manner of material, is largely based on constructs from an earlier era. This brings us to realize the reality of our world, whether architecture, signs, clothes, or books, could actually have been a mere concept in some far distant time. We assume it all to exist without any historical context, whereas context is everything in Maggs' work. He contextualizes detritus, and searches it out in flea markets, junk stores, and antique shops.

The act of re-presenting imagery is something art book lovers encounter every time they flip through a book—whether the subject is contemporary or historical. The act of re-production levels everything, and involves a filtering process we largely never question. For his current show at the Robert McLaughlin Gallery in Oshawa, Maggs has chosen actual books for re-photography, page by page. The results are a visual delight!

Take, for instance, the 13 colour wheels Maggs' photographed from Werner's *Nomenclature of Colours*, a book he first encountered at a Spring Hurlbut show in the Manchester Museum (it was actually part of the installation). Originally designed as an adaptation of Newton's colour table, specifically for mineralogists, Werner's *Nomenclature* had an edition in the McGill University's Rare Book Room division. Maggs chose to photograph and print from this specific 1821 edition, and the results are fascinating for enlarged as they are, they reveal the aging, the wear and tear on the edges, plates, and surface of each page, in a way that, like Angela Grauerholz's photographs do—the photograph carries a Romantic cachet, for its very unusual re-fabrication of the material aging of the book object.

A Chevreul work titled *Exposé d'un méthode de définir et de*

nommer les couleurs d'après une méthode précise et expérimentale avec l'application de ce moyen à la définition des couleurs d'un grand nombre de corps naturels et de produits artificiels (Paris: Firmin Didot Frères et fils, 1861), has been adapted to become *Cercles chromatiques* for the Maggs show. The beautiful colour plates, of which there are fourteen (with 944 pages of text in another volume) become the subject of each photograph, designed to give craftsmen of Chevreul's era any colour yarn they may need. The results become a comment on the act of replication, and the nature of Chevreul's original content (each successive colour wheel had 10% more black in its original book design, with the final one being achromatic), and the act of re-contextualization through art for, as Maggs comments, his process could symbolize a "passage from day to night, from positive to negative, from life to death."

John K. Grande

KLEINBERG

PEOPLE OF THE DANCING SKY: THE IROQUOIS WAY MYRON ZABOL

McMichael Canadian Art Collection
Dec. 10th, 2005–March 19, 2006
10365 Islington Ave.,
Tel.: 905-893-1121
www.mcmichael.com

Organized by the Woodland Cultural Centre and the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, *People of the Dancing Sky* comprises 50 photographs by award winning photographer Myron Zabol. These photos celebrate the Iroquoian native culture and present the Iroquois peoples of all ages and activities. For their staged studio set up look they recall photography from the 1950's. There is some kinship with Edward Curtis' early photographic records of western American Native culture, or even William Notman's studio set up portraiture. Zabol includes backdrops, scenery, nature, and the effect is pictorial, as if these compositions were stills for a film, and very much orchestrated . . .

Like an anthropologist of the everyday, Zabol captures the

stances, traditional clothing, dress, plumage, dance and ceremonial life with a very real sense of the strong spiritual aspect inherent to indigenous cultures. We see three girls carrying baskets and wearing beadwork on a sunny day by the river; Longhouse speaker and chief Arnold General with his cane and a reposeful look in his face and eyes. Alvin Parker, a Seneca dancer is presented in highly colourful garb, dancing in front of a flat background while Hubert Sky stands in beaded moccasins brandishing his lacrosse stick under a crown of feathers.

The beautiful Santee Smith, who learned her potter's trade from her parents Leigh and Steven Smith, dances gracefully in the forest, her arms upraised as if communicating with the Great One. To witness the chiefs, the faithkeepers, the dancers, the clan mothers, and children in these photos gives us a very poignant insight into the values and belief systems, as well as the resilience of Haudenosaunee Iroquoian peoples' culture. Zabol's enduring project required five years for completion. Seen as a whole



Zabol's project in his own words: "(...)illustrates the traditional Iroquois Longhouse people as they left one millennium and marched into the next."

Zabol continues . . . "The harmony between the Iroquois people and their natural environment, that is depicted in their ceremonial clothing, symbols and traditional activities was the challenge for me to use the art of photographic portraiture as a means of expressing inner spirituality."

John K. Grande



REGINA

REGINA CLAY; WORLDS IN THE MAKING

November 19, 2005–February 26, 2006

The MacKenzie Art Gallery
3475 Albert Street
Tel.: 306-584-4250
Fax: 306-569-8191
www.mackenzieartgallery.sk.ca

If Regina signifies in the Canadian art historical imagination, it is for the Regina Five, a group of he-man formalist painters who worked here in the 1960's and 70's. But if Regina is known in the Canadian popular imagination, it is likewise known for the work of its ceramic artists from the same period. While the internationalist abstractions of Bloore, Godwin, Lochhead, McKay and Morton may be hard for the average person to call to mind, who can forget Joe Fafard's ceramic portraits of towns folk, and his cows, or Marilyn Levine's clay shoes and satchels. *Regina Clay* is curator Tim Long's effort to record and celebrate the accomplishments of this loose group of artists and shift the focus from Regina, as modernist holdout to postmodern innovator.

The binary between these two groups is more than rhetorical. While the formalists were reigning at the University of Saskatchewan, Regina campus (University of Regina after 1974), and looking to New York for legitimization, ceramic artist-professors Ricardo Gómez and Jack Sures were shaping the sculpture and ceramics program and it was taking a decidedly Left coast turn. Thanks in part to a Mackenzie show, *California Ceramics* (1969), and David Gilhooly's short tenure at the

University (1969-71), Funk ceramics came to Regina and flourished. It was a breath of fresh air that lead to funny, parochial, often rural, mimetic, and Pop work—the antithesis of Prairie Formalism. And, because the formalists were more firmly entrenched in the University, the upstarts were soon ousted: Gilhooly was not invited to continue teaching and the other funkified artist/professors Joe Fafard and Russell Yuricity soon left the academy for nearby rural settings and the commercial market.

The divide was deep: formalism versus Pop; internationalist versus regionalism; urban beatnik versus down-to-the-earth hippie; abstract purity versus funky humour; high art versus craft, and so on. While the formalists could rely on well-developed theory (Greenberg, etc.), the ceramists were not so polemical or intellectually well supported, so they turned to their neighbours. Their practice over theory aesthetic encouraged more diverse and approachable works.

Regina Clay is a sprawling exhibition full of the expected and the surprising. There are lots of Fafard's diminutive ceramic folk, and a few cows; but Long has also included the hilarious bust of Ted Godwin with one of his "tartan" stripes dripping down the center of his face. You would expect to see some Levine bags and footwear. They are here, but so are some of her Daliesque melted pop bottles in ceramic crates. Russell Yuricity's unashamedly nostalgic sculptures of farm life might surprise some, but they are compensated for by his delightfully goofy, Baroque beer bottles. The requisite Cicansky ceramic vegetables? Check. But also his weird homage to Magritte surrealism, *Brown Boot with Pink Toes and Hoof*, and some of his very-much-of-the-time-and-not-of-seen-since sculptures of VW hippy buses, and dilapidated houses populated by funky you-had-to-be-there characters. But strangest of all is Ann James' *I'm Roberta, I'm Betina (Lonely Girl #1 and #2)*. The two eviscerated and oozing figures that sit on two wooden chairs. If they resemble anything in the art world, it may be Ed Kienholz's 3-dimensional nightmares. (The

California artist had a groundbreaking show at the Mackenzie in 1966 that was restricted to a 18+ audience.)

While there are none of the terrific murals created by the Regina ceramists of the period, Sures' wall relief pieces writhing with agriculture offer a nod in that direction. Most surprising to me were David Gilhooly's frogs. They and he have a looming reputation. He is credited with exporting funky ceramics to Regina via California. But if these awkward frogs drizzled with ugly glazes are anything to go by, all of his students outdistanced their master.

David Garneau

VANCOUVER

BRIAN JUNGEN: PROTOTYPES FOR A NEW UNDERSTANDING

January 28–April 30
Vancouver Art Gallery
750 Hornby St.
Tel.: 604-662-4700
www.vanartgallery.bc.ca

An inveterate fabricator of objects out of objects, Vancouver-based Brian Jungen plays on and with readily available products and items of Pop culture giving them an ironic Native twist. Born of Swiss and Aboriginal (Dane-zaa) parents, Jungen recycles new store bought materials and reinvents them. They can become powerful objects that allude to the icon and its power in societies new and old, or alternatively literal reconstructions of what look deceptively like natural history display items, as in they hover in the air so elegantly. Jungen extends the definition of art into natural history, and in so doing develops an environmental discourse purely out of the materials he uses. This brings his art into the realm of contemporary anthropology, and plastic chairs being made from oil, reconstructed as they are into whale skeletons, could allude to the oil spills that inadvertently kills sea water culture including whales and destroy entire biocultures. All these effects are the result of human greed, and the objects themselves represent greed recycled into heritage and objectified meaning. The elongated form of a whale, the first of which was given



the name. *Shapeshifter* (2000) looks like the vertebrae of some huge marine mammal and it is installed as it would be in a natural history museum. Instead it is actually an skeleton ingeniously made of plastic (oil-based) chairs. The *Shapeshifter* title could make of think of how elements, objects and materials are endlessly transformed, ourselves included, as we pass from life to afterlife, for instance, or the way products endlessly reform and re-define nature's materials.

Cetology (2002) is simply named after the branch of science devoted to the study of whales while *Vienna* (2003) the third whale skeleton was named after the city where it was first exhibited. As artistic process, Jungen's art shares similarities with Shinto and other Asian religious viewpoints as does West coast native culture, for all materials—natural or synthetic—are conceived as being

equal, while rational categorization of matter can be less important . . .

Born in Fort St-John, B.C. in 1970, Jungen is an ingenious craftsman whose art involves the deconstruction of the fetish objects of consumer paradise, or alternatively, a consummate re-construction of form out of product. A pair of Nike Air Jordan trainers are basketball shoes with a difference (prestige item) are not so different from age-old Native masks. They animate our culture in a similar way, causing us to envision a hierarchy of meaning, and placing a value in some abstract (read fetish) symbols associated with sport. Jungen has disassembled these cult objects (almost a sin in our consumer culture) and re-constructed them into ceremonial masks akin to NorthWest coast native tribal artefacts. As Jungen states: "I was interested in the ubiquitousness of native motifs, especially in

Vancouver, and how they have been corrupted and applied and assimilated commercially, e.g., in the tourist industry. It was interesting to see how by simply manipulating the Air Jordan shoes you could evoke specific cultural traditions while simultaneously amplifying the process of cultural corruption and assimilation."

These artworks recycle Pop icons just out of the box, to redesign them into archaic icons we associate with museum collections, while many masks and artefacts traditionally simply decayed and returned back to the nature they once were extricated from as raw wood, to then be carved into masks . . . Icon begets icon.

A new series that Jungen refers to as the *Talking Stick* (2005) series involve baseball bats, and these have been engraved into by the artist. His carvings move into the field of linguistics, integrating word fragments or "words with a social weight" into

the bats. Jungen thus builds a defense for what anthropologists call a material cultural analysis, thus challenging a linguistic theory of culture, and the claim that entire constructs or worldviews are based on the development of language (while largely ignoring other aspects of cognitive structure(s) that pre-cede the development of language in so-called primitive cultures).

While Jungen is very much esconced in today's culture, and realizes the power of brand name, of the logo, and the role fetish plays in capitalist culture, his *Prototypes* (1998-2005) and *Variant 1* (2002) reconstruct artefacts out of the new logo-ized matter of Pop culture, even the Nike Swoosh symbol is applied to the reconstructed objects to resemble Native U-form and ovoid shapes characteristic of traditional NorthWest coast formline design, something Lawrence Paul likewise has exploited in his paintings. Breaking down stereotypes can involve reassembling a similar set of stereotypes, and this craft-like character of the re-manufacture may be a weak aspect of this art in the long run, but at least it amuses in the same way Kim Adams assemblages out of Canadian Tire and consumer object detritus can do.

Recently on view at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York, where the show was well received, Brian Jungen's current exhibition is by one of Canada's most interesting multi-disciplined artists of our times, and one who has a new-old world sense of what art is or can be. These object/artefacts *look like* they carry a code, a history and some iconic and purposeful meaning . . .

John K. Grande

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