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Nude and Dummy, 1950
New Brunswick Museum, Saint John

■ SACKVILLE

**THE COLVILLE GIFT
TO MOUNT ALLISON
UNIVERSITY**

ALEX COLVILLE
DISHEVELED DESTINY
COLIN CAMPBELL

Owens Art Gallery
Sackville, New Brunswick
September 29 - November 12,
2000

There are two rather different exhibitions currently at Mount Allison University's Owens Art Gallery in Sackville, New Brunswick. The first is an exhibition of a major gift of eighty-nine drawings to the gallery by artist Alex Colville and, the second, a video presentation by Colin Campbell. Both artists have direct connections with Mount Allison University. Colville is an alumnus and former long term (1946-1963) professor in the Fine Arts Department and Campbell taught in the Department in the early 1970's, but that is where the similarities end. Colville is perhaps Canada's best known realist painter and Campbell is a pioneer video artist.

While in Sackville in 1972, Campbell produced the video *Sackville I'm Yours* which has gone on to be recognized as a classic in the medium. This video deals with a sense of humour about the problems of identity of an avant-garde artist, Art Star (Colin Campbell), in a small town (Sackville). Over twenty-five years later Campbell was invited back to the university by the Owens Art Gallery as a millennium project to produce another video titled *Disheveled Destiny*. For this video Campbell sets out to unravel: "...some forgotten (perhaps buried) histories of Sackville, while probing the anxieties of the present's concern about the future."

In addition to showing the new video, the gallery is presenting an exhibition curated by Owens director, Gemey Kelly, that includes artists such as Fredette Frame, Ian-Carr Harris, Thaddeus Holownia, Geoffrey James, Gary Neill Kennedy, Barbara Sternberg and the NE Thing Co., all of whom have produced work that is about the Sackville area. Sackville is a bit of a paradox in that it is a major Maritime art centre, but located in a relatively isolated community of fifty-four hundred people (excluding students). There is a story there, but it is too long for this short review.

Alex Colville has given the university some eighty-nine drawings. The majority are preparatory studies for the mural *Athletes* which was completed and installed on the campus between 1960 and 1961. This is an important gift as it provides insight into Colville the artist works. The drawings reveal Colville to be a most careful artist who leaves little to chance. This does not mean he is not creative, quite the contrary! These drawings show the way Colville builds an idea step by step from original conception to completed project. The changes in the composition from one drawing to the next, how geometry plays such a central role, reveal Colville's creative process from start to finish. Viewers can step across the street from the Owens Art Gallery to Athletic Centre where the permanently installed completed

mural is on display. There is also another earlier Colville mural in the building next to the Athletic Centre, Tweedy Hall, whose subject is the history of Mount Allison University. These two murals are the only two works not in the Owens Art Collection by the artist on campus.

The year 2000 marks the eightieth birthday of Alex Colville and the day before the official opening of this exhibition on October 1st, the town of Sackville declared an Alex Colville Day with a number of official events that included the unveiling of a plaque designating Colville's former home on York St. as an historic site. The house is located just one block away from the other three buildings where the artist lived and worked from 1949 to 1973, on the same street as the Owens Art Gallery, the Athletic Centre and Tweedy Hall. Some of Colville's most important early paintings such as *Nude and Dummy*, 1950, were conceived and painted in the very crowded attic studio of this house.

Much has been written about the influence of Alex Colville on the development of realism in Canada. It can certainly be seen in the work of his students such as Tom Forrester and Christopher and Mary Pratt. This partially explains why the Department of Fine Arts at Mount Allison has been identified with realism, though Alex Colville stopped teaching there in 1963. In truth, what has gone on in Sackville over the last half a century is much more interesting than pegging the place to one particular style of art. Colville has stated that he never tried to teach students to work like him. The Pratts have both told me that this was true and Tom Forrester, a leading proponent of contemporary realist style was an expressionist when he graduated from Mount Allison in the 1950's.

This exhibition shows two poles of artistic activity within one artistic community. There are far apart, but they share the common bond of place. Sackville and its surrounding Tantramar Marshes are powerful places that cannot not help but be strong influences on artists who

chance on them. Isolation from larger centres can be a good thing as it gives artist the possibility of doing their own thing without much interference. This exhibition prove this point. Today's Sackville may be less isolated then it was thirty or forty years ago, in part because of new technologies, but I am not really sure that this is an improvement. The big question is if regionalism in art, or anything else for that matter, can hold its own in this age of globalization. I wonder if a place like Sackville could develop another Alex Colville in this day and age.

Virgil Hammock

■ QUÉBEC

ARTBORETUM

(BIENNIAL OF CONTEMPORARY ART)

Maison Hamel-Bruneau
2608, chemin Saint-Louis,
Sainte-Foy
June 12 - August 20, 2000



Ivan Binet, *Mère, arbre et ciel bleu au repos*

Ranged around the beautifully treed grounds and gardens of the Maison Hamel-Bruneau and interior gallery space at Sainte-Foy, the *ArtBoretum Biennial of Contemporary Art*, curated by Guy Sioui-Durand, author of *L'art comme alternative* is an interesting show. Juxtaposing the works of four artists who work with themes of nature in different ways, Sioui-Durand states his choice of artists and their approach to nature expresses, "a will to reflect on the existential significations of art, to achieve a new ethical balance to our rapports with the environment."

Yvan Binet's immense 44 foot photo display ranged in and around the trees in a horizontal series, depicts his mother sitting under a tree on the Plains of Abraham. This immense representation of his mother against a backdrop of a tree is presented on its side within a natural, albeit manicured context. The juxtaposition of a billboard size photo of an elderly person in a natural (and



Continuing until September 17th, the National Gallery of Canada's retrospective Alex Colville: Milestones, presents an interesting counterpoint to the Sackville show. Included in this major show are Colville's *Nude and Dummy* (1950) created during Colville's Sackville years and the masterworks *Horse and Train* (1954), *Hound in Field* (1958), *Pacific* (1967), *Berlin Bus* (1978). His most recent painting *Living Room* (1999-2000), which depicts a pianist and seated man, explores the luminous effects of surface light effects in novel ways. In generating an illusion of reality that is distinct from photography or cinema, Alex Colville continues to demonstrate the power of painting as a contemporary medium of expression.



Lucie Robert,
La femme en pot

historical) setting in a living natural environment is slightly unsettling. We often see such imagery along a highway, or in a city, and its purpose is usually purely commercial. Inside the museum Binet juxtaposes a section of a real tree trunk complete with insect marking on its surface with a close-up photo image of a tree. The effect is surreal. Binet's *Château Richer* panoramic triptych of photos of trees in a landscape after the Ice Storm are truly eloquent vista recordings of this natural catastrophe panorama.

Lucie Robert's gigantesque *La Femme en pot*, is the most monumental work in the show, and comprises an immense flower pot made of a veil-like wire screen — (the kind used to keep mosquitoes out of a cottage) — and metal structures. Constructed around a mature tree at the entrance to the grounds, Robert's reconstruction of an artificial structure whose usual function is as a "nature container", a larger than life flower pot, builds a rapport with an organic living structure. It causes us to reflect on the great divide between nature and culture in the simplest of ways. Inside the Maison Hamel-Bruneau are a series of ingenious and playful representations of the human figure by Robert. These sensitive introspective works, whose figures are engaged in a kind of ritual *ballet absurde* are sometimes pierced with holes so light projects from behind, othertimes pieced together in sections to look like marionettes.

Native artist Sonia Robertson's sound and object installation *Prière* is the most powerful work in the show, particularly for the unusual

way it transgresses any notion of the art object and instead engages in a ritualistic representation that transgresses environments, even the walls of this museum. The form of Sonia Robertson's tree, made of rice paper sections with tree bark textures imprinted on it, is presented on a museum wall and has viewing holes next to it that enable us to see the tree outside, and recorded sounds of rain falling on a tree. Wooden prayer beads or "pearls" are in the four traditional native colours: white representing north, yellow the south, red the east, and black the west. The colour green for earth and blue for sky have also been added. Robertson ritualistically assembled this chain of literally 40,000 beads herself as part of the project and the immense necklace begins inside the gallery, pierces the walls and making its way to a mature tree outside rising up along the trunk to the first branches in a gesture of ritual healing and restitution. A recording of Robertson's heartbeat can be heard emanating from a speaker at the base of the tree.

Louis Fortier is the absurdist in the group. His surreal distended, exaggerated, mutated faces and forms of people and children are like biogenetic mutations of Disneyland people. One small wax piece of a child's face is truly horrifying as is Fortier's *Double Adam*, a breast-like wax form painted grey presented on a pedestal. The exact same form in exactly the same scale is mirrored upside-down on the ceiling of the gallery. Outside, hanging from a tree are hundreds of Fortier's wax moulds of heads painted gold. They look like golden apples and play on and with the legendary ancient myths of the golden apple associated with Hercules that promised eternal fulfillment. These apples with their mutated faces, distorted by cloning, surround this tree of life and reveal Fortier's fascination with recumbent DNA structure and alchemy. *Arboretum* is a great show that achieves its purported goal to address ethical and humanistic issues in presenting a myriad of artistic responses to the theme of nature in a serenely beautiful setting. There are even two old fashioned Marc-Aurèle Fortin paintings *Clair de lune* (1960) and *Paysage, Sainte-Rose* (1953) at the Maison Hamel-Bruneau to remind us how far Quebec art has come from the days when landscape painting was king!

John K. Grande

■ MONTRÉAL

THE DREAM STATE/THE STATE OF THE DREAM

RÉVERIE LUMINESCENTE

Maison de la culture Mercier
8105, rue Hochelaga
June 15 - September 3, 2000

SUSAN EDGERLEY

ANDRÉ LAVOIE

CHRISTINE PALMIÉRI

FRANCINE PRÉVOST

DONALD ROBERTSON

RANANG ROUSSEAU



Susan Edgerley
From the one, series V, 1999

As part of the event *D'un millénaire à l'autre* occurring across twenty sites in Montreal, six artists have participated in a project whose themes are dream and luminosity (light).

The materials used for the event range from glass, wire and wood, to video, light and sound. Each artist achieves his/her own unique expression not only in terms of physicality, but also in the addressing of the "other" by conceptual stratagems. One of the highlights of the exhibition is how inventively the role of dreams are explored in contrast with the "real world". The spatial and temporal aspects of the works paradoxically raise questions about its role in today's contextualized landscape.

Ranang Rousseau's piece is a video installation titled *Drums 'N Bass 2000*. Three video monitors arranged in the middle of the gallery in the shape of a triad, complete with chairs and headphones. From the monitors flow photographic montages of various geographical and human situations. In a staccato rhythm too hyper for the eye to settle upon for more than a second at a time, glimpses of a Kalahari bushman, then an American astronaut on the moon, then birds in flight and so on, become a blurred gestalt of the world in-crisis. Meanwhile, Rousseau recites a monologue describing the need to remedy the situation as he exhorts the viewer to take a stand. Rousseau's juxtapo-

sition of information overload, besides the prevailing pattern of failure for humanity to change fundamentally, creates a eulogy to the power of the dream to transcend the impossible. However, his sense of urgency provokes nostalgia for romanticism rather than convincing us to concede that the dream is obsolete in this context. Here, the world is presented as a film without depth, and dream is neither able nor relevant enough to affect any constructive change.

Christine Palmiéri's multi-disciplinary work, titled *Neant Compulsif 2* enacts a pushing back of the world — as — comodifier in order for her dream to maintain its distance within the context of her own personal history. Two igloo-shaped structures placed onto the floor house her past and future. Projected on these vinyl-covered structures is a pastiche of images depicting souvenirs of herself (a superimposed self-portrait), her family, and other subjects, such as fields of flowers. From above, spotlights shine down in the primary colours striking the ground as if excavating the past with pulse-like regularity. This suggests the potential for colour to open the doors to primordial realms. A recording of a gently flowing river plays on, creating a sensual convergence of light, sound, image and transcendence. The artist's intergalactic site is a simultaneous search for past and future equipped with a radical sense of experimentation. Her dream is enough to launch herself accordingly, and like Kubrick in *A Space Odyssey 2001*, Palmiéri seeks the seeds of the dream by going to the depths of the symbolic traces of original thought.



Donald Robertson
Copernicus, 1993

At first glance, André Lavoie's formal wood floor sculptures captivate the eye for their lyricism and mastery of craft. *Signes des Temps* (*Sign of the Times*), is a group of elegantly carved wood works. They contain a heavy *torpidity* at the base, and their extended outgrowths seem to exist in a state of unrest bordering on torment. This formal resistance to the environment suggests a conceptual dialogue between a historical framework, (within the context of plurality), while maintaining a poetic voice. They bring to mind the grave asceticism of Roland Poulin's obsidian floor pieces, yet Lavoie departs from sheer density of weight by allowing light to pass through the contorted gesture. *Signs of the Times* reflects formalism's metamorphosis, albeit a painful one. Where darkness once remained safely at home in the recesses of time, serene and unquestioned, Lavoie's manipulation of light where none might be, is like Lazarus who, having been declared dead, rises in painful knowing that it is a redeeming gesture.

Susan Edgerly's piece, entitled *Vau*, is an exquisite wall sculpture that uses small fragments of molten glass pinned to the wall to form the shape of a large spiral. Her choice of materials expresses fragility. Glass, a conduit for light (and electricity) is a traditional medium, but Edgerly puts it onto a pedestal of contemplative beauty. Her piece has no rational purpose, other than to reflect the relationship between the ever-living cosmos and consciousness.

This show raise awareness about the way the dream has its place in the lives of these artists. Dreaming is an organic necessity for human survival, and also a prophetic visionary mystery. It is also the last possible, uncharted realm securely emancipated from the *commodification of the rational mind*; the dream as a site and as a basis for engaging the real world has never seemed so relevant. This impression remains long after the viewing.

Isak Augustine

■ TROIS-RIVIÈRES

CIMES ET RACINES ART & NATURE SYMPOSIUM

Parc Nature La Gabelle
August 1 - 27, 2000

Sited around the historic La Gabelle hydro dam site on the St.-Maurice river north of Trois-Rivières, the *Cimes et Racines* Art and Nature Symposium is one



Reinhard Reitzenstein, *Transformer*
Symposium Cimes et Racines Art et Nature
Photo: Roger Gaudreau

of Quebec's best kept secrets. The actual location around a dam completed by the Shawinigan Light & Power Company in 1924, with its natural glaciated river banks, cliffs and shorelines is nothing less than spectacular. The only river crossing point between Three Rivers and Shawinigan, La Gabelle was a place where natives traded with the French settlers in the early days. Energy, industry, nature and history all meet here and the invited local, national and international artists had a rare opportunity to create quality artworks in this place steeped as it is in the natural, cultural and economic history of Quebec.

North Carolina artist Patrick Dougherty's freeform assemblages woven together out of tree branches are visual enigmas embodied by the artist with a fanciful, fairytale quality. Dougherty's *Yardwork* created at La Gabelle is the first work ever conceived and created in Canada. Dougherty exploits the supple tension, elasticity, tonal and textural qualities of the wood he works with. His art has a "wildness aesthetic" rooted in the North American experience. Combining craft, and the physical practice of drawing in space with tree saplings, Dougherty gathers, cuts, assembles and weaves, in this case, a gathering of seven 20 foot towers made of braided red maple saplings. These swirling wooden towers, drawn in space, are surrounded by a swooping braided form that acts as an *aesthetic container* for this highly charged, large scale installation.

Roger Gaudreau's *La Rosace* set in the forest interior on the east side of the St. Maurice River is a gesture of healing, laid out in the form of a Rose window, the kind one finds in European Cathedrals like Chartres as well as in Quebec. In the tranquil quietude of this interior forest setting, Gaudreau has created this circular form using intricate concrete sections, brightly coloured crushed brick, and an array of red and green flowers. Planted Norway maples surround the site. The unusual allusion to the Church in a contemporary artwork is neither critical thereof nor in the artspeak genre, but instead uses nature as a bridge to link an ar-

chitectural form associated with our Judeo-Christian heritage amid the natural history of this place.

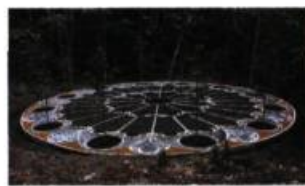
For his immense *Transformer* piece, Reinhard Reitzenstein relocated a 55 foot white spruce tree found in the forest nearby and raised it between two disused hydro pylons where it now hangs upside down on a hill overlooking the Saint Maurice River. Clearly visible from across the river, *Transformer* is a spectacle to behold. The tree, a natural resource from the early days of the primary forest industry in Quebec takes precedence over the aesthetic of the hydro pylon, which incidentally has boat-like shapes in its upper section. French artist François Davin likewise alludes to the early logging in the region. The phantom-like 50 foot long logs he has reconstructed in the scale of those that grew in the primary forests over a century ago, look somehow artificial, constructed as they are out of an agglomeration of "pitouines", the tiny logs now found floating in the river. Ranged around a stream they look almost surreal.

Louise Paillé's *Le Grand Voyage* was inspired by her discovery of a 160 by 10 feet long graveyard of old trees that mark the spot where the Saint Maurice river flooded its banks over 30 years ago. Paillé has again used pitouines whose surfaces have been softened by their river journey, to create a circular assemblage near the river. The plaque-like poetic copper engraved notes on some logs recount her feelings about the history of these trees: "In this whirlpool the metamorphosis of the world takes place." A pile of similar, part-reconstructed, part natural pitouines have been placed nearby, an enigmatic expression of the diminishing scale and volume of our forest resources...

The two outdoor assemblages titled *Le Temps Suspendu* by Lynda Baril on both sides of the Saint-Maurice river are assemblages of tree-like forms that hang in the forest between trees, a hybrid fusion of the natural and man-made. Baril asked local residents in the region to provide thousands of coat hangers for



Patrick Dougherty, *Yardwork*
Symposium Cimes et Racines Art et Nature
Photo: Lynda Baril



Roger Gaudreau, *La Rosace*
Symposium Cimes et Racines Art et Nature
Photo: Lynda Baril

the project. Each coat hanger, its past use and memory concealed, represents the human presence. Collectively assembled like all those forgotten memories and people who once lived near La Gabelle in the 1920s, Baril's coat hangers (with natural wood fixed onto their bases), an allusion to the nature and resources that provided the people who lived here with their well being. A worthy tribute to nature in this new millennium the *Cimes et Racines Art and Nature Symposium* is scheduled to take place again next year.

John K. Grande

■ TORONTO

WILLIAM KENTRIDGE

Art Gallery of Ontario
317, Dundas Street West
August 5th - October 29, 2000



Catherine Heard
Vanitas, 1999

South African artist William Kentridge, an artist whose multidisciplinary background in political science, philosophy, theatre and fine art drew him to investigate the social and cultural landscape of his native country, is holding his first show ever in



William Kentridge
WEIGHING...and WATCHING (1997-98)
 Charcoal, pastel on paper
 Collection : Michael and Brenda Sandler, Beverly Hills



African becomes witness to atrocities, sometimes overt, othertimes as innocuous as a lonely figure seated by a boardroom table. These images make us all the more aware of the stereotypical roles such people assumed in the past and that no longer make sense. The caricature element in Kentridge's drawings cannot be underestimated. The often incomplete, rushed look of these graphic depictions, sometimes compared with the 18th century caricaturist William Hogarth (whose *Rake's Progress* looked at English society with the same disparaging eyes as Kentridge looks at contemporary South Africa), parallels the transitional and "incomplete" state of South African society today. The way Kentridge observes society—neither as active participant nor disinterested observer— but simply objective witness, makes this show a must see for all interested in the unbridled, often difficult path of progress in South Africa's newly awakened democracy.

John K. Grande

■ ALBERTA

PETER VON TIESENHAUSEN: DELUGE

Southern Alberta Art Gallery
 601, 3rd Avenue, S. W.
 Lethbridge, Alberta
 May 6 - June 28, 2000



Deluge, 2000
 Mixed media installation
 Photo: Dongil

Peter von Tiesenhausen is known for his decompositions, Wagnerian environmental sculptures he sets on fire or allows to rot into the landscape. He has built heroically futile



ships watted from willow and pine branches and abandoned to sink into the soil — huge woven willow pods that desiccate high in the trees of his farm — and ponderous yet ethereal burnt men that perch on inner-city roof tops. While designed to decay and built of salvaged branches and derelict wood, his sculptures are always well crafted. But his latest installation, *Deluge* disrupts this pattern; it is hardly crafted at all. Arranged rather than built, it is more cerebral and cryptic than anything he has done to date.

Von Tiesenhausen has an international reputation for his sublime site-specific installations. He has been increasingly challenging himself to make work as an immediate response to whatever new space is offered to him. Arriving at the gallery only a few weeks before the exhibition with little more than his imagination and whatever the site has to offer in the way of raw materials, history, environment, and helping hands, the artist goes to work. This high-risk game has led to some anxious moments and some wonderful sculptures. However, upon seeing *Deluge I* was sure he had lost the gamble in a big way.

When you enter the spacious gallery on the second floor of the Southern Alberta Art Gallery you may be disappointed, as I was, to find three dozen unremarkable branches hanging from the ceiling. Ranging from twenty centimeters to over two meters long, and everything in-between, the spruce prunings are suspended at various lengths from the high ceiling by fishing line. Well separated from each other, the rough, thin sticks are neither evenly distributed nor do they appear to be arranged in meaningful groups. Seeming patterns dissolve as you circulate through the work. Though I enjoyed

walking among the swarm of branches (it was like floating through a stilled storm) that minor pleasure was mitigated by the creeping feeling that I was missing something significant or mistaking a hoax for an enigma.

At the end of the gallery opposite the entrance, a pedestal supports what looks like a rotting piece of wood, but turns out to be a cast bronze. As you walk around the pedestal you become aware that it is positioned like a pulpit or a podium and the room resembles a small church or community hall. And then it hits you! Looking out from this point of view, the random bits of wood suddenly collude to form the contours of a levitating boat surrounded by floating crosses. It's magic! The scene surrounds and seems to penetrate the viewer. The image rushes both toward and away from you. Cruciforms fly overhead, to either side, and just beyond your peripheral vision. It's low-tech virtual reality!

As long as you stay within the vantage area's invisible sphere, even if you rotate your head, the thick picture remains in perspective. Straying from the vantage area causes the scene to fragment into an abstract field. Looking with both eyes, the mind oscillates between reading a picture and fathoming for depth. This scintillating effect is reminiscent of looking through a stereoscope.

Deluge comes on looking like a knotty bit of minimalism but resolves itself into a room-sized picture puzzle. While it can be appreciated for its ingenious optical illusion, seeing *Deluge* as only a one-liner requires a willful blindness to the obvious religious symbolism. It is extremely rare to see a contemporary religious artwork in a public gallery that does not have an ironic twist. There are very few taboos in the art world: politics is acceptable if it is liberal or oppositional; sex and violence are passable if contextualized and labeled; but mainstream religious symbols must be smuggled in.

In part, von Tiesenhausen wants the viewer to re-experience his excitement, while walking in a Lethbridge park, of seeing a crucifix in a tangle of branches. But beyond the illusion, the content (the Christian symbol) recalls others who have discovered God sending messages through nature. While *Deluge* may be contained by an ironic reading, and some people see messages in nature, they really only see their own projected desires. It remains possible the artist is sincere, that he wants to prime the pump and have viewers discover the magic he finds in nature.

In an interview, von Tiesenhausen expressed his hope to capture some of the (pre-Christian) symbolic energy in the cross without the Christian baggage. In this installation, the symbol is so overwhelmed by Christian associations

that I am not sure he can escape it. Yet for someone classified as an environmental artist, von Tiesenhausen demonstrates in *Deluge* considerable conceptual skills that have us reflect more on human visuality and desire than on environmentalism.

David Garneau

■ VANCOUVER

BETWEEN TWO WORLDS: THE ART OF POLAND 1890-1914

Vancouver Art Gallery
750, Hornby Street
June 10 - November 12, 2000



an indistinct shadowy space at the entrance to the show. Her dark questioning eyes are slightly averted from our gaze. The subtle palette of greys highlighted with luminescent white impasto prompts comparison with James McNeil Whistler, whose work Boznanska would have known. Like so many of these artists, Boznanska spent much time abroad contacting and exhibiting with artists of other nationalities. *Girl with Chrysanthemums* is neither heroic, nor even specifically Polish. Is it fair to read it as an expression of the Polish dilemma of being caught "Between Two Worlds"? It is true that its quality of sadness recurs throughout the show. Olga Boznanska's own response to criticism of her melancholic mood was: "I cannot be different than I am—if a foundation is sad, everything that grows on it must be sad."¹

Jacek Malczewski's canvas *Relaxation*, a self-portrait of the middle-aged bearded artist slumped over a table, his wrists in manacles, seems a better reflection of the central theme of underlying tension alluded to in the exhibition title. The art materials depicted are untouched. One might easily see this as a work of political protest created by an artist whose patriotic freedom of expression has been suppressed by the occupying power. The curators at the National Museum describe Malczewski's intention as quite the opposite. The painting, they believe, depicts his need for rest from the burden of making patriotic art for a Poland now in relative peace and

prosperity (albeit under foreign rule), allegorically represented as a young woman doing needlework. The shackles are the Polish Academy, not the Austrian state. Malczewski's ambivalent image encapsulates the awkward position of Polish artists who longed for artistic freedom.

This show reveals how these artists actively participated in European developments centered in Vienna, Paris and London—such as Impressionism, Post-Impressionism and Symbolism and makes it clear that they were not leaders in these new ideas. Rather, it seems that it was difficult, if not impossible, for Polish artists to bridge the gap between their inherited belief in fighting for political autonomy with a nationalistic art, and their new desire to make an unburdened art of the "naked soul" for its own sake.² Influenced by Nietzsche, Schopenhauer and Maeterlinck, these artists were anti-heroic and internationalist in their outlooks, yet persistently passionate about Polish identity and culture.

This exhibition provides new material for those with a special interest in the emergence of European modernism but it is not clear what the wider appeal of the show might be. The parallels between the search for national art in Poland and Canada alluded to by the curators of this show, are, despite the common French modernist and Scandinavian influences, not that clear. The Group of Seven's search for an essential national identity in the Northern landscape was part of an occupying power's claim to conquered territory.

Polish painters worked in precisely the opposite direction by identifying with their indigenous homeland. In place of the unified national style one might expect, expressions of the Polish experience are diverse.

A renewed interest in this period of Polish art interestingly coincides with the post-social-



Between Two Worlds: The Art of Poland 1890-1914 is neither a summer block-buster nor even a display of heroic painting, as its publicity might lead one to expect. It does, however, open a window on a confused moment when modernism hit the cultural life of occupied Poland around 1900. The National Museum in Cracow selected a hundred items from its collection to sample the range of concerns and media explored by artists who formed part of "Young Poland", an intellectual and cultural movement similar to others across Europe that flourished in the liberal climate of Austria-ruled Cracow, from 1890 up to World War I.

The oil paintings that dominate this exhibition, hung in a series of rooms recreate a fin-de-siècle salon atmosphere in muted tints of moss, mustard and terracotta. The initial impression is of traditional genres—history, portrait, landscape, peasant life—painted with academic naturalism. Disquieting themes emerge: melancholic anxiety in the portrait of a young girl; eerie foreboding in a nocturnal winter landscape; a morbid cast to the flesh of an erotic nude. There are preoccupations with death and with evil.

Olga Boznanska's *Girl with Chrysanthemums* (1899), the image chosen to represent the show stands directly facing the viewer from

ist economic development of Poland. The show's corporate sponsor in a press release describes their business investments in Poland, and goes on to proclaim Polish artists to be "always powerful and persuasive" defenders of national freedom and cultural identity. It seems ironic to hold up as heroes of Polish nationalism and capitalist development, artists who first sought to escape from ideological obligations during the period covered by this exhibition. The real contribution of this show may be to throw into question the validity of art serving heroic, nationalistic objectives at all.

Joan Richardson

1 *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Poland 1890-1914*, National Museum in Cracow, Vancouver Art Gallery, 2000, p. 13.

2 *Op. cit.*, p. 9.

■ VICTORIA

MEMOIRS: TRANSCRIBING LOSS

Art Gallery of Greater Victoria
1040, Moss Street
September 15 - November 19,
2000



Arnaud Maggs, *notification 1* (détail)
Courtesy of Susan Hobbs Gallery, Toronto
Photo: Isaac Applebaum

An exhibition of five thoughtfully-considered works by contemporary artists Christian Boltanski, Betty Goodwin, Mary Kavanagh, Arnaud Maggs and Patrick Traer, *Memoirs* investigates aspects of personal history, ritual, and cultural experience as they relate to memory, loss, and mortality. Using photography, video, and installation these artists establish a wholly contemporary, yet evocative discourse of yearning. These contemporary *memento mori* create a contemplative framework within which to consider the passage of time and the spaces between life and death, body and spirit.

French artist Christian Boltanski's *Archives de Musée des Enfants* (1989), an installation involving sixty photographs and twelve lamps, contrasts the monumentality of the work's presentation with the vulner-



Arnaud Maggs, *notification II (détail)*
 Courtesy of Susan Hobbs Gallery, Toronto
 Photo: Isaac Applebaum

able images of faintly lit faces, whose fragmented histories remain shadowy and partially hidden. Boltanski's installation sustains, with an existential dexterity, the emotional charge that accompanies our memories of past time(s), incorporating the passage of time, and its inevitable collapse into remembered reality. The disparate qualities of presence and absence enable the viewer to reconstruct memories, as we do in looking at images from our own childhood. The implicit loss they signify involves a reframing of reality that is subjective and within this subjective reality, truth as the body knows it, is realized.

The spectral image of Anne of Brittany (ca.1517 - 1531), reproduced from the mediaeval transi tomb of the abbey church at St. Denis, is the subject around which Saskatoon artist, Mary Kavanagh constructs her work, *en transi* (1997). This close-cropped enlarged, and blue-tinted photographic detail depicts the inert stillness of the post-mortem corpse, (transi) dramatically. Above the still a video projection of a slow-moving flame that runs in a 10 minute loop completes the 7' 6" diptych, dissolving into vibrant orange, yellow, blue, and white colours. Viewed in darkness, Kavanagh's pairing of an inert, historical image with a vivid moving one — the flame — is beautiful and disquieting. The anxiety-producing aspects of mortality dealt with in this work are left unanswered and open.

Early in his career, Arnaud Maggs adopted a method that became a personal philosophy: every image photographed was contact printed and included in the finished work. Maggs seminal obsession with the portrait favours a grid format in which a subject is often situated both frontally and in profile, as in *64 Portrait Studies* (1976-78). Since then Magg's serialization of subjects has expanded to include the collecting, classifying and photographing of the entire catalogue numbers of all 828 jazz LP's issued on the Prestige record label in *The Complete Prestige 12" Jazz Catalogue* (1988), of over 300 ubiquitous hotel signs in Paris for *Hotel* (1991) and all the pages of photographer Eugene Atget's address book for *Repertoire* (1977). *Notification I*, 1996, presented in the Victoria show

incorporates photographs of a collection of black-edged 19th century mourning stationery found in French flea markets. The 96 neatly arranged, subtly nuanced photographs, symbolic reminders of the people they represent, invite the viewer to participate in this last ritual. Maggs' *Notification I* becomes a public site for mourning, a dignified remembrance of the dead, like Flander's Fields.

The relationship of disparate objects and ideas is essential to Patrick Traer's artistic practice. Incorporating text and neon signs Traer's post-minimalist aesthetic involves embroidering, in a series of untitled works from 1997, metaphors for the transitory nature of the body incarnate. Reminiscent of burial veils or shrouds that are fragile by nature, the large, visceral organisms are interrupted by fluid tracings. A profound melancholy seeps from these tissue shrouds. The lines, based on drawings, are imaged after the body's internal organs — heart, lungs, arterial systems. Like scar tissue, they trace past histories, injuries, and loss in gestures of solace and grace. Questions about grief and healing, the re-imagining of life are raised and the latent often hidden mysteries of the body are raised.

Betty Goodwin's energetic involvement in her work is heroic. Like the figures she deliberately renders, her life's engagement, her mortality, is fraught with yearning. Both testify to the almost absurd human ability to sustain chaos. Though she works in a variety of media, drawing is what sustains and brings her art to life. The often featureless, emotionally charged, and psychologically heavy figures in Goodwin's drawings, rendered in a vigorous, gestural style are enshrouded in darkness. Often weightless, they float, extending into empty surroundings from which there is no escape. These figures struggle for release from life, their private histories are a secret. Like the ghosts from T.S. Eliot's *Wasteland*, or Dante's *Inferno*, they are caught in prolonged states of existential angst. *The Weight of Memory* 1998, depict a floating figure above a ground of stones. Both elements maintain their equilibrium. The energy field between them is carefully sustained. The figure does not descend; the stones retain their position. All is contained.

MEMOIRS: *Transcribing Loss* provides an unusual, unsettling yet ultimately provocative selection of contemporary art dealing with a seldom shown theme: (im)mortality — the body and spirit's passage through time and space, between life and death.

Linda Giles

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