

English Reports

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ANDRZEJ WROBLEWSKI

Retrospective

WAR CONTINUES TO BE A FACT OF LIFE AND, FROM GOYA

TO BOTERO, ARTISTS CONTINUE TO DENOUNCE ITS INHUMANITY AND

DEVASTATION, ITS TERRIBLE SYMBOLISM UNCHANGED.

An exhibition of a wartime Polish artist at the Muzeum Narodowe in Warsaw is a poignant reminder of how little has changed, and of the timeless, evocative power of art.

Andrzej Wroblewski (1927–1957) is an iconic figure in the history of Polish art. A romantic hero, whose premature and mysterious death before the age of 30 etched his name forever onto its pages, he remains strikingly contemporary, both in his subject matter—*alas!*—and style.

Before disappearing while on a solitary hike through the Tatra Mountains, Wroblewski managed to produce an astounding and diverse body of work, changing his style drastically in the process and breaking the path for a new generation of Polish artists.

From the then-prevalent social realism to abstract expressionism, this highly engaged artist wasted no time, his talent staunchly in the service of social and artistic causes.

At the start of his career, Wroblewski had a lot in common with other international artists of the political left such as Italian Renato Guttuso and France's André Fougeron.

His works were also greatly influenced by revolutionary Mexican art, and later on, the cinema.

The Warsaw exhibition, commemorating the 50th anniversary of Wroblewski's death, features a projection of Federico Fellini's seminal film "La Strada", whose character of the strongman Zampano is portrayed in a series of colourful, modernistic gouaches.

Wroblewski's most remembered and to this day controversial images come from the series *Rozstrzelania* (execution by gunfire), painted when he was a 20-year-old student at the Art Academy of Cracow.

Haunting, gut-wrenching, they were a visceral response to the horror of WWII and the occupation of Poland.

He wrote at the time, that he wanted to create paintings "unpleasant as the stench of a corpse". The result are terrible, moving images equal in their emotional impact to Picasso's *Guernica*, or Goya's paintings of the execution of Spanish patriots by Napoleon's troops, *The Third of May*.

Heartbreaking scenes of people dying or just about to die, broken bodies, faces frozen in pain are executed in a modern, minimalist style. With an economy of colour, Wroblewski manages to transmit the wrenching horror of these final moments; the blue of the falling body, ever so briefly suspended between life and death, is icy cold and the ashen grey of the man still standing has the texture of fear.

The faces are almost featureless, the bodies reduced at times to silhouettes, and the overwhelming tension inherent in these works lies in the merciless static composition, from which we cannot avert our eyes, in the surreal assemblage of bodies twisted upside down in the throes of death, their shadow staining the wall where they just stood.

They form a macabre pantheon, the living holding hands with the dead, the young and the old, the artist spares us nothing, offers no solace. Wroblewski's art cries out in a voice that still reverberates today, from Africa to the Middle East, where bodies of falling civilians continue to leave silent shadows on nameless walls.

His death came at a time of great changes in international contemporary art, particularly in Britain and the US with the emergence of pop-art, and one cannot help but wonder what turn his career would have taken, and where his artistic explorations may have led this fascinating artist.

Dorota Kozinska

March 9–May 6, 2007

Warsaw National Museum
Al. Jerozolimskie 3
Warsaw, Poland
www.mnw.art.pl



Andrzej Wroblewski,
Rozstrzelanie Surrealistyczne
Courtesy: Warsaw National Museum

REGINA

CANON FODDER:
LOOKING AT LANDSCAPEAN ARTISTIC INTERVENTION
BY SEEMA GOEL

April 7–September 9, 2007

Mackenzie Art Gallery,
Regina, Saskatchewan

Inuit print
Tudlik, Man Killing Seal, 1961
stone cut on paper, 76.2 x 58.8 cm
Mackenzie Art Gallery, University
of Regina Collection.

Regina's Mackenzie Art Gallery recently invited Seema Goel to create an artistic/curatorial work with their collection. In her foray in the vault, she noticed that Euro-Canadian artists often depict the land without people while Inuit artists presented people and animals but not the land. This observation inspired *Canon Fodder*.

On the south wall of the largest of the Mackenzie's eight galleries are forty-two landscape paintings hung salon-style. Facing them are three park benches, each fitted with a speaker activated by a button to play 10 seconds of nature sounds. On the opposite wall is a row of 17 Inuit prints. In front of these are five pedestals decorated with large primary coloured dots. On top of the pedestals are Inuitish looking carvings made of *Wonder Bread*: a seal, several polar bears and a person. The artist/curator's statement spans the east wall. The text arrangement is amusing, given the landscape theme, because it requires numerous walks to read the long lines.

Art historians have long noted the absence of Aboriginal people in Canadian paintings from the expansionist era. Such images suggest to potential settlers that the land is uninhabited and ready for claiming and cultivation. With this in mind, I found myself looking for other signs of hovering human life. While people are absent in the paintings they are present in their making. Each painting displays a point of view, an artist before a scene. Some seem to be saying, "I am the first one here to see this as worthy of depiction." Others seem lost before the un-picturesque vastness, recording but insecure.

Goel's audio benches are ironic reminders of the artificiality of landscapes, but by resting us before the paintings, they also position us like the artists. So composed, I found myself empathizing with their projects. Some are just knocking-off souvenirs and finding home (Britain and Ontario) out west. A few seem freed by the Prairie to abandon the English lake-country picturesque formula (foreground foliage giving way to mid-ground water backed by trees or a fringe of mountains topped by clouds) and invent their own conceptions. Tanabe finds a rhyme with the flat patches of mixed cultivation and minimalism while Ernest Luthi's very modest and local imaginary imposes a farmer's eye on the land.

Apparently, less influenced by European traditions and imaginary, Inuit prints are about living the land rather than being separate from it. The difference between these and the examples from the South is ontologically dramatic. Inuit people, like western artists before the 1400s, rarely depict the land without people. Often, like Pootagook's *Hunter's Signal*, the artists are not just making aesthetic objects but are passing along cultural knowledge.

Seeing the environment as the genre 'landscape' requires a certain distance, a lack of intimate relation. Goel's comparison is poignant and may stimulate urban viewers to thoughts and feelings about the consequences of this estrangement and the resulting Romanticism.

However, people are people, the more time I spent with the exhibition the more humanity I discovered in the landscape paintings—not all of which seem overwhelmed by an imperialist unconscious.

The fourth element in the exhibition, Goel's *Wonder Bread* Inuitish sculptures, is the most puzzling. *Wonder Bread* is pejoratively associated with bland, White, urban North America culture. Perhaps she is suggesting that the South's consumption of Inuit sculpture has perverted that culture from its natural evolution. Maybe she is critiquing the plastic knock-offs of Aboriginal art? They are funny, disturbing pieces that do not make cohesive sense in relation to her other, clearer messages. The earnest curator and adventurous artists are not quite working together. Nevertheless, the insightful comparison and art's resistance to containment make this a marvellous experience.

David Garneau

KINGSTON

KAREN DAVIE

UNDERWORLDS

March 1st–April 29thAgnes Etherington Art Gallery
Queen's University
University Avenue at Bader LaneTel: 613 533-2190
www.aeac.ca

With the opening of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art in Brooklyn, visual politics continues to invade the artworld, for better or worse. If it isn't one form of politics, then it is another. Unusually, Karen Davie is a Canadian born painter who is making her painterly way with what has been called a *new feminist approach to abstract painting*. While everything old can be new again, Davie has a certain shock value to the way, interweaving, stripy, sexy paintings she has presented in this, her only Canadian solo at her *alma mater* Queen's University.

Painting out of her Lower East side studio and exhibiting at Mary Boone, Davie represents a new confidence in womens' art. Influences range from the synthetic syrupy sting of Robert Crumb's druggy comics, to Ingres' fatuous women, to Carravaggio's heightened stagginess with light and form. We can see Davie knows all about those serious male abstract painters of the 1950s who sought spiritual solace and aesthetic salvation in oil on canvas. That said, there is a hint of de Kooning, of Joan Mitchell and Jackson Pollock here in the evolute tangled flow of visual images in Davie's art. These paintings exist as independent visions, with their own reality, one that stands outside time, counts time in milliseconds. There is none of the post-historical self-consciousness of the more academic post-avant-gardists works of our times in Davie's art. These works are realizations of a visual reality.

It is that leap of faith in painting that Karen Davie can do, that ability to make paint sexy, which is a step further than stylish or Op, as was the case with British painter Bridget Riley. Davie makes the jump without a parachute and she's not just full of hot air. And her bold style exists in a non-space, builds the illusion on canvas, even as it recalls Mark Rothko's words ... 'Space, therefore, in the chief plastic manifestation of the artist's conception of reality'.

This show is unusual for it juxtaposes the breakthrough paintings of the early 1990s from the *In Out In Out* series with the most recent *Chinatounblues* series. In a separate gallery space, we see some of the conceptual origins of Davie's art in performance, and event documentation, as, for instance, in the snapshot sequence of Davie blowing bubblegum in a photo booth, her face partially, then almost completely obscured by gum... In another photo document we find the artist levitating in a staged set. Here, Davie is seemingly hovering in empty space on some unseen shelf. The presentation and production of these photo docs and visual games follows a diagrammatic, conceptual stream, something shared by an



Karin Davie
In the Studio Around 1993 (photo piece)

earlier generation of American artists such as Alan Kaprow and John Baldessari, or even NE Thing Co. from Canada. The conceptually oriented event documents show Davie trying to work out and see how some ideas fit as artform (and this, long after the Mothers of Invention went into geriatric retirement). The earlier *In Out In Out* series play on and with *Op art* invention with a consecutive drip motif throughout that is mesmerizing and hypnotic.

These works visually draw one in, and play on the duality of pattern and accident simultaneously. The more celebrated *Chinatownblues* works are tubular sensual syncratic and take the objectness out of pop. There's a *post-snap, post-crackle* and *pos-tPop* to Karen Davie's *Underworld* show. The distortion, extension, interlocking flow of fluid forms, is visceral, very real. This art exists in real space and time, as a physical visual presence. And so this is straight on work, not an escapist's dream, a painting that describes, in its own way, the language of our hyperbolic world, a world where images are there to be consumed, and that we read rapidly like fast magpies, our beaks at the ready for the next image. But it is a sexy, attractive, colourful world too. This abundance of the concrete painterly tactility is a visual vernacular that enables us to read Karin Davie's work as design, as fabric for a future world. It's a passion play for our times. This is the way Davie makes it, the way Davie paints it.

John K. Grande

HUDSON

RETELLING LEGENDS & MYTHS

DANIEL BARKLEY, DANIEL DAVID & JAMES HUCTWITH

March 31–May 26, 2007

Galerie Harwood
3663 Harwood Dr.
Hudson

Tel.: 450 458-1557
www.galerieharwood.com



Daniel Barkley
Le cheval blanc, 2006
Acrylique sur toile
160 x 160 cm

Retelling Legends & Myths is a somewhat verbose and literal title for a group exhibition that is about far more than just storytelling. It presents three unusual Canadian talents in an equally original setting that is Galerie Harwood.

A large space with a bohemian feel, it provided enough breathing room for the works of Daniel Barkley, James Huctwith and Daniel David, artists with a lot of personal energy invested in their canvases.

Born in rural Manitoba, Daniel David is a modern nomad, a peripatetic, restless man, whose colour-

full lifestyle finds its expression in his paintings. Bizarre compositions and strange characters are his forte and he sets up the viewer for a unique visual experience with an ironic wink. Mannequins and wild dogs, desert vistas and alligators, mysterious goings on confuse and entertain. The titles are no help but are just as much fun: *The Botanist's Dream*, *Still life with no Exceptions*, *The Elegant Syllogism*.

A contemporary surrealist, David has created his own fantastical universe where inanimate objects come alive in odd, unfamiliar settings testing our perception of reality.

A very different *frisson* runs through the work of Toronto artist James Huctwith. With echoes of another contemporary Canadian painter of homoerotic themes, Atilla Lukacs, his art is the closest in subject matter to the title of the exhibition. Greek myths are retold in a contemporary context and with undeniably modern players: leather clad as well as nude young men engaged in symbolic re-enactments, with the artist himself serving as model in several scenes.

Huctwith's compositions are theatrical and at times disconcertingly monumental, where his powerful imagination surpasses his technique. Borrowing from the Renaissance, the artist attempts works on a grand scale, a dangerous proposition without adequate mastery of the plastic demands of such tableaux. Not a Caravaggio yet, Huctwith has enough audacity and talent to one day accomplish what his creative soul dictates. In the meantime, his paintings provide enough energy and visual stimulation to attract and hold our attention.

As if saving the best for the last, the third room of this spacious gallery belongs to Montreal artist Daniel Barkley, a hugely talented and accomplished painter. Barely into his forties, he has produced a large body of work, creating in the process a uniquely symbolic visual universe.

Continually redefining and refining his personal mythology, he draws the viewer into a monochromatic, mysterious paysage where silent processions move imperceptibly across the horizon and solemn children sit on enormous wooden horses.

Barkley has diluted his palette and diffused the light, adding new players to the now-familiar figures. There is the old man and the youth, the symbolic boat forever marooned or just about to set off into the still waters.

His characters, although contemporary, recognizable, are cast in symbolic roles, intriguing in their nudity and stillness, leaving the viewer longing for some word, a sound, an explanation. We have to be content instead with the visual magic of these enigmatic sagas. Barkley's acrylic paintings seduce with their texture, cool and smooth like beach pebbles, and the translucent, ethereal light that permeates them.

Dorota Kozinska

MONTREAL

ALAN MCKEE & DENNIS JONES

Galerie d'Este
1329 ave. Greene
Tel: 514 846-1515

www.galeriesdeste.com

Alan McKee's large photographic prints on archival paper take graphic design and playfully invent, and build illusory paradigms in what looks like three dimensional space. As visual icons they look like strange hieroglyphics—all done with real visual elements documented through photography in nature: ferns, flowers, grasses, twigs, earth. These works are built by the artist on his computer and



Alan McKee
Silverleaf, 2007

reveal a hidden world of the imagination, something we delve into, to discover a physical tactile beauty that is analogous to and with nature's ontological cycles of life.

These unusually inspiring works explore an infinite space using sculpted formal scrolling and unfolding visual passages. They suggest a continuity of form in space, just as Costantin Brancusi's sculptures once did, but these spaces exist in a visual world created with the latest technology by a process of layering, splicing and colouring. Nature becomes a fluid motif where the visual structures McKee creates are suggestive of something ultimately spiritual, a concern with endless change, and each image freeze frames this evolutive ephemeral visual discourse for us.

And there is this spiritual aspect, of revealing something invisible that cannot ultimately be measured. It recalls Paul Klee's 1920 comment in *Creative Credo* that: "Art does not reproduce the visible; rather it makes visible. . . . Formerly we used to represent things visible on earth, things we either liked to look at or would have liked to see. Today we reveal the reality that is behind visible things, thus expressing the belief that the visible world is merely an isolated case in relation to the universe and that there are many more other latent realities." Asian and Western traditions fuse together in an electric and very visual kaleidoscopic way. It is as if Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* met Yukio Mishima's *Temple of the Golden Pavilion* as art. McKee's art challenges us their labyrinthine graphics rooted in the earth. As art, McKee's work reflects the essential design and abstract principles he was exposed to as a youth when as a child in New York, he met Jackson Pollock, Hans Hofmann, Harold Rosenberg and other notable American artists of the 1950s avant garde who frequently came by to visit his family.

Some of these images could suggest a portal, a gateway, or a window. They build their vision out of composite images, or single images, where elements have been coloured in sections, while others are spliced together. The colour contrasts and geometric structures are intriguing. As process these works involve a

sophisticated understanding of today's image editing procedures, digital photographic processes and basic composition. Each of McKee's artworks carries a potential universe within. The layers of meaning, are eclectic, iconoclastic, and maintain a simple, yet direct approach to the world we are part of.

McKee's highly individuated mind builds intricate interweavings of nature and architectonic structure out of the visual. They recombine the visual in a very textual way. The grammar of this imagery is ultimately built in the same intricate, yet logical way that ancient scripts might have been, where the response is to the physicality of the structure, and the perceptual response we might have to it, as much as the content inherent to a given text. The two go hand in hand—visual and verbal—and are one and the same thing. The medium might be in the message but the symbolism is likewise in the layering and structuring when it comes to Alan McKee's artform. Pulled from reality, the art becomes a part of some greater intuited reality. The sublime sense that accompanies the inherent beauty in these highly crafted artforms rests upon an acute sense that art is an illusionistic process—part fact, part fiction.

Accompanying Alan McKee's show is another exhibition of Dennis Jones, one of Montreal's most gifted but likewise hidden artists, who has been working consistently for decades. Galerie d'Este should be commended for bringing his work to the public. Jones' part abstract, part figural assemblages, collages, paintings and etchings bring together a language that stems from, and drew its inspiration in, the great abstract movements of the 1950s. But Jones is an outsider of sorts, as much influenced by Asian art as by Western abstraction. What is unusual in Jones' art is the sensitivity to coloration, texture, and an aura of light that infuses his work. So sensitive a way of working with abstraction, something seldom seen of Dennis Jones' generation. Jones' artworks are less about the gesture than involved in the total atmosphere that infuses a subject he chooses to address in such a visually tactile and expressive way.

John K. Grande

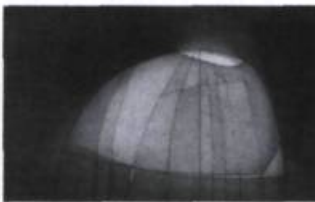
BENOIT SAÏTO & NORMAND HAMEL

APRÈS LA PLUIE,
LES MAISONS POUSSENT

April 11–June 10, 2007

MONOPOLI Galerie d'architecture
181, rue Saint-Antoine O.

Tel: 514 868-6691



Benoit Saïto
Hotaru, 2007.
Graphite on paper, 34 x 55 cm

Architecture, like any art form, influences and inspires other kinds of visual expression.

An exhibition of two contemporary artists at Monopoli architectural gallery is a perfect example of such creative meshing.

Combining the diverse talents of Benoit Saïto and Normand Hamel, it stimulates a unique spatial dialogue where colour and texture converse with silence and shadow.

Hamel's three-dimensional bas-reliefs, saturated with colour, are composed of fragments of facades and edifices, slivers of larger structures, at once narrative and painterly. His mixed-media assemblages resemble theatrical maquettes, were it not for the organic composition of the many elements that grow from the ground up, thus giving the exhibition its poetic title.

Hamel's background in art and theatre design as well as film, finds its echo in these sculptural formations, as he creates a world between architecture and stage, a three-dimensional storyboard of painterly proportions.

At the other end of the spectrum lays the quiet, shadowy realm of Benoit Saïto, populated by enigmatic organic structures and transparent geometric forms. His miniature (34 x 55 cm) worlds of otherworldly proportions are brought to life with the simplest of means, graphite on paper. These are quasi-architectural structures with no clearly defined purpose or occupants. Lines and curves intersect,

forming impossibly fragile spaces, at once ethereal and solid.

With delicate virtuosity in the handling of the medium, he produces graphic tableaux of particularly seductive aesthetic. From the striped, undulating *Ebb* to the spread wings of earthbound *Caravans* and the floating translucent wedge in *Souvenir*, his forms are infused with light, reaching beyond their confines as if in the process of becoming. Others are oddly organic, like *L'Alchemiste* resembling a variegated shell leaking light, neither animal nor inanimate object, a visual enigma.

Saïto's fine touch is equally spellbinding in *Hotaru* where a domed, translucent shape pulsates with light against an inky background. With echoes of Chinese lanterns, it is a work of nuanced, delicate esthetic, a tiny masterpiece to savour over and over.

Dorota Kozinska

DOROTHY GROSTERN

A TIME OF INNOCENCE

May 4–23, 2007

Beaux Arts David Astrof
Maison Thomson
3630, rue McTavish

Tel: 514 286-2476
www.artap.com

The autobiographical component is intrinsic to the arts. It sounds a particularly poignant note in Canada, a country, more than any other, composed of immigrants; people whose personal histories weigh heavily.

Whether burdened, or blessed, with memories of a childhood in another country, many Canadian artists imbue their work with fragile reminiscences, from Dina Podolsky's never-ending *Moscow Diary* to Yehouda Chaki's pantheon of forgotten faces in *Mi Makir*.

Dorothy Grostern has spent her younger years in several cultures, finally settling in Montreal, where she has honed her creative talent. A highly narrative artist, she weaves personal stories into her compositions, charging her mixed-media works with emotions and profound reflection.

Her recent series, *A Time of Innocence* at Maison Thomson, is particularly close to the artist's



Dorothy Grostern
A Time of Innocence

heart; at once homage to her ailing elderly mother and a meditation on passing.

Some of the images are taken from old photographs, but since few survived, Grostern relied on her memory to build the series, thus transforming it from the documentary into the painterly.

In several works, the composition is divided into two images, with a garment on one side and a human figure on the other, or, in one case, focusing only on her parents' wedding clothes, forsaking the human models.

The symbolism is deeply personal—the artist's mother sewed most of these garments herself—but also universal. From Jim Dyne to Jacques Payette and Betty Goodwin, artists have incorporated clothing into their works, seeing in it endless plastic and narrative possibilities.

Like shed skin, clothes carry the scent and the shape of the person who wore them, and into their threads are woven endless human tales.

It is these memories that are at the heart of Grostern's latest works, as she struggles with a difficult personal chapter in her life, seeking in her art both a release of her own pain, and a way of communicating a higher truth about the fragility of our human existence.

Somewhat naïve and tender, these pastel and oil-paint stick on paper drawings offer a peak into an intimate journal that lures us with

its colourful pages only to tug at the heart with its story.

Little girls giggle while posing for an invisible camera; a serious young bride and her dashing groom resemble a cut-out from an antique postcard; an empty red chair sits against a row of trees ... the pages turn imperceptibly.

Perhaps the most accomplished of the works is the eponymous *A Time of Innocence*, encompassing the essence of what's at the core of Grostern's latest production. Two young girls, clasping hands, walk quietly past a sleeping woman reclining in a chair, half hidden in the shadow.

It is the passing. The never-ending cycle of life, where for each hand we grasp there is one we have to let go of.

Dorota Kozinska

NATHALIE GRIMARD

VERTIGES

17 February–17 March, 2007

Galerie Trois Points

www.galerietroispoints.qc.ca

In this exhibition the artist to all intents and purposes sets out the first principles of minimalism. The casual observer will see little more than predominantly blank sheets of paper, some coloured string, several needles, and especially, numerous pinholes. Indeed the hurried gallery-goer may quickly conclude that this exhibit represents a pre-computer screen version of pixel!

Moreover, the sheer starkness of this show could easily repel facile art lovers. When entering the gallery the visitor gets the sense of an empty, scrubbed up, hospital operating room, with its inimitably cold, anti-septic, sterile environment. Here the artist's works lie flat against bleached walls, like surgical instruments neatly arrayed in a steel tray before an operation. The glint of a few sharp needles that dangle from threads heightens the impression of a surgeon's scalpels and sutures on display. An incisive, if not severe aesthetic, thus pervades 'Vertiges.'

The Spartan ethos of this exposition to no small degree results

from the pristine, almost virginal tenor of Grimard's art. In this vein the leitmotif of whiteness runs throughout her works so that they constitute variations on this colour. In one shade or another, white permeates these pieces to such an extent that it often comes perilously close to blanching the pinprick figures on these paperworks.

Therein resides the significance of vertigo, from which this exhibition takes its name. Grimard's tableaux create virtual whiteouts that mock the points of the compass, blur boundaries, and undermine dimensionality. Even time appears erased, so that the perforated animal and human forms in these set pieces seem to exist in a state of suspended animation.

Furthermore, the vertigo of these characters derives from an existential malaise. Their presence on paper ironically occurs through the absence of paper, namely pinholes. In effect, they owe their being to non-being. This parallels Grimard's frequent recourse in 'Vertiges' to blankness as both the negation of colour and negative space. She thereby situates her characters at the interstice of vacuity and substance. No wonder these pinprick creatures assume the guise of wraiths, aptly accentuated by their hollowness. They, animal and human, represent transitional entities that move inexorably, like all created beings, between existence and oblivion. The vertigo they experience, and the viewer vicariously through them, arises not from heights, but from the dizzying realization that by virtue of our creaturehood we constantly teeter on the brink of non-existence—and will inevitably fall into that abyss.

In essence then, Grimard employs the semblance of nothingness as a foil to articulate an existentialist aesthetic. The diptych 'Attente I, Attente II,' epitomizes this. Each frame features a lone, pinpoint, human profile, barely perceptible amidst a colourless, denuded sheetscape. In fact, both silhouettes readily fade in and out of sight so as to emphasize the liminality of these characters. Meanwhile, the bleakness of their setting bespeaks a no-man's-land that underscores their isolation; a sentiment compounded by the solitary confinement



Désir, 2006
Fils de coton
et fils d'argent sur toile
51 x 25 cm
Photo: Nathalie Legault

to which Grimard condemns the two since she relegates them to separate quadrangles. The gravitas of these twin scenes prove the touchstone of 'Vertiges'.

Norman F. Cornett, ph.d

SUTTON

DETOURS

ARTS SUTTON GALLERY

7, rue Academy

Sutton

Tel: 450 538-2563

info@artssutton.com

This is a terrific spot to visit on a summer's day. This contemporary art gallery has a welcoming, small town ambiance, and is dedicated to the presentation and development of local talent as much as to international artists. Its programming is vibrant, with more than 200 exhibitions organized since the gallery opened its doors in 1980.

In addition to art exhibits, the gallery also offers workshops and lecture series.

Because of its location and activities, Arts Sutton Gallery attracts an equally diverse public, from art student and local citizens to tourists.

The gallery is located in the village of Sutton, 105 kilometers from Montréal and is open Thursday to Sunday from 11:00 am to 5:00 pm.

Dorota Kozinska

HERE ARE THE DIRECTIONS
FROM MONTREAL:

Take **AUTOROUTE 10 E.**
to exit- **EXIT 68** toward
COWANSVILLE

Follow **PROVINCIAL
SECONDARY ROUTE 139** and
104 that leads you to Sutton

The Gallery is located in
the village at **7 Academy Road**
behind the **Esso Station.**

GALERIE HARWOOD
3663 Harwood Dr.
Hudson
Tel.: 450 458-1557
www.galerieharwood.com

Galerie Harwood is definitely different. Its owner, 'agent-provocateur' and fan of rock'n'roll, Ihor Todoruk has turned this vast three-room space into a showcase for original and often controversial artists. Unafraid of stirring up a buzz, Todoruk has a knack for finding original talent, often organizing group shows of its many Canadian and international artists.

The gallery also houses an eclectic collection of African tribal art, and other collectibles.

With photos of The Doors' Jim Morrison—taken by Todoruk himself—welcoming the visitor and heavy metal providing the musical accompaniment, a trip to Galerie Harwood is always an unforgettable experience.

The gallery is open Tuesday through Sunday.

Dorota Kozinska

RIMOUSKI

ANNE ASHTON

EL CENTRO

June 17–Sept. 9, 2007
Musée régional de Rimouski
35, Saint-Germain Ouest
www.museerimouski.qc.ca

Anne Ashton paints nature. She paints it as if she were conversing in its secret language, communing more than dialoguing with all its manifestations, from gigantic cacti and whirling wind funnels, to the tiniest of insects and shimmering dew drops.

Fragments of skies float in her paintings, suspended ever so briefly, held captive for a blink of an eye, before receding behind the clouds.

Ashton is a magical conjurer, bringing to life the inner being of her subject matter, where wilted flowers still seduce with their pursed petals, their fragile invisible core intact, and where leaves float beyond the frame, hovering on the edge of the painting, already in flight.

An exhibition of her works at the Musée régional de Rimouski titled *El Centro* offers an extensive look into the vibrant world of this original artist. Organized and curated by former *Le Devoir* art critic, Bernard Lamarche, it ought to once and for all place Ashton in the forefront of contemporary artists.

Meaning *the centre* in Spanish, the title of the exhibition holds particular significance for the San Diego-born artist. It is also the name of a town not far from where Ash-

ton grew up, in the middle of the Mojave Desert, "in the middle of nowhere ..."

"My art is often situated under the radar, on the outskirts of town," the artist says of her creative process. "The world of contemporary art and I have often felt a mutual indifference for each other."

The reason is not difficult to see. Ashton's subject matter is far removed from the abstract and the conceptual, opting for the oldest and purest of subject matters, the world of nature.

But rather than being decorative, her paintings are of the highest calibre, with tight composition and highly professional handling of the medium.

Ostensibly challenging the latest trends, she seeks inspiration in beauty, mysticism, folk art and culture, all the taboos of contemporary art. Bravo!

The result are works of incredible power, nature at its most dramatic and its most delicate. In Ashton's paintings the flowers pose, the skies breathe and the air rustles scattering perfume. Tall waterspouts loom against a black cloud, dancing towards us like shadowy dervishes.

Colour, texture, dimension, all are integral to the composition, and each work is unique, an *objet d'art* in itself. Hand-made frames are part of the whole, imperceptibly incorporated into the image.

A peripatetic, nomadic soul, Ashton soaks up inspiration on numerous road trips, releasing the accumulated impressions on canvas upon canvas of sculptural, brilliant

flora and swirling air. Her works emanate the heat of the South, imbued as they are with the scents and aura of another place, far removed from our Canadian frigidty.

Ashton prompts, seduces us into a closer look at the world around us, invites us to seek the life-force in each flower, in each gust of wind that caresses our cheek. To stop and ponder the mystery that envelops us and of which we are a part. To listen to the sound of the eternal flux, where everything lives and changes, dies and is reborn.

Several of Anne Ashton's paintings will also be exhibited at Les Jardins de Métis/Reford Gardens along the St. Lawrence and Mitis rivers, from June 23 to September 30, 2007.

Dorota Kozinska

HALIFAX

MARY LEE BENDOLPH, GEE'S BEND QUILTS AND BEYOND

28 April–9 September 2007

Art Gallery of Nova Scotia
1723 Hollis St.
Halifax, Nova Scotia

This is an important exhibition that raises many questions about the very nature of what is and what is not art. Central to the exhibition are quilts made by African American women from the very small town of Gee's Bend, Alabama who have never been formally trained as artists. Whether or not one calls these women artists what they have created is surely art and, to my mind, very fine art by any standard. Terms such as folk art, outsider art and vernacular art have been used to describe items such as these quilts usually to separate them from traditional professional fine art objects made by professionally trained artists, but I think these particular quilts would not warrant any title other than good art and the women who made them are, by that assumption, artists.

The exhibition originates from the Austin Museum of Art in Texas and the Halifax venue is its only Canadian showing which is a shame because it should have a wider



Red Mojos, California
oil on wood, 28 x 23 cm. 2005

DIRECTIONS FROM MONTREAL:

Galerie Harwood is located just off the island, 20 minutes from Montreal. To get there take the 40 West, direction Ottawa, exit 26, Hudson.

Follow the HWY Signs.



Mary Lee Bendolph
Blocks and Strips, 2005
 Corduroy
 84 x 81 inches
 Collection of Tinwood Alliance

Canadian audience if for no other reason than to raise basic questions about the nature of art and artists with more people. Mary Lee Bendolph who is now in her early seventies and the central artist in this exhibition came to Halifax for the gallery opening and the following day gave a tour of the show which was an eye opener for the luck few that were present. I have never met an artist quite like her or had a tour of an exhibition like the one she gave. Frankly, many artists' 'talks' are so boring that I would rather sit through a root canal. Not only was Mary Lee modest about her accomplishments and generous in her praise of other artists in the exhibition, and those who were responsible for its organization, but she would break into song when she was talking about a work and what a marvelous singer she is. It appears that *Gee's Bend* quilters quilt together and sing together while they are working. This is a tradition that goes back many years and on top of the very nice catalogue that accompanies the exhibition there is a two CD set of gospel singing from *Gee's Bend* that is also available in the gallery store. One CD is an historic recording from 1941 and the other was recorded in 2002. She had me singing "Thank you Jesus" before the tour was over. It is this strong feeling from the music that is reflected in the quilts.

All the quilts in the exhibition are abstract patterns as are all quilts that have ever been done in the history of quilting in *Gee's Bend* which

goes back a long way to the American Civil War. Perhaps a better, and more correct term, would be non-objective patterns, but that is me being picky about art terms so I'll stick with the lay term abstract. The quilt patterns mirror of the best imagery of abstract art, but until very recently none of the quilters had ever seen an abstract painting. The patterns in the quilts come naturally from what they see around them in their day to day life. Mary Lee states in the catalogue that she would see a brightly coloured truck and transfer those colours to a quilt or she would just look at things around her and come up with a pattern. Most of the quilts are not titled so they end up being labeled as are two of Mary Lee's quilts *Blocks and strips quilt 2005* or *Blocks, strips, strings and half-squares quilt 2005*.

The quilts from *Gee's Bend* before they were discovered as art, and this only happened in last few years, were completely functional. They were used as bed coverings or to cover drafty walls and floors. They were made from used clothing and any other cloth they found nor were they finely crafted as are some quilts such as many of those from New England, but they were always boldly designed and this is what makes them art. *Gee's Bend* had a long history as a hard and difficult place to live. It was, and is, a very small black farming community that had to work very hard just to get by. The colour and design of their quilts must, as likely does their gospel music, have brought them joy. I know it brings the current crop of quilt makers joy if Mary Lee is an example. This joy is now shared with the rest of the world. Their quilts are now exhibited in the top American art galleries, they have been featured in national television shows and the United States Postal Service is issuing a set of stamps based on their quilts. All this has happened so fast that the artists of *Gee's Bend* are still in a state of non-belief.

This is too short of a review to get into real detail about this exhibition's importance. There is other quilters work in the exhibition besides Mary Lee. Indeed.

The earliest piece, from 1955, was made by her mother Aolar Mosely. There are works by her daughter, Essie Bendolph Pettway;

her daughter-in-law, Louisiana P. Bendolph and two self-taught Alabama artists, not from *Gee's Bend*, the painter Thornton Dial and sculptor Lonnie Holley. The later two artists figure in what has happened in *Gee's Bend* and should warrant a separate review of their work nor do I have the space to discuss the prints that have been made by Mary Lee, her daughter and daughter-in-law with Paulson Press in Berkeley, California that are based on their quilt designs. They are drop dead beautiful and the editions have sold out.

One last point or two, a parallel can be drawn between what happened in *Gee's Bend* and what happened in our own north with Inuit art. In both cases a new artistic voice was heard that made the rest of us look at the world differently and question the very nature of what we call art. The other point is that this exhibition is important to the Black Canadian culture of Nova Scotia. Black Canadians can share the pride of these Alabama artists and see in the Americans's work part of their history.

Virgil Hammock

HONG KONG

CAUGHT IN THE ACT

AUTHORIZING THE STREETS OF HONG KONG

Artists: TeGustaLoQueVes

May 16th 2007—Ongoing

33 Pottinger Street, Lan Kwai Fong
 Hong Kong, S.A.R. China
 Lan Kwai Fong Street

Do we still believe that art can effect political change?

TeGustaLoQueVes? is an artist collective based in Madrid that has created a flurry of activity in the past two years. From issuing out forged invitations for the royal coronation to 10,000 of the Spanish public, to replacing 50 bus transit posters with their own political slogans, their purpose is simply to redirect the nature of art towards the free collective consumption and less towards cherished commodity—art is to be consumed by as many people as possible on the streets and everyone gets to experience it for free.

The production of guerrilla art is focused on cause and effect, not the material piece itself. What the artist hopes to stir is an effect within the minds of those people that live within the environment being altered. It does not necessarily aim to produce art that is meaningful in itself. *TeGustaLoQueVes* have recently been traveling around Hong Kong implementing their work on the streets in heavy foot trafficked areas.

From Basquiat leading to Banksy in the 90s, one might ask again what type of placement graffiti is given in the art world. "We don't consider graffiti art" stated a member of *TeGustaLoQueVes* in response. "Graffiti was never really art, not even in the 80s, we admire Basquiat, of course, but what Banksy does is bring art back onto the streets where it disturbs people, not just the 10% that go to a museum. Our art making is in the process of creating graffiti on the street, not the graffiti itself."

The performance I recently viewed in Hong Kong, consisted of 25 minutes of spraypainting and



TeGustaLoQueVes? H.K.

'tagging' onto the side wall of a building in Hong Kong's Lan Kwai Fong bar district at 5pm in the afternoon. Viewers and local passers-by were curious—everyone was cordially invited to participate by taking photographs and watching the graffiti take place. "The more people participate, the less likely the police will think it is illegitimate" said one of the artists realistically. "They think it is in some way sanctioned as a public event."

This trip, TeGustaLoQueVes have been attempting to travel and collaborate with artists worldwide. What they do during this reaching out process is disrupt unfamiliar systems by imprinting their mark on a foreign culture that thus far, has remains nonplussed to their influence. People walked by, passers-by took pictures enthusiastically before becoming quickly distracted by a nearby wedding and a better photo opportunity.

"We are thinking of going to Canada, more specifically only Montreal interests us at the moment. We think that we sense that we could find like-minded people there." Indeed.

Melissa Lam

BOOKS REVIEWS

DIALOGUES IN DIVERSITY

ART FROM MARGINAL TO MAINSTREAM

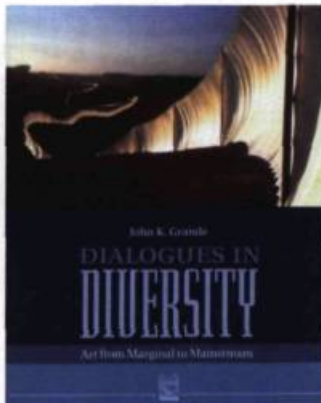
By John K. Grande

Pari Publishing, Italy, 2007
Illustrated, 173 pages

John K. Grande's latest book can be found under the heading Art Criticism/Ecology/Environment, and these three themes weave through his writing.

Art critic and author of several books, including *Balance: Art and Nature* and *Art Nature Dialogues: Interviews with Environmental Artists* (2004). His latest book carries the theme of dialogues, presenting interviews with a diverse group of international artists, focusing, once again, on the subject of the environment.

But not only. The author, and the artists he encounters, are as much involved in the discussion on the merits of contemporary art as they are on other issues.



The pleasure in reading Grande's book comes from these one-on-one meetings to which the reader become privy, listening in, as it were, to the reflections of some of the most interesting of contemporary visual creators.

Reading about the behind the scenes preparations that precede Christo's monumental 'wrapped' projects offers a fascinating look into the Herculean task of putting landscape, fabric, workforce and finances together while keeping your artistic vision intact.

The candour of this, the most controversial of contemporary environmental artists, and his partner Jeanne-Claude is in itself a rare offering.

Ousmane Sow's preoccupations are far removed from those of his European colleague. The Nigerian sculptor creates works in the ancient tradition of his culture, his hands immersed in the earth, giving birth to magnificent terracotta statues.

His talent found its expression in works of raw originality that can now be found in museums across Europe and the US. But they are also found in Africa, for Sow's art is intrinsically linked to his roots, to the struggle unique to his culture, to a voice that has never forgotten its language.

Grande's conversation with American photographer Roy Staab, on the other hand, is a dialogue on the beauty of nature and the artist's eternal fascination with its shifting landscape. Interspersed with Staab's tranquil, meditative images, these pages are like an oasis in the hum of so many other voices.

Grande's informed yet unpretentious questioning of the artists, who include Antony Gormley, Yolanda Gutiérrez, and the ever entertaining Guerrilla Girl, stimulates the dialogues found in this compilation, making them as interesting to a lay reader as they are to one immersed in the world of art.

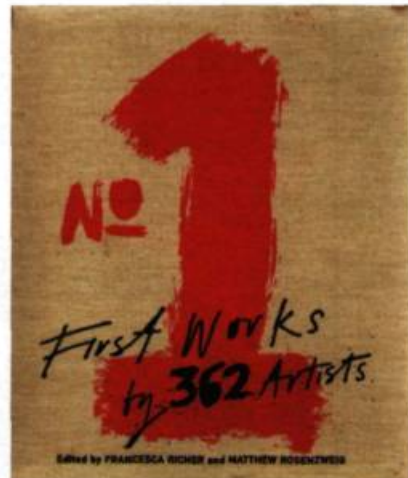
Dorota Kozinska

N° 1: FIRST WORKS BY 362 ARTISTS

Edited by Francesca Richer and Matthew Rosenzweig,
Palace Press International, China,
DAP Distribution, 424 pages,
illustrated throughout, US\$39.95

What strikes one first and foremost about this book, when one leafs through it, is the incredibly beautiful selection of artists and their works, as well as the design and quality of reproductions. Francesca Richer, who designed this book has, among her accomplishments, art directed Gotham, Tricycle and Interview magazines. For anyone who follows contemporary art, the selection is riveting, for these images and artworks, including the comments by each artist, are not standard fare in the world of publishing these days. The integral feature of this book is that the artists select the art they have made and comment on why they see it as the foremost significant first work, a work of art that helped 'define' their art, and what they later went on to do.

As a result readers gain insight into these artists' process, and the way an artist's vision gradually evolves, or suddenly makes a leap in its visual vocabulary, its vernacular style. We see Boris Mikhailov's photo on an old woman behind a former communist lectern, and he writes of the two main influences on Russian art as being the icon and suprematism. Gabriel Orozco's modest pastel on paper piece looks vaguely suprematist actually, but with a Mexican sensuality, while Richard Serra's *One Ton Prop: House of Cards* made of four 480 leaning lead plates, was, in his own words 'satisfying (...) the aesthetic came from the solution of the problem and nothing extraneous



was necessary." We have never seen Mark di Suvero's powerful wooden sculpture from 1959, with its neo-cubist character, or John Chamberlain's idiomatic steel sculpture titled *Calliope* (1954), so different from the later crushed car pieces. The same goes for Lynda Benglis' *Quartered Meteor* (1969) literally melting, in layers, in a corner, and her *Goliath* where the body reads visually as a form from nature, opened out.

The art in *No. 1: First Works by 362 Artists*, exposes a range of accents, forms, spatial endeavours, textural and tactile investigations, all those things that are part of the social and ecological event that our lives encapsulate. Some artists explain their works better than others, but this is just grist for the mill, as the saying goes. Selected artists include Vito Acconci, Frank Auerbach, John Baldessari, Matthew Barney, Georg Baselitz, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Vanessa Beecroft, Louise Bourgeois, Sophie Calle, Judy Chicago, Chuck Close, Tacita Dean, Gregory Crewdson, Eric Fischl, Gilbert & George, Nan Goldin, Richard Hamilton, Howard Hodgkin, Anish Kapoor, Alex Katz, Anselm Kiefer, R. B. Kitaj, Richard Long, Mariko Mori, Vik Muniz, Yoshimoto Nara, Cornelia Parker, Raymond Pettibon, Elizabeth Peyton, Pierre et Gilles, Pipilotti Rist, Ed Ruscha, Sean Scully, Andres Serrano, Cindy Sherman, Kiki Smith, Roy Staab, Thomas Struth, Larry Sultan, Jürgen Teller, Wolfgang Tillmans, Gus Van Sant, Bill Viola and so many others. A valuable and inspiring resource!

John K. Grande