



THE TREE MUSEUM

2002

The 5th Annual Exhibition
Finding the Intimate in Nature
September 22 to October 22, 2002

Site-specific installations by
ELLEN DIJKSTRA (Netherlands)
LYLA RYE (Canada)
Performance by
WILSON CHIK WAI CHI (Hong Kong)
Original music and performance by
JANICE POMER and **BARRY PROPHET** (Canada)

Exhibition curated by Anne O'Callaghan
Essays by Dot Tuer and Betty Yee-Wan Cheung

2003

The 6th Annual Exhibition
Shelter Inside-Out
September 21 to October 30, 2003

Site-specific installations by
ANNE-MARIE BÉNÉTEAU (Canada)
MARGUERITE LARMAND (Canada)
CHRISTY THOMPSON (Canada)
FRANCESCA VIVENZA (Canada)
Site-specific installation and performance by
T. S. ANAND (United States)

Curated by E.J. Lightman and Anne O'Callaghan
Essay by Gil McElroy

THE TREE MUSEUM • DOE LAKE ROAD • MUSKOKA

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PREFACE

Each year The Tree Museum Collective invites a number of artists to its site in Muskoka to create new site-specific works. Our goal: to establish links between contemporary art and nature.

Through these works the artists share their vision and ideas. The works become powerful tools, providing a bridge to our understanding of “self” and connecting us to this entity we call *nature*. The creation of this bridge requires commitment and sensitivity on the part of the participating artists. With *Finding the Intimate in Nature* (2002) and *Shelter: Inside-Out* (2003), 10 artists from Canada and abroad, took up the challenge. The result is a group of thought provoking works which have evolved through an extended dialogue with the site.


But our perception of the Tree Museum does not end with the installation of the new works. The essays and photographs become part of the ongoing *art experience*. Like the artists, the writers and the photographers bring their understanding of contemporary art to bear on the nature/culture discourse.

This catalogue brings together three essays that respond to the works on site and are a reflection of the writers’ views of the idea of *nature/landscape*. Dot Tuer, Betty Yee-Wan Cheung and Gil McElroy, like the artists themselves, create bridges and pathways that enrich our experience of contemporary art and its relationship to nature.

So the catalogue, *The Tree Museum 2002-2003*, becomes a work in and of itself, as richly layered as the installations that it pays homage to.

We wish to thank all of the artists and writers in the 2002/2003 exhibitions for accepting the challenges and providing us with a very special stimulus. We are also grateful for the generous support of Mentor College, the Ontario Arts Council, the Canada Council for the Arts, Art Steinberg and Prins Bernard Cultuurfonds, The Netherlands.

EJ Lightman and I assume responsibility for the curatorial and coordination of The Tree Museum Collective exhibitions but with much needed assistance from collective members, volunteers and supporters. We would like to begin by recognizing the contributions of; J. Lynn Campbell, designer of the catalogue, the invitations and all advertising; Roger Henriques, who is our web sponsor and designer; and videographers Richard Brown and Bruce Gareh for their video documentation of the 2002 and 2003 performances respectively. We are grateful to Carolyn Bell Farrell, curator of the Koffler Gallery, for her ongoing invaluable curatorial advice and support.

Finally a special thank you to Alan Tarant, Lyla Rye and John Dickson for their work in maintaining the site and the installations, and Jean Steinberg, our volunteer coordinator in 2003. 

Anne O'Callaghan and EJ Lightman

For The Tree Museum Collective.

METAMORPHOSIS AND METAPHOR: THE RE-ENCHANTMENT OF NATURE AND ART

It was one of those late August days when I drove from Barry's Bay, across Alquonquin Park towards Gravenhurst, to visit the Tree Museum. Summer growth was at its height, enveloped in that breathless moment of fullness before the first signs of autumn appear in a lone leaf turned crimson or a sudden chill at night. Above a shimmering horizon of misty hills, a sky without clouds seemed capable of swallowing the void within one in an infinite expanse of brilliant blue. Lakes nestled in the folds of the Pre-Cambrian shield were as still as glass, their mirror surfaces reflecting the sapling growth of poplar and birch crowded along rocky shorelines. Leaving the Western gates of the Park, I drove along winding side roads shaded by canopies of white pine needles and dappled in sunlight, to find, almost by accident, a small sign pointing towards the Tree Museum. I turned onto a dirt road that narrowed to a laneway, with stones jutting out of hardened earth. Like the logging roads in northern Ontario that one imagines will lead to an uninhabited lake, or perhaps to an abandoned homestead deep in the woods, but end in a rough clearing of scrub bush and stumps, the laneway seemed to go on and on forever without a lake or building in sight. It was only when I rounded a turn in the road and saw before me Badanna Zack's *A Mound of Cars*—rusty wrecks piled into earth above a rocky outcrop—that I knew I had arrived. It was not a museum in the traditional sense that I had found, but a landscape inhabited by artworks.

When we speak the word museum, what image is conjured, what floats to the surface of consciousness? Perhaps I was thinking on that long drive through Alquonquin Park of the Royal Ontario Museum, with its dark panelled wood vitrines, dusty glass containers for butterflies pinned to cardboard, wings outstretched but immobilized. Or of its diorama of Ontario's boreal forest that once existed where farmland now stretches to meet the monotonous sameness of subdivisions, earth stripped of its vegetation. Museums such as the ROM are a curious by-product of a nature shaped by culture and then classified and preserved within cut stone walls erected by a patrician class. The Tree Museum, on the other hand, exhibits artifacts of contemporary artistic expression within the forest itself, turning the equation of nature and culture, preservation and classification, inside out. What I was driving through was an environment in which art by necessity had to interact with, rather than mediate, a world of trees and moss and rocks.

Much has been written about museums and their staging of nature, the point being that it is only within the climate controlled rooms of the museum that one can insure the taming of nature's unpredictability. From the 1500s when Curiosity Cabinets served as a cultural framework for a Renaissance fascination with newly discovered lands to the Enlightenment era of 1700s when naturalists fanned out across the globe to classify the flora and fauna of its distant reaches, the mediation of the natural world had been predicated upon the ordering of things. Through this process of recording, naming and collecting, the ascendancy of natural history has contributed to what Michel Foucault describes as a "system of identities and the order of differences existing between natural entities"¹ that constituted the emergence of modernity and a "new field of visibility."² Where once metaphor made manifest the resemblances between spirit and matter, things and beings, this new field of visibility made manifest their separation. While museums such as the ROM serve to reinforce this field of visibility, what struck me that August afternoon as I wandered through the woods of the Tree Museum and stumbled upon artworks as if by chance—carvings in rocks, cars embedded in earth, bundles of sticks, rocks piled like cairns—was that the separation between things and beings, spirit and matter, was being called into question.

When I finally reached the end of the road that led through the open-air museum, I found both a cabin and a lake lying in waiting. A wild flower meadow sloped gently down to the marshy bay of the lake in front of the cabin, melding seamlessly into the woods that surrounded it. Scattered amongst the meadow's long harvest gold grasses and bramble bushes were large white balls made of plastic netting—perhaps a foot each in diameter. While clearly wrought by human hand, they had the appearance of having blown there in the wind, like oversized milkweed pods that Monarch butterflies feed upon. The artist who had made them, Ellen Dijkstra, was one of two sculptors who had been commissioned to produce new works for the Tree Museum in 2002. Dijkstra, from the Netherlands, had been staying at the cabin for several weeks, wrapping the plastic netting round and round like skeins of wool to create the balls that she would leave behind to endure autumn rains and winter gales when she returned to the Netherlands. She came out

1. Michel Foucault. *The Order of Things*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972, p. 136.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 132.



ELLEN DIJKSTRA

Extraterrestrial (2002)

Fifty ball-like objects of variables sizes, industrial white plastic packing netting.



this historical trajectory of naming, recording and collecting had come full circle, returning the collector's archive to an immediacy of place. In turn, I as the viewer was no longer an observer of a nature harnessed to a culture of classification, but a traveller witness to the unexpected and the marvellous.

While Dijkstra had almost finished installing the fifty spheres she had spent hours making, Lyla Rye, the other sculptor featured in the exhibition, was still at work on her piece in the basement of the cabin when I arrived. She was cutting words out of a huge rubber mat ring that she would later carry to the edge of the meadow clearing and place around a Juniper bush. Like Dijkstra, Rye's first associations with the landscape she encountered at the Tree Museum were fanciful and mythic, with Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's fairy tale, *The Juniper Tree*, the initial impetus for her artwork. Unlike Dijkstra, however, who had transformed her intuitive reaction to the landscape into an abstract metaphor for an enchanted nature, Rye's process of metamorphosis was grounded in the retelling of local history. The words that Rye was cutting into the rubber ring that day were culled from her childhood memories of summers spent in the area and a local farmer's reminiscences of tent caterpillar infestations and DDT sprayings and the disappearance of the small green frogs and their regeneration after the banning of the pesticide. Once installed in-situ, the black rubber ring served as both amulet and archive: a testimonial inscription of an environmental genealogy in which the viewer would have to walk round and round the Juniper bush in order to decipher the intertwined stories. In this tracing and retracing of the landscape as a source of memory, Rye had transformed the toxic waste of rubber tires into a scroll of words that venerated the earth they lay upon. Through her metamorphosis from fairy tale to remembrance, she had created a concrete metaphor for the symbiotic conjoining of things and beings.

Like any traveller entrusted with describing that which is yet to be recorded and named—in this instance the works of Dijkstra and Rye—I had brought to my journey preconceptions of what I would find. While the lineage of the natural history museum formed part of my frame of reference, the legacy of the land art movement of the 1970s formed another. In the work of artists

of the cabin to greet me, and together we walked in the meadow amongst her tangled balls of plastic netting.

She told me that the first time she visited the Tree Museum, what attracted her most about the landscape was not the forest itself but the way in which the sunlit meadow clearing dissolved into the thick dark shadows of the woods. The first image that this border between clearing and woods conjured in her mind was one of sheer white cloth floating in air, traces of tree nymphs or midnight witches who could slip through the porous boundaries of matter and spirit. In the metamorphosis from this image into the objects that lay before me, it was as if Dijkstra had found a metaphor for enchantment, casting a spell through her transformation of cloth into twine that drew us back to a time when nature was animated by folklore and a sensual energy filled the air. At once familiar and strange, natural and unnatural, these artificial spheres did not draw attention to the differences between spirit and matter but to their resemblances. The sensation that the natural world and its cultural expression were not separate but intimately intertwined had become embodied in the material residue of the white spheres resting lightly on the late summer foliage.

In the Renaissance age of discovery it was the traveler who was witness to the marvelous and incommensurable diversity of things and beings that lay outside the European grid of knowledge. In the tales the traveler brought home of strange lands and peoples lay proof that such things and beings existed. By the 1700s, however, the role of the traveler as an eye-witness guarantor of truth had been supplanted by that of the collector, who gathered things rather than stories to be carried back and classified in the metropole's museums. With the publication of Linnaeus's *Systema naturae* in 1735, this global project to harness an unruly difference to a discursive hegemony of scientific objectivity severed nature from its last vestiges of folklore and local specificity. To be a witness one had to be present, cohabiting the same time and space as the natural world one was describing. The collector's task, on the other hand, was to remove these things from their place in time and space and to reinscribe them within an empirical framework that separated nature from its cultural associations. In Dijkstra's dispersal of objects amongst the meadow grasses,


**LYLA RYE***Locus* (2002)

Black industrial rubber with hand cut text,
 outer circumference of circle 47 feet (14 meters),
 diameter of circle 15 feet (4.5 meters).

such as Robert Smithson, who had sought to escape the confinement of the gallery by relocating art in a natural setting, lay the antecedents of the Tree Museum's site-specific installations. Yet in my encounter with the artworks of Dijkstra and Rye, the disparities were as glaring as were the connections to an art historical legacy. Works such as Smithson's carved landmarks out of the vastness of the American landscape to expand a field of visibility. Monumental in conception and in gesture, they laid bare the boundaries between nature and culture that modernity had imposed. In contrast, Dijkstra and Rye's installations, nestled in the crevices and folds of the meadow clearing, were unassuming and humble, barely distinguishable from the natural environment they inhabited. Privileging tactility over vision, and metaphor over monument, they established a delicate balance between nature and culture that dissolved rather than laid bare the boundaries between the two. Through their intimate and subtle gestures, the artists made manifest that which modernity's field of visibility had eclipsed: a re-enchantment of nature and art that binds things and beings, spirit and matter, together.

By the time I left the Tree Museum that day, the sun hung low in the sky, and the dark shadows that the woods had sheltered began to spread to the meadow clearing. As I drove back across Alquonquin Park, the forest was now a dense green mat: all silhouette and contour arraigned against the descending night. From this indiscernable merging of earth and trees in the fading light, a childhood memory emerged of a dirt road rutted and overgrown with weeds. The road lay behind my cottage in the Ottawa Upper Valley, and led several miles into the woods until it ended in a meadow clearing where a homestead had once stood and the remnants of an apple orchard still grew. To reach the meadow as a child, I would walk through groves of maples thick with entangled underbrush and burnt pine stumps from an ancient forest fire. About halfway to the meadow clearing, deep in the forest, there was a hunter's shack, made of rough hewed wood and a tar patch roof. I would look through the boarded windows half expecting to see to an old man, gun in hand, only to find a few utensils left behind by hunters who slept there each fall. After my furtive peeping, I would hurry onwards, anxious to reach the meadow. As a child, the deserted

shack was ominous and threatening, while the meadow seemed enchanted and comforting, with its faint traces of human history embedded in the apple trees gone to seed and wildflowers growing over the crumbling stone-cut foundation of the homestead.

In that memory of another road, and another time, what had surfaced were the inchoate fears and fantasies of childhood submerged in the discrete ordering of nature and culture. Although I could not articulate it then, perhaps I had sensed in the hunter's shack the material evidence of a predatory attitude to nature as a thing to be possessed: as something separate from the human beings who stalked the woods with their guns. My embrace of the meadow as a safe haven of enchantment, on the other hand, evoked a way of seeing nature as an intimate part of my own psyche, and being. As children, we grasp at nature's enchantment intuitively; as adults, this perception slips away from us as we internalize the ordering of things and beings. Its re-enchantment lies in our capacity to call forth from the woods, like Dijkstra and Rye's installations, metamorphoses and metaphors that transform a way of seeing nature as subject to a predatory knowledge to that of a childhood refuge for imagination. The first impulses of Dijkstra's and Rye's encounters with the landscape were to reach back in time to fairy tales and stories of spirit worlds. In so doing, they have given us as travellers and as viewers artworks that bear witness to the regenerative cycle of our psyche. Their artworks lead us back to a time and place where nature is a sanctuary for different ways of seeing, and being, in a culture predicated upon severing its origins in the natural world. 

Dot Tuer

1. Michel Foucault. *The Order of Things*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972, p. 136.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

A SYMPHONIC PASSAGE THROUGH SENSUALITY, INGENUITY AND NATURE

Up a tree-lined, foot-worn trail, the unsuspecting theatregoers ascend on a sun-soaked, lichen-covered, Pre-Cambrian granite stage. Like garden gnomes, they scatter themselves on the lush and patchy ground, then crouch in nooks and perch on knolls just below the naturally formed stage. Since its inception, the Tree Museum has been a permanent exhibition ground for large open-air installations. The performance at hand with its eclectic blend of avant-garde dance and experimental music promises to introduce something as yet unseen to the picturesque natural surroundings. On the bill: **Wilson Chik**, a multi-disciplinary instructor, artist and performer, showcasing his own transposed and redefined Butoh, together with an original musical collaboration by **Barry Prophet**, sculptor, composer and percussionist and **Janice Pomer**, dancer, musician and writer.

In modern pop culture, the reactionary offspring of Japanese Kabuki was given 15 minutes of limelight when pop icon Madonna incorporated the dance form into her performances in 2001. "It's a theatrical presentation of my music. I've taken inspiration from many things—martial arts, Flamenco, country and western, punk, rock 'n' roll, Butoh dance and the circus." But back in 1959, the dark emergence of a new dance came into the public view when the co-founder of Butoh, Tatsumi Hijikata, took a defiant if not radical departure from the dance arts of his day. By bringing together his knowledge of western and avant-garde movement, his passion and lust for sex and death, his disdain for paradoxes in tradition, politics and even the notion of beauty, Hijikata undertook to provoke his contemporaries and his audience. This reactionary and even scandalous behaviour led to his temporary ban from the Japanese Dance Association and as well as lasting stigmatic after effects on mainstream acceptance of Butoh.

Today, as new generations of Butoh dancers emerge under the tutelage of Akiko Motofuji, Hijikata's 75 year old widow, some of them—including Hong Kong resident, Chik—have been working on building a momentum for a resurgence of Butoh with the prophetic vision of overcoming the contradictions of the dance's shadowy beginnings. Chik hopes to be one of these pioneers and speaks fondly of his teacher, whose unrelenting vision still inspires the eloquence of her fine and exquisitely beautiful movement. Chik says, "Motofuji-san has made it a point to say to

me: 'I see China in your movement. You go and transform Butoh to be part of your story. Go and redefine Butoh.'" Participating in recent Hong Kong's Asian Arts Festivals and Le French May International Festival, Chik has choreographed and performed his own movements and dance with a sense of sympathetic understanding of nature, both human and environmental. With a contemporary sensibility and approachable warmth, young Butoh performers now invoke thought and emotion from their audience—a stark contrast to the anger and antagonistic impulse of their predecessors.

At the suggestion of exhibition curator, Anne O'Callaghan, Chik was introduced to the sculptural musical artistry of Prophet and Pomer whose exploratory work is a synergistic collaboration and intuitive investigation into the natural and material worlds to seek out musical plausibility in otherwise implausible "instruments". Like Chik, Prophet and Pomer's creative path, has been innovative and broad ranging in their search for unique voice. Prophet, a multi-disciplinary artist with music at the core of his creativity, has for 25 years performed his own compositions on instruments and sculptures that he has created. Since 1996 Prophet and Pomer have collaborated on composing and performing music that combines traditional and artist-made instruments, including Prophet's own microtonally tuned glass sculptures.

For their collaborative performance, Chik, Prophet and Pomer were confronted with the question of how to bring together their respective yet disparate arts and place the results into the thematic and contextual environments of the exhibition. In all, the 3 artists had a matter of days to brainstorm and fuse together their artistic ideologies and styles into accord with one another.

Just in front of the early autumn green and rust hues of towering spruce and fir trees, Prophet and Pomer position themselves on each side of the "stage" as the spectators admire their oddly confounding collection of exotic, ethnic and invented instruments. The performance begins with *Site and Sound* a new composition created for the Tree Museum and new arrangements of *Sparrow* and *Awakening*, both original works composed by Prophet.

Sound from hand-made woodwinds, glass lithophones, whirling vacuum hoses and dragged ventilation pipes seem as peculiarly new to the ear as Prophet and Pomer's ever-changing physical interaction with their instruments are to the eyes. When Pomer plays Prophet's *Bamboo Quiver* sound construction, she intertwines herself and makes the instrument one with her body. Waves of twangy warping metals, lingering cymbals, scratchy giant bean maracas and clicking bamboo head dresses flow out around the audience—a naturally ambient musical air which has only just been released into the wind.

Behind the sounds, through the clustered forest backdrop, there is a hand and then an arm and then the crest of a head emerging from the thicket. Chik's head leans forward and down and then rocks in a slowly managed syncopated beat with the breathy music. His body is lean and long and deeply toned. His resolutely minimalist costume is a layering of skins. First there is a black—so thin that it is transparent. This outer layer of filmy black scarcely covers the torso and it reveals an under layer of stunning turquoise, which like the first skin is soft and flowing but unlike it, with its subtle sculptural, twisted sideways tail. This gesturing appendage idiosyncratically rises away from the exposed curvature and tightly strung third layer skin of the buttocks and legs.

With his semi-clothed creature, Chik creates something which is neither human in spirit nor animal in body, yet his gestures are vaguely reminiscent of some native North American dance, which celebrates the ever-present relationship of mankind with his animal brothers. Each sweeping motion of the hand is counter-balanced with a tensing in the neck followed by a flexing of the shoulder. Lunging, leaping, braking and bobbing, there is a contrasting array of emotionally rendered statuesque ponderings on little more than the passage of time. Chik emulates the sometimes-struggle and sometimes-ease of life by marrying elements of seductiveness, control, unpredictability, temperance and intelligence solely through the synchronicity of his body.

Throughout the theatrical installation, there is a conscious awareness for both the performers and their audience that there is a profound and indescribable beauty in every newly discovered



WILSON CHIK WAI CHI



JANICE POMER and BARRY PROPHET



experience. It doesn't matter if the experience is felt by the eyes, the ears, the body or the mind, but simply an acknowledgement of our desires to take in the world around us. Prophet and Pomer's improvisational "remix" of audible nature calls and samplings of acoustic euphoria paints a lush voice for Chik's speechless character. It is as though a creature of nature with its mere presence on the earth could provoke the anger of the wind, ask the rain to sing and even urge the trees to dance.

This is, for Chik, Prophet and Pomer, their first opportunity to team up on their experimentally organic collaboration and, although their future paths may never cross again, their shared symphonic passage through a timeless sensuality, boundless ingenuity and compassion for nature will cast a lasting spell on even the staunchest audience of city-dwelling garden gnomes. ✨

Betty Yee-Wan Cheung

HOUSE & GARDEN (SOME SHELTERED THOUGHTS)

A garden without a house is like a carriage without a horse.¹

—Joseph Rykwert

The word "garden" functions as both noun and verb, and it is difficult, at first glance, to include the Tree Museum under the first part of the definition: the garden-as-noun. Here, on a two hundred acre site located at the end of a two kilometer dirt road just to the east of Gravenhurst, Ontario, "garden" isn't really a description that comes readily to mind. This is a place, after all, comprised of a mixed bag of forest—varieties of deciduous and evergreen trees—that is primarily second and third growth; a place with a thin layer of the poor soil that managed to accumulate over time between the rocky granite outcroppings of the Pre-Cambrian Shield that lies beneath our feet; a place that was geologically striated by ancient retreating glaciers and so dotted with marshy bogs and wetlands, and innumerable lakes, ponds, rivers, and streams; a place of fierce seasonal clouds of mosquitoes and blackflies, and equally fierce seasonal heat and cold. Not what you might at first consider to be garden material.

There is, however, another contextual layer to consider, one of more recent vintage that alters and reworks the fit. We think of gardens as tended places, deliberate and intentional—even the Edenic garden was a place so mythologically created—and while this region which encompasses the site of the Tree Museum still bears nature's ecological marks (for the time being, anyway), to a large degree it has been succumbed to garden-as-verb, and so been actively altered, reworked, and even manufactured into a noun. This part of Canada, some two hundred kilometers north of Toronto, has long been considered a summer and winter playground, once just for well-heeled vacationers escaping the oppressive summers of Toronto, now still pretty much available to anyone who can afford to buy an increasingly expensive chunk of it and then foot the bill for a remodel of the place. The Tree Museum, then, is not located in an area of untrammelled nature (if such places still actually exist), and by its specific employment as a space for the siting of art works, it has further been aesthetically attended to and curatorially framed. This is indeed a garden, albeit one of unconventional cultural proportions.

**FRANCESCA VIVENZA***Outpost* (2003)

Overlapping rectangular painted wooden forms on metal plate

164" x 37.1/2" x 6"

416.1/2 x 95 x 15 cm

Over the course of the year 2003, artists/curators Anne O'Callaghan and E.J. Lightman worked towards building this garden the Rykwertian house that has long been called for. The dwelling they have constructed is one of metaphors, a structure built so as to make aesthetic accommodation for the additions on this site of new site-specific works by five artists. The curatorially dimensioned house in which all these works find sanctuary is called *Shelter Inside-Out*. Within it, there is indeed room enough for all.

Now, the word "shelter", like "garden," is itself both a noun and a verb (and the root of an adjective, for that matter). It functionally flickers back and forth between (even inside or out of, if you will) either the denoting of a thing or an action, between pointing to the substantiality of a tangible object or signifying the ephemerality of a performative deed. For *Shelter Inside-Out*, it is new site-specific works by **Francesca Vivenza**, **Anne-Marie Bénéteau**, **Christy Thompson**, **Marguerite Larmand**, and **T.S. Anand** that aesthetically prod at the restrictive boundaries of such either/or definitiveness, or figuratively rework its floorplan.



One of the bogs on the Tree Museum property is abutted by a bold and abrupt outcropping of granite that is the setting for **Francesca Vivenza's** *Outpost*. Essentially consisting of two flat, rectangular wooden forms that overlap one another to form the shape of a longer rectangle, the work's appearance as well as its setting cantilevering out toward (but not above) the waters of the small bog from atop the adjacent granite outcrop lend some credence to its description by many who see it for the first time as resembling a diving board.

But such narrow contextualization works against the piece's broader capabilities, for much more is at play here. To encounter *Outpost* is to come upon it from behind so that the work is situated between you and the bog. It's all actually quite a picturesque scene—rocky granite terrain in the foreground, the wetland of the bog below, and the forest of northern Ontario beyond forming a background—that frames this brightly coloured rectangle. *Outpost* itself makes for a jarring and

somewhat unexpected intrusion in the midst of it all. To mix some metaphors, it is the proverbial fish out of water: a plain geometric shape that sticks out like a sore thumb amidst the more complex and subtle shapes nature prefers. It is a true sign of human incursion into the wild. Our picturesque view is disrupted by the unnatural presence of this rectangular artefact.

Outpost is a self-conscious assertion that ideas of what constitutes a scenic landscape or what makes up the picturesque are, when you come right down to it, as artificial and contrived as Vivenza's rectangle. *Outpost* intrudes in nature as does any human artefact, be it the garbage we too often leave behind or, more to the curatorial point, something along the lines of a house—a bungalow, say, perhaps part of a subdivision of “little boxes” pushing their way ever further into what little remains of nature. Even the cozy and comforting ideas of landscape and the picturesque must give way before the onslaught of their plain geometry. Vivenza calls *Outpost* “a means of passage from one place to another.” Indeed, as a footprint of incipient human incursion, as a measure of a place's transition from natural to artefactual state, it is just that.



There is a housing subdivision of sorts out here. In a meadow, **Anne-Marie Bénéteau** has installed *Meadowvale Glen Estates*, a site-specific agglomeration of sculptural objects that both evoke and critique the pervasive intrusion of housing developments—of middle-class shelter—further and further into the quasi-natural world of farmland and beyond into actual natural habitat. The historical razing of the Ontario forests for lumber had at very least been ameliorated by second and even third-growth forests that rose up. But even such second-hand nature is being entirely undone by the economic and social appeal of the single-family dwelling and our need to cluster together in them.

Where Francesca Vivenza's *Outpost* teeters at the edge of an aesthetically abstract (even conceptual) registration of the intrusion and impact of the artefactual upon the natural world, *Meadowvale Glen Estates* is bluntly representational. Bénéteau borrows from the field of animal architecture,

ANNE-MARIE BÉNÉTEAU

Meadowvale Glen Estates (2003)

42 habitats made with Winterstone, pigments, twigs & leaves, mounted on cut saplings, in various shapes and sizes.



particularly focusing upon the hives and nests painstakingly constructed by social insects. Like wasps, creatures that construct architecturally complex and sophisticated dwellings of paper or even mud that Bénéteau admits leave her in awe.

Bénéteau's habitations are things on a stick: large, roughly shaped spheres, formed from an adobe or mud-like substance mixed with pieces of natural vegetation like dried grasses and small twigs, skewered on the end of a piece of tree branch itself stuck into the ground. Each of the spheres is puckered with small, crater-like entry point. I'm home, honey.

It's a colony of a kind, a tightly-knit gathering here in the midst of the meadow. But of its intended inhabitants we know nothing. Like almost any typical suburban subdivision, *Meadowvale Glen Estates* is isolated and disassociated from its surroundings, and just like such residential neighborhoods on virtually any weekday, it is utterly devoid of life. While there may be no place like home, it's an equation disturbingly distorted as our sense of "place" becomes increasingly disconnected from the idea of "home". Though Bénéteau's spheres will no doubt come to be inhabited by some freeloading species never ones to turn their noses up at ready-made lodging, for now they little more than lonely encampment of empty vessels, signifiers, if you will, of how there really is no home like place.



Near the edge of Ryde Lake, **Christy Thompson's** *Borealis* is situated in a small clearing almost entirely surrounded by trees but which is open along one side to a path that runs down between the lakeside and the Tree Museum main building on the higher ground above. Nature of course abhors a vacuum, so the clearing has itself completely filled in with tall grasses that are over a meter in height. Gazing into the clearing from the edge of the path, some objects seem to be floating just above the top of the grass. They look for all the world like stones. Rocks.

Walking into the grass for a closer inspection of the installation reveals that while they do indeed resemble rocks (and there are four of them), they are in fact synthetic (albeit, representational)



CHRISTY THOMPSON

Borealis (2003)

4 rock like objects made from fiberglass covered in fluorescent paint, which briefly illuminates at night. Mounted on 4 foot stainless sheet shafts,



objects, each of which is set atop a long metal shaft that is itself anchored into the ground below. The small diameters and extended lengths of the shafts, combined with the lightness of the artefactual rocks atop them, means that it doesn't take much to set them swaying in a motion reminiscent of the movement of the surrounding grasses; a good wind will do the job quite well.

Maybe that is all incidental to what is really going on. What seems to be front and center is a strong element of theatricality and stagecraft. *Borealis* is only approachable from one direction (equivalent to the theatrical "downstage"), and the opening into the clearing from the path loosely functions as a kind of proscenium. We enter *Borealis* theatrically.

Or perhaps more precisely, we see it theatrically. *Borealis* is in large part built upon the precepts of illusion. It is a constructed and directed kind of seeing Thompson would have us engage in, evidenced in her sculptural articulation of a series of spurious geological objects carefully sited within an actual natural setting, and via the nighttime visibility of the rock artefacts which fluoresce when briefly illumined at night by a nearby light (a sight few visitors to this place would actually have the opportunity to witness). We've long used nature as a setting or even shelter for our dreams, fantasies, and illusions. And we've long projected whatever psychological, philosophical, social, political shapes we want onto it, rendering the natural world little more than a stage on which we might observe big and little dramas of Life playing themselves out. However, with *Borealis*, the cat is out of the proverbial bag. Thompson tries to fool no-one, for this is a self-conscious theatricality in which we take part. In the end, there are simply artificial rocks and real grasses swaying in a wind that is of no ideological use to anybody.



Out some distance from the main Tree Museum site, just off the access road in a small clearing in a sheltered glade of maples, is another stage. From the road, **Marguerite Larmand's** *Butoh* is an initially unnerving sight to behold: five life-size figures, all in a row, suspended from the trees.

The figures are all attached to a single long and narrow tree trunk that has been denuded of any



MARGUERITE LAMAND

Butoh (2003)

Five life-size figures made from wax and sisal cloth, wearing acrobat harnesses and suspended from a horizontal tree trunk.



branches and is attached at either end to two supporting trees. In the clearing that the horizontal trunk spans, the figures hang and gently sway in the breeze or when caused to do so by visitors (human or animal). Larmand has stated that the inspiration for *Butoh* comes from the Sankai Juku Dance Troupe, a Japanese-based group best known for their balletic performances done while being lowered from the sides of buildings (which resulted, years ago, in the death of one of the dancers), so theatre, drama, and the idea of the stage are integral to the work.

But metaphors proliferate in this altered stand of maples, one of which has everything to do with the idea of home. What we essentially have, here, is a kind of sketch or outline for the concept of a home (stay with me, now). The long horizontal timber spanning the clearing is arguably analogous to a long central ridge poll of a roof held in place by supporting columns (the standing maples on either side). The roof itself could be likened to the canopy of trees overhead. If we push the analogy to a possible conclusion, the figures hanging suspended in the clearing could be likened to, say, a household finding shelter from the elements, bound together by the meaning of “home”.

In Larmand’s piece, the tree trunk spanning the clearing and holding the figures suspended above the ground is bowed in the middle by their weight. If we tweak our analogy, perhaps this expression of gravity might be representative of the emotional and psychological weight of the sheltered inhabitants straining things to the point of some kind of possible (or even eventual) collapse. *Butoh* does, after all, have an air of impermanence to it: the ridgepole is tied off with rope at either end (and not permanently fastened), and the figures are likewise simply roped into position. Entropy and decay will eventually have their inevitable way. As with everything, this world too will collapse. “Life is a bridge,” the saying goes. “Build no house upon it.” But we do, and it does. Always.



Where the edge of the forest meets a large clearing, **T.S. Anand** has situated *INTENT 1: Standing with Trees*, a series of tall tubular “tents” (punned on in the work’s title) made of fine gauze (mos-



T.S. ANAND

INTENT I: Standing with Trees (2003)
(detail)

quito netting) suspended from tree branches. Each makes for an interior diameter just the size of a single standing person. There is an audio component to this work. Each tent is equipped with headphones connected to a CD player that offers us the calm, measured voice of Anand urging us toward awareness of our breathing and our stance, toward a self-conscious sense of just exactly where it is on this planet we have set our feet.

Now, “shelter” is ultimately a fugitive thing, temporary in every possible sense. No home is forever (“life is a bridge,” etc.). That is especially the case when it is constructed from a fine netting, flimsy and of little real value against any of the elements. But these shelters of Anand aren’t intended merely to poetically sketch out the idea of the impermanence of things (though they do just that quite well). Rather, they are here to stop us in our tracks, to root us here, if only for a few minutes. And standing within these filmy, insubstantial things thinking of our lungs inflating and rhythmically deflating, and of the force of gravity that links our feet on the ground to the very core of our planet far below, there is an infinitesimally tiny chance we just might be forever changed. Transfigured, even.

Our analogy, then, could very well be the Eastern Tent Caterpillar. It’s a social insect that once hatched from a large mass of eggs in the early spring, sets to work with its brothers and sisters spinning a silken tent in the crotch of fruit trees, a shelter for use when the weather is too hot, too cold, too wet, or when not out feeding on the leaves of the host tree.

But the tent-as-shelter is later abandoned, the caterpillar instead spinning a very different tent: a silken cocoon in which it pupates and emerges in mid-summer, transformed into a moth. Shelter become a place of metamorphosis. Tent-as-transcendence.

In a companion performance piece, *INTENT II: Tent Dance*, Anand performs solo accompanied only by a small, lightweight dome tent, the kind so beloved of campers. It begins as an object of play, but later in the dance undergoes its own metamorphosis and becomes an object of labour that Anand carries, Atlas-like, upon her back. In the end, the shelter-as-deadweight is abandoned,



T.S ANAND

LEFT: *INTENT II: Tent Dance* (2003)
Performance by T. S. Anand with tent,
with broadcast sound (fifteen minutes).

INTENT I: Standing with Trees (2003)
Five Single-Occupancy Units: mosquito
nets, real estate flyer boxes, brassiere
straps, portable CD players, headsets,
multi-channel/tri-lingual recorded
sound (five minutes).

INTENT III: Gallery Installation (2003)
Artifacts from performance, video and
slide projection (continuous), digital
prints on canvas, wall text from ashes.

and then literally deconstructed as Anand disconnects the nylon shell of the tent from the fiberglass poles which have given it hemispheric shape, and allows the entire thing to fall into a useless heap on the ground.

An expression of the inevitability of entropy and decay, or the idea of shelter transcended: Anand leaves it marvelously unclear and so leaves us to the task of constructing from it a meaning we can inhabit. But in Anand's work, as in the pieces by Vivenza, Bénêteau, Thompson, and Larmand, there is a pointed reminder that we should be careful where (and how) we build such houses, as, in the end, we may very well find ourselves forced to seek shelter elsewhere. ³¹

Gil McElroy

1. Joseph Rykwert, *On Adam's House in Paradise: The Idea of the Primitive Hut in Architectural History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1981), 13.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

2002

WILSON CHIK WAI CHI is a movement explorer based in Hong Kong. His experience comes from mystical traditions, Butoh, fitness & integrative well being, dreams and visual arts. His simple approach to life is to balance the act of doing and being. His movement work has been featured in international fringe festivals, cross cultural exchanges and solo & choreographed productions. Furthermore, Wilson is one of the co-founders of Meli-Melo Limited, a living arts company whose main focus is to encourage and support individuals in pursuit of their ideas through creative channels such as ART JAM, mixed media presentations, exhibitions, theatre and performance as well as workshops for the community and corporations.

"If a pine tree in nature stands in his own radiance and is nothing more than a pine tree, then how could a human with a 'higher' consciousness not see his/her true nature and accept?"

ELLEN DIJKSTRA lives and works in Rotterdam. A graduate of The Academie van Beeldende Kunsten, Rotterdam, her work has been presented in the Netherlands, Germany, France, Spain and Canada. Selected exhibitions include: *Bounce*, a Canadian and Netherlands Art Exchange at SNACC, Winnipeg and Open Space, Victoria, BC (1995); Niggendijker Gröninge (1995); *Onderwater*, SBKD, Drunen (1996); *Rebound*, Museum-park, Kunst Complex, Rotterdam (1997); *W-Industries-Tuinieren W139*, Amsterdam (1995); *Verrassende gewassen*, Zonnemaire Buitengewoon, Zonnemaire (1997); *Bloeman*, Kasteel van Rhoon, Rhoon (1999); *4 Dutch Artists*, Leo Kamen Gallery, Toronto, Ontario (2000); *Dresses*, SBK KNSM eiland, Amsterdam (2001); *Occupying Space*, Ruimte Bezetten, Rotterdam (2001). Ellen is a founding member of Kunst

Complex Foundation, Rotterdam. She has shown in Kunst Complex group exhibitions (1981-1999), and all of the international exchange projects arranged by the Kunst Complex, in Germany, Spain and Canada.

JANICE POMER has been performing and teaching in the fields of dance, theatre and music since 1976. She has led choreography, modern dance and professional development workshops for the National Ballet of Canada's Education Dept, Young People's Theatre, the Canadian Children's Dance Theatre, the University of Regina, University of Waterloo, York University and the Royal Academy of Dance. She co-founded and directed the Toronto Festival of Fools (1979-81) and Jabberwock Full Theatre Co. (1979-83). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s Pomer choreographed and performed eight full length multidisciplinary touring productions with composer, percussionist, sculptor Barry Prophet. Since 1996 Janice and Barry have been composing and performing music that combines traditional and artist-made instruments. In 2001 Pomer's book *Perpetual Motion: Creative Movement Exercises for Dance and Dramatic Arts* was released internationally by Human Kinetics USA.

BARRY PROPHET is a composer, percussionist, and sculptor whose music has appeared in galleries and theatres in Canada, the United States and Europe. Creating unique sounds since 1979, he has exhibited and performed on his percussion sculptures *Glass Box*, *Revolving Tone Door* and *Transparent Tone Arch* at the Art Gallery of Windsor (1986); Bloomsburg Theatre, Bloomsburg USA (1989); the Art Gallery of Algoma, Sault Ste. Marie, (1989, 1991, 1992); Thunder Bay Art Gallery (1989, 1990, 1991); White Water Gallery, North Bay (1989); McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinberg (1994); Pekao Gallery, Toronto (1997) and the Canadian Sculpture Centre, Toronto (2002). Barry's micro tonally tuned glass lithophones have been featured in performance venues throughout the country and his 1997 recording *Crystal Bones*

(CD) has been choreographed to by international dance artists. Barry has led traditional and experimental percussion programs for students and educators across Canada since 1983 and is currently the Education Director for Music Gallery Institute.

LYLA RYE is a Toronto artist who received her M.F.A. from the San Francisco Art Institute in 1994. She has exhibited across Canada and in the US in sites including a bathroom, a women's prison, a hole in the wall, warehouse basements and on the internet (www.23rdroom.org). Her work has been seen most recently in *Separation Anxieties* at The Grimsby Public Art Gallery and the eyelevelgallery, Halifax, *Domesticate* at The Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax and in a solo exhibition, *Nomadic Architecture* at The Women's Art Resource Centre, Toronto. She exhibited with the collective Nether Mind in all its exhibitions from 1991-1995 and has shown in group exhibitions at the Power Plant, Toronto (1998), The Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon (1999), The Dunlop Art Gallery, Regina (1998) and at The Textile Museum of Canada, Toronto (2001).

DOT TUER is a writer, cultural historian, and Professor at the Ontario College of Art and Design in Toronto, Canada. Her writing on contemporary art concerns the intersections of history, memory, and technology. A collection of her essays, *The Making and Unmaking of History: Reflections on Contemporary Art* is forthcoming from YYZ Press. Ms. Tuer has presented public lectures at the National Gallery of Canada, the DIA Centre for the Arts, the Chicago Institute of the Arts, the Sydney Biennale, and the National Museum of Fine Arts in Argentina, and is the recipient of senior Canada Council and Ontario Arts Council Awards for her critical writing and fiction.

BETTY YEE-WAN CHEUNG has practiced architecture in Ontario and Hong Kong for 14 years and is currently a director of *Meli-Melo Limited*, a multi-disciplinary "living arts" company in Hong Kong. Meli-Melo's driving force is growing

creativity, in part through the development of their socio-leisure-entertainment group painting sessions called *artjamming™*. Her own artistic work has included life drawing, photography and painting. Her works have shown in Hong Kong as part of *Entanglement and Light + Shadow* (2000) as well as her solo exhibition of paintings, *Epic Dreams* (2000). Some of her recent photography and paintings were shown as part of *The Art of Architects* exhibition at the Hong Kong Arts Centre (2002). In 2003, she and Meli-Melo co-founder Wilson Chik published their first book entitled "The Art of Artjamming".

Born in 1965, in Taipei, Betty immigrated to Toronto in 1968, she has been attracted to artistic projects since the age of five. She graduated from the University of Toronto with a Bachelor of Architecture degree in 1989. Since 1993, she has lived and worked in Hong Kong, where she continues to pursue creative projects for their constructive, restorative, balancing and inspirational effects.

2003

T.S. ANAND is an environmentally sensitive, interdimensional artist and art facilitator. Born in Toronto, Tripura immigrated to California and received a BFA in Sculpture; an Advanced Yoga Teaching Credential; and a Master of Fine Arts in Spatial Art. She has taught Art & Technology; Yoga & Bodywisdom; and Intermedia for the University of California in Santa Cruz. Director of *Empty Pedestal Productions* and co-founder of *Sculpted Experience Collaborative*, T.S. Anand exhibits and performs throughout the Bay Area in venues such as the Triton Museum of Santa Clara; WORKS/San Jose; and Luna Groove in San Francisco. She is interested in issues of time and place; she often explores paradoxical relationships; and her work attempts to bridge the gap between internal and external experiences. "Performance art is a transcendental experience."

ANNE-MARIE BÉNÉTEAU: for over twenty years, Bénéteau has been producing work about the impact of humans on nature, and vice-versa. Her work has been shown in solo and group exhibitions nationally. In Toronto she has shown at DeLeon White Gallery, the Red Head, Women's Art Resource Centre, A Space, Workscene and others. Originally from Windsor Ontario, "one of the most industry-affected areas of the country" her work has explored issues around the representation of nature, species diversity and environmental devastation. In her most recent exhibition at the MacLaren Art Centre in Barrie, she created over three-hundred polypropylene pillow-like objects with bird feathers sewed on each one to create a massive tableau of undecipherable hieroglyphics.

MARGUERITE LARMAND became a full-time practicing artist in 1995 following a thirty-five year career in all levels of the teaching profession. Born in a farming community near Midland, Ontario she received a BA in Art and Art History from McMaster University, Hamilton and an MA in Art Education from the State University of New York at Buffalo. Solo exhibitions since 1995 include the Art Gallery of Hamilton, Hamilton Artists' Inc, Burlington Art centre, Glenhyrst Art Gallery of Brant, across Canada in North Bay, Thunder Bay and Edmonton and in Eastern Europe. Larmand's work explores ecological relationships and pervasives that impact on human conditions globally and locally. For the past three years she has been working with water and air in an attempt to mediate widespread anxiety over events centred around these two elements. She deliberately works with fragile and temporal materials believing they best represent the kind of physical reality in which we daily live.

CHRISTY THOMPSON is a sculpture/installation artist who lives and works in Toronto. Recent exhibitions include *House Guests* at The Art Gallery of Ontario in 2001 (Toronto), *Starlings & Caverns* at The Art Gallery of Windsor in 2002 (Windsor) and *Expect Delays* at Artspeak in 2003 (Vancouver).

She is currently the Co-Director of Program-ming at YYZ Artists' Outlet in Toronto.

FRANCESCA VIVENZA graduated at the Academy of Fine Arts of Brera, Milan, Italy, and has been living in Toronto since 1970. Her work has been included in exhibitions throughout Canada, Europe, Cyprus, and the New Library in Alexandria, Egypt. In 1995, Vivenza had a major solo show, *Dive* at The Koffler Gallery, Toronto, curated by Carolyn Bell Farrell. From 1992 to 1998, Vivenza was also the Canadian writer and editor for NEXT Arte e Cultura, an international art magazine published in Rome, Italy. In 2002, Vivenza's FX video *Mother's Tongue* was presented at Arcipelago, X Film Festival of New Images, Rome; En Plein Air Arte Contemporanea, Pinerolo; Naplesfilmfestival, Naples, Italy. *Mother's Tongue*, and Vivenza's one-of-a-kind book works will be exhibited at Lonsdale Gallery, April 2004. Vivenza is represented by Lonsdale Gallery, Toronto.

GIL MCELROY is an independent curator, critic, and poet. His books include *Gravity & Grace: Selected Writing on Contemporary Canadian Art* (Gaspereau Press, 2001), *Dream Pool Essays* (Talonbooks, 2001), and the forthcoming *NonZero Definitions* (Talonbooks, 2004). He currently lives in Colborne, Ontario with his wife Heather.

HAMILTON ARTIST INC. Founded in 1975, Hamilton Artists Inc. is an artist-run centre committed to the presentation, dissemination and support of contemporary visual arts practice in Canada. Now located at 231 Bay St. North, the centre maintains a yearly schedule of seven exhibitions while working collaboratively with other local arts institutions and partners to facilitate or co-curate projects both inside and outside the community.

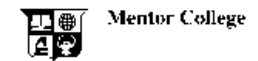
E. J. LIGHTMAN is an artist based in Toronto. She graduated from York University in 1975 and continued postgraduate studies in experimental art at the Ontario College of Art. Since

1977, she has participate in exhibitions throughout Ontario as well as internationally, with work included in group shows presented in Central and South America, Mexico, England, Scotland, Belgium and France. Lightman was active as a member of Workscene Gallery in Toronto from its inception in 1989, curating several group shows including *Art & Technology* (1994). She co-curated *Myths from Cyberspace* (1996/97) with Carolyn Bell Farrell, a two-part exhibition at the Koffler Gallery. E.J. Lightman is the founding member of The Tree Museum (1997) and co-curator of the site-specific outdoor installations at The Tree Museum, Gravenhurst, Ontario (1998 to present). Recent exhibitions include, mixed media works *Natural Icons* (2001) at Tusk Gallery, Toronto and *The Tree Museum Collective: An Alternative Site* (2002) York Quay Gallery at Harbourfront Centre Toronto.

ANNE O'CALLAGHAN was born in Ireland in 1945 and immigrated to Canada in 1968. O'Callaghan's work extends from photo-based installation works to sculpture. Since 1981, her work has been presented in solo and group exhibitions in Ontario and Asia. Recent exhibitions include: site-specific installations at The Tree Museum (1998-99): mixed media works at Artist Alliance, Hong Kong (2000): installation *Time as Place* at SCAM, Toronto (2001): *Scenic View* (an interactive sound sculpture), Visual Arts Centre of Clarington (a Public Art Project 2001-2003), *The Tree Museum Collective: An Alternative Site*, York Quay Gallery at Harbourfront Centre Toronto (2002) and *Urn an Artist Garden* (2003). York Quay Gallery at Harbourfront Centre, Toronto She is a member and co-curator of the Tree Museum Collective, Gravenhurst Ontario and a member of Red Head Gallery Toronto.

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ARTIST ALLIANCE
HONG KONG



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