Faculty of Liberal Arts & Sciences

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Shadow of the Machine. Museum London. London.

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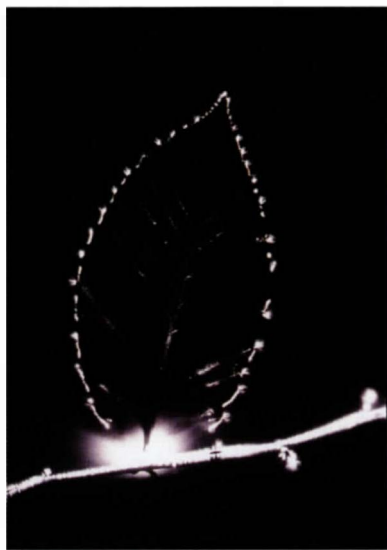
MARIE-JEANNE MUSIOL *Leaf on a Branch* 2001
Electromagnetic photograph 20.3 x 25.4 cm

of greens, reds and gold. Historical, sociological and painterly concerns overlap to create a shifting system of images, tied to an underlying sense of narrative by the art-historical fragments.

Work from the second period, from 1997 and 1998, is transitional. Here, the overt figurative references disappear as Lacasse crops and enlarges the art-historical images more tightly. Reduced in many cases to painted marks, they form an overall scrim of visual interference. The result is atmospheric; transparent colour elements begin to take over the surface. They wash down the entire surface of the painting, making what Lacasse calls "a veil" over the underlying lines and marks of the art-historical fragments.

From 1999 onward, there is a significant shift. Lacasse discards the subtext of art-historical imagery. Instead, vertical bands of colour hold the surfaces as Lacasse tips and tilts his paintings to steer the paint on the canvas. The "veil" effect becomes a Niagara-like waterfall of paint. You feel the impasto surfaces of Borduas and Riopelle hovering, a sense that a curtain of paint has closed over figurative painting.

In his earlier works, with his copying and layering of fragments of art history, Lacasse offered a postmodern conception of painting. With the newer, more visceral approach of his latest works, he taps into the dynamism of abstraction. It is as if he has reviewed the history of 20th-century painting; a figurative past dissolves into issues of performance and materiality. The longer you look at the latest paintings, the more you wonder about what lies behind the paint. Your gaze doesn't travel across the surface so much as into it. You begin to think about the history you cannot see, and you feel prepared for what might come next.

BRYNE McLAUGHLIN

Marie-Jeanne Musiol
◄◄
AXE NÉO – 7 ART CONTEMPORAIN, HULL

In her newest body of work, Marie-Jeanne Musiol makes use of special scientific equipment to induce an electromagnetic field around the leaves and stems of plants. The luminous emanations that appear are recorded in black-and-white photographs, exhibited recently in a group of poetic installations collectively titled *Corps de Lumière—Bodies of Light*.

The light-filled beauty of these small images (none exceeds eight by ten inches) is far removed from Musiol's previous dark photographs of tree trunks and roots around the site of Auschwitz. Both bodies of work spring from a singular desire to extract and record memories stored in matter. The photographs of Auschwitz gain strength from their opaque silence, yet Musiol felt that ordinary photography could not express the "...energetic presence felt in this site where the water of the ponds, the trees of the forest, with their roots grounded in human ashes, were acting subtly upon matter." For her new work, she has found in electromagnetic photography a way to perceive and record a field of light that surrounds objects.

In the installation *Cabinet des plantes*, small tropical plants are lined up against walls hung with photographs of plant sections. The process of deterioration and repair, recorded through the clusters of light around the edges and veins of the leaves, is explained in captions beneath the images. Pictures of a corkscrew hazel leaf, taken over a span of 72 hours, show a gradual dimming of light and end with an all-black surface. A lacerated leaf turns black at the point of its wound, but when the artist moves her hands over the leaf before photographing it, light returns. According to Musiol's text, it even responds to the thought of reparation.

The piece alludes to the types of specimen collections that have delighted naturalists of past centuries, and revives the viewer's sense of awe at the beauty of nature—here found in a field of energy rather than in the concrete forms of objects. The black-framed images are also reminiscent of Christian Boltanski's anonymous "portraits" of Holocaust victims, reminding us of Musiol's alertness to the hidden energies of mute matter in her Auschwitz photographs.

In another, darkened gallery space, *Champs de Lumière* shows a wall filled with small backlit images of plant sections, minerals and hands. In their constellations, they take on a cosmic quality. It is a sublimation of sorrow, perhaps; searching for dark truths, Musiol stumbled upon beauty and did not turn her back. An accompanying video melds flowing sequences of light emanations, its fragility highlighted by a subtle soundtrack by John Seck.

Musiol returns to straight photography in a third exhibition room with magnified images of human skin. Her picturing of our largest sense organ reminds us that human perception remains grounded in the body, regardless of scientific enhancements. The contrast in scale between these blow-ups and the nearly life-sized plant images shows Musiol's impulse to expand the field of perception and, accordingly, become better attuned to nature's hidden realities.

PETRA HALKES

Shadow of the Machine
◄◄
MUSEUM LONDON, LONDON

"Shadow of the Machine" is a modest gem of an exhibition addressing issues of technological mediation. Its most refreshing aspect is the quiet elegance of the art, in which digital processing is employed as a conceptual rather than a technical framework. From Colette Whiten's pixelated portraits to Stephen Andrews' oversized film strips, Michelle Gay's computer-coded printouts and Cheryl Sourkes's composite photographs, each work is a contemplative distillation of our simulated existence.

In Whiten's *I Witness* (1999), the artist takes digital outputs of photographic portraits, breaks them down into a pixelated grid and transfers the image onto a white fabric pattern that she fills with hand-stitched beading. Her portraits are then enclosed in glass spheres and mounted on the wall. From this vantage point, their barely discernible features become the irises of

disembodied eyeballs, staring back at the viewer like digital shadows come to life. In a gesture reminiscent of the mothers of the disappeared in Argentina, who during the military dictatorships of the 1970s donned white handkerchiefs and clutched photographs of their missing children to proclaim their existence, Whiten's intimate and delicately crafted portraits reconnect the viewer to the body's presence.

In Stephen Andrews' *Lazarus* (2002), an eloquent and haunting work about death and resurrection, the primacy of the body also seeps through the artwork's layers of representation. Combining photocopied photographs and video stills into handmade, oversized film strips, Andrews creates a storyboard narrative that begins with anatomical skeletons and ends with his own body emerging from grainy images. The cinematic quality of the work, evident in both its degraded photographs and its narrative sequencing, produces a dreamlike effect. There is something uncanny, and deeply moving, in the way the body appears to strain against its own technological mediation, made flesh again through its ephemeral reframing.

While Whiten and Andrews turn the digital eye of the camera upon the body, Gay and Sourkes explore disembodied locations of a technologically induced vision. Gay's *Battle Game* (2002) creates a digital print-out of the Bayeux Tapestry from the programming code for a computer war game, *Quake*. The original tapestry is a chronicle of the Norman invasion of England; its reproduction is a modern simulation of the historical referent. What unites them is the obsessive, almost compulsive nature of their making. Replacing hand weaving with the equally laborious task of computer programming, Gay renders visible the human presence that steers our virtual worlds.

Sourkes, who is also the curator of the show, contributes photographs based on city Web-cam sites. For *Cam Cities* (2002), Sourkes collected hundreds of stills from different cities' live-feed Internet sites and arranged them in grids to create large-scale composite photographs. At the centre of each photograph, the grid bulges, becoming a global eye looking back at the viewer. Through these surveillance grids, *Cam Cities: Virtual Vienna* becomes lush with

canals and parks, *Cam Cities: Virtual Toronto* a conglomerate of highway intersections. In both, empty streets heighten the sense of human presence elided by a ceaseless flow of images. As in the other works in the exhibition, the arresting of this flow unveils a place within digital processing where the body, fragile and yearning, emerges from the shadow of the machine.

DOT TUER

Shary Boyle
◄◄
KATHARINE MULHERIN GALLERY, TORONTO

"Once upon a time" is the evocative phrase that enters one's head while viewing Shary Boyle's exhibition "The Omitted Tales." The scale of the installation is intimate, featuring book-size drawings and paintings—recalling fairy-tale volumes illustrated with line drawings and the occasional special treat of a full-colour reproduction—that make direct reference to both the format and the content of traditional books of tales.

Several bodies of work, like groups of
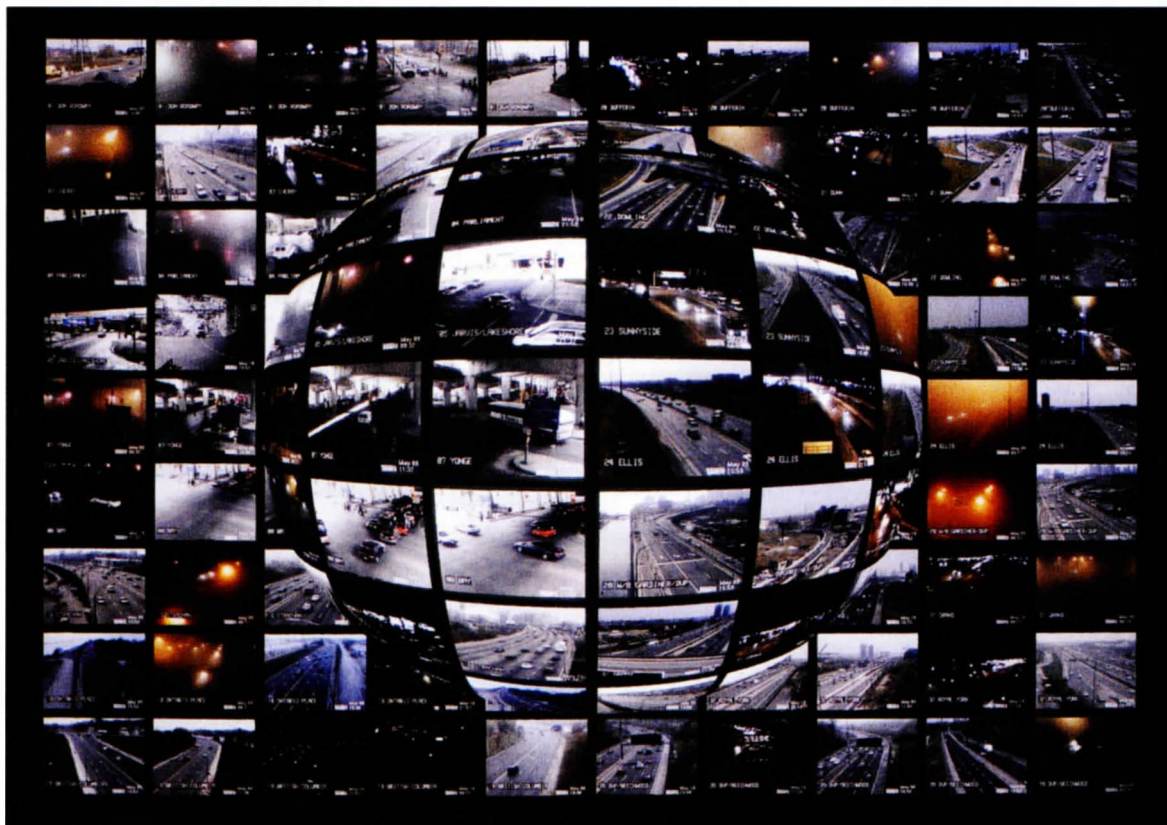
CHERYL SOURKES *Cam Cities: Virtual Toronto* 2002 Digital output on vinyl Dimensions variable