



Faculty of Art

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Focus on Janis Bowley & Oliver Kellhammer

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Over the last few years, Janis Bowley and Oliver Kellhammer have collaborated on a number of installations that reflect their shared environmental and technological interests. Their most recent collaboration, *Specific Pacific — Model of the Universe* (1989), shown at Toronto's YYZ and at the Surrey Art Gallery, is a model of an ecological environment that illustrates how the lack of long-range planning and general mismanagement of our natural resources are threatening not only our supply of raw material but also the ecological balance itself.

Specific Pacific is made up of four installations: suspended over a pool of water are a model of an atom, a Douglas fir pine cone made from cardboard, a stuffed crow and a pair of magnets that interact to create ripples and also influence the action of a compass situated between them. In another grouping, the legs of a rough, unfinished wooden table stand in bowls of water; on top of the table are placed blueprints of collaborative drawings. In the third, Xeroxed photographs of a section of beach in B.C. are divided by pots and string; from the string hang cardboard models of marine life such as a starfish and razor clams that testify to the delicate and increasingly upset balance between man and nature. Finally, two painted curtains open and close mechanically and at random. When the curtains are closed, one can see the image of a healthy forest. With the



Above: *Forest Models of the Universe* 1988

View of installation at Mercer Union

Photo: Peter MacCallum

Lower right: *Forestsforeverclearcut*

1989 Detail from installation

Specific/Pacific Oil on canvas,

computer-controlled electric motor

9 x 8 ft. Photo: Janis Bowley

curtains open, the same forest is revealed after being harvested by the B.C. logging industry.

The struggle to regain a sense of equilibrium and direction amid the exploitation of our resources is represented in the installation by aligning the pieces along an axis that takes into account the 20 degree difference between true north and magnetic north (as experienced on the B.C. coast). In addition, the compass that hangs over the pool seeks north but is pulling against the contrary influence of the magnets.

Recent installations by Bowley and Kellhammer have expressed similar themes. *Niagara — Model of the Universe* (shown at the Niagara Artist Centre in St. Catharines in March 1989) dealt with the pollution of the Niagara River;

Heart, Lung and Soul by Kellhammer, one element from *Forest — Models of the Universe* (Mercer Union, Toronto, June 1988), was a closed eco-system in which growing plants were fed air and water through a network of tubes that was in turn hooked up to an inflatable globe.

These installations benefit from the singular qualities that each artist brings to the collab-

oration. Bowley provides a cool, painterly approach toward the layout and graphic components of each show, and Kellhammer, primarily a "new media" artist, orchestrates the electronic elements. Together they are producing important and socially relevant art dealing with a society increasingly threatened by its careless attitude to the environment.

Nancy Paterson

