

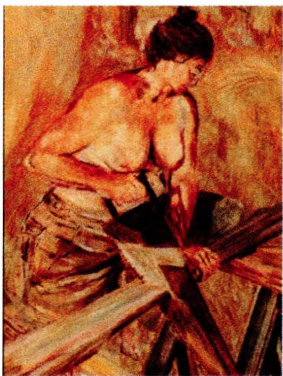
WHAT USE ART HISTORY?

Justin Ogilvie Ursula Medley William Pitcher
 Elizabeth Russell Ruth Scheuing Ed Varney
 Michael Nicoll Yahguhlaanaas

Guest Curator: Ann Rosenberg



William Pitcher *Artemis*



Ursula Medley *What I Saw*



Ed Varney *MONA*



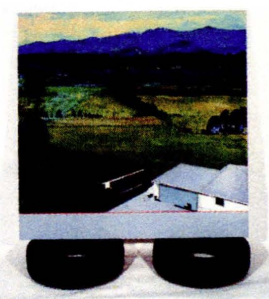
Ruth Scheuing
Cyborg Descending the Staircase



Justin Ogilvie *Study*



Michael Nicoll Yahguhlaanaas
Copper from the Hood #2



Elizabeth Russell *Dusk*

WHAT USE ART HISTORY?

WHAT USE ART HISTORY? This question arises inevitably in my two principal occupations - teaching Art History and writing about art.

The purpose of instruction in the subject is validated if a student, after a brief introduction to Art History, is able to distinguish a Post-impressionist-inspired painting from one influenced specifically by David Hockney. As a critic, my credibility depends on an ability to accurately identify and describe the various influences at play in an artist's work. Both occupations have taught me that almost every piece of art is influenced, even if only in general kind of way, by what its maker has seen and thought about.

The seven participants in this show have been selected because they created art inspired by models and ideas taken *overtly* from recent or past Art History. The illustrated wall texts in the show allow viewers to *see* the sources and *read about* how and why the references were chosen and re-employed. Despite "borrowing" the pieces in *WHAT USE ART HISTORY?* are "original" and highly contemporary.

Some refer to comic books and ads. Some utilize image-making techniques that rely on sophisticated computer software, computer-driven equipment, digital cameras and state-of-the-art inkjet printers. A few offer commentary on current politics and environmental threats. In this way they become their own form of new Art History which will be of use (or at least illuminating) to those who see the work now or in future.

Ann Rosenberg, Vancouver-based curator and critic

CURATOR

ANN ROSENBERG - Ann Rosenberg came to Vancouver in 1963 after completing an MA in Art History at the University of Toronto. For over 40 years she has been a college instructor, exhibition reviewer and critic. She has mounted exhibitions in many different venues: Surrey Art Gallery, The Roundhouse, Woodwards, Richmond Art Gallery, the Vancouver Jewish Community Centre's Holocaust Education Centre and Zach Gallery and the Canadian Craft Museum. *WHAT USE ART HISTORY?* is her first stint as guest curator for the Comox Valley Art Gallery in Courtenay and her first opportunity to circulate a show in British Columbia.

ARTISTS

ELIZABETH RUSSELL - In 2006, Elizabeth Russell staged *Art & Ideas* at the CVAG. I wrote "Art from the Global Village", the principal essay for the catalogue. Russell's *Dusk* was an up-dated version of the overview of Comox Valley that E.J. Hughes painted in 1953. Although a reproduction of Hughes' landscape hung in the Gallery Shop alcove, it was not exhibited beside Russell's version of the scene. Because of that fact, the audience could not readily appreciate how suburban sprawl had encroached upon the once-idyllic farmlands Hughes represented or how Russell had transformed her source technically and in other ways. This situation led me to think of a sequel for *Art & Ideas* that would begin in Courtenay and would include Russell's 2006 interpretation of the Comox Valley alongside the reproduction of the E.J. Hughes paradigm. The show would include pieces by other artists where similar comparisons between their recent works and art historical precedents were apt but, more importantly, pieces where such resources could be demonstrated through the inclusion of relevant illustrations in the Wall Texts.

Elizabeth Russell's *Dusk*, triggered the curatorial premise of *WHAT USE ART HISTORY?* In 2008, she has made a new piece called *Transition* which, while still 'remembering' the 1953 Hughes in some ways, picks up on the theme of the transformation of the semi-rural Comox Valley of the '50s that was an important aspect of her 2006 *Dusk*. The symbol of the change in Russell's just-completed installation is not the suburban bungalow and paved streets but the Big Box commercial outlets that are usurping what's left of nature in communities throughout the valley and causing more and more use of ever-expanding highways systems to access them.

URSULA MEDLEY - Ursula Medley lives in Powell River where she paints *plein air* landscapes in oils on small canvases, challenging herself to begin and finish a work in an hour. Sketches sometimes become the bases

for much larger, more detailed compositions. Despite being painted months later in her studio, the subsequent works retain the freshness of the artist's first response to the scene.

Medley paints the realities she lives, whether at home or abroad in places like Tuscany where, for the last several years, she has given workshops in old master oil techniques and painting *al fresco*. In addition to impressionist-inspired landscapes, still lifes and portraits she is currently working on a more imaginative series about Lang Bay Amazons, featuring her neighbour Lenore as the principal model.

These more speculative pieces recall Rubens' voluptuous paintings of goddesses from the 17th century and Lucien Freud's present day renditions of mature women in all their overt fleshiness. More information about Medley is on internet, www.ursulamedley.com

JUSTIN OGILVIE - Justin Ogilvie is a Vancouver artist who graduated from Emily Carr Institute of Art & Design in 2000. His art is inspired, in general, by several artists from the distant or more recent past who are known for their skills in drawing. But in 2005 (while preparing for *Dissolve*, his first major solo show in Vancouver's Diane Farris Gallery) Ogilvie was struck by the powerful figures of Michelangelo. In a recent interview, he singled out a preparatory sketch Michelangelo made for the central figure in the 1504-5 *Battle of Cascina* as the image that led him to develop his present style. The drawings and narratives in his March 2008 one person exhibition at the Diane Farris Gallery called *Continuum* continue that well-developed aesthetic. All the mixed media images Ogilvie has created in recent years are based on studies of nude models who pose singly or in groups for scenes he directs in his studio-inchoate scenarios that intentionally project feelings of restlessness, estrangement and angst.

Ogilvie has intimated that his next works will explore different technical means of expression taking off, perhaps, from his appreciation of the elusive art of Ann Kipling. Ogilvie's art can be seen on the internet, www.justinogilvie.com

WILLIAM PITCHER - Bill Pitcher is based in Golden, B.C. He produces sophisticated Photoshop 'renewals' of Art Historical sources by re-enacting and updating them. His process involves using many different digital files and complex computer techniques to combine his elaborately shot photos of local models and relevant props with his own photographs of well-known Canadian sites, cities and animals.

Pitcher's reprisal of the Greek story of Pandora (as illustrated in the 1898 Pre-Raphaelite painting of that name by JW Waterhouse) is in many ways typical of his way of making the past speak to the present. Pandora is described in Classical mythology as the first mortal woman. Zeus set her up to bring the downfall of Mankind. At her birth all the gods and goddesses give the beautiful baby girl a trait: Aphrodite gave her beauty, Apollo the gifts of Music; Poseidon guaranteed she would never drown and so on. Zeus filled her with the insatiable curiosity and a sense of mischief that he knew would accomplish his dreadful ends. When it was time for Pandora to marry the Titan Epimetheus, she was given a dowry in a container which she was told never to open. When no one was looking, of course, that's exactly what she did releasing the evils of pestilence, sorrow and death. Only Hope was left in the chest. In Pitcher's re-telling, the evils released are the logos of the 30 top corporations listed in the Dow Jones Industrial Average. The familiar architecture and signage of WAL*MART looms through the fog in the background of Pitcher's tableau. Other images of his devising include contemporary references like: toxic chemicals, navel jewelry, oil refineries, tattoos, golf courses, city nightscapes, themed coffee cups, disco balls and a potent-looking frond of B.C. bud.

Many people in Golden work with Bill to achieve his very convincing *trompe l'oeils* that are presented as high-resolution ink-jet (giclée) murals on canvas. Images of his Ancient Myths & Modern Metaphors series are available on www.williampitcher.ca.

RUTH SCHEUING - Ruth Scheuing is an internationally-known Vancouver-based artist who, for many years, was the coordinator of the Textile Arts Program at Capilano College. Since the mid '90's, Scheuing has combined images from Art History with other imagery via Photoshop to create computer-generated images that are transformed pixel by pixel in her textile murals that are woven "by hand"-on the largest, most technically advanced computer-run Jacquard loom in Canada, located in Montreal.

In her witty pastiche of Marcel Duchamp's 1911 *Nude Descending the Staircase* the abstract lines and shapes of his 'naked female' are supplanted by the repeated torso of an 1885 dressmaker's aid topped with a bland-faced woman's head 'taken' from an early 20th century advertisement. This mechanical creature is neither woman nor machine but a *cyborg*, something in between. The environment of Scheuing's female construct is beautified by a flower and leaf pattern like the ones found in the machine-woven fabrics or wall papers that were lovely to look at and relatively affordable because they were mass produced.

Rather than being as it seems, a homage to Duchamp as an artist and/or a remembrance of his *Nude Descending a Staircase*, Scheuing's 'Cyborg' tapestry's subject is more fundamentally about how machine produced products and even computer technology was changing women's roles at home and in the work place in the early 20th century. *Cyborg Descending a Staircase* is from Scheuing's on-going Flowers and Leaves Series which all celebrate the persona and words of the renowned, early 19th Century Ada Lovelace who is sometimes described as "the world's first programmer". In one often-cited phrase Lovelace stated that the out-put of the Analytical Machine (that was invented by her mentor and friend Charles Babbage) was algebraic but the Jacquard loom (which was a computer that operated on similar principles) produced flowers and leaves. Other visuals and facts about Scheuing may be seen on www.ruthscheuing.com.

ED VARNEY - Ed Varney is a well-established member of the Vancouver Art Community who now lives in Royston, near Courtenay. Google up Edwin Varney and you'll access references to several major activities, including his long-standing engagement in an International Correspondence Art network. His fill-in-the-blank M.O.N.A images will play an audience-participation role in *WHAT USE ART HISTORY?* as they have in many different circumstances in the last decade. Selections from his current Collaborations with Dead Artists Series are also apt inclusions in this traveling show. The four 'Mondrians' chosen for exhibit are each an original composition based on three horizontal lines, three vertical lines executed in primary colours—the rigorous parameters chosen by Varney for this mini-series within Collaborations. Varney says, "Just think of these variations as similar to those that Berlioz might have constructed on a passage taken from Mendelssohn."

MICHAEL NICOLL YAHGULANAAS - Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas *Copper from the Hood #2: Stolen but Recovered* is a tongue-in-cheek version of a highly revered traditional Haida "copper" shield. His contemporary 'copper' is constructed from a pair of car hoods that have been welded together. The surface has been covered in copper paint then embellished in the Haida Manga graphics (part Northwest Coast First Nations, part comic book, part graphic novel, part Caucasian, part Japanese Amime) that Yahgulanaas is becoming known for here and abroad. (see Haida Manga, Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas and www.rockingraven.com on the Web). Yahgulanaas who has lived in Prince Rupert, Old and New Masset, now resides on Bowen Island. His recent show in Vancouver's Museum of Anthropology called *Meddling in the Museum* has been a critical success. Influences from many different art traditions are brought together in his work.

WHAT USE ART HISTORY? Schedule:

Comox Valley Art Gallery, Courtenay

March 8 - April 19, 2008 www.comoxvalleyartgallery.com

Art Gallery of South Okanagan, Penticton

Sept. 12- Oct. 26, 2008 www.galleries.bc.ca/agso

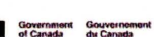
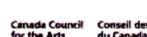
Two Rivers Gallery in its Rustad Galleria, Prince George

Nov. 6 - Nov.30, 2008, www.tworiversartgallery.com

Evergreen Centre Art Gallery, Coquitlam

Dec. 6, 2008 - Jan. 11, 2009 www.evergreenculturalcentre.ca

 **COMOX VALLEY ART GALLERY**
580 DUNCAN AVENUE, COURTENAY, BC V9N 2M7 • Ph. 338 6211
contact@comoxvalleyartgallery.com • www.comoxvalleyartgallery.com



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