

Artists get in touch with their inner GPS

Reminders of Bill Vazan's 1971 tape bits on the floor in Conceptual Cartographies exhibition

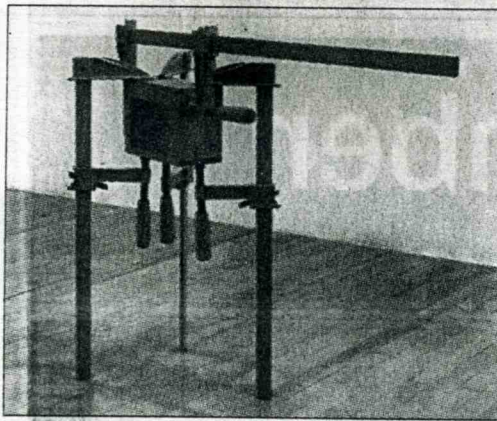
HENRY LEHMANN
SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

If what you're looking for is the quickest path from Point A to Point B, the puzzling maps featured in *Conceptual Cartographies*, now at Galerie Liane & Danny Taran, will not help. Instead, they tell us to stray from our routine perspectives on distance, space, time and self.

Each of the five contemporary Canadian artists participating in this intriguing show, curated by Renee Baert, has a personal take on the map concept, itself almost explosively fertile with enough potential metaphors to fuel the imaginations of several generations of artists. Certainly, we live in a period obsessed with "mapping" everything from chromosomes to the ends of the universe.

In fact, deep space is the vantage point in Toronto artist Gwen MacGregor's piece, titled the *GPS Satellite Series*. Consisting of a row of five cigarbox-size stainless-steel TV monitors, this sleek work presents a visual record of the artist's movements in several cities. These alleged strolls register on the screens as nervously crawling white lines; the cities appear as mere dots on dramatic video images of an Earth spinning just fast enough to suggest the end of civilization. However, we can't worry about the earthly destination of someone we can't see, and we never actually see the actual artist — just the abstract traces.

There's an element of angst in just looking at the majestic, wickedly taunting world map painted in hard-to-see clear varnish on one whole long white gallery wall by Vancouver artist Antonia Hirsch. Titled *Forecast*, this work depicts a kind of conceptual "odd couple:" reality and distortion. As the panoramic



BETTINA HOFFMANN OPTICA

Untitled, 2006, by Kevin Yates: an inspired heir to American artist Anthony Caro.

map looms into focus, we see that the countries are in their proper location, but their size is disproportionate, with South America appearing much bigger than North America.

In fact, according to the artist's text, the size of a place is a logical function of the area's annual rainfall. Yet, for all the conceptual rain, there's no green, but rather, an eery monochrome calm, untouched by pollution or tornado. We can only imagine what a future update of this map will look like, with all the countries drenched by global warming and swollen, according to Hirsch's use of rain-land ratios, to gargantuan size.

While MacGregor's work is arguably a portrait of objective, dispassionate reality, Toronto artist Sandra Rechico's map, drawn on an unframed sheet of paper and based on the artist's hometown, almost pulses with personal feeling. The black lines, pleasingly low-tech, are actually hand-drawn and at least as much linked to Rechico's inner self as to Toronto's unspectacular street grid.

Of course, the forefather — or mother — of all Canadian maps, the one to which all the current cartographers/artists are eternally beholden, is noted Montreal artist Bill Vazan's astounding 1971 *World Line*, a piece that consisted of a few bits of tape on a gallery floor. These were calculated in theory to extend around the globe — talk about extreme monumentality expressed with the simplest of form!

Also included in the current, worthwhile, theme show are interesting, thought-provoking works by Ottawa-artist Juan Geuer and Montrealer Eric Raymond.

Conceptual Cartographies remains on view at the Liane & Danny Taran Gallery, Centre des Arts Saidye Bronfman, 5170 Côte Ste. Catherine Rd., until Jan. 28. Call 514-739-2301 or see www.saidyebrofman.org.

Nature as vaguely warm-blooded, though at times looking somewhat bloodless, takes centre stage in many of Montreal artist Sylvain Bouthillette's mixed-media paintings now on view at Galerie Trois Points. The best works, such as the exotically named *Milarepa l'invincible*, have roughly symmetrical compositions, dominated by the enlarged digital image of a bird's head, always in profile.

Indeed, the bird's head, alluding to the ancient Egyptian god Horus, is, in turn embedded in the "eye" of the painting. Certainly, the inert bird in the picture exemplifies perfect decorum, if, by that, we mean complete stillness - nature for lovers of law and order.

Sylvain Bouthillette's mixed-media works remain on view at Galerie Trois Points, 372 Ste. Catherine St. W., Room 520, until Dec. 23. Call 514-866-8008 or consult www.galerietroispoints.qc.ca.

Unnatural stillness rules the roost in Oregon-based artist Kevin Yates's mainly wood installations now gracing the space at Optica. One of these, titled *Room with No Walls*, consists of 1,153 tiny picnic tables stacked to resemble, perhaps unintentionally, a massive cage. However, more in-

teresting are the smaller, untitled works, abstract constructions apparently held together with carpenters' clamps, themselves crafted from wood.

Form and function merge in this work, so literally down to earth, yet a demonstration of soaring, sublime harmony - an

inspired heir to the art of the great U.S. sculptor, Anthony Caro.

Kevin Yates's *This room has no walls* remains on view at Optica, 372 Ste. Catherine St. W., Room 508, until Dec. 9. Call 514-874-1666 or consult www.optica.ca.

