

sublime; that is, outside the boundaries of earthly beauty. So accomplished in their calm beauty, these panoramic photographs remain potently ironic within their framing of culture/nature. This is both a satisfaction within the imagery and an aesthetic pleasure in looking, as the contemporary viewer can only admire the abstract clarity and composition within the confusion and impurity of the history that produced the formal garden.

In "Developments" Arni Runar Haraldsson documents, in a series of five (24" x 26") C-prints, the suburban encroachment on a rock-jutted, mountain terrain. Haraldsson refers to these records of suburban claim of previously undesirable land as "social-scapes." The tradition of landscape photography as an inquiry into the visual components of nature undergoes re-evaluation within the backdrop of continual "progress." The artistic corollary of this moral depiction makes nature precious both aesthetically and politically. Haraldsson's pictorial logic connects both the virtue of contemporary observation and the conventions of the picturesque passed down from 19th-century landscape painting and continued in photographic practice. Keeping within the compositional legacy of expressing the ideal and the real, nature is detailed in the pictorial elements of the foreground, placing "development" — condominiums, subdivisions, monster homes — in the background. Nature finds its grounding in colour that articulates pictorial detail in the light and shadows of the early morning or late-day sun. The stark realism of "development" is documented through geometric elements, especially in the formal design and spatial representation of technological application: the powerlines with their clear-cut right-of-ways, and the roughly terraced mountain slopes ready for construction.

Haraldsson's low, close perspective in *The View of Mary Hill at Sunset from the Coquitlam River* (1990) monumentalises the water, grasses and shrubs, isolating them pictorially and conceptually from

the "development" of the background. The detailed foreground pictorialises the complexities of nature. The cleared land within this pictorial scheme appears ravaged, as if napalm were the cause. Yet it is a casual destruction. Convenience seems to be the main factor in clearing land. No trees are left to be enshrined in parks as nature; as nature is laid waste, landscape is wasteland.

The pictorial expression of nature exists as a verisimilitude of modernism. The colour of the C-print ignores nostalgia, giving nature equal billing with the commercialised production of the "social-scapes." But, identification between the ideal and the real persist, if only in a slightly sardonic attitude that still suggests a desire for the union of nature with human nature. If the Coquitlam River were not named, the viewer might seek a glimpse of Walden Pond with which to

contemplate these philosophies of the self — the self as within nature and as immediately affected by the loss of nature. But, in contrast to contemplation and self-satisfactions, the formal resolution of the photographs and the astute pictorial representations dismiss fabrication of a philosophy within artifice and nature instead they desire a timely pedagogy. As Haraldsson writes in a statement on the work: "Nature is presented in terms of a critical negativity that has not renounced visual beauty and the promise of a future." Such a contemporary mythology of salvation is articulated in a very small cluster of trees overpowered by a long stretch of condominiums and rows of suburban houses, a "symbol of resistance" offered by an elderly woman who refuses to sell.

Petra Rigby Watson

Roy Arden

■ OR Gallery, Vancouver

Arden's recent exhibition, "Frontenac" consists of six mounted and framed photographs of a boiler room's interior and one larger photograph of a boiler front close-cropped. In addition, there are two monochromes — a flat black rectangular section painted directly onto the gallery wall and a rectangular section of the entire lower portion of another wall painted with, and labeled "Silver Tremclad."

Since Robert Smithson, the use of mirrored surface to implicate the viewer in the construction of meaning, thereby decentring the art object, has become a familiar strategy, if not a convention of late-modernist art practice. Yet here, the murkily reflective surface of the Silver-Tremclad-covered wall implies a hesitancy to fully capitulate in this regard, as it recalls equally such work as the *Grey Paintings* (1975) of Gerhard Richter and the monochromes that Jeff Wall was painting directly onto walls in the late sixties.

Arden's minimalist rhetoric of the painted components addresses the expectations of the modernist white box that is the OR Gallery, as well as the conceptual bias of its curatorial history, policy and audience. Also, these painted elements evince a constructivist balance that allows entrance by extension to socialist modes of debate and enquiry.

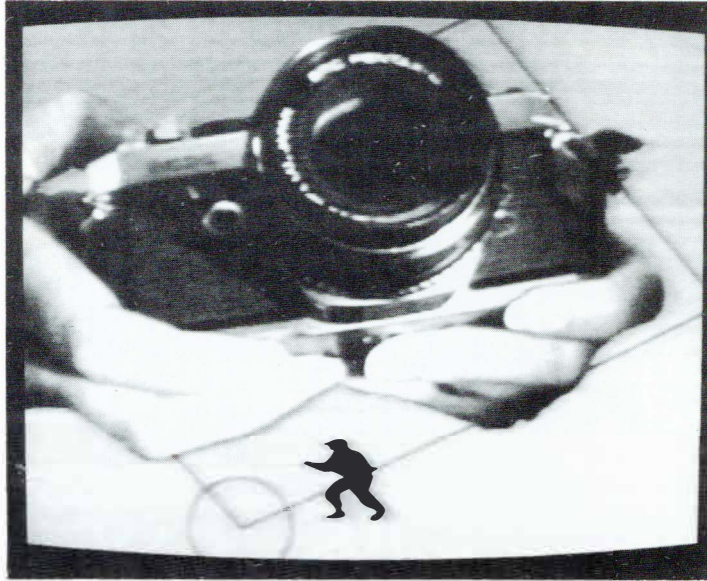
An interesting contradiction, grounded in the material of the work, arises from the connotation of the use-value of the paint itself in everyday life. Well known as the rust paint that lets the user paint directly without having to sand or prime first, it is also known among some "artoid" subcultural strands as a counter-fashion material. In the latter context, its users claim a decorative and ironic illustration of the inevitability and uncoverability of public corruption, hence the impossibility of transcendence of production and reception. This social history of Silver Tremclad could provide an egress to the "despair of painting" by pointing

out such an impasse within the hermetic occlusions of modernism.

Perhaps in this there is an attempt to divert interpretation back from the infinity of an undifferentiated semiology, the jingling of an overactive chain of signification, to the ongoing circulation of meanings like the circulation of fluids — oil, water or — hot air, say — through the conduits emerging from the hidden core of the building, the Frontenac. This building, where Arden lives, provides living quarters for artists, curators, architects and other such workers in the production of meaning. Within this economy, the boiler room functions literally and materially as the base in the basement which underwrites the surface production and thereby refers to an institutional critique generated in the late sixties by conceptual art.

The six smaller photographs show an area and contents usually not seen by the residents of the Frontenac, but one that would seem to be the workspace of an absent janitor or caretaker. This usually dark place is now well lit to allow its photographic representation and the intrusion of us, the viewers, into this absent worker's inner sphere. And so we are given admission to where the sun don't shine, the powerful lamps penetrating the darkness and eroticising this traditionally male workplace. The larger photograph, separated from the rest on its own wall close to the flat black monochrome, gives us a gander at the Big Daddy boiler, in full frontal extreme, pressing right up close to the edges of the photograph. Arden lays claim to Wols as the historical precursor of his pictorial practice in this series, as we can see from the attention paid to the detritus and instruments of industrial society in these pictures — all the stray bits of scrap, bundles of plastic-bagged god-knows-what, pails and coils of hose or pipe, ladders and abandoned cisterns, etc.

Dotti Trujillo Lusk



Vanalyne Green
*A Spy in the
House that Ruth
Built*
Videotape

Images 90

■ Euclid Theatre, Toronto

The "Images 90" festival offered an assemblage of film and video makers, workshops geared to their professional needs and screenings of nearly 90 alternative films and videos. Now in its third year, the six-day festival is hosted by Northern Visions, a group of independent media workers. This year, programmers from five regions of Canada chose work from all over the world, reflecting a remarkable scope of concerns, including those of Feminism; First Nations People; Gay and Lesbian Rights; Racism; AIDS Education and Activism; Art Criticism; Self-definition and Self-determination; Alcoholism and Drug Addiction; Colonisation; Displacement and Rootedness; Cultural Assimilation vs Multiculturalism; and Capitalism and Consumer Culture.

There is no presumption in this review to pass fair and thorough comment on such an ambitious and eclectic exercise. Instead, I will discuss how certain of these works, through myriad strategies, successfully address the issues at hand, with the acknowledgement that others, for various reasons, fail to do so.

All of the works in the festival are, or

at least intend to be, critical of the hegemony of dominant cultural values. They position themselves ideologically as "other" than the mainstream. Many, though not all of the works, by virtue of the ways in which they're made, are critical of prevailing values in commercial films and in popular television. *Pregnant with Dreams*, a tape about the 1987 Encuentro Feminista Latinamericano y del Caribe by Mexican artist Julia Barco, is a moving affirmation of women's potential for empowerment through solidarity, and an exhilarating call to action for those who've reached the limits of their victimisation by military, political, religious or personal domination. Avoiding the slick, sterile production values of so many institutional documentaries, the tape has a direct and "dirty" style, having been recorded mostly in available light. Pointing out that social and individual needs come together in women, this raw, earthy document invites the women to speak for themselves without the intervention of authoritarian voice-overs. Despite the rough "look" of the tape, Barco's editing is highly sophisticated, and she avoids the merely didactic while orchestrating an intimate, lengthy and patient engagement with the process employed by these women in assessing past gains and future