



Philippe Raphanel, *Large Garry Oaks* (1987), oil on canvas, 167 x 137 cm, photo: courtesy Diane Farris Gallery

Philippe Raphanel
Diane Farris Gallery
November 5 to 23
Vancouver

Philippe Raphanel is one of the artists dubbed "Young Romantics" in 1985, and his neo-expressionist acrylics, in hot oranges and yellows, of logs suspended over a whirling vortex or of logging trucks crashing through the picture plane to violate the viewer's space, were visual *tours de force*. Such images haunt the mind's eye, making an encore difficult to imagine. His 1986 show was a qualified success because the struggle to articulate his frightening vision of British Columbia's landscape resulted in a number of disparate images; the most successful being monumental mine shaft pieces. The new landscapes, however, signal a major breakthrough for this gifted, young artist.

Painting on Hornby Island, Raphanel has returned to oils and the result is exhilarating. In place of tortured logs and sinister mine shafts, he offers a joyous celebration of nature that recalls the German *Die Brücke* painters. His gestural, painterly canvases disguise a firm, classical composition under a heavily impasted surface of colour and lush, sensuous brush work. In painting after painting, one senses an artist at home in his medium and environment. *Steep Road* is a beautifully orchestrated composition building from layers of dark, rich green on the left, through smoother brush strokes and muted tones in the middle, to a contrasting sky full of light and movement on the right. Despite the tension created by the sharp diagonals of the road intersecting the lines of rushing foliage and cloud, there is little anxiety here. *Arbutus Trees*, employing a similar composition, presents a row of

twisted trees marching at an angle across the picture, but again the result is joyous, not troubled, because a wide range of purple-blues in thick, wavy strokes balances the contorted tree trunks and transfuses the entire image with a delicate light.

Not all the paintings work this well, however. When he attempts a closer view of forest growth, the composition is less confident; Raphanel contrives one within the dense screen of grass and leaves through *chiaroscuro*, in an apparent effort to overcome his two-dimensional surface. One noteworthy success amongst these forest close-ups is *Large Garry Oaks*. Here the loose, energetic yellow and green brush strokes in the foreground are controlled by the natural design of branches in the middle distance, and the contrasting areas of light and dark impart a tense, but satisfying, balance to the image.

The graphite-on-paper drawings and the exquisite, small oil studies included in the show reveal the importance of drawing and composition to Raphanel. Yet it is in the large oils that he demonstrates what he can build on this disciplined base. In colour, texture, light, and sheer pictorial drama, the best oils display a *jouissance* in the art of landscape painting.

Sherrill Grace