

## HELGA PAKASAAR / *Moodyville*

For the *Moodyville* exhibition, seven artists were invited to produce new works that respond to North Vancouver—the locale of Presentation House Gallery and its home in a designated heritage building. The show's title suggests an imaginary place, a state of mind, and a particular history, especially the city's ties to resource extraction industries. Moodyville was the earliest non-indigenous and industrial settlement on Burrard Inlet. Founded in 1872 near today's Saskatchewan Wheat Pool terminal, it was a prosperous, albeit short-lived, sawmill community that boasted the first library in the Burrard Inlet. Invoking the city's beginnings through collective urban memory, the *Moodyville* project explores changes in civic identity as visions of the future relate to a barely-remembered past.

The artists researched North Vancouver as a mental, social, and physical space, resulting in artworks that allude to the psychic atmosphere and spirit of the place—its *genius loci*. Iconic sites such as the Capilano Suspension Bridge, the grain elevators, and the sulphur piles are barely recognizable in the works, while the hidden and forgotten are brought to light: a tawdry paintball field, stumps scarred by logging, back alleys, and phantoms. Their often dystopian views offer clues to the city's counter-narratives that are to a large extent underground or mythical lore: the notorious Prussian Count Gustav Constantin Alvo von Alvensleben, Burner Boys, Seylynn Skatepark, and Vantan Club, for example. The exhibition reveals the often uneasy space between real and imagined places—psycho-geographies—and the contingencies of picturing that condition.

Questions about “capturing spirit of place” and interpreting history are taken up by Karin Bubaš and Kyla Mallett. Looking back to earlier times, they transcribe narratives of the past as delicate negotiations with the present. Bubaš was inspired by archival photographs of late nineteenth-century summer parties on the lawns of *Moodyville*'s “Big House.” Set in Cates Park, her film is a period costume reenactment of a croquet game played in a foggy, rustic setting. The slow motion footage intensifies a mood of foreboding and anticipation as the four figures interact on a grassy area surrounded by the wilds of nature. This seductive tableau makes reference to historical representations, specifically the attention to social attitudes depicted in the impressionist paintings of Manet. One of

the specially designed costumes displayed as a museum artifact reinforces the temporal mysteries of the scene.

The hauntings and residues of history are equally interesting to Kyla Mallett. She summons the past by evoking the ghosts of Presentation House through a series of spirit photographs shot in the building during an overnight stay. Originally built as a school in 1902, the building was subsequently used as city hall, court house, and police station before becoming a cultural centre. Mallett's work began with an all-night séance, resulting in photographic evidence of phantom-like shapes, apparitions, and spiritual presences in the form of ectoplasm. The cryptic images (significantly analogue silver gelatin prints) include diaristic notations that offer further clues to her encounters with the paranormal. Often using pseudo-sociological methods, in this case interviewing people who had "experienced" the ghosts, Mallett draws out veiled networks of communication through anecdote and the incidental in ways that question the impulse to identify historical significance.

Presentation House as a historic landmark becomes the literal canvas for Babak Golkar's *House of Sulphur*, a chalk drawing on its exterior. His intervention temporarily alters our perception of the building, aligning it with the sulphur piles that visually dominate the waterfront. The motif of bright yellow, the colour of the North Shore's cabs, continues in Golkar's gallery installation of drawings and a video of taxi rides around the North Shore paired with yellow chalk drawing "souvenirs" inspired by those journeys. The work articulates the complex labour economies and socio-political conditions of cabdrivers, a profession dominated by first generation immigrants. Here they are heard telling stories that express their conflicted experiences as "foreigners" drifting through a moving landscape, the backdrop that informs their lives. Through this sequence of translations and displacements, Golkar unveils a complex, social topography.

Mike Grill's own cognitive mappings investigate more concrete terrain. In his photographic series, *North Shore*, he creates a suburban map where nature seems to dominate the architecture, and sweeping vistas lead to uninhabited landscapes of sea and sky. His photographic studies of the spatial relations between the built and natural environments of the North Shore's residential areas suggest nothing but the ordinary to be remarkable. In Grill's streetscapes, domesticated gardens are overgrown by brambles; derelict shrubbery becomes

indistinguishable from encroaching forest. The famous tourist spectacle of Capilano Suspension Bridge strung dramatically between towering forests is pictured as a mundane urban space of asphalt and pedestrians.

The exhibition registered urban landscapes still very much tied to their natural setting and exuding the wet smell of rotting foliage. Dan Siney's large colour photographs dramatize the dominant presence of the wilderness of North Vancouver. By hiking into the forest to document eerie tree stumps left behind by early logging and by recording the moods of a night sky, Siney produces images that result from an intense encounter with nature as palpable sensation. Through this sense of immediacy, his pictures propose a type of sublime experience. Through an equally intense but more distant perspective, Jim Breukelman draws out the intersections of natural and human spaces. His seductively detailed photographs of built environments in relation to encroaching wilderness expose the dynamics of interstitial landscapes, as with the grain elevators viewed through a screen of trees in Moodyville Park. Breukelman's documentary studies refer to prescient environmental and social issues, such as his *PacificCat* project that examined the ill-fated construction process of three Fast Cat ferries east of Burrard Dry Dock, the last major shipbuilding venture in North Vancouver. For the *Moodyville* exhibition, he embarked on an investigation of North Shore Paintball's playing field. With an incisive eye, he records the disturbing beauty of the garishly-coloured tableaux of tires, dirt mounds, and constructed "wilderness" animated by the residues of combat sport.

Jeremy Shaw uses the research methodologies of a social anthropologist, investigating the complexities of local culture, often through the subject of youth subcultures. In his video, *Best Minds, Part One*, Shaw documents the social ritual of Straight Edge youth dancing at Seylynn Hall. Shot in real time, the camera seems to participate in the event. The immersive, slow motion footage evokes a cathartic ritual of seemingly ecstatic and at times violent movements. A sense of druggy reverie is amplified by the hypnotic soundtrack, a minimalist composition by the artist that draws parallels between the end of analogue technology and the ruins of spent youth. Shaw interprets the scene on its own terms. His work considers how cultural life and passing eras are experienced and understood. As with the other artists in *Moodyville*, his investigations of fleeting social conditions give credence to the transient psychic terrains that constitute North Vancouver.