

## WAYFINDING: ALL OVER THE MAP

*“Looking for direction in a complicated world”<sup>1</sup>*

*Is that the sun or the moon?*

*I don’t know, I’m a stranger here myself.<sup>2</sup>*

USING THE THEME WAYFINDING, curators E J Lightman and Anne O’Callaghan presented artworks by Lisa Neighbour, Orest Tataryn and Walter Willems. In addition, Tataryn was guest curator for a series of projections held on Saturday, September 13, and created by Sebastian Burdach, Alison S.M. Kobayashi, Darlene Naponse, and David Rokeby (see Kim Simon’s “Wayfinding in the Dark”). Working within the wide parameters implicit in the concept of wayfinding, each artist’s response was inventive and thought-provoking. The central component of Neighbour’s *Erratic Theatre* was an illuminated stone, while Tataryn’s installation *see to phi* offered a visual system through which to view the surroundings. Both pieces suggested themselves as markers, wayfinding tools toward an understanding of their forest environment. Willems’s *History of a Time to Come: Part I – Escape* skewered visitors with dystopian possibility in his promotional material and sales centre for a planned community on the site.

In his seminal book *Wayfinding in Architecture*, Romedi Passini cites a range of sources to argue that cultural and personal differences are significant factors in wayfinding. He notes Amos Rapoport’s conclusion that Western civilizations tend to see space in physical terms while Australian aborigines conceive of space through meaning and symbols derived from their culture, as famously illustrated in Bruce Chatwin’s *The Songlines*. In his discussion of perception and cognition Passini points out that

*[t]he historical evolution of the visual arts conveys the images people associate with their everyday environment... Artists of most periods have tried and believed they succeeded in representing their surroundings objectively. In all probability, their images deviated only little from the popular images collectively held during a period (59-61).*

The Tree Museum artists have developed individual responses to the idea of wayfinding that feed into current cultural and societal practices and preoccupations. The wayfinding representations employed in the 2008 installations present a large range of avenues of exploration into the collective zeitgeist.

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**OREST TATARYN**  
 SEE TO PHI  
 PHOTO: CAT O’NEIL

SEE TO PHI (INTERIOR DETAIL)  
 PHOTO: NICOLE POTVIN

SEE TO PHI (EXTERIOR DETAIL)  
 PHOTO: NICOLE POTVIN



1 [www.corbindesign.com](http://www.corbindesign.com) (January 2010).

2 Andy Capp joke.



Tataryn's *see to phi*, named for the mathematical ratio "phi" or the golden mean, is the organizing principle for his sculpture. The artist states that when "I work within the constraints of this glorious ratio I become free."<sup>3</sup> Consisting of three aligned tubes of rusted steel, glass and polyvinyl chloride (PVC) suspended on steel posts, each element offers up its material individuality, while a view through all three leads the eyes into a scene across the bay that divides the view according to the famous ratio. A geometric device to attain pleasing proportion, the theory of the mean has been used to map everything from patterns in nature to Vergil's *Aeneid* (Harris). The middle section of glass, retrieved from an Ontario Science Centre discard, resonates with suggestions of scientific experimentation in a giant lab. The PVC is threaded with what appears to be intravenous tubing, and, when viewed through its interior, becomes a magical chamber leading toward that golden section. The exterior tubes are tied together to resemble the shape of sails, thus contextualizing the artwork in terms of ancient and contemporary wayfinding strategies.

Neighbour's *Erratic Theatre* emanates light from an enormous boulder, in polar opposition to Francis LeBouthillier's *Pressure Sensitive* (2000). The earlier project relocated a similar boulder, leaving a visible gap where it had resided for eons. In contrast, Neighbour's is suggestive of a mysterious and evanescent natural world that can exert its own will. A painted white stone by day, it is a radiant thing after dark, this due to ultraviolet spotlights and phosphorescent paint that releases absorbed energy slowly. During the nighttime events, viewers are given flashlights to use as light pencils that "draw" images upon the stone. Someone stencils a hand, a touchstone to prehistoric cave paintings, but unlike the art at Lascaux or Altamira, these transitory images are gone after a few seconds. This magical luminosity affects the stony surface, making its venous structure more evident, implying a visceral fragility that contradicts the logical understanding of the properties of granite. It also contributes to the vocabulary of Neighbour's 2007 Tree Museum installation, a collaboration with John Dickson in which she positioned glowing fruits inside his mirrored outhouse. Past associations to wayfinding exist here, since stones have functioned throughout time as markers to indicate direction or conceal a supply cache.

In stark contrast to the dreamy radiance of the boulder, and the historical connotation of Tataryn's telescope, Willems's *History of a Time to Come: Part I – Escape* demonstrates a road that hopefully will not be taken. A billboard and presentation centre advertises the development of a new highway leading toward a model community. In 2008 the Tree Museum house functioned as a hospitality centre much like an actual new home presentation venue. Complete with web component, signage and business cards, it was staffed with

PAGES 18 AND 19  
LISA NEIGHBOUR  
ERRATIC THEATRE  
STONE AND PHOSPHORESCENT PAINT  
PHOTO: THE ARTIST

ERRATIC THEATRE  
PHOTO: THE ARTIST



3 Artist's note.

uniformed sales representatives to obfuscate queries and pass out treats. While Willems's *Escape* uses language and imagery from a familiar paradigm, it is cleverly subverted. The road is named *1001 Nights Parkway*, a trickster figure (monkey) sits atop the entrance boulder, and two somewhat bewildered moose are swamped under the highway sign. The slogan promoting the project is "Escape: Follow the Road to a Sanctuary of Civilized Living." On the website the moose and swamp vanish, to be replaced by the highway and a hot car. The sign and its relations to what it signifies is disrupted: the signified is not a new development, rather a critique of the rampant urbanization that continues to threaten green space throughout the province and beyond. There will be no sanctuary and no escape.

While Passini's writings supply the curatorial direction, it is interesting to note that there is a company that offers "Wayfinding consulting and analysis, including all aspects of communication between you and your visitor" (Corbin Design). Willems's project mimics this business approach, using similar language, materials and syntax.

Tataryn's telescope-like creation offers a guideline toward a psychological wayfinding into the other artworks. As well as convey its own aesthetic impact, *see to phi* has metaphorical implications, brought to bear because of an informed viewership. Knowledge of Western art and related concepts surrounding the golden mean lay the groundwork for the story, possibly, the mythology. While not knowing about the golden mean will not preclude enjoyment of the art, an awareness of its cultural resonance can enhance understanding.

Willems's work capitalizes on the language and imagery of what Linda Hutcheon refers to in *Irony's Edge* as "overlapping communities" (96). Wayfinding as business, as a philosophical perspective, and even as a disorienting influence can be investigated in his ironic representations. He suggests the unthinkable, which, in the bucolic Tree Museum environs, presents an unambiguous message. Were it played in Mississauga or Durham there might actually be applicants for his Phase One. In a review of Hutcheon's book, Jenifer Karyshyn refers to "the conventional characterization of irony as an elite practice which winnows the competent from the slow, and which eludes description" and goes on to describe how Hutcheon counters this idea with an individual-empowering reading in which

*...irony does not "exist." Instead, it is a kinetic – indeed, almost ephemeral – event that can "happen" between speaker and auditor, or between curator and museum visitor; and "the final responsibility for deciding whether irony actually happens in an utterance or not (and what that ironic meaning is) rests, in the end, solely with the interpreter" (45), rather than with the initiating ironist (Karyshyn 971).*

Given the alarming realities that Willems addresses, the shared communities that Hutcheon describes might be an overly optimistic interpretation. One can hope that Joseph Beuys's idea of art as a societal curative could have some traction here. Within this context, wayfinding for the 400-acre Tree Museum is a useful concept in that the contrast for artists working in an informed and sophisticated current of practice invites an exploration of the disconnect.

With the Tree Museum into its second decade, an effective overview emerges as to the purposes, endeavours and conceptual *gravitas* inherent in the many projects. A general framework or strategy can be established through which artists have responded to the forest. The works can be considered in terms of 1) nature/culture parody, 2) nature as a contemplative site, 3) historical perspectives, and 4) environmental issues.

Many works on site effectively parody the disconnect between city and forest. In particular, Persona Volare (2007) displays an awareness of informed audiences that will easily read the ironic. Carlo Cesta's *Vacancy* is a garage door perched on a rocky promontory, reminiscent of a structure that a developer might use to indicate the newest project. The absurdity of urban intrusion is underscored by Kate Wilson's cryptic and mysterious signage attached to the trees, one in particular indicating where to find the elevator. Both Willems and Kobayashi (Simon) create narratives that target collective anxieties through parody. They create unviable scenarios that underscore the uneasy relationships between civilization and the natural world.

Given the splendour of the site, there are many poetic amplifications for experiencing the natural world, or at least one that is less compromised than its urban counterpart. Tataryn's device, Wen-Chih Wang's canopy lookout (2007), O'Callaghan's arched *Relic of Memory* (1998) and J. Lynn Campbell's spiral of cedars (1999) are a few of the works which present an essentially Romantic approach that privileges feeling and experience within the beauty and wonder of Nature. In 2008 Neighbour creates a theatrical moment, mimicking the glow worms and fireflies that light the night forest.

Several are invested with historical perspective. Research-based, they reference area land use, European and native settlement, national and international history. In the Tataryn structure, the engagement is with Western thought and the Renaissance cojoinment of mathematics and art. Natural history and the growth patterns of the forest are also explored in installations by artists such as Jaffa Laam Lam (2007) and Jocelyne Belcourt Salem (2000).

Given the museum name and its locale, there is considerable environmental commentary. Extinct trees are named, birds are imagined through sound and image, and alternate views are created. Badanna Zack embeds junked autos into an earth embankment for a roadside sculpture titled *Mound of Cars* (1998). Burdoch delivers messages on conservancy, while Willems assaults with pointed irony. Finally it is an ecological focus that is the primary concept under which all of the previous discursive structures can exist.

From Prince Henry the Navigator to "Where is Osama Bin Laden?" humans have wanted a formula, a map, a GPS, to cut through the clutter and complexity of information that jams our synapses, inhibiting clarity and direction. Here the artists' wayfinding endeavours to function as filters or focusing devices.

Tataryn's view across the lake is ordered through the exact positioning of the telescope-like structure. The view-finder eliminates extraneous visual information and the natural view becomes a constructed image. Neighbour creates a touchstone that calls visitors toward its evanescent light.

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**WEN-CHIH WANG**

*BRIDGE* (2007) DETAIL

PHOTO: MICHEL BOUCHER

**ANNE O'CALLAGHAN**

*RELIC OF MEMORY* (1998)

PHOTO: ROGER HENRIQUES

**J. LYNN CAMPBELL**

*IN-SIGHT* (1999)

PHOTO: RIC AMIS





While both impact visually upon the existing environment they are less radical than Willems's imaginary road into the swamp. Yet, all three present pathways and direction in terms of wayfinding, and oddly echo the business model that tells us that

*Wayfinding is...[d]irection for people in motion. It considers all the tools you use to share wayfinding information with visitors.... Properly designed, it ties together verbal and visual cues throughout your organization: architecture, interiors, lighting and landscape design. (Corbin Design)*

Outdoor forest installations introduce special issues, given that home base for many contemporary artists is a large urban centre. In a discussion of cognitive mapping, Verena V. Hafner from the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory at the University of Zurich contrasts wayfinding in urban and forest environments:

*Wayfinding in cities is much simpler than finding one's way through natural environments. Navigation through cities can rather be considered as route following... Wayfinding in forests, in contrast, whether it is human or animal wayfinding relies much more on general sensory input rather than associations with specific distinguishable landmarks. The configuration of several landmarks is more important than the identity of a single landmark... as is a continuous input from the environment. (Hafner, "Explaining Wayfinding Behavior and Cognitive Mapping: Book Review of Golledge on Cognitive-Mapping")*

Once again we can use the mantra that "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and that the multiplicity of artworks relating to the idea of wayfinding present an extraordinary experience for visitors to the site. Artists and artmaking can offer many strategies; both lived and imagined, to help us find our way.

MARGARET RODGERS

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WALTER WILLEMS

HISTORY OF A TIME TO COME: PART I

INKJET ON VINYL

MOUNTED ON ALUMINUM

WOODEN CONSTRUCTION

DIMENSIONS VARIABLE

PHOTO: THE ARTIST

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