

## Artists Statement

Gwynedd Tremblay

“Our human frame, our gutted mansion, our enveloping sack of beef and ash is yet a glory. I hold the cracked mirror up to man.” - Leonard Baskin, sculptor (1963)

I love this quote. I love it, yes, for its nearly Jacobean hyperbole of language, but also for the grain of truth it contains. It would seem that as we are awash in an ever deeper torrent of image and sound, the role of the artist is ever more the mirror of society. I have noticed in the past that though new media seem to add new rivulets to the stream every few months, seldom does one disappear. Elegies have been spoken over painting ever since the invention of photography, but paintings are still being made. The same could be said for lithography, calligraphy, linocuts, and other labor intensive methods of making images. The only example of a medium disappearing seems to be that of holography. During my student years at the Art Institute of Chicago, holography went from being a separate department to no longer having classes offered in the artform. Holography has yet to develop its own language, a victim of its own “gee whiz” factor. The usual course is that once popular mass media are surpassed and the medium is surrendered to the realm of the fine arts. Painting was once the documentary art for historical events, but photography took over that role, leaving painting the freedom to find its deeper artistic expression. Photography conceded to film (the news reel), and then film to video. But none of these media were lost when once of the role of documentarian was passed on to a more immediate form. Artists act as the preservationists of archaic form, the examiners of memory and explorers of new imaging techniques. The need to image ourselves and represent the self would seem to be essential to the human spirit. The ability to image the self and the universe is directly relational to the ability to imagine it. Paul Virilio cites Descartes when discussing “the *imperative to re-present oneself*, the imaging of the imagination . . . which Descartes considered a veritable part of the body, *veram partem corporis*. Just when we were apparently procuring the means to see further and better the unseen of the universe, we were about to lose what little power had of imagining it. The telescope, that epitome of the visual prosthesis, projected an image of a world beyond our reach and thus another way of moving about in the world, the *logistics of perception* inaugurating an unknown conveyance of sight that produced a tele-scoping of near and far, & *phenomenon of acceleration* obliterating our experience of distances and dimensions (pg 4 Virilio).”

I find this idea of telescoping image perception to be very interesting, and I think partly explains the rise in the appropriation of popular images in fine art since the invention of photography. The more we became accustomed to the once distant and exotic becoming enotcic and familiar, the more it became the role of the artist to be point out that one should stop and examine what was in one’s immediate environment. In present day America, we are more familiar with the faces seen in the evening news than we are with our neighbors down the street, but those images are cut loose from their anchors and often

consumed without contextualization. Popular media are driven to uncover the phatic image.

*The phatic image* - a targeted image that forces you to look and holds your attention - is not only a pure product of photographic and cinematic focusing. More importantly it is the result of an ever-brighter illumination, of the intensity of its definition, singling out only specific areas, the context mostly

disappearing into a blur. (pg. 14)

Not so many decades ago, if a human being saw something, that thing was within reach and fell into the realm of possible choices the integrated ego could embrace. Thus, that which was observed became part of and an extension of the corporeal body. But now in the flood of images we experience daily, the majority are out of reach and unavailable, leading to a type of imagic schizophrenia, and a reordering of proprieties.

*Everything I see is in principle within my reach, at least within reach of my sight,* marked on the map of the 'I can'. In this important formulation, Merleau-Ponty pinpoints precisely what will eventually find itself ruined by the banalisation of a certain teleology. The bulk of what I see is, in fact and in principle, no longer within my reach. And even if it lies within reach of my sight, it is no longer

necessarily inscribed on the map of the 'I can'. The logistics of perception in fact destroy what earlier modes of representation preserved of this original, ideally human happiness, the 'I can' of sight, which kept art from being obscene. I have often been able to confirm this watching models who were perfectly happy to pose in the nude and submit to whatever painters and sculptors wanted them to do, but flatly refused to allow themselves to be photographed, feeling that that would amount to a pornographic act. (pg.7)

### ***My personal artwork***

So am I addressing all these issues in my own work? Perhaps not overtly, although at times certain themes rise to the surface, and then sink to join the sub-current that is present in all my works, along with such factors as my Catholic upbringing, my life as a Gay man, and the experience of long term HIV survival. My underlying interests and philosophies are under continual examination, and reassessment. In the meantime, I rejoice in and celebrate the quotidian images that are so much part of mid-century American psyche. I revel in the small moment, the overlooked or barely noticed. I will never cease to paint, whether with a brush or a video camera.

