

TERENCE DICK in Toronto 05/10/11

Contact Photography Festival | Dynamic Landscapes at MOCCA | Robert Bourdeau at Stephen Bulger | Surendra Lawoti at Gallery 44 | Marie-Jeanne Musiol at Prefix ICA | Karen Henderson & Lauren Hall at YYZ | Niall McClelland at Clint Roenisch
posted by Terence Dick - May 10th, 2011.

The month is May and that means the **Contact Photography Festival** is upon us. The excessive number of exhibitions is more than any one person could absorb (though it would be fun to try). The best plan is simply to keep your eyes open as pictures appear throughout the city, from your local restaurant to billboards overhead, even on those TV screens on the TTC.



Viviane Sassen, *Parasomnia*, 2010 (courtesy of Motive Gallery, Amsterdam and Stevenson, Cape Town/Johannesburg)

The curated exhibition at the **Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art** serves as a thematic hub out of which various featured exhibitions, public installations, open exhibitions, and special events spiral. This year the focus is on four artists – **Olga Chagaoutdinova**, **Scarlett Hooft Graafland**, **Viviane Sassen**, and **Dayanita Singh** – each of whom uses colour photography to combine natural landscapes and un-natural behaviour to dramatic effect. Graafland's arctic surrealism is the most obviously playful, while Sassen's studies of posed figures taken throughout Africa leads the classical portrait tradition in an unexpected direction. Chagaoutdinova's interiors document the inversion of wilderness and domesticity and Singh finds poetry in the neon-lit night. For a show without the smattering of recognized superstars that usually get included, *Dynamic Landscape* is a pleasant surprise and a solid collection of work.



Elle Flanders & Tamira Sawatzky, *Isdud*, 2009

One of Contact's many public pieces can be found in the courtyard of MOCCA, stretched across the west wall of Clint Roenisch's gallery (more about which below). **Elle Flanders** and **Tamira Sawatzky** have an ongoing project where they document the sites of long demolished Palestinian villages in Israel. A more unlikely image of the troubles in the Middle East could not be imagined, which is what makes it all the more unsettling.



Robert Bourdeau, *Paris, France*, 2001 (© Robert Bourdeau / courtesy of Stephen Bulger Gallery)

Down the street at the granddaddy of Contact, **Stephen Bulger's** gallery, there is a selection of the quietly elegant black and white landscape photography of **Robert Bourdeau**. The all-over compositions of his images, both natural and man-made, render the world in an abstract pattern of light, the best of which bleach out recognizable features to reveal the formal beauty of the world.



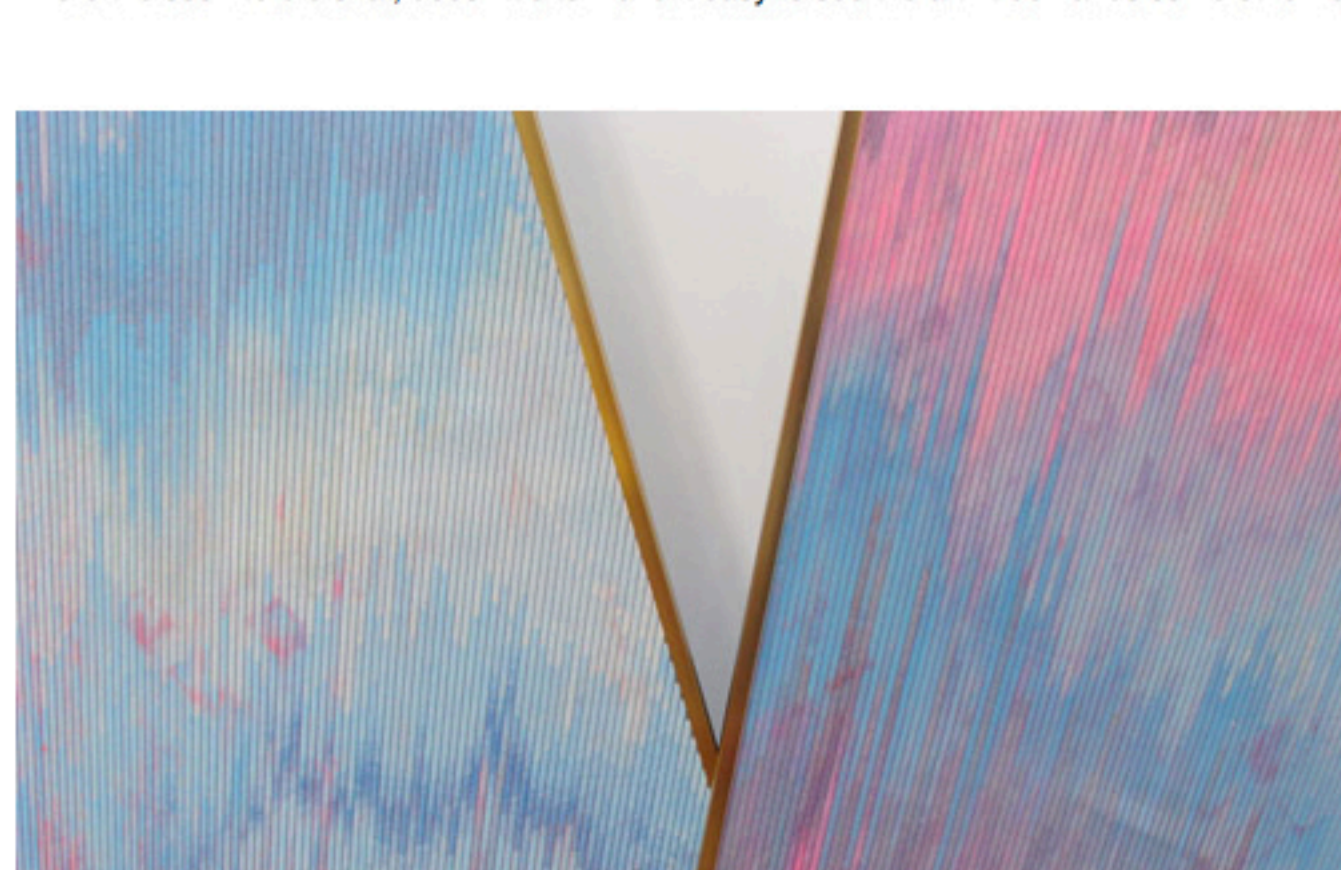
Surendra Lawoti, *Shelter 18* from the series *Don River*, 2009

A much different combination of man and landscape is found at that other home to the photographic arts, **Gallery 44**. There you can find **Surendra Lawoti's** large format documents of the temporary shelters that can be found hidden along the banks of the Don River and the men who live there. The subject matter is more compelling than the images, but the artist manages to convey something of the hardscrabble existence of these marginal residents while also eliciting a sense of intrigue and menace from the enveloping vegetation.



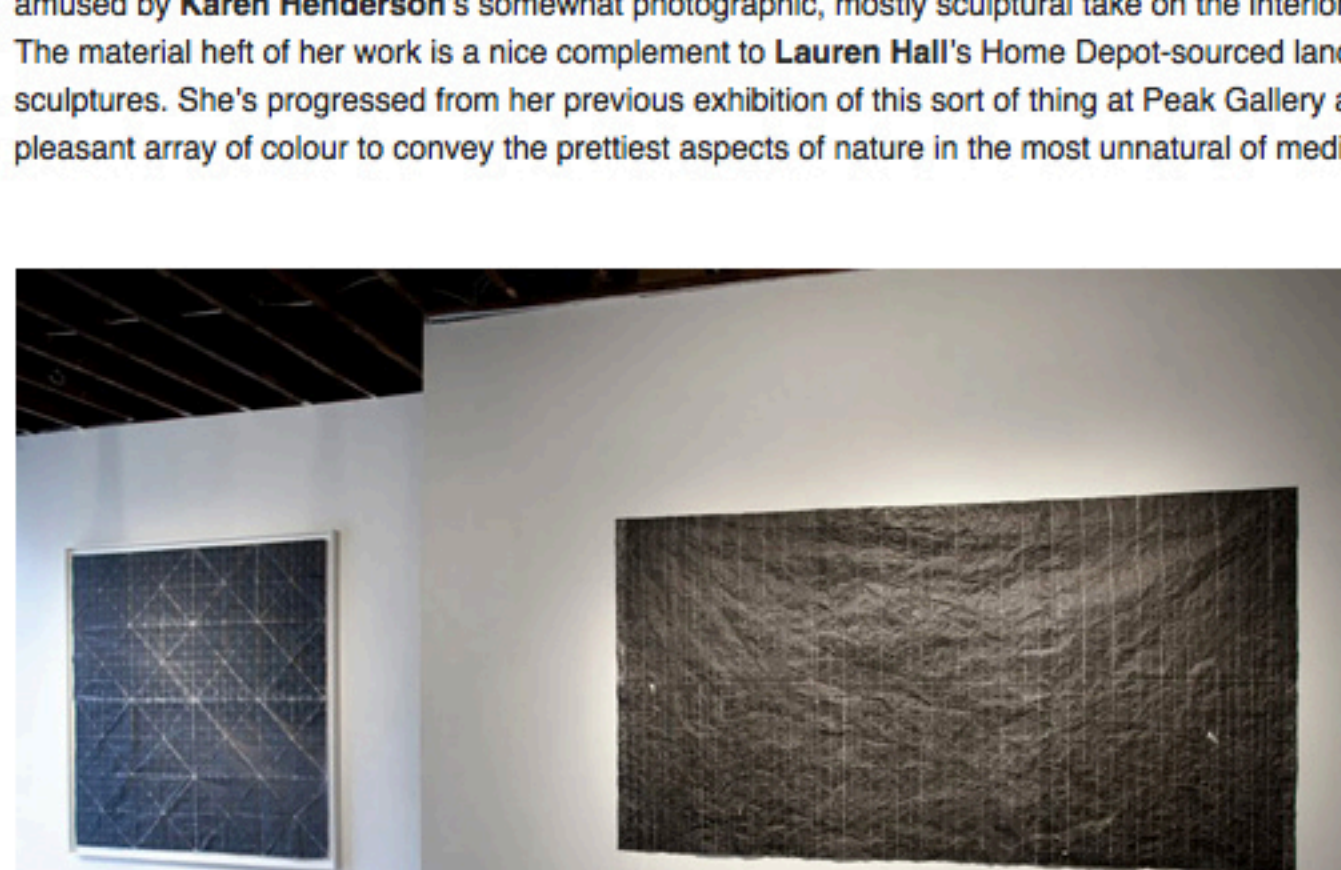
Marie-Jeanne Musiol, from the series *Black Holes* (installation), 2010

Also at 401 Richmond, though strangely not officially part of Contact, **Prefix ICA** presents a tough to consider installation by **Marie-Jeanne Musiol**. The Quebecois artist has documented a series of latrine holes from the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. The fact of the Holocaust makes any assessment of artistry challenging, if not impossible or irrelevant, and this work, asking as it does for us to stare down into black pits where the soon-to-die shat, does little to make it easy to see the art. It demands some other reaction.



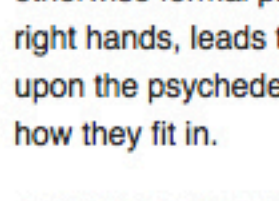
Lauren Hall, *Sunset Peaks* (detail)

Taking a break from photography (more next time, I promise), I dropped in on **YYZ Artists Outlet** to be amused by **Karen Henderson's** somewhat photographic, mostly sculptural take on the interior of the gallery. The material heft of her work is a nice complement to **Lauren Hall's** Home Depot-sourced landscape sculptures. She's progressed from her previous exhibition of this sort of thing at Peak Gallery and added a pleasant array of colour to convey the prettiest aspects of nature in the most unnatural of media.



Niall McClelland, *Highest Prices Paid For Gold*, 2011, installation view

Heading back to where I started, I visit **Clint Roenisch Gallery** and am wowed by the stark minimalism of **Niall McClelland's** works on paper, fabric and mesh. There's a death aura that lingers around these and contemporary art, a ficto-critical piece about the Leona Drive Project, and a review of Oakville Galleries Un-home-ly exhibition. His art criticism has appeared in Canadian Art, BorderCrossings, Prefix Photo, Camera Austria, Fuse, Mix, C Magazine, Azure, and The Globe and Mail. He is the editor of Akimblog.



Terence Dick is a freelance writer living in Toronto. He is currently working on an essay about war and contemporary art, a ficto-critical piece about the Leona Drive Project, and a review of Oakville Galleries Un-home-ly exhibition. His art criticism has appeared in Canadian Art, BorderCrossings, Prefix Photo, Camera Austria, Fuse, Mix, C Magazine, Azure, and The Globe and Mail. He is the editor of Akimblog.

