

MENNONITE HERITAGE CENTRE Gallery

CANVASSs

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<http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/programs/gallery/>

hours: Mon. – Fri., 8:30 AM – 4:30 PM; Sat., noon – 5 PM

an institution of Mennonite Church Canada

located on the campus of Canadian Mennonite University

TAX DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS: The MHC Gallery's budget is met primarily through private, tax deductible donations. Please, help keep the gallery alive and growing. Make cheques payable to: MHC Gallery. Mail to: MHC Gallery, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4. Credit card donations, contact Connie Wiebe at cwiebe@mennonitechurch.ca.

(204) 888 6781; Ray Dirks, curator, rdirks@mennonitechurch.ca

Pamela Leach

Ruskin's Pool:

Art's Truth about Nature

What started as spring fever therapy took on its own life. Communing with a puddle in my Crescentwood neighbourhood park, I was drawn beyond an initial dismissive glance at dirty spring runoff. I noticed the various qualities of light bathing and transforming it...green and gold and gray and blue and pink and purple as it unfolded anew and anew at each visit. Solid death became liquid life. A teeming ecosystem emerged in and around the puddle...a vibrant and vulnerable habitat. As my eyes focused, I could see its finer textures. Its beauty became sublime and its brokenness seemed to echo my own yearning for healing. I found in my puddle a mystical stillness and restorative well.

Within weeks, my photojournal of the puddle also grew impossibly — to over 700 images, from which were drawn the works in this show. These like many photographs express the intimacy between the observer and the observed. They are 'still life' in the 'still' eddy of early spring, but they capture the dynamic of a relationship flourishing. My camera and I lurked shamelessly in the park. During a breakfast with my son, we took turns sitting on top of the picnic table while the other sloshed around in our shared pair of rubber boots. At the end of his school day, and mine at CMU, we would taste the hush of the pool at twilight, as the roar of city traffic ebbed.

Melting and growing and greening, then suddenly crystallized, whitened, winter's pall returning, the pool had its own strange rhythm. This was an exquisite encounter between seasons. Spring like all epiphanies


is wild and woolly and breathes right through us. The puddle was teaching me, lapping me into a new wholeness if I would receive it.

I called my muddy puddle 'Ruskin's Pool,' located pretentiously as it was on Ruskin's Row. John Ruskin (1819-1900), art critic and social thinker, called 'the grandfather of the Arts and Crafts movement', inspired much of the architecture and interior design of this Crescentwood neighbourhood. His outspoken criticisms of environmental degradation, specifically water pollution, and the human costs of the industrial revolution were prescient. Ruskin called for a new relationship between the land and its people. He railed against the suffering, but also against the aesthetic numbing that remains key to capitalism's success. He observed that we have been blinded to the full costs of our greed. The Arts and Crafts Society suggests that Ruskin

...characterized all machine made objects as "dishonest." He believed, along with [William] Morris, that handwork and craftsmanship brought dignity to labour. He further felt that the factory/industrial work of the age disrupted the natural rhythms of life by imposing artificial hours and conditions on workers. To this end he founded a utopian Arts & Crafts community in 1871.

For Ruskin, art was deeply spiritual. His admonition that "art must tell the truth about nature" carries even today a compelling challenge. What is truth? Crescentwood's Arts and Crafts-inspired

houses reflect into the pool nature's grandeur, the strength and beauty of wood and stone. But in truth they also tower over this postage stamp of nature—the park, dominating the landscape with their affluence and domesticating everything aspiring to the wild. The park itself is a parody of nature, utterly unthreatening, controlled. Or is it?

What is my art's truth about this keyhole of nature, this puddle? What is nature's truth that is pouring into my camera? Sufis talk of the soul as a threshold through which there are two streamings. Mine often collide uncomfortably. My camera is an extension of this same threshold...the power and import of the puddle streams into it, into me. All who 'linger' by the pool or its photographic 

Proposals?

Artists, please, submit your proposals to us! The gallery hosts exhibits in approximate two month blocks throughout the year.

Mailing list

To receive **CANVASSs**, invitations to all exhibitions and other gallery updates contact Connie Wiebe, cwiebe@mennonitechurch.ca.

Contact

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Thanks

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Pamela Leach Ruskin's Pool Sam Baardman Water's Edge

OPENING: Friday, January 22, 7:30PM

January 22-March 6, 2010

Water — flowing, stagnant, frozen, thawed, pristine, polluted, winding, pooling, searching, finding — dominates two photography exhibitions opening on January 22. Pamela Leach, a professor at Canadian Mennonite University, happened into being a photographer, pulled by the recurring pooling of an urban puddle and all that it represents to her. Sam Baardman, a professional in various artistic pursuits, including photography, came to the gallery's attention through the recommendation of artist and friend Bob Haverluck. The photographers do not know each other but their themes stream together, causing viewers thoughts to flow from weedy puddle to shoreline to greater depths.

Sam Beardman

Water's Edge



remainder risk thus being opened.

Sometimes the dregs are most revealing!

The truth of Ruskin's Pool is refracted through reflections, so the images leave one uncertain of what is real and what is mirrored...this disorientation brings a fresh gaze. Reflections too have their own 'truth.' The upside-down-inside-out feeling of these works evokes the puddle's rich and puzzling complexity. The pool is an act of organic defiance, cheekily contradicting the Parks Department staff and their mandate of LAWN. It is not only wastewater, but habitat, shelter, lifeblood. The puddle *is* real, an authentic urban moment. Floodwaters have been the source of fertility in Southern Manitoba for millennia. Yet this too, we 'need' to engineer out of being.

Ruskin's Pool is also iconic of the fragility of nature in an overbuilt, globalized world. Bits of advertising flyers and plastic packages float along. Street sand and gasoline form telltale slicks. Eventually the pool's own inconvenience is vacuumed away by a City Works crew. Ruskin's Pool is a long way from being a wetland, and yet it screams out to us for them. It has been said that "because we do not think of future generations, they will never forget us." In its brief existence, Ruskin's Pool was a sanctuary for me and many life forms. Its greater sanctity can still be tasted through the photographs, which challenge us to discover and hold to our own truths.
Pamela Leach

For those on our regular post mailing list, go to www.mennonitechurch.ca/programs/gallery/ to see some of the images and print out a colour invitation, if you wish.

Next

In the Spirit of Humanity student exhibition, March 12, 7:30PM. Discover what has been happening in schools throughout the city participating in the gallery's *In the Spirit of Humanity* project.

2009 is over, the gallery year isn't

It was stated in the last newsletter that the gallery still needed about \$20,000.00 to break even for the year. The response has been terrific but we still need approximately \$5,000.00 by January 31, the gallery year-end. Can you give an early 2010 donation? All donations are tax deductible. Cheques can be made out to the MHC Gallery and mailed to 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4. Donations can be made by credit card by calling Connie Wiebe at 204 888 6781.

CANVAs

Despite its importance to virtually every system on the planet and to our material life, we are curiously alienated and estranged from water. Having lived on the banks of the Red River for many years, I have come to realize that the people who live within the river's domain are largely unaware of its existence in anything but the most superficial terms — as a lovely scenic feature, as a playground, or as a force to be tamed in flood season.

I think it's true that, for most of us, our intimate knowledge of water starts at the tap and ends at the drain. Outside of these boundaries, things get very fuzzy, very quickly. Nothing in the clear, flowing, temperature-controlled water that we use in our everyday lives would suggest that our water systems are in trouble, or that, as my friend Bob Haverluck likes to say, the river is wounded and on the run.

But in some ways it is obvious why we are so ill-equipped to understand the troubled state of our lakes and rivers, and how we are complicit in their deterioration. We are land-dwellers, air-breathers, lung users, drowners. Though our bond with water is inescapable, our head is in the air and our consciousness is dry as dust.

As the environmental crisis grows, such a dim awareness of water will have to transform and we will have to re-imagine our relationship to the earth and to its most common element. Water is already becoming a dominant concern in the cultural, political, scientific, and economic conversations of our time, but we have to go deeper.

In this series of photographs I have tried to play with some ideas about how we can begin this transformation. Some of the images stand as an invitation to stop at the place where earth and water meet, to contemplate and meditate on the boundaries that separate us emotionally and materially from the liquid dream of lakes and rivers, and to consider the porous earth through which water continually seeps into the channels and bowls of the watershed. Other images place us into the water itself, either in the shallows or beneath the surface, depicting ordinary moments — reading, sleeping, or simply gazing upwards from an unfamiliar and alien world.

We need a shift in consciousness, and a re/placement of our selves in relation to water if we are to preserve and sustain our world. Given our history, this may not be easy. A recent documentary film called "Waterlife" called for the adoption of a new set of cultural values in relation to water. In the *Globe and Mail*, the film's reviewer derisively asked, "While we're waiting for this mass consciousness shift, could somebody fix the plumbing?" How do we come to finally realize that it's not "somebody", but each of us individually, who has to do the work? How do we replace the mechanistic "plumbing" metaphor with something more profound, more true, and more personal? How do we move from the Water's Edge into the realm of water itself? *Sam Beardman*

Fabric/textile artists with Mennonite Church Canada connections

visit www.mennonitechurch.ca/programs/gallery/ to view a call for artists related to the *Acts for Peace/Art for Peace* exhibition that will be featured at the 2010 Calgary assembly.

Please, consider a donation

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contact Connie Wiebe at (204) 888 6781 or cwiebe@mennonitechurch.ca to donate by credit card

DONATIONS ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE

images by Sam Baardman



River People 03



- River People 01
- Meeting Place 06
- Shore Line 01
- Shore Line 05



images by Pamela Leach

