

ARTS

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Shore



By Land and Sea (Prospect and Refuge)

One of the most timely and contended issues of the late 20th century is individual identity in relation to community and place. *By Land and Sea (Prospect and Refuge)* is an artist's project by Marian Penner Bancroft which addresses landscape as being at the heart of both art and identity. It will be on view at Presentation House Gallery from November 6 to December 19.

Ideas of "prospect and refuge" discussed in landscape architecture consider the desire for conventional landscape views, which allow us to see without being seen, and to imagine some safe and private place in which to situate ourselves. Land is traditionally a source of passionate identification: of home, history, sacred sites, patriotic boundaries. Today, however, there may be many claims on any number of landscapes for any individual or group; current thinking incorporates this diversity with respect to our relationship to place.

As an artist using photography, Bancroft positions herself in various geographies, not as representative of the omnipotent view but as an indi-

vidual among others and within a personal and social history. Her own views are made up of the experience of being an artist, a tourist, a descendent, a resident, a woman—and each view has its own distinct conventions.

The landscape tradition in visual art in Canada is a strong one, most prominently through the Group of Seven, but also in early photography such as the work by William Notman chronicling the passage for the Canadian Pacific Railway. These works have been used to establish a specifically Canadian identity. The millennium provides an opportunity to both celebrate and transform the landscape tradition, opening a space for multiple readings that enrich and destabilize the idea of national identity.

This exhibition of Bancroft's beautiful landscape images revisits her own family history, which is, like that of many Canadians, a history of migration. In this instance, the migration is from South Russia (now Ukraine) to Saskatchewan with the German-speaking Mennonite community, and from the Highlands of Scotland to Manitoba and ultimately to British Columbia. Images of letters, diaries,

maps, and drawings provide a personal entry to the photographs.

The work operates within the context of other contemporary landscape photography that explores the social and formal phenomena of landscape. In current art practice, landscape is most often anti-nature, industrial, urban, and infused with the foreboding of environmental disasters. But in *By Land and Sea*, Bancroft has returned to nature as genealogy, once again drawing on personal history as a primary source for her work.

The exhibition opens at Presentation House Gallery on Saturday, November 6, at 2 pm. Marian Penner Bancroft will show slides and discuss her work on Saturday, November 20, at 2 pm. The public is invited to both events.

Karen Henry is adjunct curator at Presentation House Gallery. She is an independent curator and writer, and was the co-curator, with Karen Love, of the summer-long project War Zones, organized by Presentation House Gallery in collaboration with six Vancouver organizations.

