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A40 - North Shore News - Friday, May 2, 2008

visual arts

Picturing Moodyville as a state of mind

NV's Presentation House Gallery explores a North Shore identity

Moodyville opens at Presentation House Gallery today, with a public reception at 8 p.m. Features works by Jim Breukelman, Karin Bubas, Babak Golkar, Mike Grill, Kyla Mallett, Jeremy Shaw and Dan Siney.

Erin McPhee

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NORTH Vancouver's ambitions — past, present and future — are being explored in a new exhibition opening today at Presentation House Gallery.

Moodyville, a groundbreaking multimedia exhibition, takes its name from the industrial settlement established on the Burrard Inlet in 1872. The works take into consideration North Vancouver's socio-cultural landscape and how it's defined by its natural surroundings as well as bringing to light shifting identities and distinctive aspects, creating a unique portrait of North Vancouver.

"The title Moodyville is meant to really evoke this idea of the past of this place and maybe some kind of collective memory . . ." says Presentation House and Moodyville curator Helga Pakasaar. "It's not meant to be specific, it's just a more general evocation. It also to me suggests a state of mind."

To get the exhibition off the ground, Pakasaar commissioned seven artists with various connections to the North Shore, asking them to respond to the locale of North Vancouver without giving them any direction.

"As is always the case when you commission artists, things evolve in different ways," she says.

The resulting works, which includes photography, videos, drawings and a major outdoor installation that will see



JIM Breukelman's Paintball Landscape, North Vancouver, is featured in the Moodyville exhibit at Presentation House Gallery which opens today and runs through June 15.

photo courtesy the artist and Republic Gallery, Vancouver

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More projects planned for later this year

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Presentation House undergo a temporary makeover, are very different than what Pakasaar had originally imagined. "That's part of the pleasure of doing these things," she says.

Featured North Vancouver artist Babak Golkar, of Middle Eastern descent, decided to investigate the immigrant experience on the North Shore. Interested in social issues, he opted to explore the situation of many newcomers to the area who find themselves unable to work in their respective fields and instead become cab drivers. He went so far as to become licensed as a taxi driver. As a client, he compiled video footage which is being presented as part of the exhibition.

"It was an amazing experience," he says, referring to his findings on both sides of his exploration, as a cab driver and a client.

In addition to the footage, Golkar made a series of chalk drawings which will be displayed and yesterday, got started on

an outdoor installation — his largest to date. With the help of some former art students, Golkar temporarily resurfaced the exterior of Presentation House with bright yellow chalk.

This is not the first time Golkar has done an installation in the public realm. In 2005, he hung a large banner over a Park Royal overpass, as well as in other locations in the Lower Mainland, that simply stated "We Are Sorry."

Moodyville's House of Sulphur is representative of a number of themes, including the unique situation of a taxi, which is both a public and private space, and applies that idea to the building, he says. As well, it makes a connection between Presentation House, a landmark building on the North Shore, and another iconic site, the yellow sulphur piles situated along the North Vancouver waterfront.

Golkar says the weather will play a role in how long the non-permanent chalking lasts.

Another of the participating artists who surprised Pakasaar with their offerings was Karin Bubas, a photographer, who

opted to make a film. Intrigued by North Vancouver's history and the name Moodyville, Bubas searched the local archives where she came across an early photograph of people playing croquet. She re-enacted the scene, filmed in period costume in slow motion at Cates Park.

"Nothing happens, although there is a very ominous sense that something will happen," says Pakasaar, of the silent film that references impressionist painting.

Fellow Moodyville artist Kyla Mallett turned her focus on Presentation House after hearing that a number of paranormal occurrences are rumoured to have occurred there. She had a sleepover at the gallery — complete with an ouija board — and interviewed individuals who had seen or heard related ghost stories over the years. She ended up producing a series of spirit photographs in the traditional turn of the century style and is organizing a séance at Anne Macdonald Studio.

"Today, contemporary artists are understanding that place is not something that you can easily picture," says Pakasaar. "It's an *imaginary* kind of space, it's a psychic space. It's really how we are in our geographic environment and how we understand it is a very complex engagement. I think by choosing to evoke the ghosts of Presentation House, she's trying to also bring forward ideas about the difficulty of representing place and people too."

The timing was right for this type of exploration of North Vancouver, considering the degree of dramatic visible change occurring, mainly the urban development at its waterfront, says Pakasaar.

"It's an interesting time for this place, how it's imagining itself as a very up-to-date place, but also has a history and is still framed by these mountains and the forest," she says.

"My hope is that these works will provoke some thoughts about what the place is and also how we are picturing it," she adds.

The exhibition is just the tip of the iceberg of what has turned into an ambitious undertaking. It will be fully documented in a special issue of the *Capilano Review* about the North Shore and its history.

"It's trying to examine, again, the identity of the North Shore and its cultural expressions," says Pakasaar.

There will be a screening of documentaries about North Vancouver in June. As well, Pakasaar says they plan to hold a public forum in September bringing together a number of perspectives, including architects, urban planners, cultural theorists and First Nations voices.

Moodyville is financially supported by the Spirit of B.C. Opportunities Program, B.C. Museums Association: B.C. 150 Grant and the North Vancouver Office of Cultural Affairs.

Other participating artists include Jim Breukelman, Jeremy Shaw, Mike Grill and Dan Siney. The exhibition will remain on display at the gallery, located at 333 Chesterfield Ave., in North Vancouver, until June 15. For more information, visit www.presentationhousegall.com.



photo courtesy the artist and Monte Clark Gallery, Vancouver

PRODUCTION still from Karin Bubas' HD DVD projection *Afternoon Croquet (Moodyville)*, 2008.

NORTH SHORE Outlook

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THURSDAY MAY 22 2008 11

Moodyville

A fresh, insightful exhibit brings together seven artists' musings about life in North Van.

KELLY MCMANUS

STAFF REPORTER

Earlier this month, Babak Golkar took a stick of yellow chalk and coloured over the entire exterior of the Presentation House Gallery.

He had help. His students from Emily Carr got up on ladders and coloured the formerly green building stroke by stroke.

The effect from the street: the gallery has a strange dandelion glow. Up close, it looks like it's been loved and left by an industrious gang of wall-colouring first graders.

His Deriv(e) project in the gallery's latest exhibit, Moodyville, uses chalk in an exploration of Golkar's series of taped conversations with North Shore cab drivers.

A two-hour video installation chronicles his chats about politics, the economy and life in North Vancouver.

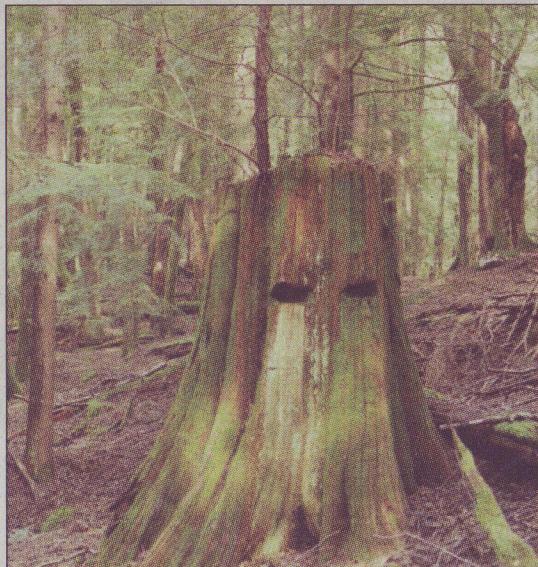
Inspired by the iconic yellow sulphur piles in the harbour, he later completed a series of yellow chalk drawings about the cab drivers's stories.

Golkar is one of seven contributing artists in the exhibit exploring the place and politics, the culture and essence of North Van, once a frontier boom town called Moodyville.

"They all approached it in a very personal way," says curator Helga Pakasaar of the artists' unique methods.

Kyla Mallett's series about local ghosts and spooky ectoplasm channels pseudoscientific paranormal photography at the turn of the 19th century.

To prep for her exhibit, Mallett interviewed North Van residents about



HAUNTED TREE STUMPS - In the Presentation House Gallery exhibit Moodyville, Dan Siney's "Stump Skulls" is a series of uncanny portraits, skull-like tree stumps of old growth trees in the forests of North Vancouver. Submitted photo

the infamous Presentation House ghosts – a woman with long hair who walks the upper floor and a gent named Frank who some say haunts the theatre.

Dan Siney's Stump Skulls series of photographs is beautiful and strange – uncanny portraits of old growth stumps, moss-covered, with logger-foot-holes carved out like eye sockets.

Karin Bubas' dreamy slow motion film, Afternoon Croquet, harkens to the golden days of Moodyville, when women wore long, full skirts to play croquet or hike the back-country.

Jeremy Shaw's short film, also dreamy – although for more, almost anthropological reasons – shows straight-edge kids rocking out in slow motion at Seylynn Hall.

Jim Breukelman's paintball landscapes, overturned logs and abandoned shacks spattered with neon shows the quiet aftermath of countless paint ball battles.

This is a fascinating, surprising exhibit, with little quirks and insights into North Van culture.

Moodyville runs until June 15 at the Presentation House Gallery (333 Chesterfield Ave., North Van).

Admission is free. Wednesdays through Sundays, 12-5 p.m. Thursdays, open until 8 p.m. Info: 604-986-1315 or www.presentationhousegall.com

seven days

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ARTS

Illusions of freedom fill portraits of prostitutes

VISUAL ARTS

E. J. BELLOQC: STORYVILLE PORTRAITS

At Simon Fraser University Gallery until June 14

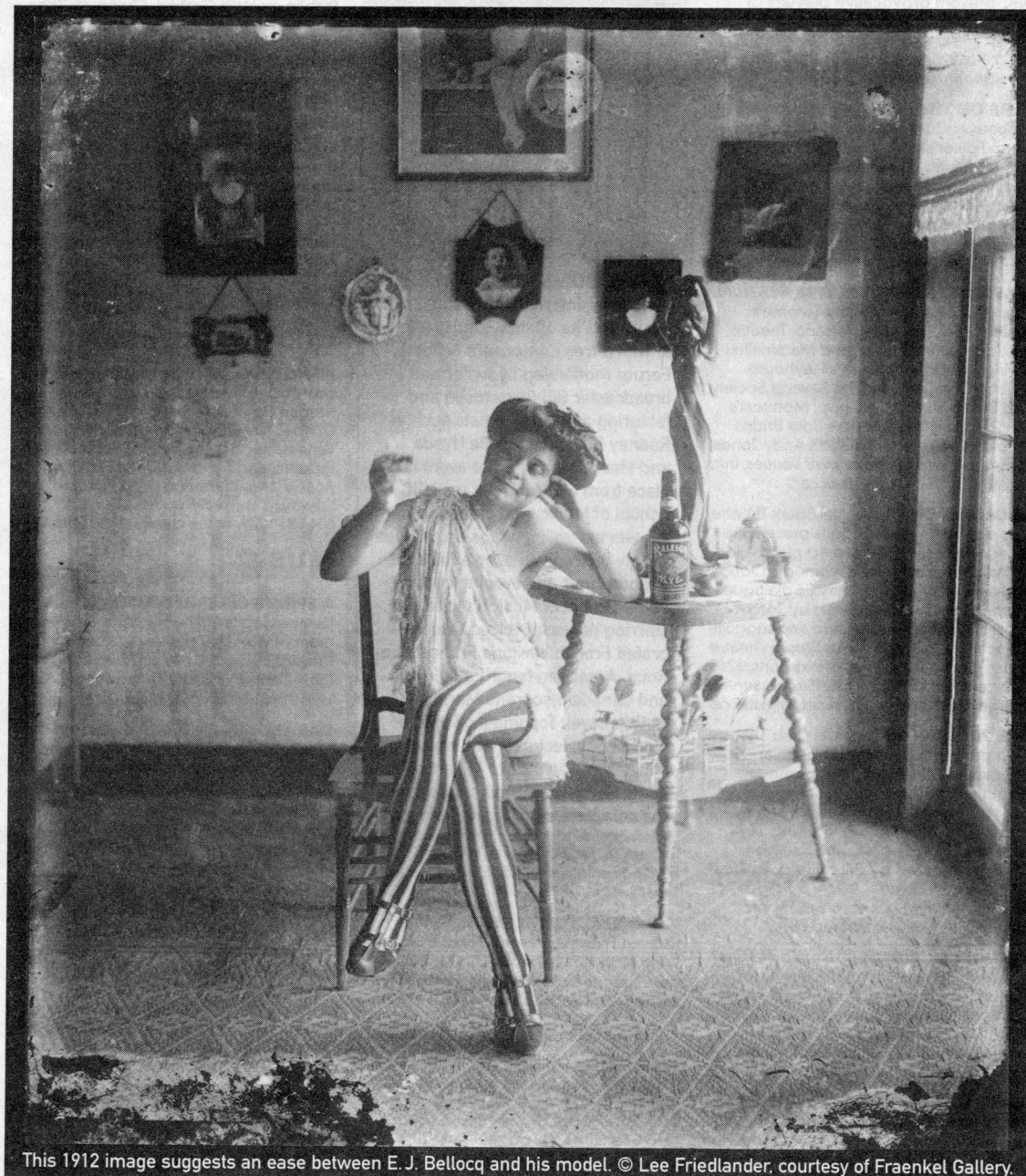
Few photographic series can generate as much critical discussion and conflicted response as E. J. Bellocq's shots of Louisiana prostitutes. Taken between 1911 and 1913 in Storyville, the red-light district of New Orleans at the turn of the last century, they depict individual women in various poses, moods, and degrees of nakedness. Formally and technically, they are not particularly distinguished, although the 49 prints on view at the Simon Fraser University Gallery bear the weirdly picturesque evidence of their origins: cracked, broken, and water-damaged glass-plate negatives. More than anything, it is their subject matter that has vaulted these photos into the realm of fetishized fine art.

And it is that subject matter—nameless, often naked sex-trade workers from a time and place long gone—that most fascinates and troubles us. Bellocq was a self-taught commercial photographer, and descriptions of his style range from the vernacular to the naturalistic to the would-be pictorialist. Little is known about him, and even less about what motivated him to take these photos.

Better understood is the history of their recovery from obscurity, in which contemporary American photographer Lee Friedlander played a crucial role. Some time after Bellocq's death in 1949, the glass plates passed into the hands of a New Orleans art dealer. Friedlander acquired them from him in 1966, painstakingly developed the prints, and brought Bellocq's work to the attention of curators, critics, and a wide public.

The photos reveal a condition of familiarity, and many critics have lauded the friendly rapport they see between the photographer and his models. Still, this condition is not consistent. Most of the fully dressed women (looking like middle-class maidens and matrons) and some of the nudes appear relaxed and at ease with the camera. One, stretched out on a divan and wearing nothing more than a mask and black stockings, smiles broadly at us. The smile and the mask vie strenuously with each other in humanizing and dehumanizing her.

Others, standing naked in bedrooms or courtyards, or sitting on bare wooden chairs, look stiff and uncomfortable. A famous nude shot of a slender teenager, lying on a chaise longue, is awkwardly posed and fraught with apprehension and vulnerability. That



This 1912 image suggests an ease between E. J. Bellocq and his model. © Lee Friedlander, courtesy of Fraenkel Gallery.

some postures are plain and uncontrived while others are playful, sentimental, or pseudo-seductive has provoked speculation that Bellocq gave his subjects the freedom to choose the way they presented themselves to his camera. Still, the notion of "freedom" in the context of prostitution—then as now—is hugely problematic. We know all too well that certain social, psychological, and economic circumstances remove "choice" from the sex-trade equation.

Bellocq shines in the rare moments when he depicts his subjects in a condition of uncomplicated everydayness, of ordinary humanity. One such image shows a smiling young woman, in a loose blouse and bloomers, holding a homely dog on her lap. Her smile

suggests that moments of pleasure—of friendship, playfulness, or the unquestioning affection of pets—occur in even the most degraded life.

> ROBIN LAURENCE

MOODYVILLE

At Presentation House Gallery until June 15

The title of this group show, *Moodyville*, is taken from the earliest industrial settlement on Burrard Inlet. According to Presentation House Gallery curator Helga Pakasaar, allusions to this short-lived North Shore sawmill community, founded in 1872, jostle "collective urban memory". Writing in the exhibition's brochure, she adds that the

idea of *Moodyville* as a vanished place "suggests how civic identity changes as visions of the future are imagined in relation to a barely-remembered past".

Six of the seven artists in the PHG show have lived on the North Shore at some point. All were commissioned to create new work in response to the *Moodyville* theme, and subjects range from tree stumps and suburban houses to a grain elevator and a paintball park. All the photo-based art on view is smartly conceived and executed.

Karin Bubas's silent DVD projection, *Afternoon Croquet (Moodyville)*, depicts a slow-motion game of croquet enacted in Victorian costumes. With references to archival *Moodyville* photographs and a painting by Edouard Manet,

this work poses an absurd gentility against wild nature. As in European fairy tales, the dense, mist-shrouded forest that borders the croquet lawn evokes uncontrolled forces—darkness and danger beyond the reach of civilization.

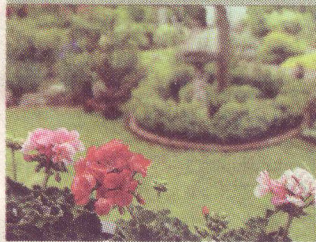
Jim Breukelman, Mike Grill, and Dan Siney also make art at the permeable interface between nature and culture. Siney's *City Moon* gives us a moody night sky viewed through overhead power lines. Chair-lift and bridge lights, floating in the darkness of his *Sky Bridge*, resemble distant constellations. These large, grainy photographs effectively play clichés of lyricism off of confrontational technique.

An exception to the nature-culture dialogue is Jeremy Shaw's DVD projection with sound, *Best Minds Part I*, which extends his preoccupation with youth cultures and the seeking of ecstatic states. Shot at a straight-edge dance in North Vancouver, the work records casually dressed young men in a frenzy of leaping, twisting, and turning. With their arms and legs wildly swinging, the dancers employ extreme activity and ramped-up levels of testosterone, adrenaline, and endorphins, to achieve an altered condition of being. We don't hear the music they're dancing to; instead, Shaw's somberly mesmerizing soundtrack adds aural texture to this compelling piece.

Presentation House itself is the subject of two works here; Babak Golkar's *House of Sulphur* and Kyla Mallett's series of black-and-white photos of a staged séance. Golkar's intervention, in which he and a team of assistants covered the façade of the building with bright-yellow chalk, alludes to the monumentlike sulphur piles on the north shore of Burrard Inlet. The work seems to play with the "presentation" part of Presentation House—false fronts, stage sets, the artifice of cultural production, and the disguises of commerce. It also suggests the many uses of this 1902 building, which has served as a school, a municipal hall, and a police station.

Mallett's hilarious "documentation" of a nighttime séance on the allegedly haunted premises of Presentation House sends up the notion of spirit of place while spoofing popular culture's appetite for the paranormal. More seriously, Mallett's ghostly apparitions and streams of "ectoplasm" acknowledge anonymous past lives entangled with the shifting functions of this structure. Its present state as a cultural centre is also in flux, with the gallery hoping to find a new space in the near future. As with nature and culture, the divide between past and present is a porous one.

> ROBIN LAURENCE



Wednesday, May 21, 2008

56 pages

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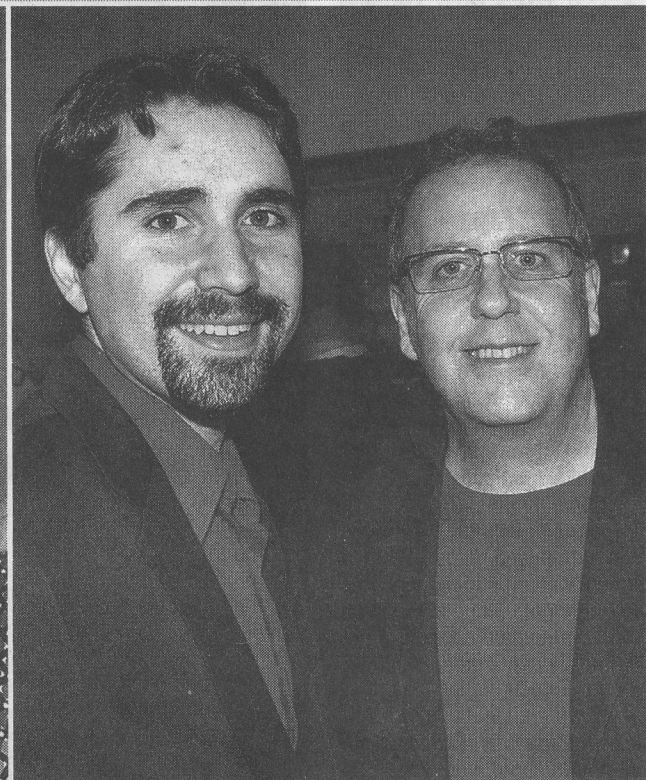
bright lights *by Paul McGrath*

Moodyville opening reception

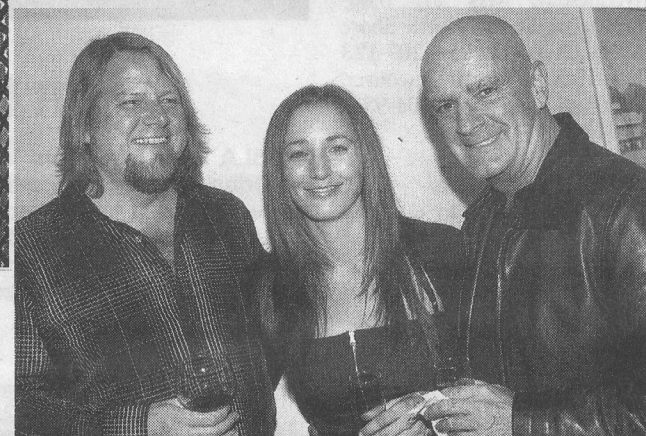


Pantea and Asmir Bassiri congratulate Moodyville curator **Helga Pakasaar** on a successful opening.

Presentation House Gallery's current exhibition **Moodyville** opened May 2 with guests taking in the works of seven Lower Mainland artists and their visions of the North Vancouver community. The exhibition takes its name from the prosperous sawmill community Moodyville, the earliest industrial settlement on the Burrard Inlet which was established in 1872. The commissioned multimedia works draw upon that history as well as the rapidly changing face of the Lower Lonsdale area today to form a complex picture of North Vancouver's sociocultural landscape, one that is still very much defined by its natural setting. The exhibit will remain on display until June 15. Info: www.presentationhousegall.com.



City of North Vancouver Coun. **Sam Schechter** and Director of Cultural Affairs **Ian Forsyth** show their support.



Neil Scott, Kirsten May and **William Cupit** have a chat.



David Clausen looks at exhibiting artist **Jim Breukelman's** photograph along with the artist himself.



Andrew Gruff, Marian Penner Bancroft, John O'Brian and **Cornelia Wyngaarden** attend.



Sophie Dikeakos and exhibiting artist **Karin Bubas** flank City of North Vancouver Mayor **Darrell Mussatto**.



Melanie O'Brian, exhibiting artist **Kyla Mallett** and **Robin Mitchell-Cranfield** explore the exhibition.

Please direct requests for event coverage to Bright Lights c/o North Shore News.
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