Lois Andison, Susan Collins, David Rokeby

Outlook Express(ed)

29 June to 26 August 2007
in Gairloch Gardens
curated by Marnie Fleming
Exhibition openings Thursday 28 June. Accumulated Outlook will open at 7:30 pm at Centennial Square followed by the opening of Outlook Express(ed) in Gairloch Gardens at 8:30 pm and a reception sponsored by Lexus of Oakville, Lexus Canada and Nationwide Audio Visual.

The crocuses and the larch turning green every year a week before the others and the pastures red with uneaten sheep’s placentas and the long summer days and the new-mown hay and the wood-pigeon in the morning and the cuckoo in the afternoon and the corncrake in the evening and the wasps in the jam and the smell of the gorse and the look of the gorse and the apples falling and the children walking in the dead leaves and the larch turning brown a week before the others and the chestnuts falling and the howling winds and the sea breaking over the pier and the first fires and the hooves on the road and the consumptive postman whistling The Roses Are Blooming in Picardy and the standard oil-lamp and of course the snow and to be sure the sleet and bless your heart the slush and every fourth year the February debacle and the endless April showers and the crocuses and then the whole bloody business starting over again.


Samuel Beckett, one of the great modernist writers, was in his own way a landscape artist. In the above passage from Watt he was defining a specific view and celebrating the passage of time in a particular landscape. This excerpt is carefully crafted and has an internal rhythm that speaks to the seasonal and mundane beauty of the natural world. It is a type of list-making and gathering together of images. His text reveals nature’s permutations, moments of transition and stark beauty. In important respects, it shares characteristics with the artists in Outlook Express(ed)—who are also in their own way landscape artists—but of a new and contemporary type.

Outlook Express(ed) looks at how new media has offered artists Lois Andison, Susan Collins and David Rokeby innovative ways of thinking about time, and thus the ability to create new ways of representing landscape. Each has examined a precise geography, from a specific outlook, revealing the fleeting qualities of the landscape and its constantly shifting tableaux. Their work demonstrates the passage of time as the seasons pass and as the earth hurls along in its perpetual orbit.

Andison, Collins and Rokeby deal with the transformative process of real time in a particular landscape using new media technology. Therefore, the title Outlook Express(ed), “expresses” a playful double entendre—referring to a specific place, while also referencing a popular, technological, timesaving computer programme. While quite diverse in their chosen outlooks, the artists share common constructs that are both digitally and data-driven. Over an extended period, they have recorded and accumulated images to form an archive of their specific landscapes, or perhaps, more correctly, “data-scapes.”

It is in the amassing of their information that surprising encounters become revealed, as a result either of human interaction or of natural forces. And while the underlying landscapes largely remain constant, many mini-events unfold. For example, in Andison’s time and again, a neighbour’s garage, seen from the artist’s bedroom window, is torn down and eventually replaced by a new construction. Collins’ carefully programmed Glenlandia reveals the subtle effects upon a Scottish vista in which a loch’s water levels rise and fall and the moonlight waxes and wanes. Rokeby’s Machine for Taking Time, commissioned for Oakville Galleries’s permanent collection and set in Gairloch Gardens, attests to the seasonal plantings of the garden, particular behaviors of Canadian geese, and an array of other events that occur beyond the limits of our normal perception.

From the outset the artists have manipulated the time and space of the landscape in the act of recording it by digital camera or Webcam, and then again, in the final screening of the image. The completed work is no longer confined within the same temporal and spatial boundaries, but rather is turned into riffs and rumination, sampled and shuffled through digital processes. Their images are not static but traverse from one time-frame to the next, thereby negotiating new positions with the present. The “outlooks” slip in and out of linear time, resulting in landscapes that are re-shaped and transformed. They allow us to perceive new incidental details that our eyes and memory initially failed to record. We are made to see the landscape in a way that was not previously understood. And, like the Beckett passage, events are strung together in a sequence that suggests mystery. In effect, all these artists are giving us still life in motion—thoughtfully and carefully programmed to reach the platonic essence of landscape.

— Marnie Fleming, Curator of Contemporary Art


Cover page: Susan Collins, Glenlandia, 19 August 2005 09:53 am (detail), © Susan Collins.
time and again

*time and again* is a year-long time-lapse video composed of still images shot from a fixed vantage point. Working within a predetermined process, I photographed the same scene every half hour for a period of one year, starting January 1, 2004 and finishing on December 31, 2004. The camera points down into a garden and an adjacent yard. Over the course of the video one witnesses both small incidental changes of isolated localized movement—the sudden appearance and disappearance of a squirrel, or branches succumbing to the weight of rain—and major changes such as the destruction and reconstruction of a garage. Randomness meets order while nature and culture mix.

The key concerns in this work are time and duration. In the genre of landscape photography/painting one observes the passage of time through the four seasons as a subtle meditation on temporality—a still life in motion. In contrast to this subtlety is the mechanical movement of one image following the other, processed with only a slight video transition, to create a staccato movement like a clock ticking. The decision to have the movement more pronounced than fluid and *filmic* is a nod to early Edward Muybridge’s motion studies—freezing and releasing time.

Conceptually many artists have dealt with similar concerns, some I knew of before I made the piece (like Andy Warhol’s *Empire*) and others I learned of later when I was considering the finished work. I like the idea of there being a lineage of people looking at landscape and the environment and dealing with natural/organic along with technical/mechanical processes. In *time and again* the camera mechanically “chooses” the picture based on timing while the composition and point of view are intuitively considered. The window is a framing device and all other details of the window frame are masked out to allow for the experience of time marching on.

Yet to examine the passage of time is nostalgic—even melancholic—looking back. When I made the piece I started to think of a self-referential element. I then decided to place the camera in the position of the birdhouse in order to “look back” at the house. The birdhouse, which had been observed for over a year, was now the observer. I installed the time-lapse video of the comings and going in the house itself inside the birdhouse to correlate with the idea of inside looking out. This piece is entitled *re: view*.

Most people know me as a kinetic sculptor and are curious about the shift to video, but *time and again* is a study in movement. Although the subject I chose is in many ways quite mundane and “un/monumental” the piece/portrait is very intimate and personal. It reveals something about me—that I have always been a window gazer.

— Lois Andison
Glenlandia

Over a period of twenty-four months, from September 2005, a Webcam has been placed overlooking Loch Faskally, in Pitlochry, Scotland.

The Webcam has been programmed to record images at the rate of a pixel a second, so that a whole image is made up of individual pixels collected over 21.33 hours — just under a day. Each image is collected from top to bottom and left to right in horizontal bands continuously. It encodes the landscape over time, recording fluctuations in light and movement throughout the day and night.

This is a sister piece to Fenlandia, a work which transmitted images over a 12 month period (April 2005–April 2006) from the roof of a 17th century coaching inn in rural Cambridgeshire. Fenlandia explored the relationship between landscape and technological innovation in East Anglia’s “Silicon Fen,” where technology is literally embedded in the flat horizons of a reclaimed landscape of canals, sluices, dikes and ditches.

Similarly, in Glenlandia, what appears to be a quintessentially “natural” Scottish loch-side view — Loch Faskally — is actually man made. It was created behind the hydro dam at Pitlochry, and the water levels in the Loch rise and fall according to the demand for power in the neighbouring glens.

As well as creating a perpetually updating “live” image, Glenlandia saves an image every two hours, translating into an accumulated archive of over 6,000 images to date, with each image—or still—forming a complete work in itself.

When lined up together in series, time becomes both explicit and implicit in the work, from the thinning and widening band of black depicting nighttime throughout the year to the occasional white streak, which appears to be a comet but turns out to be the moon slipping through the night sky...

Certain things become visible and others less so. The banding across the images shows how frequently light changes throughout the day. People and moving objects become quite abstract, represented by a captured pixel or two, whilst the enduring, underlying architecture of the landscape remains constant.

The live transmission becomes effectively a moving still, focussing more on “the moment,” the “where is now” — mesmerising with its slowness and concentration on finding and then following one tiny moving pixel.

For the prints, the still stills, the “right now” is the moment, the point at which that image is captured or archived. If viewed live, the moving still, the point of “right now” is shifting constantly through each image.

Glenlandia is intended to be slow, a reflection on time, landscape and observation, as well as exploring—in this age of instant communications—what it means materially to record a digital image and transmit it across space and time.

Regularly updated stills of Glenlandia can be viewed in the site's archive, whilst a downloadable (flash) application lets the work function as a distributable artwork which can be viewed full screen and updated live to your computer in real time until September 10, 2007.

http://www.susan-collins.net/glenlandia

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Machine for Taking Time

As an artist, I seem to do two things with computers.

I am always looking for ways to use computers to construct antidotes to the dominant effects they have had on us and our culture. My first major work, Very Nervous System, used computers to re-engage participants with their bodies, to counter the fact that they seem to make our own bodies uncomfortable, invisible or irrelevant.

Computers can process things remarkably quickly, and this speed has been leaking into our lives for the past few decades. As we struggle to keep up with the constant change and acceleration technology makes possible, we lose sight of the fact that the computer has other less celebrated properties, such as infinite patience.

Machine for Taking Time is a system designed to use the computer’s patience to capture the passage of time throughout the space of Gairloch Gardens. It is also a machine designed to draw us into “taking time,” a device for encouraging us to slow down and enter the gentle suspension of time that comes from the act of contemplation.

For Machine for Taking Time, I placed a camera on a motorized mount and perched it on the gallery building. I designed a trajectory that covered most of Gairloch Gardens and set up a programme that panned and tilted the camera through 1,080 positions along this path, taking an image from each point-of-view every day from March 2001 to June 2004, building up a database of about one million images. The computer now wanders through this database, stitching together a leisurely continuous pan through the garden, staying true to the spatial trajectory but shifting unpredictably through time.

Sometimes it stays on one day for a while. You can follow the micro-narrative of a stroll through the park. Other times it starts slipping through time, moving from day to day as it progresses from position to position. The human narrative falls away to be replaced with the shifting of climate and the seasons. Occasionally it leaps across the years…trees disappear; artworks installed on the grounds appear and vanish.

This cavalier relationship to time echoes the movement of human memory as it leaps back and forth across time. But Machine for Taking Time gives this fluid time travel of memory the immediacy of vision. The sensation of the pan keeps the eye in the present, drawn to consider the changes in the image as though they were plays of sun and light, to interpret them as live, unfolding experience. But just beneath this shifting surface there is a sensation of something very still, something like an ideal Gairloch Gardens hanging in a hybrid space between particulars and abstraction.

Floating in this river of externalized remembering, in this zone suspended between the singular and the idealized, I am reminded of the strangeness and beauty of memory, which tends to fall into familiar invisibility.

This is the second thing that I find myself doing with computers: using them to reframe human processes so that I can wonder at them again.

— David Rokeby