

Site Scope 2003-2004

www.sitescope.ca

Of course the first thing to do was to make a grand survey of the country she was going to travel through. 'It's something very like learning geography,' thought Alice, as she stood on tiptoe in hopes of being able to see a little further. "Principal rivers--there are none. Principal mountains-- I'm the only one, but I don't think it's got any name."

Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*

How can one come to know the place one inhabits in more stimulating, original and pleasurable ways? *Site Scope*, Oakville Galleries's two-year public programmes initiative, sketches some potential answers to this question through a series of innovative community-based projects. Oakville Galleries offers the public several methods of experiencing the Galleries, our grounds and the surrounding town, through printed walking tours, video and web-based orientations, and through public interaction with our visiting artists, writers and thinkers.

Site Scope proposes that viewers extend their experience of art within the gallery/house to include the landscape outside its walls. A series of guests has been invited to live at the Galleries for one month each to act as guides in this process. During this time the resident must venture out each day to explore the surroundings, and this exploration is then charted as a web-based project that offers different forms of involvement from viewers. Each resident presents alternative, visual means of exploring Oakville as a territory of contemporary culture; their approaches are inspired by Oakville Galleries's exhibitions, as well as by the ability of the Internet to articulate a shared yet subjective experience of the locale.

Site Scope is informed by the way the Internet offers a virtual view of maps as fragmentary, provisional and time-sensitive renditions of a location. By contrast, real communities use visual means to regulate and define physical public space. These range from the modest, such as pedestrian signs, to such comprehensive designs as town plans. Beyond these official, civic representations of a town, there are a myriad of overlapping, interdependent, ever-mutating perspectives that allow individuals to hold different interpretations of the same place. *Site Scope* sets out to reveal these points of view as they can be glimpsed behind the Heritage Zones, the developers' "communities" and the urban planners' official designs. It brings into question commonly held views of Oakville's identity to stimulate ever more vital versions of what the town once was, now is, and could become.

Oakville Galleries in Gairloch Gardens is designated as a Heritage space, yet this history is not widely known. As a portal into the community, *Site Scope* invites viewers to enter into the unique historical, architectural and environmental setting of Gairloch Gardens. A site map encourages visitors to discover the estate garden and its connection to the surrounding built and natural environment. An orientation video in the Galleries screened alongside a picture window to the lakeside grounds gives a brief, pictorial background to the historical circumstances and the personality behind the site.

Once the estate of Lt. Col. W.G. MacKendrick, Gairloch Gardens encapsulates an important moment in the history of Canadian landscape design. MacKendrick, who, in 1922, landscaped and built the secluded family compound that now houses Oakville Galleries, was manager of a paving company that helped to transform "muddy York" into a sprawling metropolis. During Toronto's early boom, his roads opened up the possibility for car owners to live in large, landscaped lots.

This history of suburban evolution was brought into focus last fall by our inaugural resident, critic John Bently Mays. Through on-line essays, he probed the idealizations of domestic security and small town life that he found to be at the root of Oakville's identity. Interviewing residents, he raised questions critical to the town's future as it faces re-definition through the invasion of settlement from

the Greater Toronto Area. His inquiry focussed on the notion of community as it is interpreted out of a yearning for security and continuity. Please read his essays online and explore the contextual information offered through hyper-links to background on the issues, and links to resources about Oakville, New urbanism and suburbia.

Jeff Thomas, our second *Site Scope* resident in March 2004, continued with an investigation into the ways that images are used to define a sense of place. The themes of pilgrimage, trails, destination and destiny linked to images of history were the entry points for his project. Jeff Thomas is an Iroquois/Onondaga photographer and curator who now lives in Ottawa, Ontario. For several decades his work has investigated how Native peoples are represented in an urban context, presenting the image of the American Indian as one that is constantly being defined. He undertook the challenge of creating a web-based project that correlated movement and story-telling with a search for cultural identity in the landscape.

Throughout the journey, Thomas worked with the dual landscapes of the web and the physical world. The virtual trail of his travels was hyper-linked to networks of history plaques and Web-based Heritage Trails. His travel itinerary was formulated around geographic points marked to offer historical outlooks on the First Nations presence in the region. These take the form of plaques, museums or, in the case of Crawford Lake, the re-creation of a settlement. Thomas elaborated upon and added to this system by marking new outlook points with the aid of his camera and a toy Indian. Meanwhile, the stereotyped image of the mythic Indian was omnipresent in the landscape, appearing on signs for streets, clubs, harbours and businesses. Please visit our website and retrace his journey.

Vancouver artist Kirsten Forkert has been invited this fall as our third resident. Her work investigates questions of public space and community and how these might be defined outside of the rhetoric of official culture and/or the mass market. In contrast to Jeff Thomas's travels within the Halton region by car, Kirsten will act as pedestrian and cyclist in our largely car-based town.

In a car culture, for example, parks tend to be regarded as "drop zones": a place for incidental, secondary activities, a playground for kids, a safety valve for dispersing congregations that may threaten peaceful streets, or somewhere to unleash the dog. Gairloch Gardens former estate grounds are only one variation within the spectrum of public green spaces. Parks may be designed to be 'active,' offering such facilities as climbers for young kids, cement landscaping for skateboarding adolescents, or pools for everyone. Or, they can be designed as neutral green space - available for the anticipated recreational needs of the population.

Kirsten Forkert is an artist fascinated by this gap between the way in which spaces are designed for particular uses or types of people and the fact that they are often used in ways that depart from the designers' intentions. Her investigation will be guided by an open-call to the community to share their experiences of Oakville's public spaces. Part of her project involves noting the incidental and surreptitious social actions that are harboured by Gairloch Gardens at different moments of the day and night. To experience this site as part of a network of local public spaces she will walk, bike and take the bus to get from place to place, with the intention of shifting the scale and perception from the standard car-centric viewpoint to the less officially represented pedestrian or bikers' Oakville. The process of discovery will be charted on a day-to-day basis on Oakville Galleries's website.

Finally, to round out 2004, we have invited historian Pleasance Crawford this November to explore the flip-side of the public park: the garden. "Pleasance" is the Middle English word for garden, and the serendipitously named Pleasance is well known for her in-depth investigations of Canadian cultural landscapes; the history of gardens is her specialty. In her residency Crawford will make Gairloch Gardens her home, inviting inhabitants of Oakville to collaborate with her in discovering visual

evidence of the town's pre-war gardens and the memories they evoke.

Titled *Home Landscapes* her project complements the exhibition by Janet Hodgson: *Here and There, Then and Now*. Crawford is interested in exploring the range of home landscapes in and around Oakville during the 1900-1939 period. Her research process is two-fold: first, an invitation is issued for town residents to submit photos of pre-war gardens, (which may be outdoor family portraits) for analysis and interpretation. The images, scanned to high-resolution digital format to expose background detail of the setting, will evoke memories of similar gardens and their uses. These recollections will be gathered and displayed alongside Crawford's historical commentary on the website. Supporting this activity will be her individual work in the Town's Archives held by the Oakville Historical Society. On-line documentation of this will serve as a demonstration of how to carry out cultural landscape research based on archival photography. To inspire a broad scope for research, the *Home Landscapes* web-project will offer links for Internet users to access the myriad of archival image databanks. Finally, to bring this community exercise home, the site will feature a small virtual exhibition of the history of three local estate gardens: Gairloch Gardens, Erchless Estate and Edgemere, a private historical property.

(Please print text below print in Box)

Oakville residents are invited to contribute pre-1945 snapshots or posed portraits in private gardens. The photos should be labelled and accompanied by the owner's contact information. If possible include a brief written account of the importance of the garden to the individual or family who used it, or call the gallery and speak directly to Pleasance Crawford. For personal photo pick-up and return service or further information please call Teresa Casas 905.844.4402 ext. 23 or email <teresa@oakvillegalleries.com> <<mailto:teresa@oakvillegalleries.com>>>

Home Landscapes Lecture Series

Organized for Oakville Galleries by Pleasance Crawford and presented in collaboration with Oakville Museum at Erchless Estate and the Oakville Public Library. This lecture series provides a context, within the broader field of landscape and garden history, for the project's focus on home landscapes in Oakville during the 1914-1939 period. It offers the audience a focal point and gathering opportunity for the over-all project.

Christopher Campbell: *Past Glories, Future Trends in Landscape Design*

Wednesday, November 3 at 7:30 p.m.

Auditorium, Central Branch, Oakville Public Library

Downtown Oakville, 120 Navy Street

Focussing on professionally designed home landscapes in Southern Ontario, 1914-1939, Mr. Campbell will include a brief overview of the role of landscape architects in Southern Ontario before 1914 (e.g. C. Ernest Woolverton, Max Stolpe, Frederick G. Todd, the Olmsted firm, etc.) Also an examination of landscape and garden elements of the 1914-1939 period, using examples of the work of the Dunnington-Grubb, Harries, Hall & Kruse, Arthur M. Kruse, and other professional designers active in Southern Ontario, particularly in and around Oakville.

Edwinna von Baeyer: *The Enchanted Garden of William Lyon Mackenzie King*

Wednesday, November 10 at 7:30 pm

Oakville Museum at Erchless Estate

Downtown Oakville, 8 Navy Street

William Lyon Mackenzie King developed his Kingsmere, Quebec, estate landscape for nearly 50 years. Although no formal plans exist of the overall design, King left an amazing record of many of his inner thoughts and outer actions concerning his estate in his diaries and private papers. Drawing on this

fascinating material, Edwinna von Baeyer will trace this development and show how it reflected his eccentricities, romanticism, spirituality and the gardening spirit and styles of his time. Kingsmere was many things to King: a refuge, a status symbol, an experimental station, and an enormous canvas for him to fill with a beautiful landscape of flowers, trees, picturesque roadways and statuary. It was also a landscape reverberating with spiritual emanations understood only by King. It became a physical projection of King's fantasy life, his enchanted garden.

Pleasance Crawford: *Home Landscapes*

Wednesday, November 24 at 7:30 p.m. Auditorium, Central Branch, Oakville Public Library

Downtown Oakville, 120 Navy Street

Pleasance will speak on amateur-designed home landscapes in southern Ontario, 1914-1939, focussing on vernacular landscape and garden elements of the period, with examples from archives, *The Canadian Horticulturist*, and nursery and seed catalogues; and Oakville examples, including those found during the residency.

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