

IN QUADRATUM

The square is familiar and identifiable to us all. It is one of the first shapes we learn to recognize. Children use it as a main focus in their drawings. They might depict the square to suggest the basic structure of a house, to represent a box or sometimes a book. These animations of the square are not unique to children but are echoed in symbols found throughout cultures and societies. The four artists who make up *In Quadratum* also thought of these objects when considering the square and these ideas and others are reflected in their new work. After playing with different possible ideas for a collaborative project, this group of artists found that the natural theme should be the square to reflect the four equal but separate members. Whether in clay, paper, painting or printmaking, their art is a result of their individual explorations of the theme. When brought together, their art gives balanced but layered answers to the question: what is the square? Their responses are ones that address the stability and uniformity of the square but also disturb it and open it up.

When I asked a random group of people how they would describe the square or what qualities they felt a square had, I received a list of positive adjectives like strong, equal, solid and safe but also a list that suggested its limitations like confining, inflexible, cold and safe. This dichotomy seems to be one of the complexities of the square. Its safety, for instance, can be at once attractive and uninviting. Its walls can be there to protect us or to contain us against our will. One of the artists in this exhibition, Derek Chung, looks at the square as an object that can control chaos within its borders or keep it safely outside. Either way, the fear, or perhaps the excitement, created by the unknown and the disorderly are robbed, or maybe saved by this rigid structure.

Chung's clay tiles are beautifully manipulated in a methodical process of working the clay and then using a glaze and wax resist to create the pattern. It is a regimented process that results in balanced and rhythmic patterning. But Chung disturbs this regularity by including one set of white tiles. The cleanliness and beauty of these white tiles parallel these same qualities of the square but within a series of red clay tiles they surprise us and force us to reconsider them.

Chung's series of tiles also references early clay tablets. The purpose of these early tablets was to record stories; they are some of the earliest forms of today's books. This connection between the square and the book is common. Ruth Read also thinks about this relationship in her work. Many of her works incorporate the book, the vessel of knowledge and information. Made out of brown paper stained with india ink, these hand-made books (which interestingly contain no written language but still convey an abundance of information through the staining and the making) lie or stand beside other objects upon altar-like slate tiles. Read places the books beside hand-made paper bags and natural materials to conjure up all her reactions to and relationships with the square. In one case a book hides inside a box. These boxes and bags remind us of the square's ability to hide and protect and that what is inside can offer us welcome surprises. For Read the square reminds her of the winter garden, enclosed on four sides and containing natural materials. Her work also includes elements from nature like a dried pear, sand collected from Newfoundland and dried leaves. The garden for Read is a place of peaceful intimacy separated from the rest of the world, a sacred place of solace and a quiet

space to think. Similarly, these offerings of objects gathered together and organized personally by Read, give viewers an intimate encounter with the artist and her thoughts and provide safe escapes of beauty.

We use the word square to define a meeting place in the central part of a city or town, one often bordered either literally by walls or by walls of buildings. Carol Kapuscinsky's paintings take us far beyond the city square and out into the fields of Ontario. Her four-foot squared canvases depict fields, in each of the four seasons. Despite the fact that she has chosen to use a square canvas, clearly defined within specific borders, Kapuscinsky manages to take the viewer far beyond these limits. Within this structured form, she offers us peaceful views of the seasons, each one with familiar attributes and personalities. By continually layering thin glazes of colour onto the canvas, Kapuscinsky creates a rich and deep experience of the land. Further, she manages, by her choice of subject matter and her treatment of the paint, to draw us into the scene and in so doing the sides of the square fade and are replaced instead with a sense of endless life.

The square can also have much more symbolic if not ritualistic roles. For Judith Welbourn there is a clear connection between shapes and colours. Through studying the characteristics, meanings and symbolism of colour, Welbourn discovered the relationship between the strong shape of the square with the strength of the colour red. Both for her represent universal symbols that are deeply connected with the earth. In *Red Monopoly* she brings those two thoughts together in four lithographic prints that hang as one large square. Here again, the artist has chosen to use the structure of the shape but by adding one corner that is similar to others but distinctly different, she questions its uniformity and adds her fingerprint.

In this exhibition the square is undoubtedly an icon, but quite different from being sterile and cold, the squares of *In Quadratum* are nothing if not personal. The artists in this exhibition, although celebrating the formal qualities of the square, add evidences of their personal lives, softening the rigidity and inviting their viewers to experience their creations in a safe but exciting way. By pushing the strong boundaries naturally imposed by this shape, they open it up and let people in.

Maura Broadhurst, Curator
The Latcham Gallery

From the Exhibition In Quadratum October, 2003

The Tree Project: A Passion of Three

For artists, Carol Kapuscinsky, Mee Ae Song, and Judith Welbourn, expressing their personal experiences through artistic means was the key to The Tree Project – a collaborative exhibition featuring twenty-two works examining one of the most significant living plant forms found in the world.

From memory and history, mysticism and spirituality, *The Tree Project* is all encompassing in its scope and depth and the passion demonstrated by the artists for their subject matter and what it represents to each of them.

The serenity, for example, that Kapuscinsky feels in the presence of her subject is reflected in large oil-on-canvas depictions using rich but quiet glazes of colour with three or four thin layers at a time. “Being close to a tree is a very comforting experience,” explains the Ajax artist, for whom the significance of the tree traces back to her childhood when she first read the poem *Trees* by Joyce Kilmer.

For *The Tree Project*, Kapuscinsky leads the viewer on a journey along Lake Ontario to experience the trees she has observed close to home. In preparation for creating her works, the artist utilizes both still photography and video to capture not only the visual components but also the sounds and mood of the experience. Kapuscinsky then brings this raw footage to her studio to work from.

The Tree Project is the first painting show in Canada for Korean-born Toronto artist Mee Ae Song, who has long been a collector of tree drawings by her friends. Working in mixed media, Song focuses on the rings and roots of a tree as she intertwines their history with the lives of different friends, interpreting the impression she had from these individuals and their lives. “The tree shows the element of the person”, she says, using the rings and roots as an allegory to reflect the inner being. Like trees, people, too, have outside appearances that can differ greatly from what they are like within, she adds.

Similarly, Song uses tree roots to symbolize the connection between individuals and the unique characteristics each brings to a relationship. In one depiction, for example, the view is from above and illustrates hand-like roots protruding and supporting each other.

As with the other works in *The Tree Project*, Judith Welbourn imbues symbolism but on a level that makes use of and demonstrates her extensive research – taking place over a period of many months – into her subject matter. By her own admission, Welbourn is “always rummaging around in mythology and spirituality” and for this exhibition, immersed herself in the study of the tree and its use as a metaphor. The resulting series of five panel works incorporates facets of the research in an interpretation that is as layered and creatively complex as the traditional method of printmaking, using woodcut relief techniques on hand made gampi paper, chosen by the artist. The panels are placed edge to edge and each panel has a right and a left side as one would see in looking at pages – still referred to in modern lexicon as leaves – in an open book.

Religious symbols, icons, Druid and Celtic symbols, not to mention components of various trees themselves, figure prominently in Welbourn’s works, in addition to the five

elements said to embody the *Tree of Life* or *World Tree*: air, earth, water, fire and the key to the greatest of mysteries.

Through different eyes and different feelings, the three artists successfully convey their curiosity, awe and respect for the tree.

MariAnne Kazmer
The Station Gallery
From *The Tree Project Exhibition* 2003

Review **THE TREE PROJECT**

With different eyes and different feelings we will convey our curiosity, awe and respect for the tree. From *The Tree Project* artists' statement

This exhibition is well worth the drive to Whitby. It's impossible to do this show justice in 600 words, but I hope to entice you to see it for yourselves. If you would like to see thoughtful, thought provoking artwork created with integrity and passion, you'll be in the right place.

In her statement, Carol Kapuscinsky promises (and delivers) to "create moods of serenity, revealing transition between the visual and spiritual". The translucency of her oil glazes make the passage of light an important element in her work, alluding to the concept of transcendence. Because the tree forms are simplified, without foliage, without tiny twigs, the branches fraction the expanse of sky, framing new shapes and making the viewer aware of "looking through", simultaneously seeing new shapes. Even in the paintings with very blue skies there is no evidence of sun, no significant shadows, no reflections in water. This allows for the rich colour saturation of an overcast day and creates the quiet, reflective, mood and mystery that are integral to such days. Kapuscinsky keeps you from floating away and getting lost by painting trees that are substantial, grounding. She hasn't missed a step or an opportunity to create the environment in her paintings that she promises in her statement. Before leaving her work, be sure to step back so that you can see several pieces at once, a small forest, what an impact!

In her relief prints, Judith Welbourn explores tree metaphor and symbolism, mantras, rituals, oracles, ancient societies, ancient history of language, the five elements embodied in the *Tree of Life*...a rich brew. Now you might be tempted to think that this will be a dry, science/history lesson, not at all. With *Tree Alphabet I – VI*, Welbourn creates lovely multi layered prints mounted in shadow boxes which allow her "leaves" to float, cast shadows, be alive. They are simultaneously leaves (pages) of books and leaves of trees. Printed on Japanese Tamura Gampi paper, each translucent layer of image and colour has a specific and intentioned exploration. Nothing is "by accident". As she invited the viewer into the mystery and beauty of her inquiry, one cannot help but enter into a visual conversation with the work, to come to the threshold of a deeper understanding of and curiosity about the nature of the world, humanity and of language. Be sure to stop often and back track while moving along these works, there's always something new to discover. You leave pondering and appreciating the door she has left ajar for you.

MeeAe Song is interested in how personality traits are revealed through drawings and how these drawings create a window to better understanding the friends she invited to draw trees for her. Her works explore the results of her observations of the collected drawings and of her reflections on her relationship to the contributors. One of her pieces is comprised of four individual drawings of cross sections of tree trunks. At first glance, four drawings of growth rings...at closer examination, they are as individual as fingerprints and the friends that inspired them. The darker, denser areas in each tree cross section is evidence of times of stress and siege. Nothing is left to chance, even the background colours and textures carry information. The four friends came to the opening and without prompting, each seemed to know instinctively, which drawing was "their's". In the

piece *A Scar Doesn't Have to Be Obvious*, also a cross section of a tree trunk, we can see old scars that have been incorporated into the fibre of the tree, have become part of its core, without being revealed at the surface, the bark, the skin. Her works invite the viewer to a deeper understanding of life, and an examination of our position within and responsibility toward nature (including human nature). Her titles are important and helpful to the understanding of her work. Be sure to look at a piece, then read the title, then step back and look again.

Review from *surface and symbol*

By Clarissa M. Lewis

Vol 15, No. 8, October, 2003

Life in the Garden, Part II ... *An Evolution*

Imitation is said to be the highest form of flattery. Evidence of imitation can be found in many human activities including gardening. There are numerous reasons individuals take up gardening, however, the one reason that rings true in all cases is the desire to re-create nature's perfect features within a controlled environment.

For artist Carol Kapuscinsky, part of nature's appeal includes the ability of many species of vegetation to live in harmony. As an environmentalist and a humanitarian, the artist aims to encourage this behaviour in mankind.

Kapuscinsky's original works for *Life in the Garden*, make the connection between nature and humans by featuring sunflowers and Nigerian school girls. In this new series, the painter has removed all direct references to human imagery and instead implies only its presence.

Maintaining similar constructions, Kapuscinsky's paintings depict wild and cultivated gardens in the forest with tall rectangular trees lining the background of these paintings, in a rhythmic pattern. To the artist, cultivated gardens represent a spiritual connection to her mother and a venue from which to communicate her feelings towards nature. The actual production of a garden reveals our need as humans to take control of our environment and protect it from outside forces. The flowers in Kapuscinsky's garden line the foreground of the painting, discouraging entry and encouraging protection.

Collectively, Kapuscinsky's paintings evoke a feeling of surrealism. Cool colours are used throughout and the shapes of objects have been simplified. The most notable feature among these paintings are the trees. Void of all greenery, only the mid-section of the trees are painted and their shape has been defined by simple repetitive rectangles. The artist explains that during her drives into the country she noticed, when looking into a forest, that one only really sees part of the tree trunks. The surrealist feeling of the paintings is reinforced further with the addition of a pure blue sky backdrop.

Kapuscinsky's paintings raise the viewer's awareness of the environment by filtering away all extraneous objects and focusing on simplified shapes and colours. The vegetative foreground and surrealist backgrounds tell a story about nature's ability to live in harmony and the importance of protecting its existence.

Admira Nezirevic
The Station Gallery, Exhibition Catalogue
Life in the Garden, Part II, June 1996