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ECOSIMULACRA: ECOCRITICISM AND THE CONSTRUCTED LANDSCAPE

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ECOCRITICISM AND THE CONSTRUCTED LANDSCAPE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis applies the literary theory ecocriticism, in particular ecofeminism – a distinct eco-philosophy within the larger discourse of ecocriticism – to the art historical genre of Canadian landscape painting, with a specific investigation into the impact paintings by women artists from the 1930s have had on Canadian society's relationship with nature. Particular attention is placed on the works of Pegi Nicol MacLeod (1904 – 1949) and Prudence Heward (1896 – 1947). This ecocritical framework is then employed to examine the contemporary landscape paintings of Canadian artists Eleanor Bond and Monica Tap, as well as my own art practice. In order to gain insight into how society's treatment of nature has been influenced by the western tradition of landscape painting, the past is used to interpret the present, while the present is used to gain an understanding of the past in hopes of reaching a more sustainable method of re-presenting the nature/culture relationship in the painted landscape.

Keywords: ecocriticism, ecofeminism, nature, culture, Canadian landscape painting, anthropocentric dualism, androcentric dualism, Pegi Nicol MacLeod, Prudence Heward, Eleanor Bond, Monica Tap, Group of Seven, social-humanist art

For Gavin

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Introduction

Discourses surrounding visual art and literary theory have, at various junctures, been seen to operate in a relationship of reciprocity. They have shared approaches to rereading visual culture and literary texts – such as structuralism, Marxist criticism, deconstructionism, psychoanalytic criticism, feminist criticism, and postmodernism. The more recent literary theory framework, ecocriticism, first arose as a concept in the late 1970s during meetings of the Western Literature Association (Barry 249),[1] but it did not consolidate into a more recognised "ecological literary study" until the early 1990s in the USA (Glotfelty xviii) and the UK. Ecocriticism initially concentrated on reexamining the literary genre of nature writing, which pays particular attention to the relations between literature and the physical world (Glotfelty xx). It has grown in scope since then to include other literary genres, such as fiction and drama. An ecocritical perspective is also being brought to other disciplines throughout the humanities: historians are "tracing the connections among environmental conditions, economic modes of production, and cultural ideas through time"; anthropologists are examining the link between "culture and geography"; psychologists are exploring the interrelationship between "environmental conditions and mental health"; philosophers in various subfields, such as "ecofeminism, environmental ethics, deep ecology, and social ecology," are critiquing "the root causes of environmental degradation" and attempting to "formulate an alternative view of existence with the earth" (Glotfelty xxi). Although the narrow focus of ecocriticism has

[1] Cheryll Glotfelty cites William Rueckert's 1978 essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" as possibly the first text to coin the term *ecocriticism* (xx).

expanded, little has been directed toward the visual arts disciplines, in particular to the western tradition of landscape painting.

This thesis seeks to apply the literary theory ecocriticism, in particular ecofeminism, to the art historical genre of Canadian landscape painting, with a specific investigation into the impact paintings by women artists from the 1930s have had on Canadian society's relationship with nature. This line of inquiry will then be used as a foundation for examining the contemporary landscape paintings of Canadian artists Eleanor Bond and Monica Tap, as well as my own art practice.

Ecofeminism, or ecological feminism, a distinct eco-philosophy within the larger discourse of ecocriticism, combines the critiques of both the anthropocentric dualism of nature/culture and the androcentric dualism of man/woman. It attempts to dismantle such dualities by recognising that "men and women are part of both nature and culture" (Plumwood 36). Chapter one, "Framing Gender in the Canadian Landscape," employs ecofeminism, to examine how Canadian women artists of the 1930s have constructed nature as subject for landscape painting within a male dominated history of art, and to trace the potential influences these women have had on that history. In this first chapter I focus on the paintings of two Canadian women artists from the 1930s, Prudence Heward (1896 – 1947) and Pegi Nicol MacLeod (1904 – 1949), and their male contemporaries in both the Group of Seven and the socially-conscious modernist movement. Similarities and differences are drawn between the "feminine" and "masculine" representations of landscape, in order to gain a better understanding of our human interrelation with both our culturally conceived notion of "Nature" as the subordinate "Other," and with a nature

that coexists outside those cultural constructs – a nature that has intrinsic value in and of itself, independent of its use-value to humans.

The second chapter, "The Re-presentation of Landscape: Eleanor Bond and Monica Tap," continues to use ecofeminism as a mode of discourse. However, less attention is placed on the essentialist dualism man/woman and more on how some contemporary artists are addressing the dualistic relationship between nature/culture in their "re-presentations" of the painted landscape. I focus specifically on the large-scale paintings of Eleanor Bond and Monica Tap. Bond and Tap's works engage with certain rhetorics of art history that have contributed to the cultural construction of representations and treatments of nature. While Canadian women artists of the 1930s are not a direct historical source for the painted worlds of Bond and Tap, this thesis seeks to demonstrate that such earlier women artists as Pegi Nicol MacLeod and Prudence Heward, laid the groundwork for the ecocritical questioning found in the contemporary landscape painting practices of some contemporary women artists, including Bond and Tap.[2]

The final chapter, "Destabilising the Idealised Landscape," shows how my own art practice operates between the various approaches to landscape painting previously discussed in the text. My painting and video works simultaneously live within and yet critique the Marxist realm of "second nature" – a virtual simulation of a pristine "first nature" wrought by the revolution in information, biotechnologies, and consumer culture (Buell 3).

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[2] Particular attention is placed on historical and contemporary Canadian women artists in my thesis in order to bring focus to my examination. However, an ecofeminist re-reading of male artists that develop a socially-conscious positioning in their landscape paintings, such as Carl Schaefer and David Milne, could further extend this complex examination into the nature/culture relationship.

As ecocritic Jonathan Bate states, "the dream of deep ecology will never be realized upon the earth, but our survival as a species may be dependent on our capacity to dream it in the work of our imagination" (Bate 37-38). This thesis investigates how contemporary artists, including myself, are using the *concept* of the painted landscape, and also demonstrates that the landscape medium is indeed still an effective tool of discourse for artists.

Chapter 1
Framing Gender in the Canadian Landscape

Ecocriticism, Ecofeminism, and the Problematics of Dualism

Ecocriticism or green studies is an examination of the interconnections and interdependence between western notions of nature and culture[3], or alternatively between the non-human and human. In particular, the relationship between "literature and the physical environment" is considered as a key a site of discourse (Glotfelty xviii). Ecocriticisim can also conceivably be applied to art theory and art history, both of which share with the field of literature, genres and themes that imagine, construct, and present nature as form – for example, via the *pastoral* or according to notions of *wilderness*. Ecocritics typically focus on literature and reread major literary works, paying particular attention to nature writing, such as Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* and William Wordsworth's Romantic poetry, which Cheryll Glotfelty claims "plays a vital role in teaching us to value the natural world" (xxiii). For the purposes of thinking about visual culture and the environment, the genre of western landscape painting is arguably an important alternative to literature for engaging in rereading art through an ecocritical lens.

A common view within most ecocritical work is that the ecological crisis is largely a "by-product of culture" (Glotfelty xxi), and in particular, of western culture. Val Plumwoood in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* states that western culture views the

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[3] Raymond Williams' definitions of "nature" and "culture" in *Keywords* (1976) are commonly quoted: "'nature' is perhaps the most complex word in the [English] language" and "culture" is one of the other "two or three most complicated words" (87, 219). See his original full definitions in *Keywords* and more recent thoughts in Bennett, Grossberg, and Morris' *New Keywords* (2005).

human/nature relation as a dualism. She describes the notion of a dualism as having a "characteristic logical structure of otherness and negation," which shapes the "major basis for the connection between forms of oppression" (2). Plumwood argues, "that this [dualism of human/nature] explains many of the problematic features of the west's treatment of nature which underlies the environmental crisis, especially the western construction of human identity as 'outside' nature" (Plumwood 2). The historian Donald Worster proposes that we "are facing a global crisis today, not because of how ecosystems function but rather because of how our ethical systems function" (qtd. in Glotfelty xxi). Worster goes on to offer that, while literary scholars, anthropologists, philosophers (and, it can be added, artists) "cannot do the reforming," they can certainly "help with the understanding".

To initiate a project of *understanding*, ecocritics take up a decisive perspective that views nature as an entity existing beyond ourselves that can affect and be affected by us, rather than being a support to a human-centred or anthropocentric perspective where the natural world surrounds and serves us (Barry 252, 264). Lawrence Buell points out in his *Writing for an Endangered World* that, "Insofar as human beings are biohistorical creatures constructing themselves in interaction with surroundings they cannot not inhabit, all their artifacts may be expected to bear traces of that" (2). Buell, like many ecocritics, has an aversion to an absolute nature/culture distinction. He advocates a new "myth of mutual constructionism" that recognizes the existence of the nature/culture distinctions as empirical facts. But those distinctions also interrelate and perpetually shape and reshape one another (Buell 6). This raises the challenge to ecocrtitics to be vigilant or, as Greg Garrard puts it, "to keep one eye on the ways in which 'nature' is

always in some ways culturally constructed and the other on the fact that nature really exists" (10).

"Nature" as cultural construction as opposed to nature as it actually is[4], echoes a mindset that acknowledges the difference between gender as social construction and sex as a biological category, something which is regularly argued in feminist theory (Garrard 9). Ecofeminism brings together critiques of both the anthropocentric dualism of nature/culture and the androcentric dualism of man/woman. As a system, ecofeminism embraces these two discursive frameworks, and critiques the traditional conventions that share a common "logic of domination" that associates women with "nature, the material, the emotional, and the particular," while men are related to "culture, the non-material, the rational, and the abstract" (Garrard 23).

Ecofeminism moves even further to examine the more recent and conflicting "logic of domination" in which "'male' essence ('virility')," is associated with a nature that is viewed as "wild, violent, competitive and sexual" and "'the female' is viewed in contrasting terms as insipid, domestic, asexual and civilising" (Plumwood 20). Val Plumwood points out that both the traditional "logic of domination" of men as culture and women as nature, and the more contemporary conflicting model of "men as forceful and wild" and "women as tamed and domestic," confirm the dominance of masculine power (20). Since these male/female and culture/nature dualisms are so closely intertwined, neither side can be completely understood in isolation from the other. It is

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[4] Kate Soper further examines the concept of "nature" in *What is Nature?* (1995). In this paper I simply refer to "nature as it actually is" as a notion that situates nature as being *for itself* rather than as a cultural formation in the service of humans.

not simply the distinctions between women/men and culture/nature that are in question, but rather their immutable dualistic constructions (Plumwood 33).

Ecofeminism attempts to dismantle such dualities by recognizing that "men and women are part of both nature and culture" (Plumwood 36). Ecofeminism's goal is not to simply "change who wields the power," which would then replace one form of dominance (patriarchy) for another (matriarchy), but rather to seek to "transform the structure of power itself" (Starhawk qtd. in Gaard and Murphy 3). In order for this transformation to occur, ecofeminisim advocates a more inclusive and diverse critique of the "master model" of domination that includes both the masculine and the feminine. An ecofeminist rereading of art history must therefore present a balance of similarities and differences between male and female artists' constructions of the landscape genre to gain a better understanding of our relationship to nature that exists outside our cultural constructs – a nature that has intrinsic value in and of itself, independent of its use-value to humans.

The Influence and Role of Gender in the Landscape Painting Tradition

While it is far too simplistic to state that women artists represent landscape one way and men another, it is necessary to explore differences and similarities with which artists of different genders and backgrounds have addressed the subject, in order to establish the degree to which gender influences how nature has been, and is presently, represented in art. Furthermore, such an exploration enables us to understand the important roles that women, as subjects and makers of art, have played in the creation of the western landscape painting tradition.

In *What is Nature?* Kate Soper points to a convergence of feminist and ecological political aims. Clearly both positions mobilise critiques of patriarchal oppression, including notions of nature as "bestial 'other' to human culture" and woman as "inferior 'other' to man" (Soper 122). It is, however, highly problematic to equate nature automatically with femininity. Soper warns us that with this "ideological parallel" the maternal and nurturing role assigned to women is legitimated, and such an assignation therefore serves to limit the potential of women (123). Nature as feminine has also been depicted historically in landscape painting as both that from which masculinity attempts to assert its "autonomy and separation," as well as the state of innocence to which the masculine wishes to return (Soper 126). It is therefore useful to examine how women artists have constructed nature as subject for landscape painting within the male dominated history of art, and to trace the potential influences those women producers have had on that history, despite how it has often been recorded.

As Val Plumwood reminds us in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, women are also producers of culture, and both men and women are "continuous with, not alien from nature" (Plumwood 35-36). She goes on to state that it is important to think carefully about and question the normative standards that arise out of the socially constructed ontologies of women-nature and men-culture. These dualities or "hyperseparations" develop not only out of "difference" and "distinction," but also from concepts of "superiority/inferiority" and "radical exclusion" (Plumwood 49). According to Plumwood, it is the identity of the "master," rather than simply a masculine identity, that is defined by the denial of dependency upon a subordinate other for survival (42). It is therefore the systematic exclusion of the subordinate from the "master category" that

results in dualisms, such as human/nature, man/woman (Plumwood 41). She attributes this pervasive dualistic attitude to influential and overarching theories such as those of Enlightenment philosopher René Descartes (1596 – 1650), whose theory regarding the separation of mind and body reinterpreted mental activities involving the body (such as sense perception, which appeared to bridge the mind-body and human-animal division) as purely mental operations separated from the agency of the body. Mental reason or "consciousness" was effectively divorced from the body. As a result, animals were seen as bodies without minds and the gendered reason/nature dualism was created as a justification for the patriarchal domination and oppression of both women and nature in the interests of a universalising western notion of "humanity" (Plumwood 115).[5]

It is important for our purposes to acknowledge these socially constructed anthropocentric and androcentric attitudes and, as suggested above, recognise that the launching of an examination into the "systems of domination" can offer a deeper understanding of how such attitudes came about, how they may have historically changed, and how they can continue to change. Importantly, an investigation into the intermediate states found between the similarities and differences in how nature is depicted in the landscape paintings of Canadian women and men artists of the 1930s will be employed. Particular attention will be placed upon the works of Canadians Prudence Heward and Pegi Nicol MacLeod and their male contemporaries in the Group of Seven

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[5] Val Plumwood makes us aware in *Feminisim and the Mastery of Nature* (1993) of complaints by critics such as Murray Bookchin, that "the blanket category 'human' obscures highly relevant cultural and other differences between human groups, and differences in responsibility for and benefits from the exploitation of nature (11). This "universalised concept of 'humanity' can be used also to deflect political critique and obscure...fact[s]...[as well as] cover over vitally important social, political and gender-based analyses of the problem" (Plumwood 12).

and the socially-conscious modern movement of artists.[6] In the process of this investigation, insights into how the interconnected essentialist-dualisms of nature/culture, men/women have changed during the twentieth century will be highlighted.

The Socially-Conscious Shift in Canadian Landscape Painting

The 1930s in Canada was a time of transition. In the moment between the First and Second World Wars there was a distinct shift in the role of women in society due to the effect of men returning home from the First World War. Women, who had won the vote in 1922 in every province except Quebec, were given the task during the war of filling the jobs normally held by men. Yet at the end of the war they were, to a significant degree, expected to relinquish their newfound social status.

Canadian art was also caught in transition in this period, moving from a strong nationalist art prescribed by the Group of Seven in Toronto (1920s) to an internationalism in art called for by the Contemporary Arts Society in Montreal (1940s) (Hill, *Canadian Painting in the Thirties* 11). The 1930s was a period when artists were actively questioning their responsibility to society as national unifiers or social commentators. Images of the isolated wilderness were suddenly inhabited by the figure. Artist and critic Bertram Brooker indicated in his *1928 – 29 Yearbook of the Arts in Canada* that a shift was occurring in the representation of the Canadian landscape, from depictions signaling an acutely "personal engagement with the wilderness," to an evident interest in the "imprint of human settlement" (Hudson 25). Those artists in the *Yearbook* included

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[6] Art historian, Anna Hudson, describes the socially-conscious artists of the 1930s in Toronto as, "a community of like-minded individuals engaged in an international effort to recognize the modern artist's vital role in social reconstruction and reform" (3).

Brooker himself, Charles Comfort, Carl Schaefer, George Pepper, Yvonne McKague, Gordon Webber, Edwin Holgate, Prudence Heward, and Anne Savage (Hudson 25). This marked socially-conscious shift indicates a more interrelational mindset: humans were being depicted as continuous with the landscape rather than as heroic subjects responsible for the dominance of the wilderness frontier. However, the socially-conscious artist's *humanist* principles of "order, balance, and harmony," (Hudson ii) favours an anthropocentric engagement with nature. Yet it can be argued that theirs was a more sympathetic approach that encouraged depicting the Canadian landscape in a codependent and interactive relationship between humans and nature, rather than as a place marked by a relationship of dominance.

Between the *Pastoral* and *Wilderness*

Both French Canadian artists and those included in Brooker's *Yearbook* have been credited with celebrating the *rural* over wilderness in their paintings. These artists seldom depicted the landscape without the trace of human activity, whether by including fence posts, telegraph poles, country roads or the obvious presence of the human figure itself (Tippet 78). There was also an emphasis on "agrarianism"; a work-related rather than aesthetic relationship with the land (Garrard 49). Interestingly, an apparent distinction between how women artists and their male counterparts related the figure to the landscape can be traced. Works such as Edwin Holgate's *Lumberjack* (c. 1924) and Charles Comfort's series of large murals for the Toronto Stock Exchange (c. 1937) entitled *Refining, Agriculture, Oil, Engineering, and Construction* and *Transportation and Communication, Mining, Smelting, Pulp and Paper* still present dominant heroic

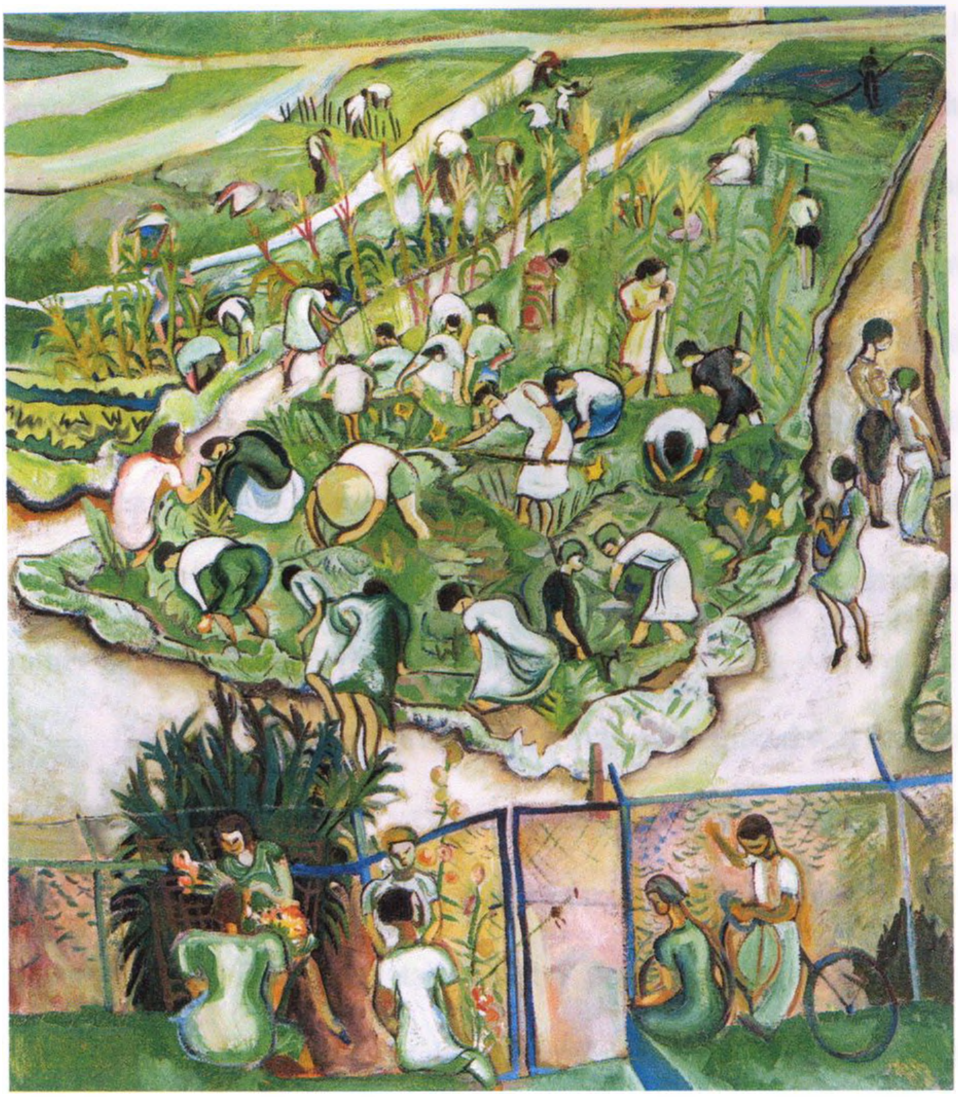

Figure 1 Pegi Nicol MacLeod, *School in a Garden*, c. 1934; Oil on Canvas, 112.4 x 99 cm, National Gallery of Canada

narratives of the conquering frontiersman, the lumberjack, and the bushman. Whereas, works by women artists, such as *Farmer's Daughter* (c. 1938) by Prudence Heward and *School in a Garden* (c. 1934; Fig. 1) by Pegi Nicol Macleod, integrated the figure into the rural environment, one in which the human subject was already understood to reside. As Maria Tippett states in *By a Lady*, "few [women artists] banished the human form from their paintings of the land in the way the Group [of Seven] did" (72). In opposition to the more masculinised approach to the working *of* the land by the frontiersman in the isolated

wilderness, women artists portrayed their subjects as working *in* the land: a much more empathic and interrelational way of representing the human/nature duality.[7] This representation echoes Buell's notion cited earlier, of the "myth of mutual constructionism," which acknowledged the ability of the physical environment (both natural and human-built) to shape cultures that ultimately refashion the physical environment (6). In the first half of the twentieth century, women artists in both literature and landscape painting represented the experience of the natural world as one of "immersion" rather than "confrontation," and they displayed an attitude of "recognition" rather than "challenge" (Norwood 344).

Depicting the rural environment in this integrated way suggests that Canadian women artists in the 1930s were employing the Old World *pastoral* tradition[8] in their work, as opposed to the New World *wilderness* tradition promoted by the Group of Seven. Dorothy Farr and Natalie Luckyj[9] point out, "that in general, women painters have tended to choose psychological and narrative themes, rather than action subjects or the 'empty landscape tradition'" (1). However, the works of both English-Canadian Montreal artist Prudence Heward (1896 – 1947) and English-Canadian Toronto and New York artist Pegi Nicol MacLeod (1904 – 1949) were located somewhere between the *pastoral*

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[7] My usage of the "working *of* the land" refers to an action directed *towards* the landscape, whereas the "working *in* the land" refers to a motion of reciprocity and engagement *with* the land.

[8] Greg Garrard in *Ecocriticism* describes the classical pastoral tradition as reliant on two key contrasts: "the spatial distinction of town (frenetic, corrupt, impersonal) and country (peaceful, abundant)" and "the temporal distinction of past (idyllic) and present ('fallen')" (35). He points out that the pastoral trope's "long history" and "cultural ubiquity" means that it must and will remain a major concern for ecocritics (Garrard 33).

[9] Dorothy Farr and Natalie Luckyj curated the important exhibition *From Women's Eyes: Women Painters in Canada* in 1975 as a part of the projects that were initiated in Canada to celebrate International Women's Year.

and the *wilderness* traditions, and generated a new dialogue between humanity and nature. Art historian Anna Hudson acknowledges Heward's *Girl on a Hill* (c. 1928) as marking a "pivotal moment in the convergence of landscape and figural painting in Canada, [promoting] the advancement of a socially conscious modern movement of painting" (52). The *pastoral* genre employed by Heward and her contemporaries, such as Anne Savage and Sarah Robertson, relies upon the retreat from the city to an idealised rural countryside and uses nature as a location or reflection of human predicament, rather than proposing an interest in nature in and for itself (Garrard 33, 35).

The *wilderness* influence in Prudence Heward's work arises from the Group of Seven's "national school of art" that was being encouraged from the 1920s and lasted until after the disbanding of the Group in 1931. Heward actively participated in both the Beaver Hall Group (1920 – 1922) and the Canadian Group of Painters (1933), which were guided by A.Y. Jackson, a founding member of the Group of Seven, who staunchly believed that the revitalization of Canadian art would come from a continued exploration and interpretation of the northern Canadian landscape (Hill, *Canadian Painting in the Thirties* 11). Pegi Nicol MacLeod's earlier work, such as *Log Run* (c.1930) contains a similar *wilderness* influence to that of the Group of Seven and Tom Thomson (1877 – 1917). Joan Murrary notes how MacLeod's early landscape paintings clearly demonstrate the "same sort of blue shadows on snow from a hillside of trees" as well as the forceful brushstroke technique as Thomson's work (19).

In a 1928 Group of Seven exhibition, many young painters who advocated the inhabited landscape were invited to exhibit their work alongside the Group. Among them were several women artists including Prudence Heward, Pegi Nicol MacLeod, Sarah

Robertson, Mabel May, Yvonne McKague Housser, and Mabel Lockerby (Hill, *The Group of Seven* 208). Their depictions of the lone figure in the Canadian landscape, that served to integrate both the *wilderness* and *pastoral* traditions, generated a dialogue with the Group's most celebrated paintings portraying the single isolated tree.[10] The tree came to take on a humanist symbology representing spiritual enlightenment, social consciousness, and national unity when exhibited alongside these women's works (Hudson 29). Women artists arguably had a direct influence on how the Group of Seven's paintings have come to be interpreted and remembered in art history. Remarkably, the means by which women experienced the human/nature relationship penetrated the canon of the "national school of art."

Prudence Heward and Pegi Nicol MacLeod: Women Artists in a Time of Transition

Prudence Heward's work moved beyond the "figure in the landscape" as a representation of the harmonious unification of humanity and nature that was endorsed by Bertram Brooker and the socially-conscious artists. According to filmmakers Pepita Ferrari and Erna Buffie, Heward's *Girl Under a Tree* (c. 1931; Fig. 2) portrays the artist nude, reclining in a "natural" setting with modernist buildings looming behind her on the horizon. Ferrari and Buffie's film *By Woman's Hand* points out how, in this work, Heward offers a direct challenge to the role of women in art (culture), by becoming both the subject and object of the work. This piece extends its challenge to a wider social sphere by calling for a *redefinition* of woman as nature. *Girl Under a Tree* articulates

[10] The single isolated tree has been the subject for a wide range of artists throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. It was the theme for an exhibition held in 2000 at the London Regional Art and Historical Muesums entitled simply *The Single Tree*.

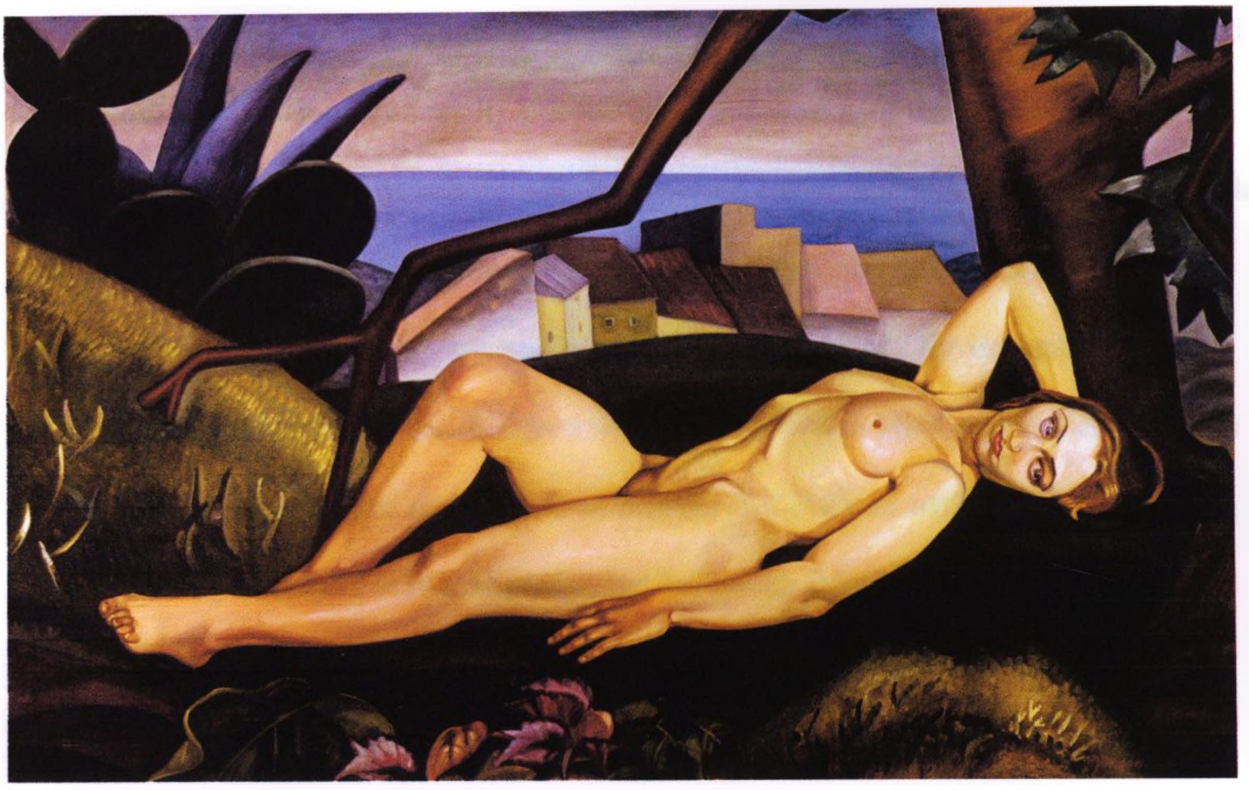

Figure 2 Prudence Heward, *Girl Under a Tree*, c. 1931; Oil on canvas, 122.5 x 193.7 cm, Art Gallery of Hamilton

Plumwood's reminder that "women create culture too" and helps to dispel the myth of woman as only a nature object or its caretaker. The sculptural treatment of the forms found in the painting (Hill, *Canadian Painting in the Thirties* 40) gives those forms the sense of having been carved and built from human hands, reinforcing the anthropocentric construction of nature.

Historically one of the most common forms of denial with respect to women and nature is what Val Plumwood refers to as "backgrounding," in which nature and/or women provide "the environment and conditions [background] against which male 'achievement' takes place [foreground]" (Plumwood 21-22). In Pegi Nicol MacLeod's *Torso and Plants* (c. 1935) the artist's static, nude torso is juxtaposed with gestural daffodils, hyacinths, and rhubarb stems. MacLeod's body acts as a supportive

background for the writhing plants. Here there is a reversal in the tradition, usually found in Heward's and most other socially-conscious artists' works, of the figure as the foreground and nature as the subordinate background environment. MacLeod's body both supports the plants and is dominated by their vigorous movement. The rhubarb stems found in the bouquet in her lap are traditionally used as a remedy for unwanted pregnancy. Importantly, their inclusion references an abortion MacLeod may have had in 1935 (Brandon 86). Her last major study of herself, *Self Portrait with Jane* (c. 1939) compositionally reflects *Torso and Plants*, but her young daughter, Jane, replaces the plants – altering the symbol of the subjects MacLeod's figure supports – ostensibly moving from death to life (Brandon 109). However, through deliberate cropping of her head from both compositions, MacLeod's body remains an anonymous, female background *and* provider, upon which nature/life depends. The artist offers a direct challenge to the traditional dualistic, subordinate, conception of human/nature.

Given the foregoing, it can be asserted that men are not the only gender capable of developing a cultural construction regarding our human relationship with nature. Ariel Salleh claims that the work a person does significantly shapes the way they orient themselves within the natural world (qtd. in Slicer 53). Historically, women's lives have been lived in less confrontational ways with respect to nature compared to those of men (Plumwood 35). Yet, during the First World War women were required to fill the jobs left by men who went off to fight overseas; jobs that required a more aggressive and sometimes oppositional standpoint regarding nature, rather than the more care-oriented positions that had generally been assigned to women in society. Heward's *Girl Under a*

Tree and MacLeod's *Self-Portrait with Jane* both offer a cipher of this moment of transition and confusion concerning the role of women in society in the 1930s.

Impact of the Depression on Canadian Art in the 1930s

At a time when the Group of Seven's work was being accused by critics of "showing signs of hardening into a formula," "becoming the fashionable native school of painting," and "ceasing to experiment" (Hill, *Canadian Painting in the Thirties* 21), women artists were being recognized by critics, such as Blodwen Davis of the magazine *Saturday Night*, as "experimenters of vision and courage" (Tippett 75). Paintings by women were being held up as examples of how Canadian art could step forward. However, as Maria Tippett has pointed out, the "innovative canvases" produced by these women are also historically considered to be a "failed challenge" to the "solemn, magisterial, and frequently static canvases of the Group of Seven" (75-77). This may be owing both to Canadian society's not being willing to accept art produced by women, and to the unstable economic climate of the 1930s, which did not foster a hospitable environment for modern advancements in art to flourish.

During the Depression, the National Gallery of Canada, which had recently supported women artists in the late 1920s (due in part to the advocacy of the gallery's first director, Eric Brown, and to the encouragement of the Group of Seven), had their budget slashed from a high of $130,000 in 1929 to $25,000 in 1934. As a consequence, only two contemporary Canadian paintings were purchased between 1932 and 1936 (Hill, *Canadian Painting in the Thirties* 14). Private gallery and patron sales were also next to non-existent. The total sales from the spring exhibition of the Ontario Society of Artists

in 1929, in which Pegi Nicol MacLeod participated, totaled $923 and three years later not a single picture was sold. It was not until 1940 that more than two works were purchased from the society's exhibition (Hill, *Canadian Painting in the Thirties* 13). It was, therefore, all but impossible for work by these women artists to gain recognition, let alone to be shown.

Prudence Heward, in the film *By Woman's Hand*, is represented as an artist whose work was "almost forgotten." Heward passed away in 1947 at the early age of 51 years due to severe asthma. Pegi Nicol MacLeod is also often described as a Canadian artist who should be "far better known" (Brandon xiii). She, like Heward, died at an early age (45 years) in 1949, from colon cancer. With few venues for those artists' voices to be heard and supported during the Depression, combined with the fact of their early deaths, it is not surprising that Heward and MacLeod's legacies as influential artists of the 1930s have been under-represented in Canadian art history.

The lack of both private and public art sales during the Depression compelled many men and women artists to supplement their incomes by teaching art classes, working for graphic design companies, or by taking up completely unrelated jobs. Pegi Nicol MacLeod prepared window displays in 1934 at the Eaton's department store chain in Toronto under the direction of the French designer René Cera (Brandon 77). Art became a secondary occupation for many established artists while other less well-established younger artists had to leave art altogether for more lucrative careers (Hill, *Canadian Painting in the Thirties* 15). During this time, the subjects that preoccupied artists showed "little evidence of the social, political or economic turmoil that pervaded Canadian society" (Tippett 92). Artists from both genders, as well as from middle and

upper-class backgrounds, paid little or no evident attention to the cruelty of the Depression when choosing subjects for their works.

Canadian historian Frank Underhill, in his critique of the *1936 Yearbook of the Arts in Canada,* asks the incisive question, "Why were the country's artists silent in the face of the crippling Depression?" (Tippett 100). One answer is simply that economic survival for these artists made them turn to other more popular and acceptable subjects. The Group of Seven brand of national optimism retained its standing with the Canadian public during the 1930s because it manifested a confident and heroic viewpoint that society required in order to retreat and heal itself, both spiritually and economically, during the Depression. It was much easier for an artist to make a living with depictions of "the inexhaustible wealth of the wilderness," as Douglas Cole describes the Group of Seven's work (qtd. in Hudson 29), rather than with overt social commentaries on the oppressive political and economic climate.

Using an ecocritical lens to re-examine Underhill's poignant question regarding why the Depression (also known as the Dirty Thirties) appears to have been largely ignored in the works of Canadian artists, we may speculate that to represent this crisis with its ecological overtones would have been to admit how truly interdependent we are with nature. This is a very "unfrontiersman-like" attitude: to admit defeat in the face of nature. It was also an inconceivable notion in the 1930s that our abundant Canadian natural resources could ever potentially run out. It was not until the early 1960s that

writers such as Rachel Carson[11] would begin to focus public awareness on an impending ecological crisis.

Not only did the Group of Seven members, such as Lawren Harris, present nature as a site of balance, renewal, and control in their work, but the socially-conscious artists Bertram Brooker, Pegi Nicol MacLeod, and Prudence Heward showed these sentiments in their works as well. Finding order and pattern in the Canadian environment elicited an experience of harmony and unity between humanity and nature (Hudson 52). This new Theosophical approach in modernist art emphasised an aesthetic dialogue with nature that was expressed through strong patterns and full forms derived from nature itself.

The idea of nature as a healthy, diversely balanced system is a conception upon which today's environmental movement was founded, and this notion continues to be advocated politically. However, as Greg Garrard points out, ecologists have shown us that biological diversity is not necessarily linked to stability (27). While there is potential equilibrium in nature, stasis is unusual in the natural world. There is no "ideal" end-point within ecosystems. Colleen Clements encourages a rejection of the "fairy-tale ideal of an ecosystem of achieved and unchanging harmony" (qtd. in Garrard 57). In light of this and of our present discussion, it is notable that during the years of the Depression both men and women's landscape paintings sought to depict an environment where there was stability and order – as opposed to showing the harsh reality that was in fact taking place, ecologically, outside the frames of their canvases.[12]

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[11] Rachael Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) combines literary, or cultural, analysis with scientific evidence of our eco-catastrophe. Greg Garrard credits her text as being a "critical introduction to the field of ecocriticism today" (3).

[12] The ecological crisis in Canada during the Depression was particularly felt by the western prairie-provinces. Exhaustive farming without crop rotation or other techniques

The *Civilised* Landscape

In her dissertation *Art and Social Progress: The Toronto Community of Painters*, Anna Hudson points out that, "the socially-conscious artist [from the 1930s to the 1950s] . . . defined humanist values according to those principles of order, balance and harmony established in antiquity as the building blocks of western civilization" (5). Canadian socially-conscious artists "expressed these values at the level of abstract formal design in solidly composed images of the civilized landscape . . . [producing what they felt was] an art for society's sake" (Hudson 5). Both liberal and environmental writers (and artists) often take such a benign view of classical Greek society and Platonic rationalism as constituting the cradle of western civilisation (Plumwood 72). Yet an ecofeminist perspective suggests that this classical western conception of civilisation established the origin of the human/nature dualism. The ostensibly civilised Platonic world-view supports the concept of a "mastery identity" – an identity defined in terms of multiple exclusions and dominance over not only the feminine, but also the slave, the animal, and the natural (Plumwood 72).

The paintings by women artists of the 1930s, such as Prudence Heward and Pegi Nicol MacLeod, offered a challenge to the "civilised landscape" advocated by the Theosophists and socially-conscious artists. They did so, compositionally and technically, by incorporating the human figure among the natural forms rendered in their paintings, rather than by simply producing contained, patterned, and ordered representations of the Canadian experience. In several of their paintings the brushwork functions in a way that creates continuity between the representation of the figure and the landscape, or across

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to prevent soil erosion, combined with a prolonged drought between 1933 and 1937 brought dust storms and infestations of locusts, which devastated wheat crops.

other elements of nature. The deep lines of an Aboriginal woman elder's face are repeated in the depiction of the "ancient and rugged erosions of the mountains behind her" in MacLoed's, *Braninetnan, Aged Indian Woman of Hagwelget Canyon* (c. 1928) (Brandon 42). From that same year, in MacLeod's self-portrait diptych *The Slough*, the petals of the cyclamen flowers are seen to almost merge with MacLeod's face (Brandon 44). Laura Brandon notes how "[MacLeod] both controls the plant by holding it and lets it control her, by caging and caressing her" (45). Heward's *Girl on a Hill* (c. 1928) is identified by Hudson as a "visual marker for an abstract concept of dialogue between humanity and nature" (58). It represents a balanced union between landscape and figure, spirituality and community, human and nature that the socially conscious modern movement in painting sought to promote (Hudson 52). Therefore, by noting the integration of the figure with nature, both works can be read as ecocritical recognitions of "human" identity as continuous with, not alien from, nature (Plumwood 36).

Role of the Artist

What Heward, MacLeod, and many other women artists, also demonstrated was that one did not have to tramp into the bush to find harmony or balance. Macleod felt "that an artist could turn out a lifetime of masterpieces and never move away from his (sic) backyard" (Brandon 26-27). [13] It must be noted, however, that these artists did not

[13] The Group of Seven established the masculine bushwhacking image of the "new artist," which "bound painter, subject and imagination inextricably together within the frontier spirit of a bourgeoning Canadian nationalism" (Luckyj 13). Yet, as Natalie Luckyj points out, it was a woman, Emily Carr, who was the first of this "new breed of artist." Carr was making sketching trips to Alaska in 1907 and Alert Bay in 1908 before A.Y. Jackson's first trip to Georgian Bay in 1910 and Tom Thompson's first expedition to Algonquin Park in 1912. It wasn't until the Group of Seven's image of the new

necessarily perceive themselves to be society's social and spiritual guides, responsible for the progress of civilisation, as Lawren Harris and other male Theosophists felt themselves to be (Hudson 53). Instead they viewed the role of the artist as that of an introspective observer.

In a review of Prudence Heward's memorial exhibition held at the National Gallery in March of 1948, Paul Duval, a critic for *Saturday Night*, described Heward's "painted world [as] one of sad reflections. Her subjects look out of their frames wondering and a little afraid. They strike one strongly as people living in a world which they cannot quite comprehend" (qtd. in Walters 51). Rather than offering answers to society through their work, these artists asked questions, including ones regarding the culturally constructed dualisms of woman/man, nature/culture that are still being examined today.

It can be argued that reflexive questioning through ecological and feminist paradigms is precisely how new understandings of the interwoven dualisms aforementioned, will ultimately be reached. As Kate Soper states, "it is one thing to challenge various cultural representations of nature, another to represent nature as if it were a convention of culture" (4). With the realisation that nature exists both separate from the human and the cultural, as well as being a concept through which we examine our human identity, an ecofeminist rereading of Canadian art history can offer new insights into how both women and men artists have contributed to our connection with, and construction of, the natural world.

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frontiersman artist was well established that Emily Carr's "wilderness exploits" became widely known (Luckyj 13). This masculine image of the "new artist" has been indelibly imprinted in Canadian art history.

Chapter 2

The Re-presentation of Landscape: Eleanor Bond and Monica Tap

Dissolving the Gendered Subject

The notion of reflexive questioning established in the landscape paintings of Canadian women artists of the 1930s, as opposed to the paradigmatic masculine model of "artist as solitary genius," has been carried forward into the twentieth century by both contemporary Canadian men and women artists who examine the *concept* of "landscape" in their painting practices. Since the 1930s, feminist issues and environmental ethics have existed as concerns that have been raised in western social/cultural discourses and the painting practices of some contemporary Canadian artists. With the awareness of these cultural concepts, a romanticised essentialist attitude towards landscape painting as a container of "truth," as demonstrated by artists such as Lawren Harris, can no longer hold as a viable mindset for western artists.[14]

The gap between what formerly might have been termed "feminine" and "masculine" subjects has also slowly diminished since the socially-conscious artists of the late 1930s diversified the "Canadian art canon". An evolution has proceeded from the narrow range of landscape painting subject matter, established by the Group of Seven in the 1920s, to the acceptance of the once "feminine" subjects of the figure and the narrative painted by socially-conscious artists, such as Bertram Brooker, Charles Comfort, Edwin Holgate, and Carl Schaefer. Male artists came to adopt a similar critical position for their work as that of their female counter-parts, due in part to the inclusion of

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[14] W.J.T. Mitchell, in the first chapter of his influential book *Landscape and Power* (1994) states that, "Landscape is an exhausted medium, no longer viable as a mode of artistic expression. Like life, landscape is boring; we must not say so" (5).

women into Canadian art history during the 1930s. Between the two World Wars, women came to be included in what were once exclusively male cultural organisations, exhibitions, and educational art institutions (Tippett 61): Pegi Nicol MacLeod and Marian Scott both attended the École des Beaux-Arts de Montréal from 1922 to 1923, and Prudence Heward, Lilas Torrance Newton, and Sarah Robertson were all formally trained at the Art Association of Montréal studying with William Brymner and Maurice Cullen; both Heward and MacLeod became active members of the Canadian Group of Painters in Toronto during the 1930s; the National Gallery of Canada's Willingdon Arts Prize, set up in 1928 by the governor general, Lord Willingdon (Brandon 48), was won by both Heward in 1929 for *Girl on the Hill* and MacLeod in 1931 for *Log Run.*

In *From Women's Eyes* Dorothy Farr and Natalie Luckyj state that with the introduction of abstraction in Canada in the late 1940s and 50s representational imagery, used to present a view of the world by the artist, began to disappear. Farr and Luckyj claim that with the loss and seeming irrelevancy of figurative content it was impossible to identify an abstract painting as the work of a male or female artist (2). With this attendant closing of the gendered gap in contemporary painting and issues such as feminism and environmental ethics entering the works of contemporary artists, came a shift in the way painting was talked about. This in turn repositions the focus of my present investigation.

The previous chapter used an ecofeminist framework to gain insight into how the interrelated dualisms of nature/culture and men/women have evolved, and compared the way nature was depicted in the landscape paintings of Canadian men and women artists of the 1930s. In this chapter I will continue to employ ecofeminism in my investigation; however, less attention will be placed on critiquing the essentialist dualism man/woman

and more concern will be shown with how contemporary artists address the nature/culture relationship in their "re-presentations" of the painted landscape. Ecofeminist theory is a useful tool for this further exploration because of its basic premise: "that the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature. Ecofeminism calls for an end to all oppressions . . ." (Gaard, "Living Interconnections with Animals and Nature" 1).

Kaleidoscopic Views and Possible Painted Worlds

The contemporary landscape paintings of Canadian artists Eleanor Bond and Monica Tap are sites for renegotiating the relationship of dominance and oppression that exists in the human/nature synergy. In this regard, it is valuable to recall that the western cultural construct of "nature as an image" took root in sixteenth-century European landscape painting. Historically the painted landscape has presented the viewer with a frame, in which nature can be contained as an object outside human culture. This objectifying method of perceiving nature reinforces and promotes "modernity's economic harnessing of natural resources and the colonization of foreign lands...which today profoundly threatens nature" (Halkes 3-4).

The large-scale and imposing paintings of both Eleanor Bond and Monica Tap visually and conceptually dislocate the genre of historical landscape painting's established point of view whereby nature is an object and the viewer a subject, and thus challenge the representation of nature as conquered subordinate "Other." Bond and Tap do not present a clear and didactic vision regarding current ecological debates; they

instead offer possible, mutable worlds for viewers to inhabit. Their painting practices have been built upon the foundations of reflexive questioning, as well as inferentially on visual languages established by Canadian women artists from the 1930s, such as Pegi Nicol MacLeod and Prudence Heward. Yet Bond and Tap's contemporary works can, as art critic and curator Petra Halkes suggests, "yield insight into historical Western landscape painting and how it has helped shape modernity's view of nature" (4). Here the past may be used to interpret the present, while the present may be used to gain an understanding of the past in hopes of reaching a more "sustainable" conception of re-presenting the nature/human-culture relationship within the painted landscape.

Pegi Nicol MacLeod's paintings from the 1930s to the mid-1940s celebrated "movement" in all living things; she painted "growth" in every form, "from young children to flowers" (Murray 15). "Physical motion" became MacLeod's subject matter. Her facility with the watercolour medium enabled her to directly record a "rapid summary" of life in motion, using it as though it were a "camera" (Murray 30). Film and photographic techniques of the time inspired MacLeod to embrace a new way of seeing and to visually achieve movement in her work through multi-layered images, and the display of multiple views of the same scene. *New York Street Scene* (c. 1945), for example, repeats seven times the figure of a woman sweeping the steps below MacLoed's window and offers the viewer an engaging impression of action and energy (Brandon 103). MacLeod's *Manhattan Cycle* series from 1947 – 1948 illustrates her search for "essential 'beauty' within reality." She transforms the "ugliness" of her New York landscape into something "rich and strange" by applying her "action-oriented" approach to representing the urban landscape (Murray 30, 42, 51). Macleod developed a

distinctive, angled viewpoint from above, a candid "snapshot" of the moment below her, capturing it in a "photographic" instant of stasis; she termed it "kaleidoscopic vision" (Brandon 64). [15] This elevated vantage-point eliminates any sense of traditional linear perspective for the viewer, and crowds the figure into the background, creating a claustrophobic space – the subject becoming enmeshed with the object.

Eleanor Bond: Disappearance of the Horizon

The landscape paintings of Eleanor Bond and Monica Tap both employ a version of MacLeod's "kaleidoscopic vision" to generate an instability between the relationships of viewer and painting, subject and object, culture and nature (Halkes 5). In Eleanor Bond's painted futuristic worlds that depict an "entanglement" of nature and human settlement, an oblique aerial point of view is used to engage the spectator in active viewing. This strategy can be found in her series *Work Station* (c. 1984 – 1988), *Social Centres* (c. 1989 – 1991), *Cosmoville* (c. 1995), and *Some Cities* (c. 1997 – 1998). Bond floats the viewer into her landscapes and destabilises them from the ground beneath, creating a link between the world on canvas (object) and the reality beyond the frame (subject). She undermines any pure, objective position from which to view the landscape (Halkes 7-8) – a privileged position, upon which the landscape tradition has been built.

Historically, romantic landscape painting used perspectival devices, such as the horizon line, to offer a framed reconstruction of the "perfect," idealised natural world to

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[15] Pegi Nicol MacLeod first employed "kaleidoscopic vision" in the watercolour *School in a Garden* (c. 1934); an angled view from her attic studio of young people digging in a school garden across from her parent's house. This was a subject she would revisit in both oil and watercolour paint again and again, adding more figures and action (Fig. 1) (Brandon 64).

the distanced viewer, who was deliberately placed outside of the frame to gain an objective, although culturally pre-scripted, point of view. Through the use of this framing device a "radical exclusion" of the viewer, or subject, from the alien objectified "Other" - nature, develops. A master narrative is played out, in which the "master defines himself by exclusion against the other" (Plumwood 51). Bond denies the space required for the subjective (and distanced) contemplation of objective nature in her work by tilting the horizon so high it disappears off the picture plane's surface; this is similar to both the genre of seventeenth-century Dutch panoramic landscape painting (Halkes 109) and MacLeod's "kaleidoscopic vision". In Bond's destabilised space, "the boundaries of object and subject become thoroughly entangled" (Halkes 11), and the dualised relationship between nature and culture are brought into question. Not only is Bond interrogating our concept of human identity and the relations between humans and nature with her use of a floating perspective, she is also questioning how art historical constructs have shaped our western concept of nature.

A specific example of Bond's skewed bird's-eye view can been seen in the work *Rotterdam Pioneers New Technologies for the Subterranean Eco-Suburb, an Environment with Clean Air, Clean Water and Abundant Daily Sunshine* (c. 1995; Fig. 3). In both the title of the work and the work itself, she refuses to provide a neutral vantage point from which the viewer may survey the "pure" landscape, and creates a world of "fantasy" rather than an "idealized" representation of landscape (Halkes 116).

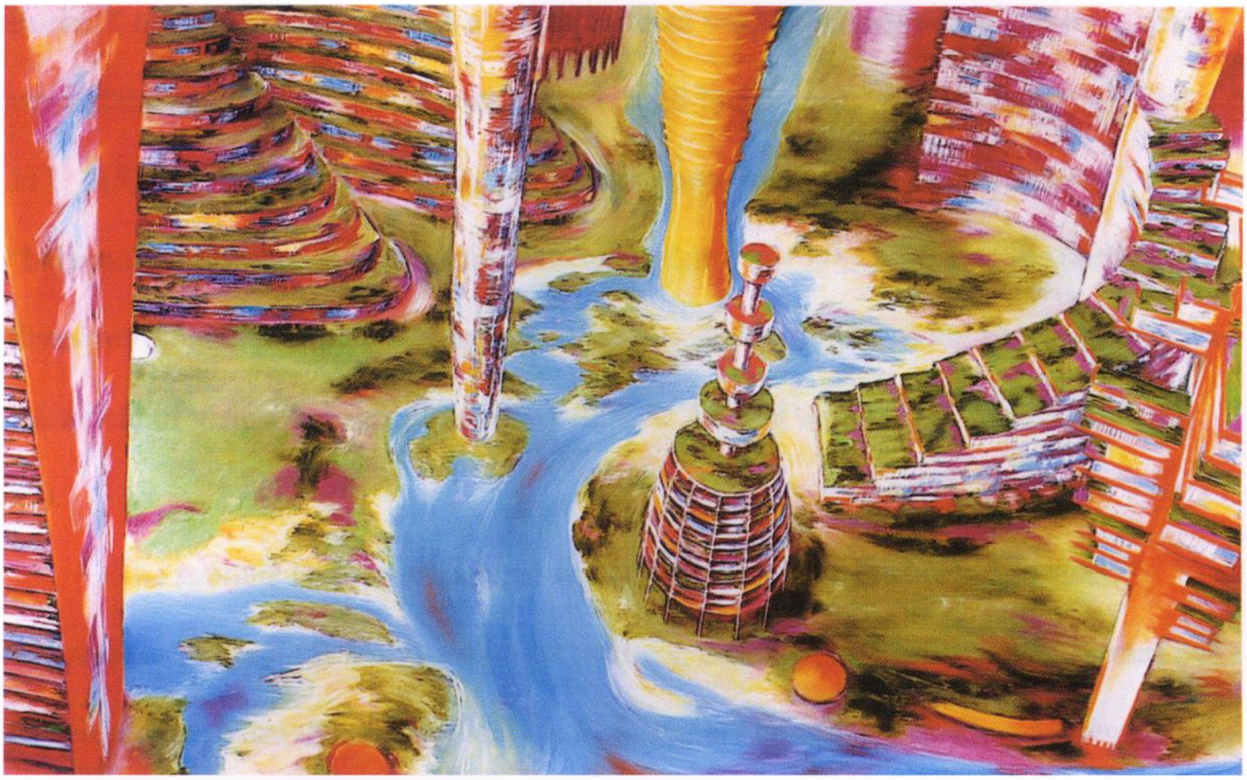

Figure 3 Eleanor Bond, *Rotterdam Pioneers New Technologies for the Subterranean Eco-Suburb, an Environment with Clean Air, Clean Water and Abundant Daily Sunshine*, c. 1995; Oil on canvas, 250 x 400 cm, Winnipeg Art Gallery

The riotously coloured monumental modernist architecture is "aerated" by the colour green on its rooftops and terraces (Sloan 41). It is a world that lies ambiguously between the concepts of "utopia" and "dystopia" – between the familiar and the unknown (Grant Marchand 33). Instead of searching for a way to present "true" nature, Bond re-presents nature as "a subject in its own right" (Halkes 14-15) and offers a relationship of reciprocity between humans and nature rather than one of dominance and oppression.

The horizon has been described by Jay Appleton in *The Experience of Landscape* as "the line of demarcation which separates that portion of the field of vision which can be perceived by the eye from that which can be reached only by the imagination" (254). For eighteenth-century Enlightenment philosophers, such as Immanuel Kant and Edmund

Burke[16], the horizon represented a threshold to an unknown, *subliminal* space – a space where "the desire for transcendence" could dwell in a "refuge from mortality" (Halkes 112, 115). Eleanor Bond's paintings deny this portal to a sublime world where "balanced," "infinite," and "timeless" nature resides. Her elimination of the horizon dissolves the prospect of a "secondary vantage-point" from which the viewer may extend their field of vision and speculate what might lie beyond our own mortality (Appleton 80).

The *sublime* is often associated with "vastness and overwhelming power," whereas the *beautiful* is identified with "softness, delicacy, and smallness" (Garrard 64). In feminist criticism the *sublime* and the *beautiful* are considered gendered categories in which the "sublime moment is particularly male" (Garrard 64). In Bond's landscape paintings, not only does she re-present a mutual relation between humans and nature through the elimination of the horizon, but she also neutralises the gender classification of the landscape.

Monica Tap: The "Composted" Landscape

Monica Tap's work dislocates the viewer's grounding through a conceptual process used in her series of "landscape paintings" produced between 1997 and 2003. By projecting and then painting several layers of seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth-century Dutch landscape drawings, one on top of the other with the aid of slides, she achieves an asymmetrical, "kaleidoscopic" surface that moves away from a "description of

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[16] The Third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671 – 1713) has been credited with changing the meaning and direction of the word "sublime" from the realm of the rhetorical to the aesthetic. It is Shaftesbury's concept of sublimity that was taken up by Kant and "became a central theme in eighteenth-century aesthetics" (Appleton 24-25).

Figure 4 Monica Tap, *Journey: red*, c. 1998; Oil on canvas, 117 x 117 cm, Macdonald Stewart Art Centre

landscape" and closer to an all-over "pattern" or decorative effect (Tousley 11). The enlarged scale of the historical drawing marks on the canvas combined with the repeated layers of their transposition, suspends the moment when the "dots, dashes and lines" converge into an illusionistic image (Tousley 13). Tap's works, such as *Journey: red* (c.1998; Fig. 4), hesitate on "the threshold between representation and abstraction" (Tousley 13), much like Pegi Nicol MacLeod's paintings. [17] As Tap states, "I am representing abstraction and abstracting representation" (Tousley 14). Whereas MacLeod preferred a spontaneous approach to attain the abstracted suggestion of movement in her work, Tap has chosen to use a more systematic method to generate movement as well as

[17] It has been suggested by writer and curator Joan Murray that Pegi Nicol MacLeod, "had she lived, might have been (like Jack Bush), one of the painters who moved to abstract work with relative ease" and cites MacLeod's *Flower Market* series as an example of how close she was to total abstraction (Murray 55).

introduce the concept of "synchronic time," in which historical and present time exist on the same plane (Tousley 17).

Curator and writer Stuart Reid describes Tap's methodical process in her "landscape painting" series as, "compost[ing] layers of history until the original image is subsumed into a dense nest" (40). All perspectival devices have been buried layer upon layer to create a new infinite and kinetically charged world that "shifts in and out of legibility" (Reid 41). In her essay, "Monica Tap: Painting and Perception", Nancy Tousley points out how Tap interrogates the cultural construction of nature by using landscape as a "motif" (11), or "social hieroglyph," as Marx referred to landscape (Mitchell 15), to be repeated continually until it is almost indecipherable.

Tap's use of a modernist square format for the series, as opposed to the conventional, horizontal, rectangular format implemented in many landscape works, also contributes to the paintings' fluctuation between the territories of abstraction and representation. Rather than offering a restricted, objective viewpoint bound by "margins in a horizontal plane" (Appleton 261), the square form employed by Tap induces a feeling of expansion of space in all directions, which in turn disorients the viewer.

The paintings of both Tap and Bond create a tension between the open invitation to the viewer through the large scale of their canvases, and the withdrawal of that invitation by leaving the viewer suspended and floating in search of a ground on which to stand (Halkes 110). With the loss of the demarcation, or "radical exclusion," between inside/outside comes an insecure footing for the viewer's human identity that is normally conceived of in opposition to nature. The disoriented spectator becomes a participant and finds him or herself in an unfamiliar and continual interrelation with nature.

***Understanding* the Landscape**

In *Landscape and Power* W.J.T. Mitchell argues that, "landscape is a dynamic medium...that is itself in motion from one place or time to another" (2). The works of both Monica Tap and Eleanor Bond recover the past in order to critique and interpret the present, echoing ecocriticism's task. They create subtle visual connections between the history of landscape representation and the present day's treatment, and state, of nature (Halkes 9).

Monica Tap's recent series of paintings reintroduces the pictorial convention of the *frame*. She captures low-resolution video footage shot at fifteen frames per second through the window of a car in the series *Homer Watson Boulevard* (c. 2005 – 2006) and *The Road to Lily Dale* series (c. 2006), as well as from a fast-moving train in the *One-second Hudson* (c. 2007) series. In the studio Tap extracts still, yet blurred, images captivating enough to generate material for a sequence of paintings.

Pegi Nicol Macleod similarly favoured the view through a window as a common device in her paintings, such as *Cold Window* (c. 1935) and *The Peace Bird* (c. 1946). Tap, however, in *The Road to Lily Dale* series, includes the "interference patterns" created by the glare on the glass of the vehicle window that interrupt the "half-glimpsed" roadside landscapes. She offers a "double-mediation" of the mobile landscapes with the camera lens and window (Brower 13). Tap in turn denies the viewer a clear representation of the landscape contained within the frame by both blurring the image of the rendered landscape and incorporating the glare produced on the window screen as a compositional element in her work. She creates paintings "in which the image is held in flux; a moving image made still and yet not still, a hybrid of resolution and not, of here

and not here" (Brower 8). With this constant oscillation the viewer is still destabilised even with the framing device's "guarantee" that "it is only a picture and the observer is safe in another place" (Mitchell 16).

Tap continues in this later series of "blur paintings" to describe rapid movement through a slow, systematic process of translation. Once Tap has decided on the particular video still she wants to transpose into oil paint she projects the chosen image onto the canvas and translates what was once an ephemeral moment into solid brushstrokes. By working in the dark with a projector, Tap distances her process of translation from becoming a romantic, self-indulgent demonstration of virtuosity (Brower 10). With this detached and mediated procedure of transposition she avoids in her landscape paintings the "pastoral narrative" – a narrative in which the protagonist/artist leaves civilisation for an encounter with non-human nature, then returns to reflect/paint after having experienced epiphany and renewal (Garrard 49).

Western art's idealised humanist notion of "pure nature" as "originat[ed] in classical antiquity," was later "reclaimed during the Renaissance," "renewed in the Enlightenment," re-articulated in nineteenth-century Romanticism, and revisited in "representational art of the modern period between 1920 and 1950" (Hudson 22). It promotes a "seamless harmony between culture and unspoiled nature [that] is being propagated even today in popular, conventional landscape painting and photography as well as in amateur painting" (Halkes 8).

The idealised and conventional landscape painting can be an innocuous object or representation. However, a dualistic "philosophy of nature as perfect 'Other', with which only certain kinds of people [are able and allowed to] achieve pure harmony", can, and

has, become dangerously exploited in the totalitarian political propaganda of Nazi and Fascist regimes (Halkes 8). Nazi ideology stressed the link between German blood and soil, or "*Blud und Boden*" – "those who held and farmed the land and whose generations of blood, sweat and tears had made the soil part of their being, and their being integral to the soil" (Bramwell qtd. in Garrard 112).[18] The Nazi ecological programme "not only appealed to small farms and georgic philosophers [such as Heidegger], but also to conservationists, enacting the world's first comprehensive nature conservation and animal welfare laws" (Garrard 112). Petra Halkes warns us of the dividing line between the "desire" for a "nature-as-wholeness" and the "insidious belief that wholeness can and ought to be achieved" (8). She points out that the large-scale Munich exhibitions of the Nazi era demonstrated how that culture "did not produce works of 'monstrous' art," but rather works of "idyllic painterly 'beauty'" rendered with technical virtuosity (Halkes 9).

Eleanor Bond and Monica Tap's landscape paintings analyze and counter the tradition of the idealised genre of landscape painting and help generate an *understanding* of how art has affected western society's attitudes towards, and constructions of, nature. Bond's uncanny, painted possible worlds are consistently unpopulated. It is uncertain as to why the people have vanished: have they been exterminated and could an "entropic process" be underway in which nature is reclaiming what remains of their cities (Sloan 38), or are the inhabitants merely hiding underground in secret resistance, "the way the Jews were forced to hide during the war" (Halkes 139)? People in Bond's landscapes are no longer working *in* the land, the way they once were in Prudence Heward and Pegi Nicol MacLeod's paintings during the 1930s, rather they are either working *underneath*

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[18] Anna Bramwell traces the links between Nazism and ecology in her influential 1965 book *Blood and Soil: Walther Darré and Hitler's 'Green' Party* (Garrard 112, 188).

it, creating change from below, or have been absorbed by it – the inhabitants have *become* the land, dismantling the dualistic master narrative employed in the painted landscape tradition.

Bond offers alternative interrelationships between human entities, organic life forms, and inorganic matter, including architecture (Sloan 41). *An Endless City: Cozy Living for a Large Population* (c. 1997), from the *Some Cities* series, incorporates a skyline dominated by a giant "bulbous" building suggestive of a mushroom, or rather a "mushroom cloud." This "over-determined signifier" signals the "demise of utopic or future-oriented dreams" (Sloan 40). Bond transforms this threat of mass-destruction into a sanctuary for "cozy living" by veiling the top of the building in a thin layer of clouds and mist. Jay Appleton suggests that historically a "wisp" of mist "provides a gratuitous increment to the refuge symbolism of the town which lies beneath [or above] it" (93). Bond is not merely reaffirming a "lost utopian dream" but is proposing a mutable interconnection between humans (culture) and nature, advocated by ecocritics.

Contemporary artists, such as Eleanor Bond and Monica Tap, are continuing the ecocritical project of *understanding*, developed in the painted landscapes of Canadian women painters of the 1930s, which recognises a mutually constructive relationship between humans and nature. The possible painted worlds of Bond and Tap draw on a multitude of art-historical conventions, such as the perspectival devices of the horizon-line and the frame. Instead of breaking with such conventions, they "transform" them, making the viewer aware of how western cultural constructs regarding nature, such as landscape painting, have shaped our behaviour towards a nature that exists beyond ourselves and our control, but that can affect and be affected by us.

Chapter 3

Destabilising the Idealised Landscape

Various modes of how the genre of landscape painting has contributed to western culture's relation to nature were explored in the preceding chapters. For example, there is the *objective* master (human) relation to the subordinate "Other" (nature) as a means for the master to establish an identity of self through developing a position of exclusion and opposition from nature. There is also the *subjective* interconnected relation between humans and nature, as advocated by the socially-conscious artists of the 1930s, as well as the Theosophist artists, who believed in an achievable spiritual transcendence by entering a direct, mystical relationship with "perfect" and "unending" nature. These approaches have historically presented viewers with an idealised portrayal of landscape.

The socially-conscious Canadian women artists of the 1930s, such as Pegi Nicol MacLeod and Prudence Heward, attempted a less heroic and idealised method of representing a continuous union between the human figure and nature than did their male counterparts. This paper earlier suggests how MacLeod and Heward's reflexive approaches to representing landscape have been carried forward into the painting practices of contemporary artists Eleanor Bond and Monica Tap. Bond and Tap's works do not attempt to depict a naturalised and "true" representation of nature, but rather attempt to bring viewers' attentions to the human-cultural conventions developed throughout the history of western landscape painting, and to show how those conventions have influenced society's treatment of nature.

My art practice, as well, is a search for an ecocritical means of re-presenting nature as a "subject in its own right," while seeking to maintain an awareness that we live in a world dominated by a Marxist "second nature" – a virtual simulation of pristine "first nature" wrought by the revolution in information, biotechnologies, and consumer culture (Buell 3). As in Bond and Tap's paintings, my work attempts to generate "active viewing", in which there is a recognition of the "viewer's own physical presence" (Halkes 5), as well as a destabilisation between the world represented and the reality of everyday life. Bond and Tap achieve this through the large and imposing scale of their paintings, as well as by bringing "kaleidoscopic vision" to their still, yet not still, canvases. Although my methodologies are related to their strategies, they are distinct from them as well.

For one area of my practice I have chosen the medium of video to undermine the objective, distanced point-of-view of the spectator. Model landscapes are carefully assembled from various discarded and recycled consumer packaging, reflecting the detailed crafting brought to the process of painting. My models of rolling farmland and telephone poles against the prairie sky are based on the landscape tradition developed by the socially-conscious artists of the 1930s, which favoured the rural over the wilderness. In producing these works, multiple digital still-photographic images are taken of the model landscapes and then transferred into a computer. The images are strung together into an animation simulating the type of unstable movement experienced by a viewer "driving" by the (model) landscape. These video works are propositions for a landscape art in a time of virtual, high-speed systems, one influenced by Jean Baudrillard's "simulacrum" (where the ability to distinguish between "the model and the real" has been

lost among the mediations of cultural constructs) and Paul Virilio's theory of "substitution" (in which "virtuality destroys reality") (Der Derian 4-5).

A destabilisation of the viewer is also invoked by my botanical watercolour paintings through the implication of Sigmund Freud's "uncanny" – the frightening found in the familiar (Freud 340). Instead of directly observing existing specimens, as did nineteenth-century Romantics such as John Ruskin and J.M.W. Turner, I work from collages (or exquisite corpses) of reconfigured and imagined plants constructed from images of the most common genetically modified plant crops, including corn, soy, tobacco, cotton, and canola. My botanical studies are not painted "from nature," but from a mediation (collage), of a mediation (a printed internet image), of a mediation (the initial photograph) of nature. In making these works, images of various GMO plants are printed from the Internet, then precisely cut out, and recombined with one another to produce a new specimen to be attentively observed and translated into watercolour. My work draws not only on art-historical conventions, but also on various scientific "objective" means of observing and representing the natural world – botany, genetics, and the camera.

Early nineteenth-century Romantics looked to both art and science in their examinations of the "*ur-phanomen*" – the essential pattern and process of the natural world (Cosgrove 237). Their interest in nature had less to do with control and mastery over the land, than with control over the very process of nature (Cosgrove 236).[19] Landscape painters, in particular England's Society of Painters in Water Colours, used

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[19] An extreme expression of the Romantic era's desire for control over the process of nature was found in the "Victorian conservatory which displayed the green and blossoming treasures of colonial territories in an entirely artificial environment wherein land is irrelevant and natural processes depend utterly on human control" (Cosgrove 236).

their art practices to adapt the "detailed observational techniques" of the expanding disciplines of the natural sciences, geology, botany, and meteorology (Cosgrove 237)[20]. The intention of the Society was to help gain acceptance of both the watercolour medium as a legitimate form for fine art, and for landscape to be considered "equal subject matter to the established genres" (Cosgrove 241-242). The now conventional genre of the botanical watercolour brings to my work a predictable familiarity that is easily combined with the unfamiliar (and it could be added, perhaps frightening) contemporary genetic transfer science;[21] a science that large multinational corporations, such as Monsanto, are attempting to make conventional and familiar to the public.[22] The preliminary collages for the watercolours are essentially "sliced" images that are "transferred" onto other images to create a new "modified" whole. By painting these new modified-plant forms in meticulous detail, I am mimicking the nineteenth-century Romanticist method of painting based on careful, minute observations to allow for "penetration into the very essence, the life force, of natural processes" (Cosgrove 238). Yet the subject with which I am attempting to engage has no "essence," "life force" or "natural process" to be revealed. There is no "empirical reality" to attend to in order to achieve "artistic truth".

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[20] England's Society of Painters in Water Colours was founded in 1804 by William Frederick Wells and still exists today as the Royal Watercolour Society.

[21] GMO's have only been in the mainstream market since the early 1990's. This is coincidentally the same time that ecocriticism was becoming established as a cultural theory.

[22] Multinational companies, such as Monsanto, who are developing and marketing genetically modified food crops, strategise to make their products more *friendly* through positive advertising campaigns that use slogans such as "...helping farmers to produce more while conserving more" and "growing yield sustainably" (*Monsanto*). They are also attempting to make GMO's more *familiar* by actively lobbying governments against discrimination of their product through standard labeling for genetically modified foods.

An extension to my watercolours is presented in a video animation, *Florilegium*, generated from the cut-out images of plants used in developing the collaged specimens for the paintings. The stop-animation consists of several short vignettes depicting proposed-plant forms pollinating, colliding, emerging, eating, and carrying-off one another. Ryan Bishop states, "As science became more enamored with not only finding the secrets of nature but of mastering them and turning the natural world to the will of human society, the concept of animation, converting dead tissue into a living being again, captured the imagination of artists and scientists in Europe in the late 18th and early 19th centuries" (346). This infatuation with the "simulation of life" still persists in contemporary technology-driven society, coupled with the "unconscious anxiety...[that] the very technologies that deliver humans this divine-like power might not always deliver what they promise" (Bishop 346). *Florilegium* attempts to operate between these two Romantic realms of fascination with mastery over natural processes and unease with what our technology might unleash.

Since the nineteenth century, the essentialist position whereby nature is seen as "truth," in conjunction with art's "duty" to closely observe and translate it as such, has come to be no longer regarded as viable for contemporary artists. Instead of simply re-presenting a Romantic failure, my botanical watercolours and video works potentially serve as critiques of our continued human drive for dominance over nature, as well as our complacency towards that dominance.

W.J.T. Mitchell reminds us that, "We have known since Ruskin that the appreciation of landscape as an aesthetic object cannot be an occasion for complacency or untroubled contemplation; rather it must be the focus of a historical, political, and

(yes) aesthetic alertness to the violence and evil written on the land, projected there by the gazing eye" (29). The theoretical discourse, ecocriticism, is a useful tool to bring into focus the critical perspective that Mitchell calls for. By using an ecocritical framework to re-read the 1930s landscape paintings of Canadian women artists Pegi Nicol MacLeod and Prudence Heward, I have suggested that not only did women artists' representations of nature reshape the genre of landscape painting in Canada, but they also provoked a shift in the way society culturally constructs its relationship to the natural world. This shift, from a confrontational attitude of dominance over nature to one of immersion and reciprocity with a nature, independent of its use-value to humans, has extended into the more contemporary landscape paintings of Eleanor Bond and Monica Tap. Although Bond and Tap challenge the conventions in landscape in order to re-present "nature as a subject in it's own right, free from cultural conventions," they have not lost "sight of the human artifice that constitutes any kind of representation" (Halkes 14). Jonathan Bate recommends that in order to overcome our apartness from nature we must "think and use language in a different way" (37). MacLeod, Heward, Bond, and Tap have all chosen the *visual* language of painting as a means to imagine the elusive, heterotopic "dream of deep ecology" – a dream that our "survival as a species may be dependent upon" (Bate 37-38).

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