



Triptych: Coming and Going, Chromagenic prints mounted on aluminum, 40" x 180", 2002.

Margaret Lawther
Souvenir: A Road Show

June 7 to July 19, 2003

Post Script is a new initiative of Artspeak, designed to encourage the development of innovative critical writing about the visual arts by Vancouver writers, to provide critical feedback to emerging and mid-career artists and to further enhance cross fertilization of ideas between the visual art and writing community.

Information about this exhibition is available on-line at www.artspeak.ca

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Scott Massey on
Margaret Lawther

Souvenir: A Road Show



Dodge, Chromagenic print mounted on aluminium, 40" x 60", 2002.

Souvenir: A Road Show

The highway has long been used as a metaphor for life. Pop culture has found innumerable ways to tell us "life is a highway". Kerouac lost and found (and lost and found) himself *On the Road*, and while some of us may be "on a highway to hell", Thelma and Louise found existential bliss beyond the end of their road. Our collective indulgence with the idea of highways has become a trope, and the physical act of getting from one place to another on the highway almost secondary to the idea itself.

The thought of taking a trip and returning empty handed would strike most people as odd, the act of collecting being an almost unshakable impulse. Whether they are photographs, the odd tourist trinket, or shells from a beach, mementoes collected over the course of a journey later serve as mnemonic devices. In other words, these objects become the points through which our memories often return. And so, as Margaret Lawther travels, she collects her future memories, or as the title of this exhibition suggests, souvenirs, en français: to remember.



Diptych: Marshlands, Chromagenic prints mounted on aluminum, 40" x 120", 2002.

Souvenir: A Road Show brings together a number of landscape photographs, and a video work, shot from the side of the Trans-Canada highway, as well as ruined vehicles in a wrecking yard. This work was made during trips between Vancouver and Montreal over the course of about two years. The drudgery of repeating this particular route is apparent in the anti-climactic views, as is the sense of loneliness that a long and solitary journey must entail, exemplified by the unmistakable drone of a passing transport truck in the video.

The images themselves are purposely somewhat banal, but each carries with it an underlying narrative: *Marshlands* points to the "encounter of man-made and natural"; *Coming and Going* speaks to the journey from life to death (albeit from right to left); and *Cows and Crows* hints at our relationship to wild and domesticated animals, one contained and the other supported by our constructions. I particularly enjoyed the cows and crows, a common feature of the roadside landscape outside of Canadian cities, those beings who are quite oblivious to our passing and indifferent to our concerns. That is why I adore them.



Travel photographs are a way of codifying the unknown and rendering the landscape (indeed any 'scape) understandable and non-threatening in its unfamiliarity. Photographs carry with them an inherent sense of ownership. As Goethe has suggested, "there is a delicate form of the empirical which identifies itself so intimately with its object that it thereby becomes theory". This theory of ownership has its art historical roots in the genre of landscape painting, suggested by Lawther's intentionally coarse-grained imagery as a result of enlarging very small negatives. Perhaps one of the intriguing aspects of travel in Canada is that there is still the possibility of encountering a vast, unclaimed landscape beyond the highway.

Long distance travel is a relatively recent phenomenon, the possibility of which seems to increase in direct inverse proportion to retaining a sense of place. The desire for travel is always tempered by the desire of home, whether we bring home with us or create it where we go. Thus the things we bring with us are the souvenirs of home and the things we bring back the souvenirs of away. Such a search for place underlies Lawther's back and forth journeys, as she attempts to reconcile the friends and family of her native



Cows and Crows, Chromagenic print mounted on aluminum, 40" x 60", 2002.

Vancouver with her job and identity as an artist in Montreal. Highways are about travel in many forms, and travel carries with it the desire of discovery, which in the end becomes a discovery about oneself.

Scott Massey
03/07/03

Tom Cochrane, song title.
AC/DC, song lyrics.
Rubinien, Leo. *Perfect Uncertainty, Art in America*, March, 2002.
As quoted in John Berger, *About Looking*, Random House Inc., New York, 1980.
Interview with the artist.