ROBERT YOUNG

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In My Small Pavilion

essays

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(T)ART AND ITS ORTHODOXIES – Robin Laurence

Looking over transcripts of the interviews I've conducted with Robert Young during the past decade, it seems that I persistently have been posing the question, "What is this image meant to signify?" and he equally persistently has been responding, "It isn't meant to signify anything, it's meant to *evoke a feeling*..."

Let's suppose, for the moment, that I'm not as obtuse as these recurring exchanges suggest, let's suppose that the repetition of this little bit of dialogue itself signifies something, let's suppose that what it signifies is Young's repudiation of — and my implication in — the affiliation of contemporary curatorial practice, art production and critical discourse. Young fiercely resists aligning his art with linguistic or cultural theory; he resists structural and post-structural analyses, textual analogies, literary readings. Yet critics and writers like myself (our careers entirely predicated upon the conversion of visual dynamics into printed words) look at Young's paintings and see images so charged with, well, *meaning*, that they seem to demand interpretation. Young, however, sees them as purely expressive, sees them as operating in another plane from language, directly and without mediation.1 Although his paintings resonate with historical references (to art, autobiography and political affairs), it is a history of sensation and feeling, not iconographic or narrative content. Young wants his paintings — his mark-making — to communicate in ways that are impossible through verbal signifiers. He does not want his work to be "dragged painfully into line with language,"2 does not want it to be "purposive" or "proscriptive,"3 does not want it to conform to a cultural thesis or illustrate a critical text. Assigning a language function to visual art, he feels, diminishes the expressive power and the mystery inherent in it. And linguistic signification compromises the transformative potential of his particular art, painting.

It seems to me if you make paintings like essays that have a single argument that can be deduced, that is very severely reducing the potential of painting... Hugh MacDiarmid said, "I've nay faith in ocht I can explain," and Roy Kiyooka said, "Art is one of Psyche's modes of dismembering mere content. The wholly explicable sculpture, drawing or painting is nothing if not erudition feeding on itself."

The paradox here, of course, is that MacDiarmid was a committed polemicist — and Young's ambitious new painting, *Tart*, is polemical too. It is art with an argument, art with a message, art that takes a stand against what Young characterizes as the "New Academy." *Tart* attempts to both represent and repudiate the curatorial and critical orthodoxies of the day. It does not argue with art that delivers a political message but, rather, decries the tendency of contemporary political art to be proscriptive. Young draws a vivid analogy between 19th century academic painting, "with its insistence on correctness and elevated subject matter,"4 and contemporary art practice as dictated by cultural theory and curatorial fashion. He is alarmed at what appears to be, in the Postmodern repudiation of the tenets of Modernism, a renewed embrace of the kinds of orthodoxies Modernism itself repudiated. He is also disturbed by the resemblance between the righteous tone of much Postmodern art and that of mid-century Fascism (which, of course, loathed and condemned all the manifestations of Modernism).

I find it very troubling when one of the aspects of the present time is an air of righteousness... It seems to me that in aid of the kind of ethical correction that's being attempted in order to redress evils, the tone of righteousness is so prevailing that that in itself is quite worrying.

Placing the action of his painting on and around the facade of a neo-classical building which also happens to be an art gallery, Young protests the collecting policies and curatorial practices which that institution, like many, represents. More particularly, he deplores the curatorial tendency away from surveying a broad spectrum of contemporary art (looking at the wide range of art being produced and celebrating its diversity) toward the organization of exhibitions around work that narrowly conforms to a particular thesis. He ironically recognizes, however, that even though *Tart* is subversive to this tendency, it employs a number of allegorical strategies and literary devices consonant with it.

A lot of contemporary allegory doesn't work very well — it's too simple-minded. But, to some extent, Tart is operating in terms of the art I'm criticizing.

The complexity and cultural resonance of the imagery, the densely interwoven appropriations from contemporary cultural life and centuries of art history, the thronging figuration played out against a background of institutional architecture, apocalyptic landscape and heavenly beyond, all contribute to the construction of a work of almost monumental scope. It strikes me that this is the most ambitious painting Young has undertaken since *The Juggler*, 1980. *Like The Juggler, Tart* seems to signal the end of a certain kind of creative or intellectual engagement for Young — the termination of his willingness to address certain critical issues. (Young's edgy relationship with theory conflates awareness of the game with a refusal to play it.)

The Juggler was a way of saying goodbye to photo-based painting, and Tart is a way of saying to hell with all that discourse — I just want to get on with it.

The figures in *Tart*, whose references range across seven centuries of Western art history into 20th century photo journalism and Black folk music, are displaced from their sources, relocated into other scenes and landscapes, other realms of existence, although ever occupying their own small envelopes of pain struggle, strife, difficulty, damnation, absurdity, and (occasional) redemption. Partly painted, partly drawn, they are physically and thematically conjoined by Young's slender, diagrammatic, colour-coded line.

In the working drawing, the parts that have to do with the institution are drawn in brown ink, and the parts repeated from art history — the figures subject to the institution — are in black ink. But the screen that the Ship of Fools is projected on is in brown ink. So if you want to be Marxist about it, then the institution owns the means of production.

The images are seamlessly collaged together, their forms, postures and expressions suggestive of certain qualities, their presence here owing to some feeling they evoked for Young, a feeling he seeks to activate for the viewer. Expressive as they may be, though, these figures are also connotative and associative: they tell stories which are equally composed of what each originally represented in art history and what they appropriatively and collectively enact here, on Young's canvas. Despite Young's sympathy with the anti-academic stance of Modernism, the densely populated nature of *Tart* and the intricately allegorical staging of the figures is certainly anti-Modernist.

Critical placement of Young's practice is difficult, since his strategies span both Modernism and Postmodernism. Certainly his appropriations from art history anticipated Postmodern self-referencing by many years, and had to do with his dissatisfaction with Modernism and his attempts to navigate around its limitations. Yet many of Modernism's formal concerns have also concerned Young. In *Tart*, however, the deployment of figures isn't about resolving formal or spatial problems, nor investigating painterliness or the nature of abstraction. For the first time in a decade of painting landscapes, still lifes and interiors, Young has largely suspended his preoccupation with the paradox of representing a three-dimensional object or space on a two-dimensional surface. Here, when figures appear to be flattened, it is because, allegorically, they are intended to suggest flatness of character. The distortions of photographically-mediated imagery (as in the curving representation of the gallery's facade) are maintained because they create an artificiality and an imbalance which accord with Young's expressive and metaphorical intent. Colour is transliterative, adapting the palettes of historical artists from widely varying reproductions in books. But colour is also expressive, inflecting our response to both formal and figural relationships throughout the canvas.

Young resists identifying the seven figures at centre stage, the seven men who stand on the curious plinth in front of the neo-classical facade and who seem to both dominate and disregard the hectic scene below them. He will, however, acknowledge that he cut the original photo-image out of a London newspaper supplement some two decades ago, because it compelled him in certain almost inexpressable ways.

Identifying these men would just shift the energy of the painting to something that's far more specific and local than I intend. And that's not how I think images can work or how I want my images to work. It struck me, when I first saw this photograph 20 years ago, as a manifestation of some character that people have or can develop, or that can be nourished at the expense of other things.

Only recently did Young conceive of employing these figures within the context of this painting. Placed in front of an immensely looming institution, the seven men convey qualities of undemocratic power, a kind of assertive evasiveness of posture and expression, a certain shifty self-consciousness, all of which contribute to their obliviousness to the pain and tribulation, the struggles and suffering, the daily lives and deaths of the figures in the realm below them. Although the message of *Tart* is not explicitly Christian, almost all its images derive from Christian paintings, and bring a particularity of association and religious connotation to the work. Even the colour of the clothing of the seven-man "committee" is referenced to the particular dark blue of the Madonna's cloak in Sienese painting. The message, though, has to do with a non-sectarian reading of the human condition.

Images of suffering happen to be, in our culture, Christian images.

Above the seven men, on banners suspended between the classical columns, are figures isolated from Bruegel's *Mad Meg*, Ensor's *Skeletons Fighting over a Hanged Man*, and a mercenary soldier by Urs Graf, all suggestive of varying degrees of folly, covetousness and absurd or grotesque ambition. Above the banners, on the pediment of the building, the torso of a naked woman references both classical sculpture and an earlier work of Young's. This classical female torso, the only image of sublimity and repose in the entire painting, suggests patriarchy's highest aspiration for art (Muse and model both being characterized as feminine), yet her reproduction on a fan (an implement of coquetry) suggests her compromised status here as a prostitute, and calls up the pun of (t)art in the work's title. Troubling as the conjunction of clothed men and naked women may be to feminists, Young insists that he is not attempting to either validate or perpetuate

patriarchal conditions, but is using patriarchy's already potent symbology for its ability to communicate certain established relationships of power and privilege.

At this point in history, if you're going to represent power, it has to be a committee of men. Just as, if you're going to represent art — or a prostitute — it has to be a woman.

The clouds encircling the temple of art are borrowed from Rogier van der Weyden's *Last Judgement*, where they were used to separate the heavenly from the earthly realm, the exalted and godly from the human and the damned. In *Tart*, they give a sense of pseudo glory or fake exaltation to the institution and its committee. But even though the separation between the realms is symbolic of rift, the clouds are an insufficient barrier, since figures from the lower world have invaded the upper, and aspects of paintings alluded to in the upper have been transposed to the lower. (The tortured little figures on poles to the left of the gallery come from Bruegel's *Triumph of Death*, and the figures being pitched off the roof at the right are borrowed from Bocklin, van der Weyden, and Memlinc.) In the upper corners of the painting, the vista opens up into starry firmament, the incomprehensible and uncomprehending enormity of the universe seeming to render all human struggle utterly meaningless.

And what of this human struggle? The mood of the lower realm is established by its landscape. Barren, apocalyptic, littered with the dead and dying, darkened by the smoke of distant fires, the landscape is appropriated from Bruegel's *Triumph of Death*, and supplemented by excisions from his *Mad Meg*, as well as from David Jones's *Epiphany 1941: Britannia* and *Germania Embracing*. The grim mood of death is somewhat alleviated by the beauty of Young's palette (which is intentionally "Mediterranean," but is also somewhat reminiscent of his earlier Nicola Lake landscapes), yet it accords with the scenes of folly, greed and gluttony, mutilation, torture and death that are also referenced here.

At the lower centre, in an architectural niche, is a female figure tilting dangerously on a swirling sphere. Adapted from from Giotto's *Allegories of the Virtues and Vices* in the Arena Chapel in Padua, it is not the figure's specific symbolism of "Inconstancy" but the sense of fickleness, instability and even panic she generates that conditioned Young's inclusion of her here. There is also the mystery of her depiction — the curious spheres beneath her feet and behind her head. Beyond her, at the far left, Jones's archaic and ritually mutilated sisters, Britannia and Germania, embrace. The original Jones drawing, executed in Britain in the middle of the Second World War, complexly interweaves biblical references with allusions to the war. But again, its appeal to Young is not in its Christian or historical references, but has to do with finding personal resonance in its aspects of beauty, sisterhood, rivalry, reconciliation. The figures adjacent, from Bosch's *Ship of Fools*, are traditionally interpreted as representing the seven deadly sins. For Young, however, the rudderless and overloaded ship functions as a compelling image of folly. Here, the Stygian landscape of the original painting has been replaced by the more hectic and depraved landscape of Bruegel's *Mad Meg*, giving folly an even more drastic consequence.

I wanted something that indicated a mood of chaos, of everything breaking down, something that suggested a crisis, a terrible happening... I have to admit that however optimistic I feel for myself, I feel pessimistic about the kinds of things that are going forth in the world.

In the next scene, Young both reinforces and undermines his own pessimism. A grotesque and absurd skeleton figure, transposed from the Ensor painting quoted in the distant banner above, is present at a scene drawn from Stanley Spencer's 1934 canvas, *The Dustman*, a work replete with themes of joyous reunion and resurrection, and of the beauty and consequence of the most ordinary conditions of life (and death).

I've been looking at The Dustman for a number of years and at first it just seems peculiar and what are you supposed to make of it? But gradually, it seems to make perfect sense. It has such emotional intensity — ordinary people having a genuine religious experience. Beatitude.

Above the figures from Spencer, on the wall of the architectural construction into which the tilting figure of *Inconstancy* is set, is "mounted" a photographic image of the folk-blues singer, Leadbelly. His placement in this painting suggests the Renaissance minstrels or troubadours whose songs originated in one social context and were appropriated into another. Reiterating the theme of protest which dominates *Tart*, Leadbelly seems to represent the once-independent artist who is pressed into the service of themes deemed socially and politically relevant.

Other variously humorous and grotesque figures are delineated below: bottom-sniffing dogs from Spencer, amputees and a one-armed, one-legged monster (an image of gluttony) from Bruegel, a pissing harlequin from Jacques Callot (the harlequin costume is a Youngian add-on, alluding to earlier work in which he characterized himself as a harlequin). There is both horror and humour in the crucifixion scene, also referenced to Stanley Spencer, also hinging on a dailiness or "homeliness" of setting and character and on Young's belief that, irrespective of the Christian symbology, the kinds of cruelty, persecution and violent repression

Tart, 1993 oil on linen, 104" x 82"
Work in Progress

of freedom enacted here are as contemporary today as 2000 years ago. Again, the image works as a generalized comment on the human condition rather than an attempt to perpetuate particular doctrines or mythologies.

Below the crucifixion scene, a naked woman from van der Weyden's *Last Judgment* is being dragged by her hair into Hell. Despite the horror of her situation, however, Young chooses to dwell on the tenderness and affection with which she was originally rendered. By contrast, Ensor's hideous clowns and buffoons are treated with humorous, perhaps misanthropic contempt. In the lower right corner, drawn to a different scale than all the other figures here, is a Cubist nude, alluding to Picasso's *Woman Seated in Armchair*, 1909.

I originally thought that this woman should be in the middle of the painting. There was something touching about her, about the way Cubism takes people apart. The fact that she is a woman — impassive, implacable, suffering — seems implicit. And the phrase, "the suffering of women," was in my mind.

Enlarged and foregrounded as she is, and juxtaposed with so many explicitly Christian images, this Cubist woman with her sad, fractured face acquires an almost penitential aura. The back of her chair is suggestive of the wing of an angel, yet she has not so much transcended suffering as resigned herself to it. Perhaps she has yet to grow the other wing which would allow her to fly out of the pain and strife of the lower realm, beyond the more subtly conflicted realm of power, into the starry firmament.

Given his repudiation of text as visual art strategy, Young's use of elements of written language throughout his painting is both intriguing and perverse. *Tart* employs quotations from the poet Petrarch, as well as from visual artists like Ensor and Graf. However, the Italian, German and French words here are not necessarily intended to be translated: their meanings are more suggestive than literal. With the phrases "Fanfares Doctrinaires" and "Vive la Sociale," Young directly references Ensor's satirical painting, *Christ's Entry into Brussels*, as a way of sending up contemporary art's subscription to trendy cultural theory, and its doctrinaire inscription within the curatorial and critical canons. He also mocks himself with a bit of graffiti that reads "Young is a fou," fou being French for crazy, and Scots dialect for drunk.

Using Postmodern strategies of transgression and disruption, Young complexly references both poetry and art and undermines those references with irony, detachment, and even wilful self-contradiction. The artist, in his view, must resist the Academy, resist the curatorially and politically orthodox. The alternative (which is the subtlest of subtexts here, but which is explicit in Young's still life paintings) is to participate in the making of art as an integrated aspect of a fully contemplative existence.

I am feeling more and more like the person I was when I was a child, that is, more and more affected by beauty. I really just want to make beautiful things — I want to make my garden beautiful and contemplative, I want to make my house contemplative... There's something about making things by hand which is very fulfilling. I'm increasingly interested in this meditative, contemplative tradition that was common in Japan.

As for the swarming and clamorous images of struggle and suffering imaged here, Young seems to be acknowledging them as inevitable aspects of human existence on an overcrowded planet. Still, his referencing them is almost a way of exorcising them, as his embrace of a contemplative existence is a way of precluding strife. In the many thronging centuries of Western art invoked here, Young creates both an ending and a beginning. He seems to turn away from Western art practice toward the Eastern tradition of the solitary and independent painter-poet, untouched by the demands and strictures of patrons, critics, curators and cultural theorists. Yet there is also an embrace — a re-embrace — of a particular Western art tradition here, and a hint as to how Young's work will evolve. His fascination with Flemish painting, revealed in allusions to Rogier van der Weyden, compasses not only the appeal of its "hard line and jewel-like local colours," but also its humble and devotional character. Compared with the "rhetoric and grandiosity" of the Italian painting that was to follow, Young says, Northern or Flemish painting possesses a domestic quality which resonates for him, and which is much more in accord with the Eastern contemplative tradition. From the noisy predations of death and curatorial practice imaged in *Tart*, Young seems to be finding a way out of art — and back into it again.

Robin Laurence, October 1993
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NOTES:

1. Robert Young, "To Maintain Absurdity and Foster Ineptitude," a talk delivered at the Vancouver Art Gallery, January 21, 1993.
2. Ibid.
3. Interview between Robert Young and Robin Laurence, September 1993. Unless otherwise indicated, quotes from Young are taken from interviews conducted September 8, 15 and 23, 1993. All extended passages in italics are also taken from these interviews.
4. Artist's statement, written for Artropolis 93 catalogue.

"PLACES TO THINK ABOUT THINGS": THREE SMALL PAVILIONS BY ROBERT YOUNG – Robert Stacey

In his moving poem "A Painter of Our Day", the late English writer, critic and anthologist Geoffrey Grigson drew what I take to be a verse portrait of his painter friend Ben Nicholson, whose sensuously chaste constructivist abstractions he praises as exemplary lessons in how (and what, and why) to see: "He teaches me what is: never nostalgia,/ Yet never contempt for what has been composed." Following the artist on his journey into the "packed centre" of the rose, the poet inquires whether he recognizes there "much/ Old reiterated wisdom of perceiving?", and answers the rhetorical question: "No, seeing what you see: what is."

I don't know whether Robert Young is conversant with the tough yet lyrical poetry or the swingeing, no-bull art criticism of the encyclopedically productive Grigson, but he acknowledges having been introduced by him to the work of Samuel Palmer, the nineteenth-century watercolourist and engraver who briefly wandered into a Blakean "Valley of Vision" in the southeast-England village of Shoreham. Young became interested in Palmer, as he did in Albrecht Dürer, during his years at the University of British Columbia, where he studied art history under, among others, the most Nicholsonian of Canadian modernists, B.C. Binning.

A linkage, here, across time as well as space: Blake, Palmer's mentor, had insisted on that same "hard outline,/ And rigid form, by...hand subdued/ To matchless grace, and sacro-sanctitude" which Charles Lamb extolled in Dürer, and which Robert Young upholds as a tenet of artistic verity as well as intellectual clarity. Despite the fact that it was that cold-eyed anti-romantic, Ingres, who coined the wise phrase, "drawing is the probity of art", this is a very British concept, to some extent a reformative reaction to the colouristic excesses of the French, an insistence on the disciplinary role of line in art (the title of a 1941 monograph by the Canadian-born Wyndham Lewis). For Robert Young, pigment is the clothing a painter hangs on the line or drying-rack of drawing, not the other way around.

This philosophy is in keeping with Young's belief that the river of modern art has diverged into two main streams, the Constructivist/Cubist and the Surrealist/Expressionist. The former of these channels claims his fealty: the classical as opposed to the romantic, the Apollonian rather than the Dionysian impulse, which leads him to build strong, authentic paintings on an architectonically sound superstructure of line. Hence his love of the German Naturalist painters who looked to Dürer, Cranach, Van der Weyden and Memling as prophets who would lead them into the promised land of enclosed forms, sharply defined spaces, discrete volumes, hard edges, and enamel-like local colours. And his sense of allegiance to such twentieth-century figurative painter-draughtsmen as David Jones, Stanley Spencer, Graham Sutherland, Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud and R.B. Kitaj. Young met the latter during his second English sojourn, but became familiar with his "edgy and literary" work (Robert Hughes's phrase) only after he had returned to his native Vancouver from London, where he had studied printmaking and drawing (the latter without benefit of instruction) - but not painting - at the City and Guilds School of Art.

The artist who would demonstrate to Young that realism still had legs was not Kitaj, however, but Alex Colville, an exhibition of whose exercises in magic-realist mimesis he saw at the Marlborough Gallery in 1970. Kitaj's explorations of modern history now seem to him to pursue a more fruitful line of inquiry than that of such compatriots as Colville, Christopher Pratt or Jack Chambers, because, as he remarks, "Kitaj

manages to juggle modernism and representation and, if modernism is over, to bring painting back to life after it had become arcane and 'exclusive'."[1] Like his American-born, London-based counterpart (described by Hughes as "one of the few real masters of the art of depictive figure drawing now alive"), throughout his career Robert Young has struggled to balance the formal and the representational, a labour he chronicled in the *Juggler* sequence.

Ironically, Young's first brush with fame came when he began to experiment with photo-based painting during his second sojourn in England, not because the mode was fashionable in the early 1970s, but because this was a way of "getting into painting through the back door," as he had not been trained in painting–this was the era of unstructured instruction – and so was unable to "manipulate space" to his satisfaction. His first essay in this genre is *Archie Young down in Quebec* (1969), based on a tintype of his great-grandparents, to whom his thoughts turned when his decision to put a continent and an ocean between himself and his family background began to feel like a banishment into involuntary exile in an increasingly unfriendly foreign country. The maze-like *Juggler*, completed in 1980, represents "the end" of the *bildungsroman* phase of this photographically assisted quest, and Young's last photo-derived images became the vehicles for "formal statements" about the nature of perception, rather than a further investigation of the self and its antecedents. Always uncomfortable with the realist label that has been stuck on him, Young considers himself to be an explorer of reality and its mirror-image, illusion, and rejects the pursuit of literalism as a foolish wild-goose-chase after the obvious and the banal – as much of a waste of time as the soliciting of contemporary "relevance."

Another connection to some of the above-named figures: the literary angle, which can be seen as an extension of line. Blake was, of course, as much (or more) of a poet as he was a painter, draughtsman and engraver; Palmer wrote verses and conducted a voluminous correspondence; Lewis was a prolific novelist, critic and polemicist as well as the leader of the Vorticist movement in painting and design; Jones was one of the greatest poets of the century; and Kitaj, whom Hughes calls "the Auden of modern painting," probably keeps more company with writers than he does with painters, and his paintings and prints are complexly if non-linearly narrational. I have no idea whether Young also writes or keeps a journal, but he is more articulate about his own work and about art in general than virtually any other Canadian painter of his generation. About him could be said what Hughes says of Kitaj: "This literacy – a sense of the thickness of art's layer over an insufficiently named world, a knowledge of what alternative images it contains – is part of...[his] essential subject matter. It explains his passion for homage, his contempt for theories of progress in art and his dislike of spontaneity." It also explains why, as in the case of Kitaj, certain critics have found Young's "wide allusions both obscure and pretentious. So they can be, but not very often.... The images that work best are those in which...[he] pins a web of congruent allusions without ever getting too literal, where the art-history and real-history footnotes balance and bear one another out." The three works under consideration in this essay fit Hughes prescriptive picture.

Yet another formative influence on the youthful Robert Young was Tamioka Tessai (1837-1924), the last authentic exponent of the Japanese Nanga or Bun-jin-ga school, whose members emulated the Chinese "literati" brush-painters. In the words of the UBC Fine Arts Department Dr. James Caswell, "Literati artists were distinguished from their professional counterparts not only by their claims to wide learning but also because of their amateur status. They were not amateurs in the sense of skill (they would not openly proclaim their true abilities with the brush and any concern for finish); rather they pursued their art because, in

the root sense of the word 'amateur,' they loved it, and they did so for their own satisfaction and that of a narrow circle of like-minded peers.[2] This encapsulates Young's own philosophy of artmaking as a discipline its adepts pursue not for fame or fortune or power but for its own sake and for what the practice teaches.

Young saw a show of Tessai's ink paintings at the Vancouver Festival in 1960, and was deeply struck by their quiescent contemplativeness, their Zen rigour, and also their "modern-looking" roughness and "lack of polish or finesse." His subsequent career has been an attempt to attain and sustain these virtues, not in pastoral retreat but in the thick of the vulgar, competitive, hypocritical circus of the postmodern art world. A renewed attachment to Tessai, whom Young describes as "an Oriental version of Samuel Palmer," and to the early Chinese amateur poet-painter tradition on which the Nanga movement modelled itself, is evidenced by the choice of title of the present exhibition, which comes from the poetic inscription on a brush-painting by Lu Zhi (1496-1576), entitled *Man in House Gazing Across a Ravine*, which he found in the exhibition of Chinese painting held at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1985: "The lingering sun slants upon my peaceful dwelling/ Among green moss, this world made pure by the afternoon's cool breeze./ At leisure in my small pavilion near the stream I gaze/ At the clouds of the sky girdling the mountain of the setting sun." As Dr. Caswell explains, "This small painting is inscribed by the artist with a simple descriptive poem which complements but does not duplicate the image.... [I]t can hardly be said he depicted the scenery of particular places. Rather, the places 'were conceived as havens of escape'."[3]

Young recalls that, during the course of an oral exam at UBC, one of his professors, Dr. Shuichi Kato, floored him with the question, "Don't you think Palmer and Tessai both are idealists?" He was shocked by the suggestion because, up to that moment, he had taken the realms depicted by these artists for real ones, actual places you could actually visit, genuine gardens by factual rivers on whose banks you could sit and drink wine and write poetry or paint at leisure and in peace. Trying to find that lost arcadian world-view is one of the philosopher-artist's life-missions; failing to do so "in reality," he or she must recreate the "small pavilion" through art.

Young titled a talk he gave in November 1992 at Simon Fraser University, and again at the Vancouver Art Gallery the following January, after a Tessai painting: "To maintain absurdity and promote ineptitude." This self-effacing mantra refers to the Nanga school's desire to sidestep "expertise" and "mastery" and revive the naive attitude of the first approach to painting. Young invokes the principle in order to distinguish his stance from the current art orthodoxy, which he sees as increasingly academic, institutionalized, moralistic, careerist and, above all, exclusionary (despite the lip-service its practitioners and thought-polizei pay to political correctness): the subject, and text, of his tartly titled *Tart*. In lonely opposition to the dogmas of this new Academy of the tenured avant-garde, Young poses the argument, exemplified by the Nanga painters, that true art comes from private revery rather than from group expressions of outrage and complaint, from experience and practice rather than from abstract theory.

A painting, Robert Young insists, is a mnemonic device that refers you back to something in your life. Without that life to be referred back to, a painting – all painting – is dead. (Who said that art is the thing that makes life more interesting than art?) Self-portraiture has been implicit if not explicit in Young's work from the beginning, although the artist's baby- and salmon-juggling person(a), teleported into a Giotto landscape of the 1971 gouache-on-paper, *Down at First Street Bridge* (Camden Art Centre, London), and the serigraphic print derived from it, is more elusively "present" in later paintings and graphics. This growing reticence can sometimes seem like a sly tease, first prompting the question, *Where's Robert?* (or, to cop a Nabokov title,

Where are the Harlequins?), and then begging it.

The conclusion of *The Juggler* series – that precarious but triumphant balancing-act – left Young casting about for a new direction, but it also provided a roadmap to the future in the form of the diamond checks behind the Harlequin-Pierrot musician. Before he could pursue this motif, however, he fell into a post-partum funk out of which he nursed himself by indulging in another fit of repairs to his 1910 Vancouver house. During this reconstructive process, Young's attention became, in Ted Lindberg's words, "fixed on an 'accidental collage' which had developed on a bedroom wall as layers of old wallpaper, randomly stripped from the plaster, revealed a configuration which, to him, was fraught with possibilities." This revelation had jumped out at him one day when, lying in bed wondering where he should look for his next inspiration, Young saw the patterns between his feet and thought, "*that's it!*" Like the lozenges of the back-cloth of *The Juggler* and *The Explorer (Stylized)* of 1978, these torn and overlapping shapes led back to Cubism, Picasso, Braque and Gris, and through them to a hybrid neo-Constructivist quasi-abstraction that brought the "juggler of styles" full-circle to his roots in collage.

First, Young made conventional drawings of the subject, then embarked on a breaking down of the figure/ground, patterned/unpatterned relationships into their component parts in an attempt to answer the age-old art puzzle: how do you "activate" a "passive" ground? One way was to erase parts of the figure and its ground. Another was to infiltrate fragmentary human(oid) figures into the non-figurative ground, as in *A Persona for the Prince* and *A Certain Thickness Still Called For* (both 1981). The twenty-strong *Princeleeps Badly* suite, which Lindberg describes as "the realistic depiction of an inherently abstract configuration", took its typically allusive title from an enigmatic remark made, out of the blue, to Max Ernst by a woman who may have been prostitute: "*Le Prince mange mal.*" Unfortunately, these difficultly beautiful variations on a cubo-constructivist theme meant more waking nights for Young, alienating some of his dealers, who wanted more of the old same, and likewise putting off the critics and the curatorial gatekeepers, whose embattled occupation of the barricaded fine-arts fortress Young lampoons in *Tart*.

The exhibition *Robert Young: Ten Years*, organized by Lindberg for the Charles H. Scott Gallery in 1982, concluded with several examples of a new series "derived from a broken kitchen chair," with which he tested "his acquired skills against a three-dimensional object occupying real space. Since he is now reasonable adept at `seeing' the 2-D/3-D illusion, flipping from the literal to hypothetical views at will, the chair presents no more obstacles than the wall." For Lindberg, these works demonstrate that Young "has replaced wanting to make 'paintings that look authentic' with authenticity itself."

With their trompe-l'oeil illusionism, the three smaller canvases featured in the present show –*The Affair: Contraposto* (1990), *Interior with Mustard, Cayenne and Pesto* (1991) and *Asparagus Crate: Winter Night in the Mandala Cave* – might at first glance appear to be throwbacks to an earlier, photo-derived realism. But what, their hermetic titles and seemingly disparate contents seem to join us in inquiring, are they being "realistic" *about*? And what, if any, is their connection to the preceding series of wallpaper and chair pieces? Young tells us this much: all three are "ruminations in an interior space." Ruminations not only on the nature of that space but on the altered circumstances of the life the artist leads in that space.

Although the loosely related trio has some of the bricolage character of Ron Moppett's and John Hall's paintings of randomly juxtaposed objects and Janice Gurney's collaborative or appropriative compositions, they seem considerably more controlled and precisionist than these analogues, and close scrutiny convinces that there is nothing accidental or arbitrary about them. But figuring out what they mean – or, rather, what

they mean us to make of them – requires insider information, which the artist is generously open in providing, when asked. Without a programme or key, however, the unprepped viewer may be at something of a loss to unravel the tangled storylines.

Robin Laurence took a stab at analysing *The Affair: Contraposto* in the Fall 1990 issue of *Canadian Art*, concentrating on the mysterious foreground, which appears to be a rectangular box of meat. "In the last few years," she writes, "Young has incorporated a simple box – a kind of Platonic solid – as the predicating structural device of his paintings. His ambition seems to be to deploy the box...as a vehicle for aesthetic concerns, without concretizing it into a symbol." Conceding that Young's imagery sometimes is "so unsettling that it is difficult to stifle questions about meaning and intent", Laurence explains that,

> Inspired by a non-Constructivist Vladimir Tatlin painting and recalling scenes from Brixton Market in the late 1960s..., Young felt compelled to paint a box as if it were fashioned out of raw meat. At first he dropped the hypothetical meat box into landscape studies, then he elaborated it in a large interior which, as he painted it, came to evoke the uneasy nature of the romantic relationship. *The Affair: Contraposto*...places the box of meat, with all its unpleasant sexual, environmental and political connotations, before a wall on which are suspended images of a man (painted from a wood assemblage Young made in 1985), a woman (derived from a discarded student drawing, its strange disproportions preserved in Young's painting), and an almost mechanistic being (borrowed from Dürer). The turning away of the woman and the juxtaposition of all the figures with the meat seem to suggest the impossibility of bridging the chasm of ignorance and stereotype that separates the sexes. The mood of pessimism, alienation and lack of freedom here is only slightly mitigated by the extreme beauty and facility with which the painting is executed.

As Young himself relates, while working on the untitled chair-series of 1983-84, he "had a dream" that he was "able to represent a horizontal surface like the seat of a chair on a vertical surface like a painting without resorting to illusionism." On waking, he started to work out this idea at the easel, determining to eschew "art" and artifice both; never having learned any system of perspective, he wanted, Tessai-like, to avoid both mannerism and expressionism. Why not simply *trace the back of the chair onto the canvas?* Young took apart a beat-up child's chair and laid the pieces on the floor for outlining. By accident or design, the collection of wooden legs, arms and slats arranged itself into a humanoid figure, which he saw as male. For the torso, he selected a piece of driftwood, onto which he painted the image of the broken seat of the chair. Then he nailed the assemblage onto a plywood packing-case. In *The Affair...*, this stick-man and its backdrop or support are rendered illusionistically; the hook that stands in for genitals is echoed by the handles of the upside-down umbrellas of the crate's "Keep dry" warning-symbol. Another hook, hovering over the "heart" or solar-plexus area of the crucified figure, alludes to the difficulty of relationships, hence to the woman who gives us the cold shoulder in the crude student drawing, which Young found on the classroom floor and "tacked up" on the left-hand wall of the painting.

On this wall is a faint tracing – or is it a projection? – of a "stereometric" man copied from the Dover reprint of Dürer's *The Human Figure: The Complete Dresden Sketchbook*. Thus enlarged and set free from the page, this investigation of the articulation of the limbs takes on a threateningly military aspect as "he" strides across the picture plane. Contrasted here is the disarticulated wooden chair-person to "his" left (our right), and the heartless, soulless automaton, who seems to be marching toward the twentieth century, perhaps for a rendezvous with one of Oskar Schlemmer's Triadic ballet-dancers, or some of Popova's or Stepanova's Suprematist worker-manikins. Is there any commentary on this conflict of raw realism with cooked idealism in the tea-chest-sized block of horsemeat in the foreground, inspired by Tatlin's *Meat*, a 1948 canvas which Young found in *Russian Avant-Garde Art: The George Costakis Collection* (1981)?

Resisting too symbolistic a reading of this disturbing work, Young insists that "my original interest in making the painting had to do with the evocative power of each of the separate images; their conflation was irrational or 'inspired'; they also provide an opportunity to delight in painting the marbling of meat and the grain of plywood." He maintains that the strange mix of images, while (or perhaps *because*) difficult to "read," works because it gives off what he identifies as the single most desirable effect of art: *feeling*. Ambivalent about interpretation, Young is interested in the "other, larger capacity" of paintings to be "authenticated" by a joint act of suspended disbelief by artist and audience. While museums and galleries everywhere are falling over themselves in a vain endeavour to make art "accessible" and "fun" (thereby exhibiting, in Young's view, a lack of respect for private contemplation and revery), a painter of his inclinations is enjoined to resist the rush to "transparency" and simple-minded comprehensibility. Life is hard enough to understand; art that seeks to assist in illuminating the mystery cannot, perforce, be "easy." By the same token, an "inclusiveness" that is imposed from above is the ultimate paternalism.

Interior with Mustard, Cayenne and Pesto "opens up" the wall of *The Affair*. It is the by-product of yet another bout of house-renovation, during which one of the painter's sons took down a chimney, thereby making a hole in the kitchen wall. What we have here, we begin to suspect after studying the picture for awhile, is yet another autobiographical allegory, as well as another "rumination in an interior space." The dismantlement of the family home occurred while Young was beginning to learn how to live in his house by himself following the breakup of his marriage and the departure of his youngest son, Jake, for a period of study in Spain. In the course of this interlude of adjustive brooding, Young experienced a sense of dislocation and disequilibrium that is aptly "illustrated" by the deconstructed space of the Picasso-esque, cubist-shaded refrigerator, ghostily floating against its half-visible backdrop. Equally disorienting are the "floating, Suprematist" planes of the rugs and the receding parallel lines of the recently sanded, variously hued and grained floorboards, flatly echoed in the monochrome slats of lath on the gypsum-stripped, plaster-oozing wall (evidence of the far room's attempt to infiltrate the near). Through the rough doorframe, however, lie lucidity and calm – or at least their promise.

Seeking our bearings in this seemingly rational yet bewilderingly detailed space, we latch onto recognizable objects and try to fit them into some kind of an explanatory narrative or schema – a natural act of deductive reasoning which the artist both resists and assists by means of the clues he strews about the scene. Young introduces these hints and signs not as indicators, however, but literally to slow us down if not to stop us in our tracks; in fact he calls the process a "slow read." The function of the myriad of cultural symbols and artefacts in these pictures is to make us put two and two together to get the five that is the "art effect," rather than to bemuse and confuse us. And this adding-up brings us back to the lesson Nicholson taught Grigson: that, instead of seeking "much/ Old reiterated wisdom of perceiving" in the picture, he should simly *look at what is there*. And what is there is, in a sense, the four-dimensional map of an artist's mind, as symbolically epitomized by the furniture and fixtures of his house. Including its memories, both bad and good.

Looking, then, both in the way that Young wants us to, and in the way writers that proceed in their investigations of other media, here is an idea of what we may find in this picture. Let's begin in the upper-left corner. Present are a handful of quotations from the realm of the real and the dominion of the banal: the little green teapot on the shelf, and above it the three containers that provide the bitterly tongue-in-cheek title: mustard, cayenne, pesto, which in acronym form – M.C.P. – add up to a self-condemnation (or perhaps a not-yet-dead white male's shrugging off of a charge that is both generational and gender-specific). In a dig at the

The Affair: Contrapposto, 1990 oil on linen, 84⅛" x 67½"

painstaking literalism of the trompe-l'oeil still life, Young has pasted an actual Keen's mustard label on the mustard-tin: why bother making a line-by-line, tone-for-tone copy of a real thing in paint, when there's much more enterprise in (re)inventing reality? More food for thought: the *faux*-Rye Crisp plate of the light-switch. But the fridge itself is transparently empty: a dematerialization of the hulking off-white emblem of our western consumerist culture and the lumpen encumbrances with which we starve the creative spirit out of our thing-saddled lives. (Then again, Young may simply have felt that the appliance ate up too much space in the picture and settled for a compromise that would both admit and deny the opaque obduracy of the object.)

Although not immediately obvious, other art is everywhere before us in this self-portrait *manqué* or *in absentia*. The function of these past presences is to supply, in Young's acerbic words, "a narrative for those who need one." On the back panel of the stove are three decal-like ovals, each containing a vignetted image. On the left: a miniature version of one of the two mixed-media paintings that Young based on Blake's *The Traveller Hasteth in the Evening*, the fourteenth plate in *The Gates of Paradise*, published in 1793.

Originally, Young had borrowed from the Blake engraving in tribute to a childhood vision of the romantic "walking traveller" whom he dreamed of growing up to be, but in the interim the striding figure has become the son to the father. (The theme of aging and death is made explicit in the fifteenth image in *The Gates of Paradise*: the youthful sojourner has become a bent decrepit geezer leaning on his staff as he enters the charnel house.) To the right of the lost traveller on the stove is a portrait of the flamenco teacher, Rosario Ancer, with whom Jake Young had recently studied, and the Muse who would induce him to seek his fortune in Europe, leaving the old man alone in the house. And on the far right is a reduction of Giorgio de Chirico's *The Return of the Prodigal Son*. Putting this equation together, we realize that these references are cited here not to score points or to taunt the visually illiterate but to say something too poignant and painful for a personally reticent (if otherwise eloquent) male artist to put into words. Having thus reminded us, with this visual shorthand, of the sense of desolation, lostness and unease we associate with de Chirico, Young sustains the note by making further allusions to the Italian Surrealist-turned-Neoclassicist in the slats and parti-coloured floorboards, and in the yellowish and reddish squares wedged between or nailed to the joists by the doorframe, which bear lines from de Chirico paintings. These are meant to mystify, to create the same feeling of anxious bafflement that we experience looking at a Surrealist-period de Chirico. Below them, a third, greyish-green scrap of wood "coincides" (Young's term) with an eerily "hovering" green carpet in the far room; on it is scrawled the editorial loop signifying a textual deletion, which in carpentry is a mark to indicate "waste" material.

The elegiac, melancholy mood of *Interior...* is underpinned by the piece of craft paper taped to the refrigerator door; the use of Spanish in the inscription forecasts the imminent departure of the bearer of the gift – the self-reinvented "Jacinto" – to the just-turned-fifty birthday boy, "Roberto Joven." (Contained in the wrapping was "*Una berida dulce, fuerte, y negro*": McEwen's sweet, strong, dark Scotch ale, now presumeably all consumed.)

Moving from right to left, we come to the doorless doorframe and peer through. The composition leads us inexorably from foreground to middle ground to background, each occupying its own room. We know we are intended to make this trek, and that its object – the destination of the track-shot trespass – will be, like the photograph of waves at the "conclusion" of the long zoom of Michael Snow's *Wavelength*, a picture on the far wall: one of the oils in Young's own *The Princeleeps Badly* series. One supposed that this wall, too, was once covered with the multiple layers of faded wallpaper that inspired the sequence. Or has that chaos

of shapes, that riot of coloured patterns merely been papered or painted over, like the life-turmoil we imagine we can keep from welling up through the cracks in our façades by containing it in a frame? (Barely visible on the side wall of the middle room, by the way, is Young's *A bauble in Babel*, a small 1987 oil.)

In formal terms, it is clear that this painting deals with the simultaneous penetration and denial of space. The viewer is being treated to a demonstration that this is not an illusion of a domestic interior but a painting. Young is engaged in an act of "teasing" - a term that simultaneously involves worrying, importuning, bantering; picking into separate fibres; combing and carding. We are witnessing an artist's argument with himself and with our narrative expectations, our impertinent curiosity, our nagging need to *know*. On a private, pragmatic level, Young is pondering how he can allow himself the luxury of working in an environment that until recently had been dedicated to the rearing of children, a site of adult responsibility and juvenile play. On a public plane, he is struggling to establish his ground as a painter/citizen/ex-family man.

Young sees the artist's job as "not letting the viewer 'go for landscape,'" that is, take the easy way out - and in. Yet here is a painter-printmaker whose original mission was to re-invent for himself, in modern idiom, the timeless vistas and idylls of Dürer, Tessai and, above all, Palmer, who had sought to make reachable through art the "visions of little dells, and nooks, and corners of Paradise" he found in Blake's wood-engraved illustrations for R.J. Thornton's *Pastorals* of Virgil. A contradiction? Is *Interior...* not a version of urban pastoral, a negotiation of the dells, nooks and corners of an enclosed space capable of exhibiting as much Hopkinsian "inscape" (cf. Palmer's "Mystery, the infinite going in-i-tive-ness") of any outdoor landscape? Domestic interior as mental topography/physical geography? Or do the psychological, familial and art-historical references that haunt these seemingly unpeopled rooms supply the deeper, richer, denser dimensionality Young finds lacking in "pure," exterior scenery?

Blake's mentor Henry Fuseli denounced the practitioners of "the last branch of uninteresting subjects, that kind of landscape which is entirely occupied with the tame delineation of a given spot." Though his own awakening from the dream of a terrene bower of bliss may been a rude one, the shock knocked Young out of the passive trance state from which Palmer never really emerged, to his ultimate failure as an artist. As Geoffrey Grigson observes, "pastoral without passion becomes vacant and soft - a sheep is either a paradisiacal creature or a woolly object, and by sticking to pastoral, Palmer missed the fulness of life...." Young's own fall from a state of suspended, sublimative grace thrust him out into a hard, sharp-edged, competitive sexual and political arena where prisoners are not taken, nor courtesies returned. But exile from Eden does not cancel out the child's version of the garden. It is always there to be sought and not found, like the lost paradise of H.G. Well's unforgettable short story "The Door in the Wall", in which a green door in a city wall, early in a life of desperate ordinariness, briefly opened, for the protagonist, on a prospect of "beauty and happiness" that filled his heart "with insatiable longings, that made all the interests and spectacle of worldly life seem dull and tedious and vain." On several other occasions in adolescence and adulthood the door is glimpsed, but for various reasons not entered. Is this threshold not a metaphor for the writer's blank page, the painter's blank canvas, waiting to be opened like a book, or a field, or a grave? For to open this door can be fatal, as it is for the seeker of the lost gate to paradise in Wells's cautionary tale: it may swing away to reveal a black void, an infinite abyss (as it did for Sylvia Plath and Mark Rothko). Or it can return us to the firm home-ground of the actual and the everyday, after all our distracted wanderings on the mean streets of the unreal electric city.

In *Asparagus Crate: Winter Night in the Mandala Cave*, Robert Young leads us through the door from

the kitchen into the partly renovated living-room of *Interior...*, which is seen hanging on the filled-in wall on the extreme left. Cater-corner to it, and forming the central focus of the picture, is a painting of a painting: *Swinging in a Palanquin*, a title taken from Robert Louis Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses*. In the upper-left corner of the actual oil (as opposed to this fabricated version) is a torn-out page from the 1928 edition of this children's classic, on which appears an illustration by Dorothy Russell of an imperious (if effeminate-looking) little boy borne aloft in a covered litter by two native bearers. In the fictional variant presented here, the proud child has been replaced by a pen-and-ink drawing by the sixteenth-century Swiss engraver Urs Graf of a humbled, bridled Aristotle, bearing on his back a whip-wielding young woman who represents carnality's triumph over mature wisdom. Young came across this misanthropic, misogynistic but all-too-true image while in art school, where he made an etching after it; its reappearance here alludes to an act of reminiscent reflection, a conjuring up of perturbing memories from the distant but unburied past.

Below, leaning against a painted backdrop (a "flopped" *Princeleeps* wallpaper-pentimento, not, thank Plato, an actual canvas), are two framed black-and-white portraits: on the left, a young woman who turns out to be Odile Versois, the now-forgotten film-star daughter of the expatriate Russian painter Serge Poliakoff, chosen because of her strange, pale beauty, which works on Young, by his confession, "like magic, like chemistry." A beauty that is linear rather than chromatic – "lyrical and melodic" in the way that a certain quality of line can be. On the right is the bearded painter-philosopher Tessai: the dispassionate mediator between the wild, foolish old man reduced to brutishness by lust and the youthful love-object of the older but not necessarily wiser middle-aged man, who couldn't resist the temptation to swing. (In the "actual" *Swinging in a Palanquin*, the black blues singer Leadbelly occupies the place now filled by the actress: the Dionysian counter to Tessai's Apollonian sage. A similar tension – or resolution – structures Young's best-known print, *Sounds Inside* (1973), featuring a hot-pink Charlie Parker blasting away on his horn in front of a cool blue-green landscape derived from Titian's *Sacred and Profane Love*. Be-bop is the flip side of Beethoven, Beethoven the flip side of Bach, Bach the flip side of be-bop....)

Swinging in a Palanquin, and hence the painting that contains this altered replica of it, appears to be a meditation on relationships: specifically on the relationship between men and women, which often takes the form of a battle or a standoff, and, in particular, on a personal relationship that had come to an end. What started the process, however, was a formal consideration of colour relationships, carried out over long winter evenings while the painter, seeking to readjust himself to his new, solitary circumstances, sat on his sofa (our own point of view) and, Lu Zhi-like, gazed across the room, contemplating the balance of the thin yellow vertical strip of wall to the left and the wider horizontal bar of red floor in the painting-within-a-painting. And tried to figure out a way of making the wall stay at the same angle at which it is depicted, not parallel with the picture plane. Tessai referred to his mountain abode as his "Mandala cave," and Robert Young speaks of his living-room as his "place to think about things." A mandala – a circle in a square – literally, a diagram of the house of the Deity is a meditative device, and the square *Asparagus Crate...* is seen by its author as both the result of his thinking about things and a generator of further thought about things and about painting – the thing and the act. A small pavilion.

Standing beside the two portraits in the painting-in-the-painting is a sinister black oblong – a speaker? – whose shape echoes that of the meat-box in *Interior...* as well as the parti coloured asparagus crate on the floor to the right. This we recognize as the object that served as the murdered French revolutionary's writing-surface while he sat in his final, fatal bath in Jacques-Louis David's *Death of Marat*; inscribed on the original

Interior with Mustard Cayenne and Pesto, oil on linen, 67½" x 60"

canvas is a rewrite of David's dedication "à *Marat...David*": "à *Lester...Young*". (The great tenor-man's Canadian namesake taught himself to blow a not-bad sax, the instrument he plays in *The Juggler*, itself based on a *commedia dell'arte* performance Young gave in 1979 at Vancouver's Pumps gallery, with Hank Bull on piano and Eric Metcalfe on vibes, all three acting out a parody of Picasso's *Three Musicians*. Round and round and round we go, muttering of Michelangelo.)

Let's step now out of the "painting" into the...painting. Repeating the bright primary hues on the Molinari-striped rug visible in the hallway to the left are the yellows, blues, greens and oranges of the titular asparagus crate, a colour scheme favoured by the Soviet Suprematist painter, photographer and designer Aleksandr Rodchenko. Connecting these two loud statements and the subtler blues, reds and greens of the triangle of Persian carpet in the foreground are the neutral grey and brown bars of the painted and sanded floorboards. Casting an elaborate, oriental shadow on the mottled wall and the frame of *Swinging...* is a vase-ful of living and dried flowers, themselves positioned "off-stage," like the frozen drama of this strangely undo-mestic interior, but intruding stealthily into view. Also offstage, through two doors on the left, is the bed-room where, lying awake, Young had seen the pattern in the wallpaper which disturbingly recalled patterns in his life, and which reminded him as well of the dreamlike rites and rituals that unfold on the frescoed walls of the doomed city of Pompeii. And where he had dreamed his dream about how to paint a chair in real space, in real time. So we end where we began, as in Eliot's *Four Quartets*, but our perspective has changed in the course of our hasty travels through these rooms with their carefully arranged found objects. Before, we were "here." Now we are *here*.

The next stage in the journey takes us from confessional rumination to satirical commentary, and from inside to outside, in the form of *Tart*, in which Young addresses the fact that, while other artists besides him-self have dwelt upon the problems and issues he wrestles with in *The Affair...*, *Interior...* and *Asparagus Crate...*, our public institutions are, by nature or design, less concerned with supporting and providing a forum for the necessary discipline of private revery - those needful places to think about things - than with maintaining the power structure and the status quo. As a result of this defensive attitude, the critical as well as the playful function of serious artmaking tends to be overlooked where it is not actively discouraged as subversive to the bureaucratic agenda and the popularizing project. Robert Hughes quotes R.B. Kitaj's state-ment that museums are - or should be - 'lighthouses of utopianism and social well-being.'" "Why utopi-anism?", he asks. "Because the museum does nothing if it does not strive toward some ideal of visual literacy. Its mission begins from the belief that learning to see is as important as learning to read, and that seeing is not the property of one class." But museums and galleries more and more are being charged with providing a baby-sitting service for restive grownups, romper-rooms for terminally bored teenages. Seeing is about believing that there is something more to be seen. When the institution abandons its educative function, its utopian mission, it loses its reason to exist. Yet where else can we go for insights into the mystery of vision? The private gallery, the university and multimedia have not yet and may never be able to take up the slack. This, in part, is the burden of the lament-*cum*-jeremiad that is *Tart*.

Robert Young is fixated upon finding a "relevant" - that is, pertinent, not "p.c." or politically committed - way to paint in so hostile a climate and under such distracting circumstances as today face all artists in all disciplines. At the same time that the pursuit of a formless realism has become irrelevant, and the ideal of "a place for everything and everything in its place" is no longer viable, our creators and makers have to deal with the fractured experience of our dying century. Charged with healing the body politic's deep psychic

Asparagus Crate: Winter Night in the Mandala Cave, 1993 oil on canvas, 72" x 72"

wounds, the cultural doctors are tempted by the simplistic quack remedies that treat symptoms rather than causes and provide short-term pain-relief to the physician, not to the patient.

Modernism, which at first seemed to offer an alternative cure for our social and spiritual ills, unfortunately, in Young's opinion, "went out on a limb" which it ended up sawing off by encouraging the creation of art that is only about other art. Young is aware that his own allusive, stylistically eclectic images could be accused of being overladen as well as overlaid with literary, musical, historical and artistic as well as personal references, but he does not support artmaking practices that wilfully exclude the viewer. On the other hand, he also believes that the viewer has to do an amount of homework commensurate with the degree of thought and feeling, craftsmanship and work that have gone into the making of subjects for contemplation and objects of consolation. We must learn to *look*, and we can only learn to look by *looking*. Otherwise, the viewer is nothing more than a passive onlooker, an idle bystander, for whom pictures are a kind of blank but busy TV screen, that radical opposite to Wells's hypothetical green door.

William Blake, who, in his angry annotations to Sir Joshua Reynolds's careerist *Discourses*, inquired, "Is Fashion the concern of Artists"?, declared in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* that "The Eye sees more than the Heart knows." In the adolescent journal that A.H. Palmer quotes in his biography of his father, the budding painter admonished himself to "look hard, long and continually." This is a task that belongs not only to the artist but to the audience. Geoffrey Grigson, in the poem from which I quoted at the beginning of this essay, counselled himself, in studying Ben Nicholson's works: "...I must reflect, and I am taught again to accept/ What is; also, that always each wonderful realm/ He makes and the immense realm each other penetrate."

Like Nicholson, Robert Young is one of those "few painters, or few poets/ Each of us can live by.../...they are Collected Works,/ Their Retrospective, their Memorial/ Exhibition of all time is here." Having found them,

> ...slowly we find the reasons
> For our love, finding ourselves, and what we lack
> As well or need the most. It is about this,
> This centre, historians of art or poetry
> Cook their most tedious fudge, missing
> Or smearing each realm-maker's liberty; it is the real,
> Like you, who win, against art's pedants,
> Art's officials, and art's auctioneers....
> They "win" by seeing what they, in their small, individual pavilions, see: *what is*.

Robert Stacey, October 1993
Toronto-based freelance writer, editor and curator.

Endnotes

1. This and the other comments by Young quoted in this essay were recorded during the course of several long-distance telephone calls with the author in September and October 1993. My thanks to the artist for so patiently responding to my sometimes impertinent and pedantic questions
2. Dr. James O. Caswell, "The Single Brushstoke", *The Single Brushstroke: 600 Years of Chinese Painting from the Ching Yüan Chai Collection* (Vancouver: The Vancouver Art Gallery, 1985), p. 43.
3. Ibid.

Robert Young 1993

BORN: 1938, Vancouver, BC
1962 University of British Columbia, B.A. (Hons., Art History)
1964 The City and Guilds of London School of Art, Certificate of Merit
1966 The Vancouver School of Art, Advanced Diploma in Graphics
1982 - Associate professor University of British Columbia

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS:
1993 *In My Small Pavilion* Atelier Gallery, Vancouver, BC
1992 *To Maintain Absurdity and Foster Ineptitude,* Teck Gallery, Simon Fraser University at Harbour Centre, Vancouver, BC
1990 Paul Kuhn Gallery, Calgary, AB
1989 *Robert Young,* The Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, BC
1989 Atelier Gallery, Vancouver, BC
1987 Paul Kuhn Gallery, Calgary, AB
1984 Atelier Gallery, Vancouver, BC
1984 *Robert Young: Ten Years* The Charles H. Scott Gallery, Vancouver, BC (36-page illustrated catalogue)
1982 Mira Godard Gallery, Toronto, ON
1982 Redfern Gallery, London, England (four-page catalogue)
1981 Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC
Confederation Art Centre, Charlottetown, PEI
1980 Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Victoria, BC (50-page illustrated catalogue)
1979 Mira Godard Gallery, Toronto; Redfern Gallery, BORN: 1938, Vancouver, BC
1978 Art Gallery of Southern Alberta, Lethbridge, AB
1977 Glenbow Alberta Institute, Calgary; Equinox Gallery, Vancouver; Marlborough-Godard Gallery, Montreal, (four-page catalogue & illustration)
1976 Marlborough-Godard Gallery, Toronto, ON
Centre Culturel Canadien, Paris, France (seven-page catalogue & illustration)
1975 Redfern Gallery, London, England, (four-page catalogue & illustration)
1974 Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, BC (illustrated, poster-format catalogue)
1973 Redfern Gallery, London, England, (four-page catalogue & illustration)
1971 Canada House, London, England (four page catalogue & illustration)
1971 Redfern Gallery, London, England

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS:
1993 *Abstraction: Which Way From Here?* Calgary, AB
1993 *Artropolis* Vancouver, BC (catalogue)
1991 Invited to: Twentieth International Graphic, Ljubljana Yugoslavia
1990 *North of the Border,* The Whatcom Museum of History and Art, Bellingham, WA.
1989 *18th International of Graphic Art,* Ljubljana, Yugoslavia
1988 *Vancouver* PS122, New York, N.Y.
1988 *Complex Object Simple Forms,* The Charles H. Scott Gallery, BC
1987 *Canadian Prints,* Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, BC
1986 *Ten Years Later,* The Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, BC (catalogue)
Making History, Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, BC
1985 *The Malaspina Print Society Ten-Year Retrospective,* Burnaby Art Gallery, Burnaby, BC
1984 *Contemporary Canadian Printmakers,* Queensland Art Gallery, Australia (Travelling exhibition)
1983 *The Hand Holding the Brush,* London Regional Art Gallery, London, ON
The October Shou; Vancouver, BC (catalogue & illustration)
Vancouver Art and Artists, 1931-1983, Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, BC (catalogue)
1982 *Canadian Art in Britain,* Canada House, London, England (Catalogue & illustration p. 47)
1981 *Realism: Structure and Illusion,* MacDonald Stewart Art Centre, Guelph, ON (catalogue, p. 35)
BC Currents, Sarnia, ON (catalogue p. 19)
Graphex 8, Art Gallery of Brant, Brantford, ON (catalogue, p. 55)
On Canvas, Robson Square Media Centre, Vancouver, BC
1979 *Selected Prints: Aspects of Canadian Printmaking,* Nickle Arts Museum (Travelling exhibition)
1979 Pumps, Vancouver, BC
1978 *Canadian Video Open,* Calgary, AB (catalogue)
1977 Redfern Gallery, London, England
From This Point of View; Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, BC (catalogue, p. 41)
1975 *Realismus und Realitat,* Darmstadt, Germany (Catalogue, illustration p. 242)
Current Energies, Saidye Bronfman Centre, Montreal (catalogue)
1974 *Bradford Print Biennale,* Bradford, England
1973 *The First British International Drawing Biennale,* Middlesborough, England
1972 *Realism: Emulsion and Omission,* Queen's University, Kingston, ON (catalogue & illustration pp. 34-35)
Sculpture at Surrey University England
1971 Blue Gallery, Liverpool, England
Redfern Gallery, London, England

1970 Kingston Art Gallery, Kingston-Upon-Thames, England
1969 Redfern Gallery, London, England

SELECTED REVIEWS:

Allison, Glenn, *Robert Young, Arts West,* Calgary, Nov. 1977 pp. 17-18
Brandon, Laura, *Robert Young at Confederation Centre, Artsmagazine,* Toronto, Sept. 1981, p. 37
B.C. Provincial Ministry of Education Media Centre, *Expressions: Robert Young - Mind and Medium,* half hour video for public television, Vancouver, 1983
Burr, James, *Surrealism suffers a sea-change, Apollo,* Nov. 1971, pp. 408-409
Burr, James, *Every Wrinkle, Crease and Flaw, Apollo,* Dec. 1973, pp. 506-507
Crichton, Fenella, *Robert Young, Art & Artists,* London, May 1979, pp. 4-11
Denvir, Bernard, *London Letter, Art International,* Lugano, Jan. 1972, pp. 50-51
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Emery, Tony, *Myth and Style in the Work of Robert Young Arts Canada,* April 1980, pp. 29-32
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Johnson, Eve, *Painter who entered a new dimension, The Sun,* Feb. 21, 1984
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Leier, Carolyn L., *Changing, The Evolution of Artists, Arts West,* Calgary, April 1984, pp. 220-221
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Mayor, Robin, *Robert Young as surgeon, Pacific Time,* Vancouver, 1975-76, p. 7
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Mullally, Terence, *Art The Sunday Telegraph,* London, Nov. 16, 1971
Nemiroff, Diana, *Robert Young, Arts Canada,* May 1977, p. 38
Packer, William, *London, Art and Artists,* London, 1971, pp. 48-49
Packer, William, *London, Art and Artists,* London, Nov. 1973, p. 49
Quantrill, Malcolm, *London Letter, Art International,* Lugano, April 1979, pp. 58-59
Rosenberg, Ann, *Robert Young, Two Sides of the Juggler, Vanguard,* Vancouver, 1984, Vol. 13, No. 516, pp. 12-16
Shadbolt, Doris, *Robert Young, the Implacable Presence, Vanguard,* Vancouver, May 1977, pp. 9-16
Stockwood, Jane, *Art, Harper's Bazaar & Queen,* London, 1971, p. 56
Taylor, John Russel, *The Arts, The Times,* London, Feb. 9, 1982, p. 13
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Vaizey, Marina, *Robert Young Arts Review,* London, Dec. 1973, pp. 867-868
White, Paul, *The Work of Robert Young, Studio International,* London, July-Aug. 1973, pp. 22-24
Wright, Barbara, *Gallery Reviews, Arts Review,* Nov. 14, 1975, p. 662
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COLLECTIONS:

Art Gallery of Greater Victoria
Art Gallery of Ontario
Art Gallery of Winnipeg
Burnaby Art Gallery
Beaverbrook Art Gallery
Confederation Art Centre
Glenbow Alberta Institute
London Borough of Camden
Montreal Museum of Fine Arts
National Gallery of Canada
Nickle Arts Museum
Vancouver Art Gallery
Banff School of Fine Arts
Simon Fraser University
University of Alberta
University of British Columbia
University of Calgary
University of Guelph
University of Victoria
Canada Council Art Bank
Canadian Broadcasting Corp.
City of Vancouver Collection
Mississauga Library
Provincial Government of BC
Bank of Nova Scotia
Bell Canada
de Beers Consolidated Mines
Elton John Collection
Esso Resources Corporation
First City Collection
Imperial Oil
Toronto Dominion Bank
and various private collections

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to thank Robin Laurence and Robert Stacey for their thoughtful texts.

We also gratefully acknowledge the financial support of Dale R. Percy and Ian F. McTavish.

Ilana Aloni
Atelier Gallery

I would like to thank Ilana Aloni for her extensive work on the catalogue and exhibition.

Robert Young

Photography:	Robert Bos - Pages 13, 17 & 19. John Sherlock - Pages 5 & 21.
Design:	Atelier Gallery
Printing:	Metropolitan Press
Edition:	750
Copyright:	1993 Atelier Gallery & Robert Young
ISBN	0-9697783-0-9

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