

# SURREY ART GALLERY PRESENTS

## SEARCH/RESEARCH: contemporary landscapes

Blaine Campbell, Landon Mackenzie,  
Scott Massey, David Pirrie

Search/Research: contemporary landscapes

BRIAN FOREMAN

Artist's Statement

BLAINE CAMPBELL

Artist's Statement

LANDON MACKENZIE

Artist's Statement

SCOTT MASSEY

Artist's Statement

DAVID PIRRIE



### Search/Research: contemporary landscapes by Brian Foreman

It is vain to dream of a wilderness distant from ourselves. There is none such.

Henry David Thoreau, Journal, August 30, 1856

Scott Massey  
*Pylon, Minor Incidents series, 2007*  
C-print mounted on white acrylic (76 x 76 x 13 cm).

Photograph courtesy of the artist.

For hundreds of years, the Canadian landscape has been a prevailing subject for artists. This exhibition focuses on the diverse approaches four contemporary artists are using in searching and researching the landscape. Their approaches range from David Pirrie's analysis of mountain terrain and Landon Mackenzie's exploration of history and geography, to

Scott Massey's interventions with nature in the urban environment and Blaine Campbell's investigations into re-development projects such as those related to the 2010 Olympics. Through their use of different strategies and research methodologies, these artists are reconsidering the tradition of the landscape genre. Their works invite us re-evaluate our relationship to the landscape and its meaning.

### Considering the landscape tradition

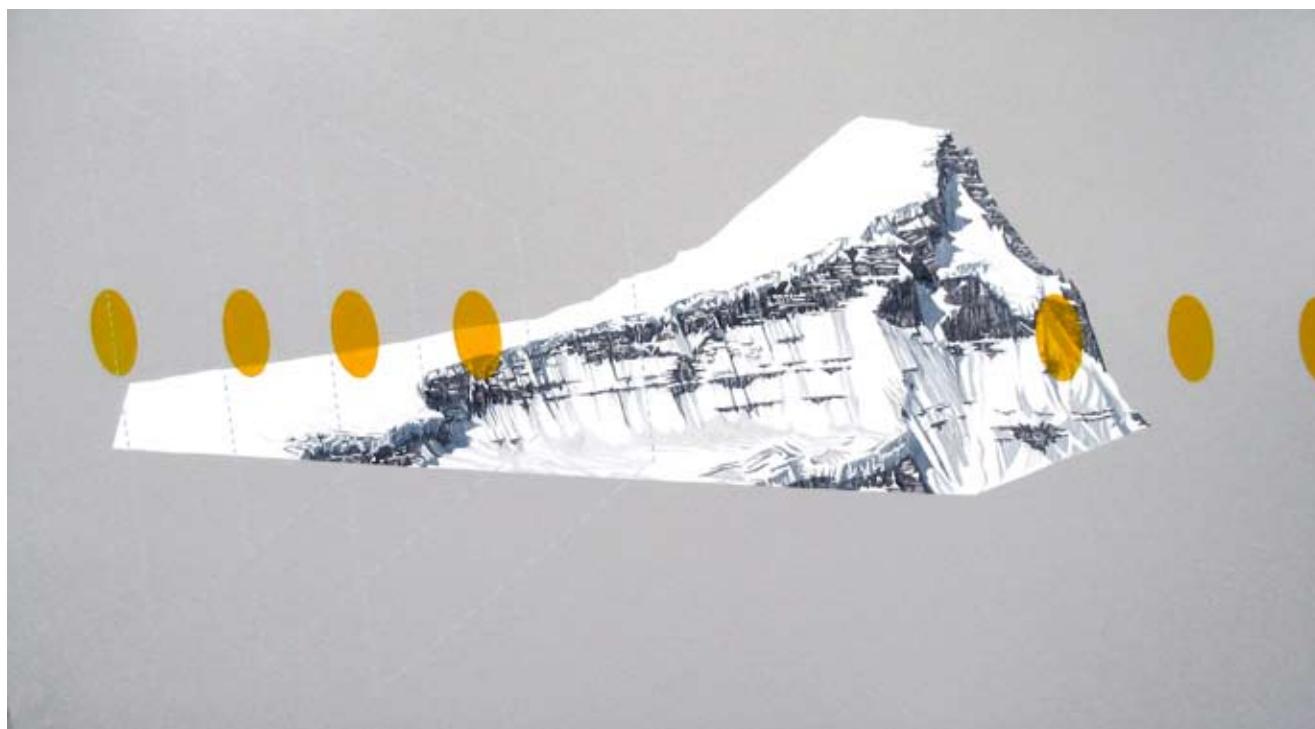
Landscapes are culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and water and rock.

Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, p.61

The word "landscape" typically brings to mind a scenic view of an unoccupied landscape; a composition

comprised of natural elements. This concept has persisted in Canadian art due to the continuous production of wilderness imagery. In the late 18th century, British officers painted topographical views of the landscape, in order to understand the lay of the territory, and to record the raw materials that were available for use. Canada was seen as a colony from which to extract resources.

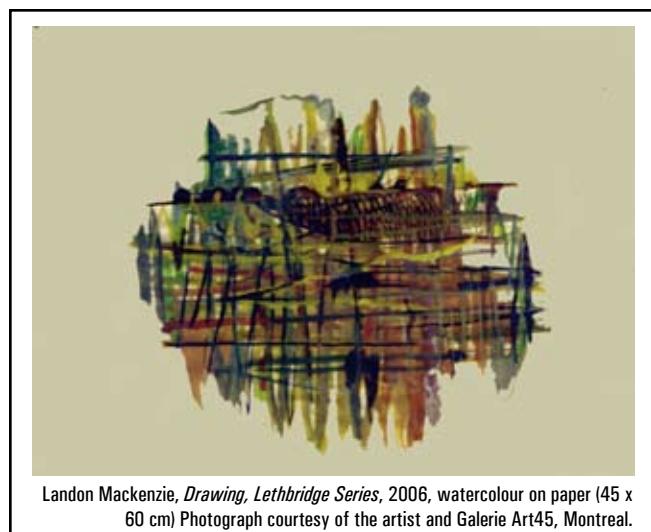
In the 19th century, artists produced images in Canada of an awe-inspiring, timeless landscape which included expansive hills or towering mountains, free flowing rivers and limitless forests. These paintings, by Allan Edson, Lucius O'Brien and Frederick Verner among others, show the influences of the idyllic arcadian scenes and romantic picturesque landscapes of European artists.<sup>1</sup>



David Pirrie, *Proposal #1 for Spatial and Timeline Indexing in the Canadian Rockies – Mt Robson*, 2007, oil on panel (101 x 183 cm). Photograph courtesy of the artist.

In the early 20th century, artists (including those who formed the Group of Seven) used the visual elements of rocks, trees and water to create images of an empty, untamed landscape. Influenced by the modernist movements in art in Europe, the Group's works combined expressive painterly techniques to create wilderness depictions of a rugged landscape. Linked to the growth of Canadian nationhood, and a desire to be seen as distinct from the United States, their works came to symbolize a northern country: true, strong and free. The image of the single heroic tree, emerging from the rocks, battling the elements has become an iconic symbol for a Canadian "spirit" - indomitable and heroic. It is these works, such as Tom Thompson's West Wind, that have become the quintessential Canadian landscapes, and remain so to this day.

Recent studies on the work of the Group of Seven have critiqued their representation of an unspoiled terrain. The depictions of rugged, virginal landscapes suppress the fact that these lands were the traditional territories of First Nations people. The works also conceal the highways and railroads used by the artists, and the effects mining and lumber camp activities had on the landscape.



## Considering the landscape today

Try as we may, we cannot separate our understanding of who we are from where we live. Landscape art continues to be a means of addressing the complexities of place, identity, and the cultural construction of nature.

Robin Laurence, "Visual Arts: Identity's Points of Origin", Georgia Straight, Feb 24 2005

Search/Research arose from an interest in the different approaches that contemporary artists employ in creating their works as well as the different kinds of methodologies they use to investigate the subject of the landscape. The exhibition that you now see focuses on four artists, based in our region, who are considering the complex scientific, historical, social, political and environmental issues that are at the core of our relationship to the landscape.

David Pirrie's drawings and paintings of the British Columbia Rockies reveal his avocation as a mountain climber. His approach to creating his images is informed by the methods of scientific inquiry and classification. A fascination with maps as a child led to the artist's interest in the physical landscape. Like a scientist, Pirrie has formulated a propositional system that overlays spatial and time markings on to the topographical features of individual mountain peaks. Unlike contemporary technologies such as satellite imaging that are now used to create highly detailed studies of the earth's geology for economic development, Pirrie's drawings and paintings explore questions about the human experience against the scale and age of these timeless geologic formations.

Landon Mackenzie is interested in geography, cartography, history and scientific research of the

brain's neural networks. She combines them to create monumental paintings that appear at first glance to be abstract compositions, yet under close study reveal traces of maps, texts and drawings. Mackenzie researches historic documents, diaries and journals, archival maps and newspapers articles, in addition to visiting remote regions such as Hudson Bay and Saskatchewan's Cumberland Delta. In her studio, she creates large-scale paintings layer upon layer, drawing upon her research, from maps and diagrams, and her memory and imagination. Built up over an extended period of time, these works are visual syntheses of her intellectual research and her intuitive artistic sensibilities.

Scott Massey creates gallery installations and performs temporary interventions in the urban environment that foreground the natural amidst the artificial reality of the city. These artworks demonstrate his sense of humour and playfulness, while he reasserts nature in very subtle and profound ways. Along with his readings on the traditions of landscape architecture and urban planning, his artistic practice is informed by his study of the modernist art movement *arte povera*, ("poor art") in which art is made from inexpensive, often found, objects as a way to democratize the production of art. Massey's work also refers to minimalist and conceptual practices, yet he imbues it with critical meaning. In his art, Massey explores the troubled relationship between culture and nature and the interconnectedness of humans and the landscape.

Blaine Campbell's work with photography and sculpture has led him to consider how the inherent properties of photographs and their presentation are received and understood by viewers. Informed by traditions as diverse as panoramic and documentary photography, as well as the Vancouver photo-

conceptualists (such as Roy Arden and Jeff Wall), he brings a critical sensibility to his images and their presentation. His current research investigates how re-development projects, seeking to stimulate economic growth, impact and modify the landscape. His artworks explore how these projects create social and political tensions, and raise questions about our treatment of the environment and ecosystems.

With the current global demand for resource materials, there has been a renewed push into areas such as northern BC and Alberta, the Canadian Shield, and the Arctic. The impact of these oil and mining projects, and the ever-increasing problems of climate change, urbanization, loss of viable agricultural lands and environmental degradation, means the nature of our relationship to and stewardship of nature is becoming more complex than ever. These artists, in their investigations of the landscape and our place within it, through scientific, archival, political and social inquiry, encourage each of us to think about how we relate to the places where we live and to consider the ongoing impact we as humans have on the land.

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1 The term "arcadian" refers to a genre of landscape, often associated with Claude Lorrain and Nicholas Poussin, that represent pastoral worlds of fields, valleys, often with figures in classical dress. The composition style was rather formulaic, with distinct layers of foreground, usually with small figures, middle ground vista, and a hazy distant background. The composition was typically framed by clusters of trees on the right and left sides of the painting. The term "romantic" refers to a genre of landscape first associated with Salvatore Rosa, whose work presented dramatic wilderness scenes. Figures, if shown, were anti-classical, often outlaw types. Romantic painters sought to capture nature as boundless, wild, and ever changing. Artists associated with Romanticism include John Constable and David Caspar Friedrich.

## Blaine Campbell

### Artist's Statement

My work often investigates processes of mediation and artifice, the ways in which environments and images can be constructed or modified yet seen as natural. In particular, I have had an ongoing interest in the landscape since my first forays into photography. This interest was heightened when I spent six months in the Netherlands, a country where almost every aspect of the earth is literally moved and organised in order to create habitable land. I work primarily with large format photography, though I am also slowly moving into other areas such as sculpture and drawing.

The *2010 minus 5* series was initiated in 2005, when many of the current Olympics infrastructure projects were still in the planning stage. The sites shown in these works had the potential to undergo dramatic changes as the result of Olympics construction. For instance, the section of Cambie Street seen in RAV Line was the approximate area where, as best I could guess from the various construction schemes at the time, the new subway would transition from below-to above-ground. Although this is no longer the case, one could presume that these buildings will still see major change, as subway stops are added along the Cambie corridor and the neighbourhood undergoes a rapid socio-economic transformation. Meanwhile, Sea-to-sky Highway and Olympic Village depict areas that have already undergone considerable change. In fact, the glade just off of the Baden-Powell Trail in Sea-to-Sky Highway may no longer exist, subsequent to the cutting of a trench through Eagleridge Bluffs.

*Transient Architectures for New Tomorrows no 6: Three Constructs* continues a series of work in which I confound photographic presentation

with structural forms. Through the explicit use of structural forms, the *Transient Architectures* series investigates the inherent nature of the photography and its reception by an audience – the ubiquitous question of “photographic truth” – coupled with how one relates to the environment – the question of an idealized “nature” versus the constructed, modified, and managed. *Three Constructs* uses three affected elements: a theatrical wall; a large format, staged photograph; and Surrey Lake Park, a public park created around an artificial lake. Each, to varying degrees, bears the appearance of an unmitigated reality but this appearance quickly falls apart under investigation.



Blaine Campbell, *Transient Architectures for New Tomorrows no 6: Three Constructs*, detail



Blaine Campbell, *Olympic Village (2010 minus 5)*, chromogenic print ( ). Photograph courtesy of the artist and Republic Gallery, Vancouver.



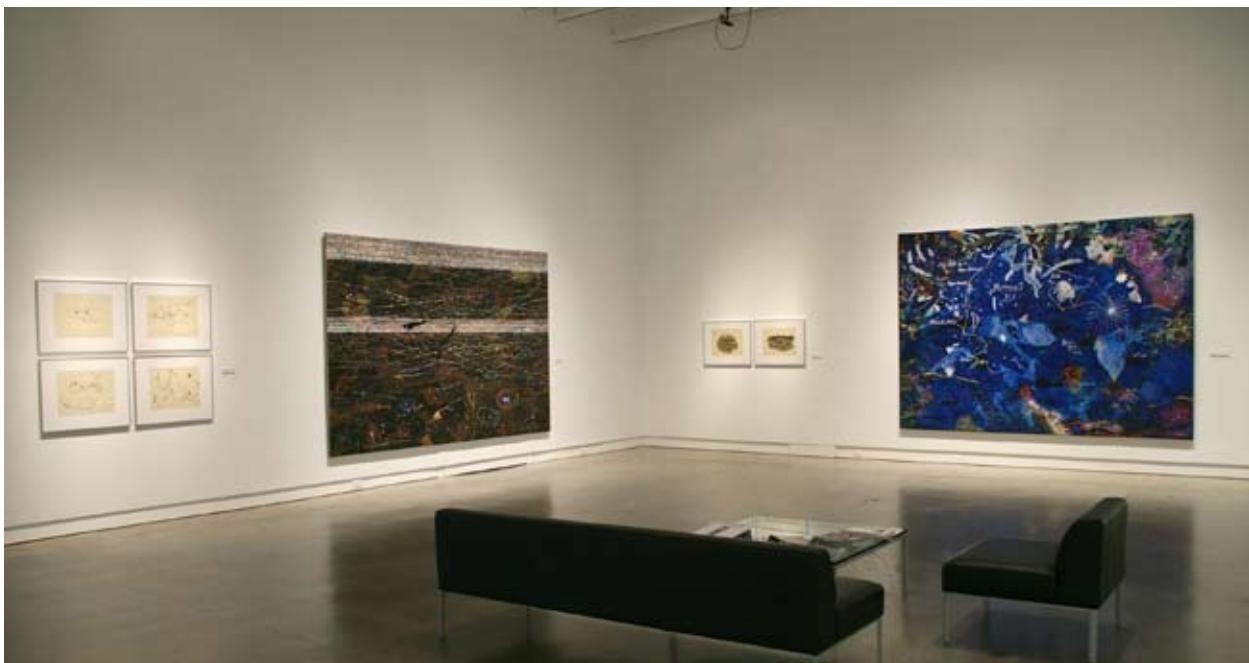
Blaine Campbell, *RAV Line (2010 minus 5)*, chromogenic print ( ). Photograph courtesy of the artist and Republic Gallery, Vancouver.



Blaine Campbell, *Sea-to-Sky Highway (2010 minus 5)*, chromogenic print ( ). Photograph courtesy of the artist and Republic Gallery, Vancouver.



Blaine Campbell, installation view of (from left) *Olympic Village (2010 minus 5)* and *RAV Line (2010 minus 5)*, 2005-2008, C-prints; (right) *Transient Architectures for New Tomorrows no 6: Three Constructs*, 2008, Duratran print, Plexiglas, fluorescent lights, lumber, and office furniture.



Landon Mackenzie, installation view of (from left): *Cumberland Drawings* (ink on paper), *World of Knots and Troubles* (acrylic on canvas), *Lethbridge Drawings* (watercolour on paper), *Houbart's Hope (Blue)*; *Tracing One Warm Line* (acrylic on canvas).

## Landon Mackenzie

### Artist's Statement

#### *Houbart's Hope (Blue), Tracing One Warm Line*

Houbart's Hope is a little-known landmark on Hudson Bay beginning in 1612 and vanishing generally by the 18th century. It marked a spot near the 60th parallel where Captain Thomas Button and his pilot Josiah Houbart believed the North-West Passage would be. This painting is from a larger series where I was making propositions while crossing two frontiers. One being the territory of The New World and the search for the near-mythical North-West Passage starting around 1600 and to this day not fully resolved; and the other being the state of new exploration, uncertainty and discovery in neuroscience and its implications for a better understanding of the brain and nervous system. Being part of a discipline that is neither geography nor science I have the advantage of working with the historical template of fiction. Both the earth and the brain have hemispheres, arteries, networks, deposits, branch-like forms, electrical, magnetic and chemical properties, so I can just start there.

#### *Lethbridge Series*

These watercolours were painted from a hotel window in Lethbridge, Alberta when I was there giving a lecture. I almost always travel with my kit to make watercolours and have painted in many hotel rooms, but these are unusual because they were made from observation as the old train trestle was so interesting and I wanted to study the structure for another series of larger paintings.

#### *World of Knots and Troubles*

I usually work over long periods of time on several canvases simultaneously until stories and constructs begin to manifest a terrain or a pattern that I can

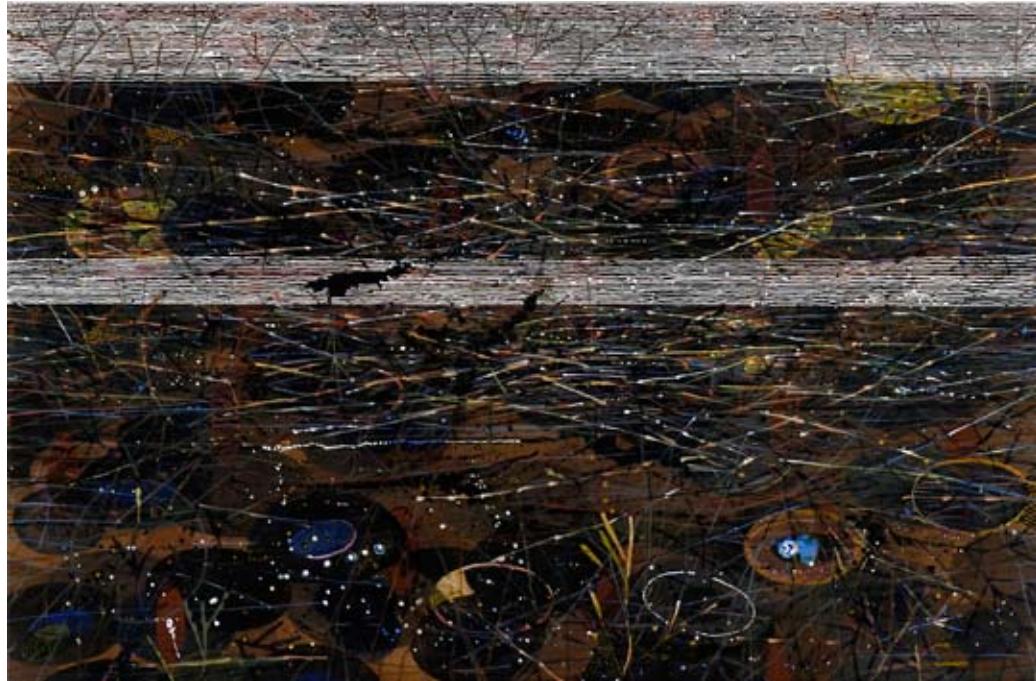
follow, like a trail or a puzzle that provokes my imagination and my analytical mind during the process of building a picture. Unlike most representational painters of my generation, I don't carry a camera or use photographs. Instead I refer to my own research, memory data bank, imagination, maps and diagrams. Though paintings are open to multiple meanings, a source for this painting began with a research trip to the Cumberland Delta in Cree Territory north of the Saskatchewan River, at the site of the first inland Hudson Bay post in the Old North West, but now critically affected by unpredictable changes in daily water levels.

#### *Cumberland Delta Series*

I have spent quite a bit of time in map archives in Canada and the UK where I usually have to work in pencil. These ink drawings were made at a hunting lodge where I was staying on the Cumberland Delta. They were copied on the kitchen table from old aerial photographs owned by the Cree family I was staying with on a research trip in 2006. Much of the topography has changed since the dams were built on the Saskatchewan River, which has created serious troubles for the delta and the people, animals and birds that live off the land.



Landon Mackenzie, *Drawing, Cumberland Series*, ink on paper (45 x 60 cm)  
Photograph courtesy of the artist and Galerie Art45, Montreal.



Landon Mackenzie, *World of Knots and Troubles*, 2006, acrylic on canvas (219 x 330 cm)  
Photograph by Scott Massy, courtesy of the artist and Galerie Art45, Montreal.



Landon Mackenzie, *Houbart's Hope (Blue), Tracing One Warm Line*, 2006, acrylic on canvas (229 x 312 cm)  
Photograph by Steve Farmer, courtesy of the artist and Galerie Art45, Montreal.



Scott Massey, *Remembrance Piece #1*, 2004, grass, soil, plywood, full spectrum lamp and timer.

## Scott Massey

### Artist's Statement:

#### *Rememoration Piece #1*

The sculptural works in the Rememoration series are works that attempt to address current issues in the relationship between humanity and the natural environment. They take as their locus various scientific studies documenting aspects of environmental degradation, anthropocentric effects on natural processes, and other outcomes of human developments on their environments. "Rememoration" is the act of re-remembering; thus the works exist as a reminder of things forgotten, ignored, or not understood but which may have serious implications for our survival.

The Rememoration works always involve a "natural" element or process combined with a technological and/or constructed mechanism through which the discourse of the work is read. This association between the natural and the fabricated references both the relationship humanity holds with the natural environment and the specific issue being addressed by the work.

For example, Rememoration Piece #1 deals with the troubled effects of light on the growth processes of, in this case, lawn grass. A standard industrial bay lamp is hung very near to the floor, surrounded by a large, circular planter of lawn grass grown from seed. As the grass seed sprouts and grows, it is phototropically drawn towards the lamp on a horizontal plane. The lamp is controlled by a mechanical timer that replicates the rising and setting of the sun for which it stands in. Also at play here are the confusing labels of "natural" and (or versus) "artificial". The obviously industrial nature of the lamp is called into question by the use of a full-spectrum light source,

and the old-world notions of landscape and Nature conjured up by the planting of lush seed grass are undermined by the use of genetically engineered seeds. Sub-textual in this work is also the newly recognized effects of urban lighting on the natural growth and dormant stages of sessile organisms such as plants and trees.



Scott Massey, *Infill, Minor Incidents series*, 2006 C-print mounted on white acrylic (76 x 76 x 13 cm). Photograph courtesy of the artist.

#### *Minor Incidents*

The images in the series Minor Incidents are the only lasting trace of the ephemeral moments of incidence that occur unplanned while traveling by foot or bicycle through industrial landscapes. These sites are visited during off hours when all or most activity has ceased. Bereft of the usual din of industry, these vacated spaces are left charged with the residue of usefulness and function, and a somewhat post-apocalyptic vision emerges. As the hum of activity dies down, we are left to contemplate its meaning.

Within this void I search for a stage in which to produce a small sculptural performance, rarely

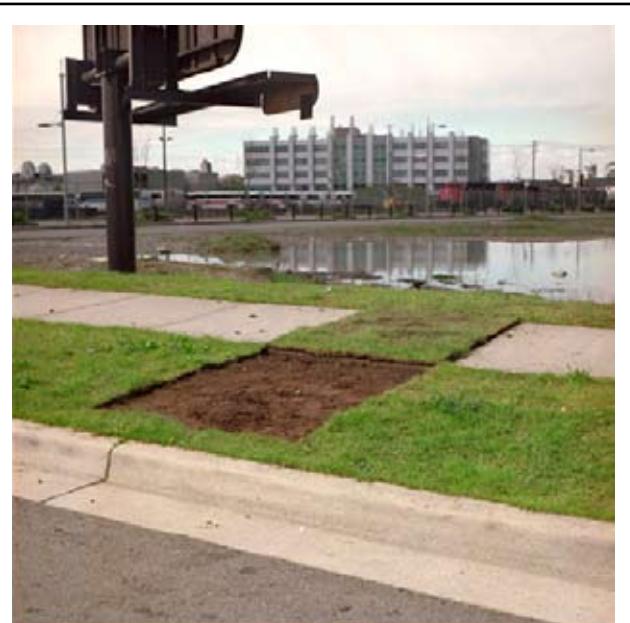
noticed and mostly unseen. Working only with materials available in close proximity to the stage, I facilitate an interaction between the elements around me. In most cases the specifics of the interaction are unplanned and are an immediate reaction to the scene inhabited at that moment. Only one element within a given scene is manipulated; everything else is left as found. I try as much as possible to engage a connection between the realized sculpture and the other elements of the scene/stage; it is important that the finished work have a resonance with the area in which it was made.

The nature of the events in Minor Incidents take their cue from various activities undertaken by civic maintenance and engineering workers. Based on tasks such as road patching, crack grinding, graffiti buffs and similar maintenance duties, the works play on notions of artistic maintenance within the built environment. Just as the "legitimate" operations of maintenance crews go mostly unnoticed and unrecognized, this "artistic maintenance" is likewise subtle and transitory, but available to anyone who finds themselves nearby at the time of execution.

An enlarger is used for printing the photographs to take advantage of the aesthetic inherent in traditional handling of materials, the unique characteristics of which reflect the performative nature and materiality of the events.



Scott Massey, *Labour of Division, Minor Incidents series*, 2006 C-print mounted on white acrylic (76 x 76 x 13 cm). Photograph courtesy of the artist.



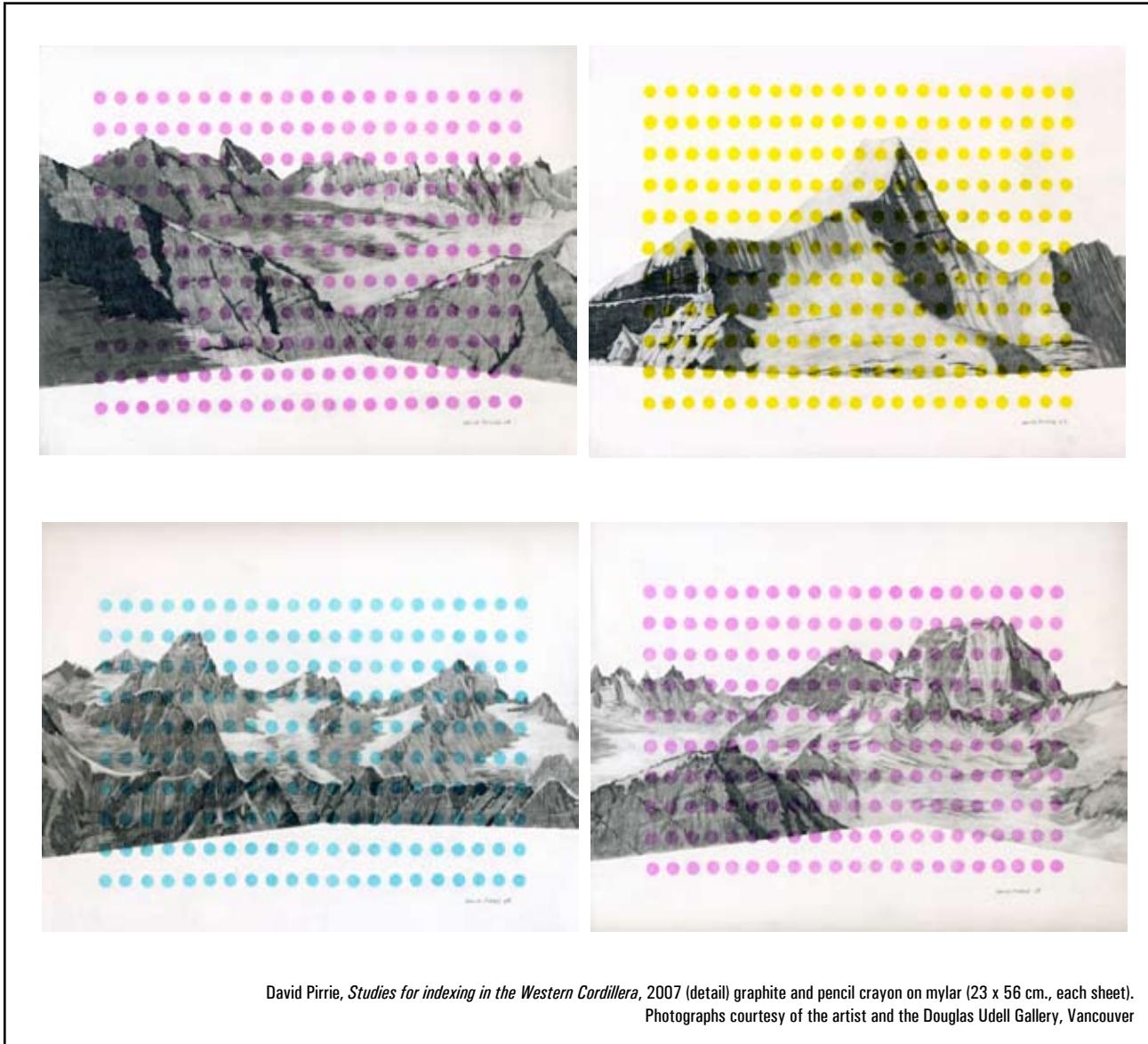
Scott Massey, *Soft Side Step, Minor Incidents series*, 2006 C-print mounted on white acrylic (76 x 76 x 13 cm). Photograph courtesy of the artist.



Scott Massey, installation view of works from *Minor Incidents* series, with *Rememoration Piece #1* in foreground.



David Pirrie, installation view of *Proposals for spatial and timeline indexing for topographical features*.



David Pirrie, *Studies for indexing in the Western Cordillera*, 2007 (detail) graphite and pencil crayon on mylar (23 x 56 cm., each sheet).  
Photographs courtesy of the artist and the Douglas Udell Gallery, Vancouver

## David Pirrie

### Artist's Statement:

*Proposals for spatial and timeline indexing for topographical features.*

These new works are what I call propositional paintings and drawings as an experiment in a new form of mapping. Our technological advances in mapping and geological/topographical rendering are astounding. Google Earth for example has revolutionized our view of the world, compressing a world of cultures and landmasses to a click of a button. I grew up pouring over atlases, when I was eight I started devising my own maps of imaginary places. Later I became obsessed with dividing spaces, always looking for the true, the level, the perfect symmetry.

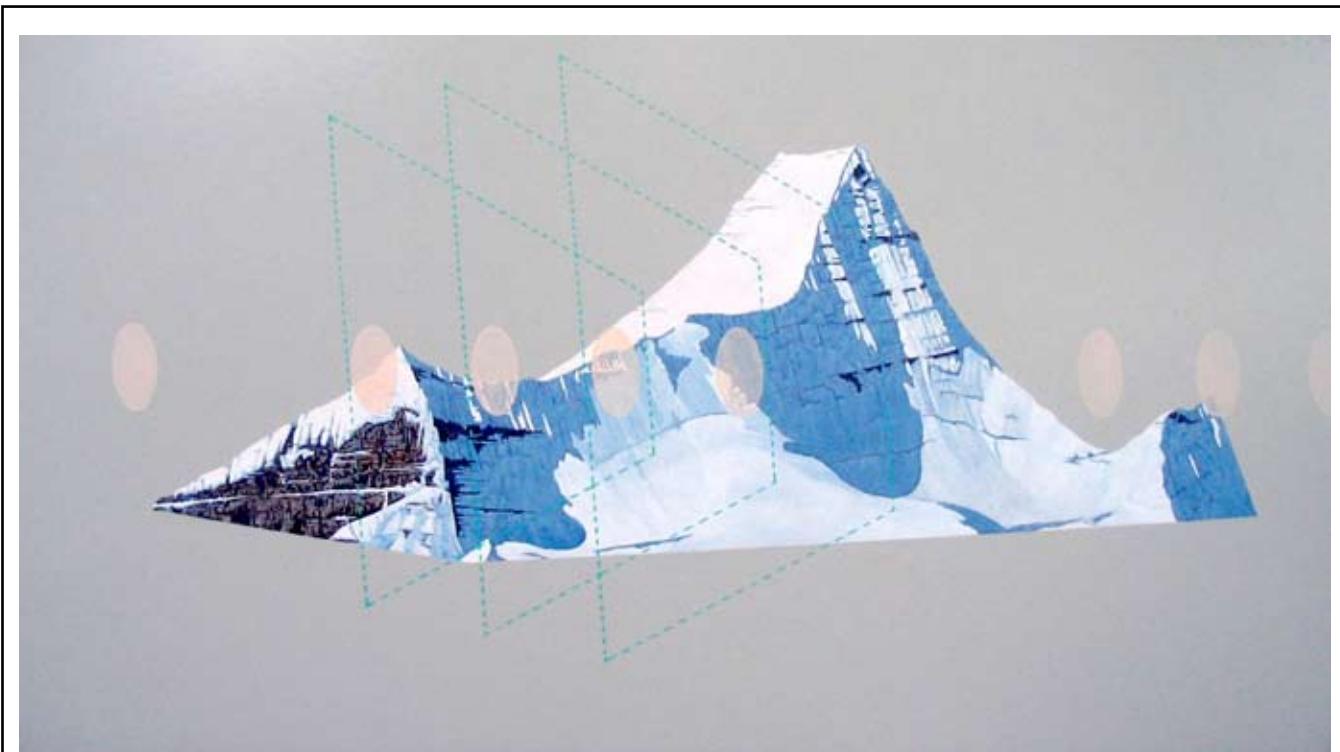
I refer to indexing in the title as a metaphorical arc that encompasses both its mathematical value as a superscript to indicate that the variable should be considered over a range of specific values, and as a value of cataloguing and disclosure. Indexing plays to the core of seeking knowledge, ascribing meaning, value, and ranking. These ideas also play to the core

of my being an artist. For what is more variable than the human factor in our need for accurate definition in situations where definition is often beyond our grasp? At what rate of velocity do you measure silence, how does one factor the value of aloneness in a wilderness environment, at what moment does one come to understand the almost preposterous notion of human scale timelines in relation to the geological.

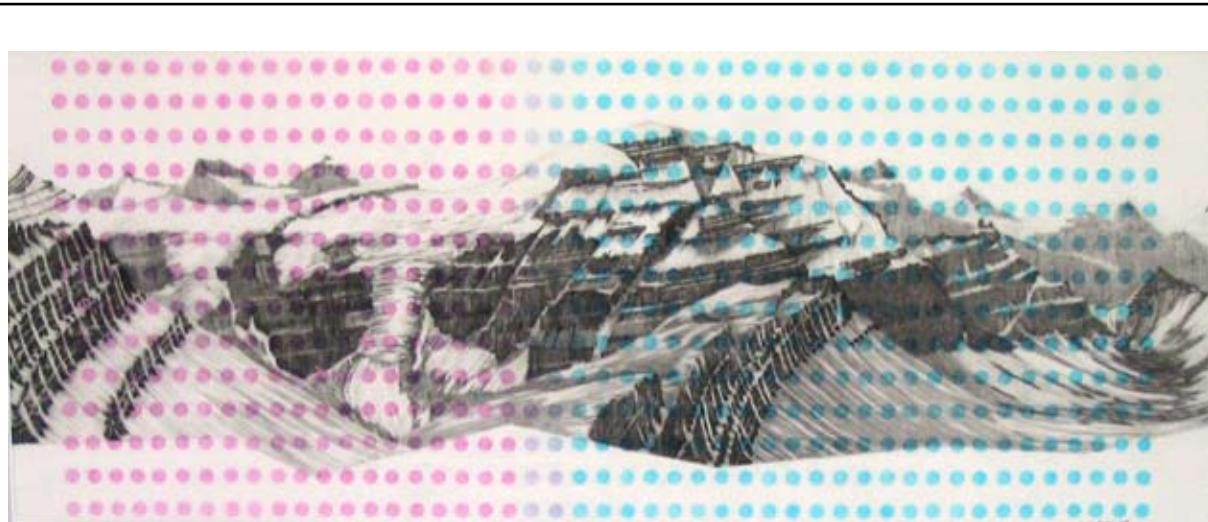
These new mapping technologies has helped and influenced me in my art practice a great deal, but so much of how we look at our landscape for example is almost rendered inert through what I would call the technological gaze. What I propose is a conceptual leap in landscape imaging, a type of technical meditation on topography and mapping. A form of cataloguing so to say, shedding light on what can best be described as the constant variable inherent in ascribing definition and meaning to an ever changing inner and outer landscape.



David Pirrie, *Panoptic Study #1*, 2007 graphite and pencil crayon on mylar (23 x 56 cm). Photograph courtesy of the artist and the Douglas Udell Gallery, Vancouver



David Pirrie, *Proposal #2 for Spatial and Timeline Indexing in the Canadian Rockies – Mt Columbia*, 2007, oil on panel (101 x 183 cm). Photograph courtesy of the artist.



David Pirrie, *Panoptic Study #2*, 2007 graphite and pencil crayon on mylar (23 x 56 cm). Photograph courtesy of the artist and the Douglas Udell Gallery, Vancouver

## About the Artists

Blaine Campbell is a Vancouver-based artist working in photography and sculpture. His areas of investigation include the inherent properties of the photograph and its relation to the viewer; the landscape and its modification and re-development within a context of economic, political and social issues.

A recent graduate of Emily Carr Institute with a B.F.A. in Photography, he previously completed B.Math. and M.Sc. degrees in mathematics. In 2007, Campbell received the national award in the BMO 1st Art! Invitational Juried Competition and the emerging artist award from the Contemporary Arts Society of Vancouver. Campbell is represented by the Republic Gallery in Vancouver.

Landon Mackenzie is known for her large-format paintings, in which she layers research notes, annotated maps, archival texts and documentation of her investigations and explorations of a geographic region. She has become particularly interested in current research on the brain and neural mapping, in relationship to the mapping of our physical environment.

Mackenzie's studies began at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Halifax. She received her MFA from Concordia University in Montreal where she also began her teaching career. Mackenzie has been on the faculty of the Emily Carr Institute since 1986 and over the past few years has split her time between studios in Vancouver, Prince Edward Island and Berlin. In addition to her many exhibitions, she has received numerous awards and grants. Her work can be found in many public collections including the National Gallery of Canada, the Vancouver Art Gallery,

the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and the Musée d'art Contemporain de Montréal. Mackenzie is represented by Galerie Art45 in Montreal.

Scott Massey is a Vancouver-based artist whose work explores the uneasy relationship between nature and culture, as often seen in the urban environment. In his work, he challenges the idea of a distinction between humans and the landscape. He works in a variety of media, including photography, sculptural installations, and interventions in the environment.

Massey has a BFA from the Emily Carr Institute, and exhibits his work across Canada and the United States. He has been the recipient of grants from the BC Arts Council and the duMaurier Arts Council. He has received a 2007 Visual Arts Development Award from the Vancouver Foundation, with which he will be exploring new materials and methods under mentoring artist Alan Storey.

David Pirrie's approach drawing and painting is through close analysis and detailed study of his subject, whether mountain terrain, as seen in this exhibition, the human body or automobile crashes. The methods of scientific inquiry, topographical mapping, and geological research inform his approach to creating his work.

Pirrie studied drawing at Capilano College, in North Vancouver, followed by a B.F.A from Concordia University, in Montreal. Pirrie has been the recipient of a BC Cultural Services Grant, and an Explorations Grant from the Canada Council. He has participated in numerous exhibitions across Canada and internationally. Pirrie is represented by the Douglas Udell Gallery in Vancouver.

## Search/Research: contemporary landscapes

This publication documents the exhibition *Search/Research: contemporary landscapes*, which was held at the Surrey Art Gallery from April 5 through June 15, 2008

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Photography: Blaine Campbell, Steve Farmer, Brian Foreman, Scott Massey, David Pirrie

The Surrey Art Gallery gratefully acknowledges the support of the City of Surrey, The British Columbia Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts.

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### SURREY ART GALLERY PRESENTS

a series of publications on exhibitions and projects  
ISSN 1918-1302 ISBN 978-1-926573-01-4 Published 2008

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