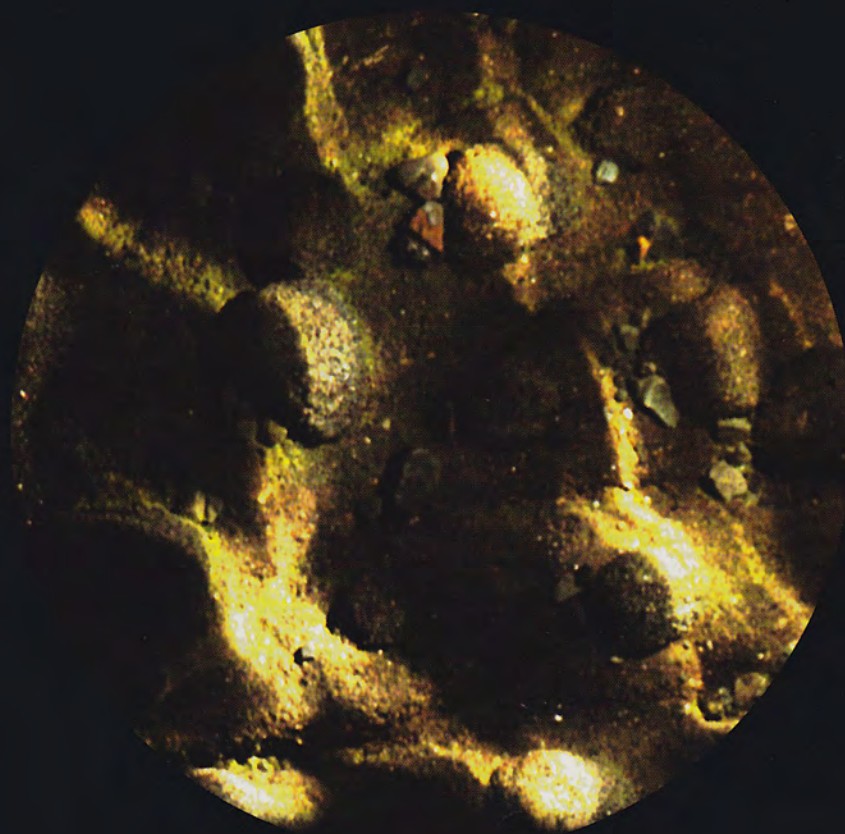


TORONTO SCULPTURE GARDEN

Panya Clark

AUGUST 15, 1995 – APRIL 15, 1996



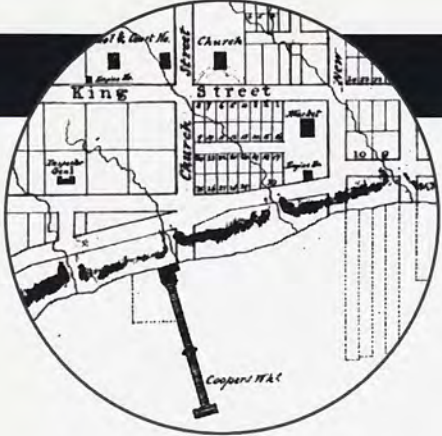
AT THIS POINT

A CITY OF TORONTO PARK ■ 115 KING STREET EAST

AT THIS POINT

"The point whereto all times are present..."

Dante, *Paradiso*, XVII.17

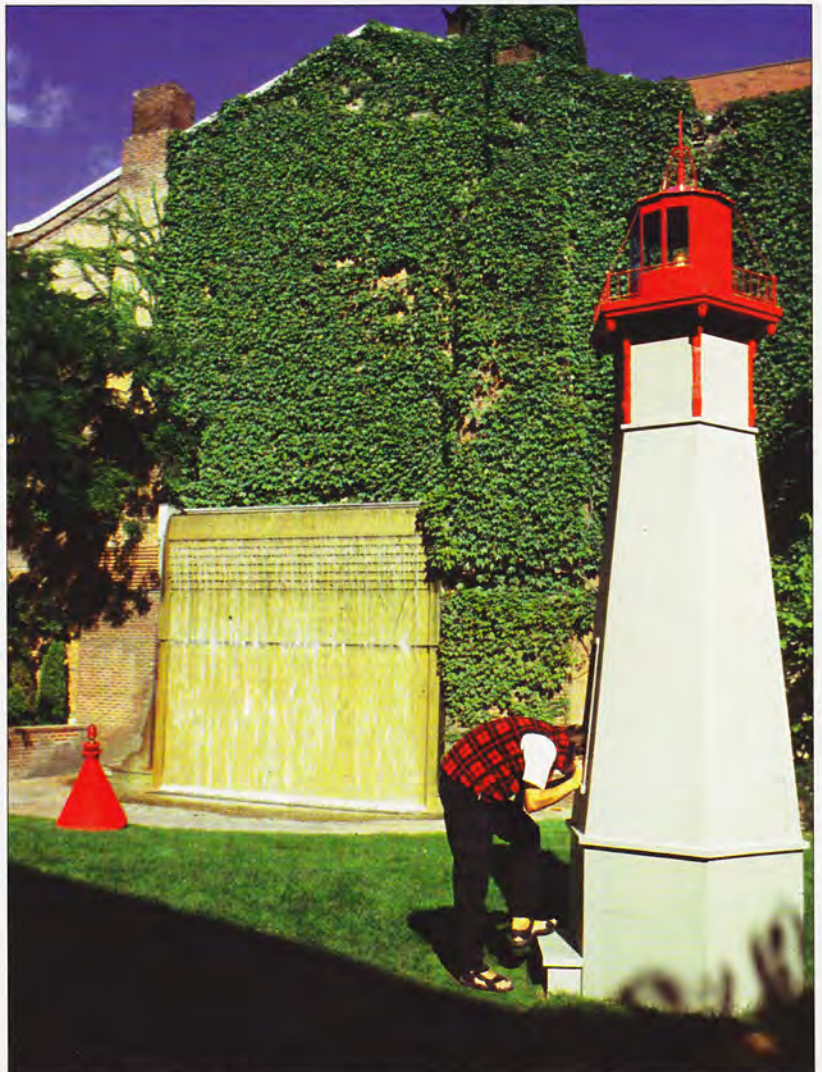


As we enter the large wrought iron gates of the Toronto Sculpture Garden, we see ahead of us a diminutive grey lighthouse paired with a bright red buoy "bobbing" on the lawn near the garden's waterfall. These intriguing yet somewhat incongruous objects appear transported from another time and place – structures typical of coastal areas recreated in the midst of a landscaped, urban setting. Our quizzical response melts into a smile of amusement. It's as if we have stumbled into a children's wonderland, the displaced, ironic and landlocked context of these structures adding to the sense of playfulness they inspire. Both the model lighthouse and buoy are faithful reproductions and, on first glance, seem relational in scale; the colourful buoy is closer to us, and is bigger, respectively, than the lighthouse which is much further afield. Walking pass the buoy, however, the illusion of distance is broken. The proportions of the objects have been distorted to create this depth perspective; in actuality, the buoy is one third normal size while the lighthouse is one seventh. From the entrance, we had compensated for this disparity, perceptually elongating the space between them.

Moving to the lighthouse, we are invited to look inside the structure and share its inner secrets. Like a museological exhibit, the didactic inscription directs our viewing. A small step offers us a boost up. Anticipating a surprise, we cup our hands around our eyes and peer down through this looking glass. Deep within the interior we apprehend what appears to be a riverbed beneath the ground level, its shallow waters rippling over a cluster of stones. Triggering the imagination, we contemplate the river's lineage to the waterfall which miraculously springs from the eastern wall of the garden. Perhaps this subterranean stream is the mysterious source of the falls or, alternately, the visible continuation of its cascading waters, which just as miraculously disappear through the grate in the ground. Perhaps this buried rivulet is an ancient waterway; coincidentally, an historic map of this area from 1827 shows a river running past this site. We beckon a friend to share the view, but the window is small; only a single visitation is possible at a time.

We never know if another sees exactly what we have seen, and whether what we saw was real. If so, how real was it?

Panya Clark's practice has consistently explored notions of authenticity. Reproducing historical artifacts and works of art, she looks at both the objects themselves as well as the attendant systems of valuation and presentation. AT THIS POINT continues these investigations. Creating multiple illusions, the artist playfully tugs at our concept of reality, questioning the authenticity of experience. Clark fabricates an elaborate three-dimensional structure to house a two-dimensional image. This image, in turn, is invested with a three-dimensional presence, enhanced by its proximity to the waterfall. Through what appears as a sleight of hand, she conjures up this imaginary current beneath the earth's surface. The darkened interior of the lighthouse is, in fact, illuminated by a mirrored projection while a rotating light simulates the



Lighthouse: 4' diameter x 16' high; wood, metal, glass, motor, patterned Lexan drum, quartz halogen flood-light, styrofoam, sand, plaster, obstruction light, timers. **Buoy:** 30" diameter x 48" high; steel, wood, obstruction light, timer. **Cover photo:** Image of moving water effect seen through lighthouse window.



ment and industrialization – literally, the filling in of our waters with land – and of losing sight of nature as the underlying force of existence. Yet, the historical and geographic continuum suggested in AT THIS POINT represents only one level of interpretation. Clark’s project also speaks to an inner landscape, its various dimensions figuratively describing different planes of consciousness. One observer remarked on a pronounced feeling of “connectedness” when looking into these watery depths: an intimate connection with another, larger world, a continuum not only with geographic history but with a different level of being. The projection, combined with the ambient sound of the rushing falls, is sensual and meditative. Despite our expectations, the unsettling movement of the currents beneath us does not destabilize our footing. The reverse holds true; the effect yields a quality of serenity, of comfort, a temporary coalescence of the fragmentation of experience – perhaps even a sense of nostalgia for lost origins or a memory of a pre-conscious state of existence. It is as if peering down into the depths of this edifice, we glimpse a manifestation of a remote, mysterious yet fundamental, life-supporting reservoir behind all immediate lived experience – a depth of reality markedly different from the rational, the literal. On an ontological level, the buoy and the lighthouse signify a movement from one mode of consciousness, one plane of existence, to another. As cautionary signs, they warn us of impending loss, of the threat of losing touch with what is most fundamental, yet intangible and invisible, within the depths of our own being.

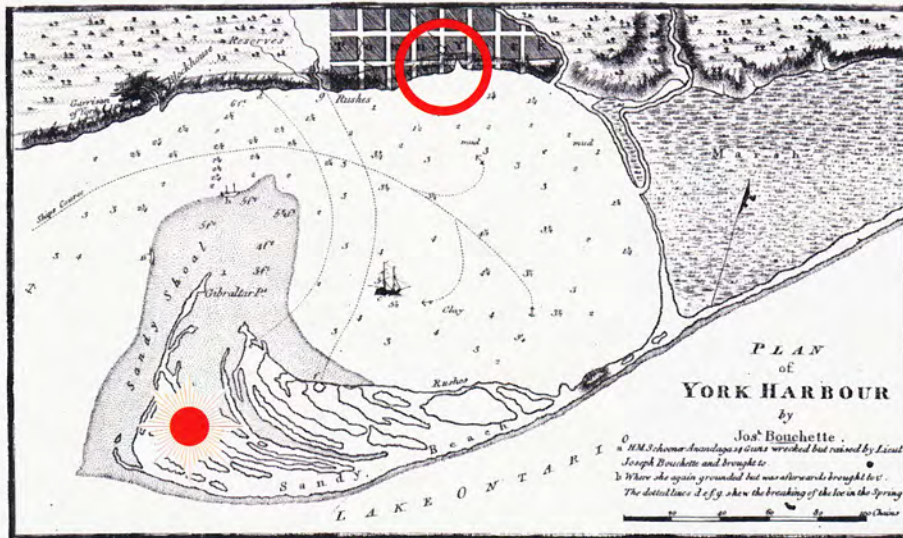
Carolyn Bell Farrell

rippling action. The technology is hidden; the magic is seamless. Ultimately, the lighthouse and buoy become glorified pedestals or props for staging this trompe l’œil effect.

Rather than mere spectacle, AT THIS POINT becomes a staging for the immaterial, a forum for what is normally unseen. Clark figuratively reproduces a history of this site; the layers of illusion are metaphors for the layers of history and of time which, unearthed, reveal the shifting topography of the Toronto landscape through a materialization of its undercurrents. Clark’s lighthouse is fashioned after one built on the Gibraltar Point of Toronto Island in 1806, in service until 1912. Once located on a sandpit stretching out into Lake Ontario, it has now receded inland following two centuries of natural and human intervention. The artist’s use of a scale model as well as the viewing window suggest the presentation of history as narrated to us through museological displays. Like these exhibits, Clark strives to give physical form to an historical memory, albeit theatrically. History is animated, made more “real” by bringing it into a “living context.” Yet, the effect is more than just didacticism. Within the city core, the reappearance of a long buried river underneath the anachronistic structure of this lighthouse physically repositions the past in the present. Like Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past*, the presence of these forms reverses the current of time. Instead of the past flowing into the present – a concept suggested by the ceaseless flow of the waterfall – the present is experienced as streaming into the past. Time, as we normally understand it, is qualified and transformed. Our sense of where we are in time and space becomes elastic, simultaneously expanding and collapsing.

As navigational markers and guides, both the lighthouse and buoy are beacons: warning signals demarcating the site of potential danger, such as shallow water or approaching land. On one level, the warning is environmental, cautioning us against the loss of our natural resources through overdevelop-





Maps courtesy of Metro Toronto Reference Library

Carolyn Bell Farrell is an independent Toronto based curator and writer.
Photos by Panya Clark except evening photo by W.N. Greer.

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Panya Clark

Born in Toronto in 1965. Lives and works in Toronto.

Education

1984 – 1988 Ontario College of Art, Toronto
Summer 1982 Parsons School of Design, New York

Solo Exhibitions

1995 National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
1994 Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto
1994 Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge, curated by Joan Stebbins (catalogue)
1991 Artspeak Gallery, Vancouver
1990 YYZ, Toronto

Selected Group Exhibitions

1995 *STONE POWDER FORT YORK*, Fort York, Toronto
1994 *SPONTANEOUS COMBUSTION*, Atlantis, London, England
1993 *SPONTANEOUS COMBUSTION*, 20 Richmond Street East, Toronto
OUT OF PLACE, Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, curated by Judith Mastai and Gary Dufour (catalogue)
ARTEDOMANI, 1992 Punt di Vista, Incontri Internazionali d'Arte, Roma Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna, Spoleto, Italy, curated by Sylvie Parent (catalogue)
1991 *VISIONS '91*, Les cent jours d'art contemporain de Montréal,

Centre international d'art contemporain de Montréal, curated by Sylvie Parent (catalogue)

1990 *THE SALVAGE PARADIGM* Wynick/ Tuck Gallery, Toronto, curated by Janice Gurney
RE-ENACTMENT: BETWEEN SELF AND OTHER. The Power Plant, Toronto, curated by Barbara Fischer (catalogue)
1989 *SCRUTINY*, YYZ, Toronto, curated by Bruce Grenville
1988 *NEW WORK*, Gallery 76, Toronto

Selected Awards

1988 Governor General's Medal, Ontario College of Art.

Grants

1995 Visual Arts B Grant, The Canada Council
1994 Travel Grant, The Canada Council
1993 Visual Arts B Grant, The Canada Council.
1992 Project and Travel Grant, The Canada Council
1991 Visual Art Grant, The Ontario Arts Council
1990 Project Grant, The Canada Council

Commissions

1994 Covenant House, Toronto
1992 The Queen Elizabeth Hospital Foundation, Nature of Giving Donor Recognition Artwork. Toronto

The **Toronto Sculpture Garden** is operated by the City of Toronto Department of Parks and Recreation. The Garden was developed through the sponsorship of the Louis L. Odette Family, the City of Toronto and the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture. The site was designed by the Architecture and Urban Design Division of the City's Planning and Development Department, in association with the Department of Parks and Recreation.

Exhibitions are funded and administered by the non-profit L.L.O. Sculpture Garden Foundation and are coordinated by the Garden's director, Rina Greer.

A volunteer Art Advisory Board, appointed by the Foundation, selects work for exhibition. Current members are Don Bennett, Shirley Blumberg, Nancy Campbell, Carlo Cesta, Robin Collyer, Stephen Cruise, Mark Gomes, Kim Kozzi, Bernie Miller, Louis Odette, Malcolm Ruby and Loretta Yarlow.

The work in this exhibition may be purchased directly from the artist or through the Sculpture Garden. The Foundation does not take a commission on sales.

Open daily, free of charge, from 8:00 a.m. until dusk.