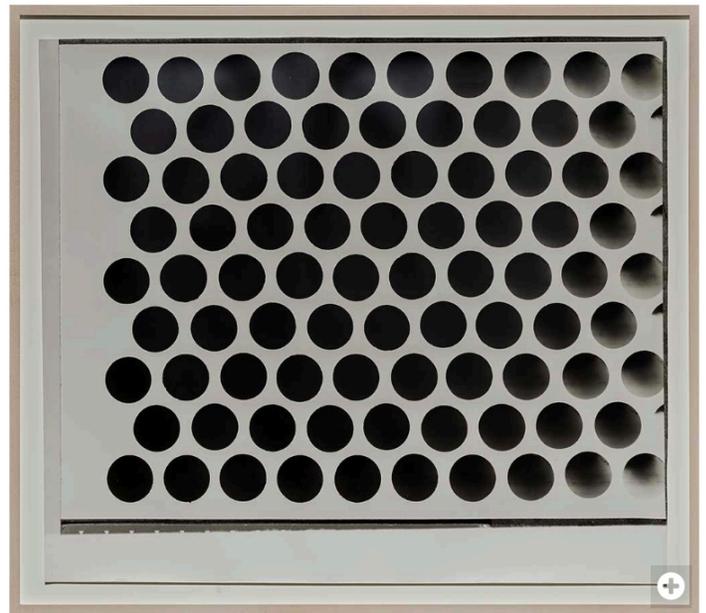


National Gallery of Canada

Focus on the collection: Jerry Pethick

November 4, 2020

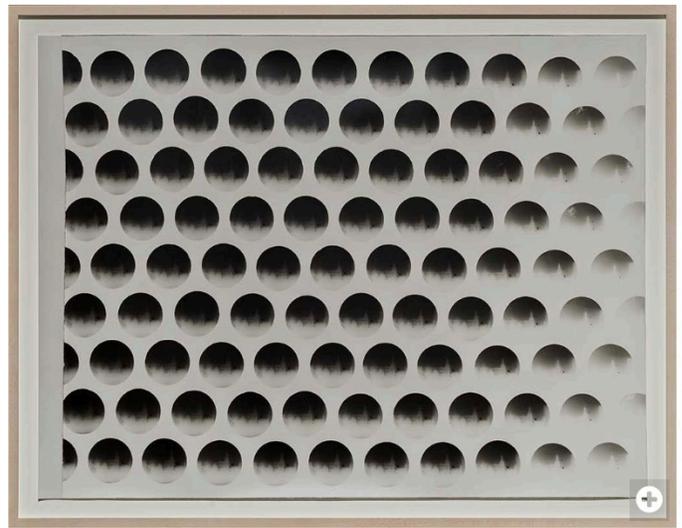
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Jerry Pethick, *Arch*, 1994. Gelatin silver print, 78.5 x 102.7 cm. Jerry Pethick, *Night River*, 1994. Gelatin silver print, 90.8 x 105.4 cm. Gift of the Estate of the artist, 2020 © Estate of Jerry Pethick, courtesy Catriona Jefferies Gallery, Vancouver. Photo: NGC

Canadian artist Jerry Pethick (1935–2003) constantly challenged the boundaries separating art and science, especially those related to imaging technologies and their purported capacities to depict “reality.” In many ways, his career aligns with ideas of art prevalent on Canada’s West Coast throughout the 1960s and 1970s, when artists championed counterculture concepts and experiences outside the mainstream. Their choice of lifestyle, buttressed by utopian ideas, was predicated upon questioning boundaries — an attitude that encouraged explorations into the interrelations between art, science, mysticism, technology and politics.

Pethick’s sideways thinking drove his art, and attracted him to “fringe” ideas and developments such as holography and lenticular lenses. For him, the presentation of subject matter was not dependent upon one-point perspective, but was realized through photographic and lens arrays with multiple viewpoints. Scientific research blended with artistic inquiry to create in-between, unresolved spaces of experience.



Jerry Pethick, *Light Sentinels I*, 1994. Gelatin silver print, 75.7 x 102.8 cm. Jerry Pethick, *Light Sentinels II*, 1994. Gelatin silver print, 79.9 x 105 cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa © Estate of Jerry Pethick, courtesy Catriona Jefferies Gallery, Vancouver. Photo: NGC

Pethick's inquiries were both scientific and historical. The artist constantly referenced photography's history in his works, infusing his images with memory of the medium's less-than-linear development and multiple origins. In one major body of work, he photographed his subjects through an array camera, each circle depicting the subject from a slightly different point of view.

Pethick's work engages in an even deeper dialogue with photography's cultural and ideological basis, given that the very structure of his camera array, and the images produced, contest the schism created via Renaissance perspective, as seen in Dürer's c. 1538 woodcut *Draughtsman Making a Perspective Drawing of a Reclining Woman* from the MET collection, in which vision, aligned through a single point and a dispassionate grid, is an intermediary between the sensual (represented by woman) and the rational (man).



Jerry Pethick, *Array Camera*, 1988, 99 lenses, wood, felt, game board, glass, plastic pipe, 11 x 15 x 6 in. (27 x 38 x 14 cm). Photo: SITE Photography. © Estate of Jerry Pethick, courtesy Catriona Jefferies, Vancouver.

In Pethick's photographs, the dot-shaped images, like the sculptural array of lenses, do not resolve into a vision of mastery. Rather, they propose a multiple, lively encounter with the world — one predicated upon imaginative peregrinations that defy resolution and the impulse to fix meaning and experience.

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Biography

Jerry Pethick studied art in London, England, at Chelsea Polytechnic and the Royal College of Art, completing his studies in 1964. In the mid-1960s, he worked with plastics and lenticular materials, and shortly thereafter became fascinated with holography, establishing a holography school in San Francisco in 1971 with American scientist Lloyd Cross. Pethick moved to Hornby Island, British Columbia, in 1975, where he resided for the rest of his life.

In the words of the artist:

Pethick rejected the teleological and its investment in the inevitable. His interests lay instead in the “apparent coincidence of purpose contrary to intent” that might “dissipate the hard realm of technology.”

Working against linear chronology, Pethick's practice charted “a perceptual journey linked to a parallel development of imaging technologies maundering about the arts and sciences that leave processes, systems and machine monuments in their wake.” [Quoted by Grant Arnold in “Introduction” *Jerry Pethick: Shooting the Sun/Splitting the Pie* (London, Vancouver: Black Dog Publishing, Vancouver Art Gallery 2015), p. 9.]