



Jerry Pethick. Exhibition catalogue *Jerry Pethick: Collection*. Victoria, BC: Open Space, 1999.



Plummet II, 1990

Foreword

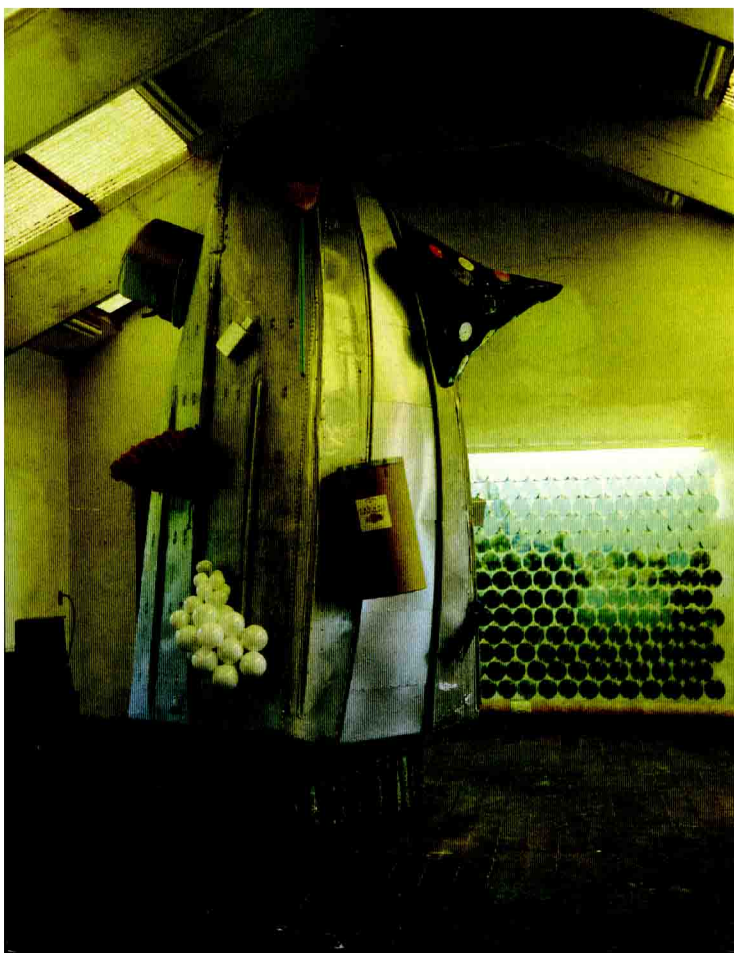
Life into art in an honest way" is the perfect description of Jerry Pethick, his work and multitude of manifestations which create an exhibition such as *Collection*. Simply put, the opportunity to present in exhibition at Open Space the work of an artist of this stature has been informative, and most certainly, at times, diverting. With Pethick, a certain type of artistic alchemy comes into play when objects, some identifiable and some not, move from their arrangement on the floor of the gallery, into the artist's vision and then attach themselves to larger backgrounds to become the final artwork.

I mention the informative aspect because the artwork unleashes stories of research, concepts, past and present work and future developments; the diversion amounts to undeveloped projects, tangents and other avenues explored or slated for future mining which creep into the conversations between the hours of continuing installation. To be with art is all anyone can ask; to be with Jerry Pethick, and his art is all I could possibly ask.

I would like to thank the artist for not only presenting his work, but also for allowing Open Space to publish his writings in this modest monograph; and his lovely and informed wife and partner in life, Margaret for her work in editing the text. Todd Eacrett put his talent to work in designing the monograph, collaborating with the artist in an attempt to create something indicative of the larger presentation. Special thanks go to Karin Scarth, Gallery Coordinator for her personal help as well as the myriad of Open Space volunteers she brings to each project such as this. The Visual Art committee at Open Space must be thanked for allowing me to indulge myself on occasions like this; and the Board of Directors for their patience with the vision I promote. To the friends of Open Space, who have contributed towards this exhibition including Xerox of Canada which helped with the production of this monograph, I extend the appreciation of Mr. Pethick and myself.

To all others, the many invaluable friends of the artist, who have contributed so much to make this exhibition possible, the artist would like to extend his personal gratitude.

Todd Davis
Executive Director
April 1999



*Homeship/
Faux Terrain,
1989-91
(photo: Bob Cain)*

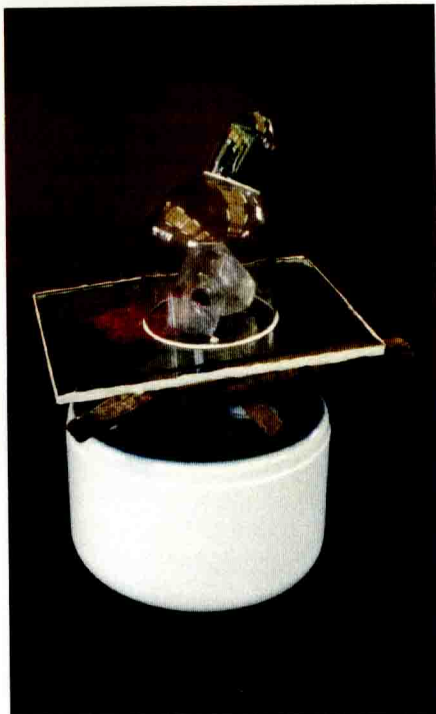
Animals Dream

When we see a large number of small photographs, each one slightly different to the next, reassemble themselves into a single large composite image, there is both a wonder and a connection that allows one to feel instinctively that we know about it. It has to do with our own perception, possibly, with its processing, our memory or our thinking. It seems familiar. Is it because of our own cells or molecules, the nature of matter or the procedure of vision?

My own inkling of such pixelated reality occurred through Dennis Gabor's demonstration about holography on B.B.C. television, where he talked about his early discoveries in three-dimensional imaging, before the laser and before its kindred photographic technology. In his demonstration, he broke a hologram into many pieces; he then showed that each piece recorded the whole image, but from its specific position in the exposed holographic glass plate. This concept of entirety from infinite points of view seemed to fit the multi-modal perception that ran parallel to insights of modern physics and eastern thought and religion. The essence of flow and flexibility replacing the monolithic foundations of Art and Science prior to the twentieth century.

The second impact on me of these notions occurred when a 3-D company in Michigan failed to get further funding for a nearly completed programme of research into integral photography, a three-dimensional photographic process. I had been encouraged to work with them on this project and when it was cancelled, the Director passed on to me a mould and some pressed plastic lens sheets, two thousand 1/8 inch diameter lenslets in a 4 x 5 inch area.

At this time, I was also working with a holography company, set up by artists and scientists, who saw this form of spatial vision as a new medium. One night, I used one of these lens sheets and placed a piece of black and white film behind it (a crude, light-tight little camera); I then exposed the film through the lens sheet with an electronic



Bifocal, 1974-93

flash, developed the negative and replaced it in the camera, registering it as well as I could to its original position. On looking at it through the lens sheet, instead of there being all the little black dots created by the negative film exposed by each small lenslet, those little black dots formed one enormous black dot. This astonished me; it was a first real comprehension of viewing a composite image and of what it might lead to. The exciting realisation lasted until I was able to make my first small array of *Margaret, Yana and the Century Plant* in the back yard of our house on Sixth Avenue in San Francisco. The large format arrays, such as *Homeship/Faux Terrain* followed with the finding of the right lenses and with the existence of the new and now ubiquitous automatically run machine prints.

This preoccupation with space led to a desire to manipulate space itself, like other sculptural elements of material and form, metaphor and

echo, the ideas that push and pull one into creative commitment. My interest that started in learning about material structure and visual aesthetics formed a curiosity about space itself—a perceptual space that becomes another element to play with and to weave into low technology constructs as well as the high technology of electronic images, diversified by the vast range of the computer.

The interrelatedness of the component parts of the array work reflect an interest that has been developing for some time in my mind. The beehive like pattern (I later learned was referred to as hexagonal stacking) had always seemed to me to be a satisfying formulation of like parts, marbles on a tray, loose ball-bearings rolling together, BB pellets piling themselves in a box; the pattern, we would learn later, that made up the fly's eye, and the honeycomb. This last holds a fascination with the bees' social organisation, with its reduced individualism depending on the similar traits of component parts being of the same importance, same scale, same shape. The architecture of a society, the near order of swarming bees.

Where there is a democracy of objects, together they form a collection. The idea of single entity unity passes and relates to another time: the organization of assembly looses the resonance of composite structure. The hexagonal pattern has the useful quality of a small area not being unit objects, an efficiency of grouping or clustering that attracts discrepancies and linear distortion. When these lines, formed on three axes show the slightest distortion whereby the pattern is invaded by bulges or angular tangents, a gradual softening of a regime takes on the balance between pattern and confusion.

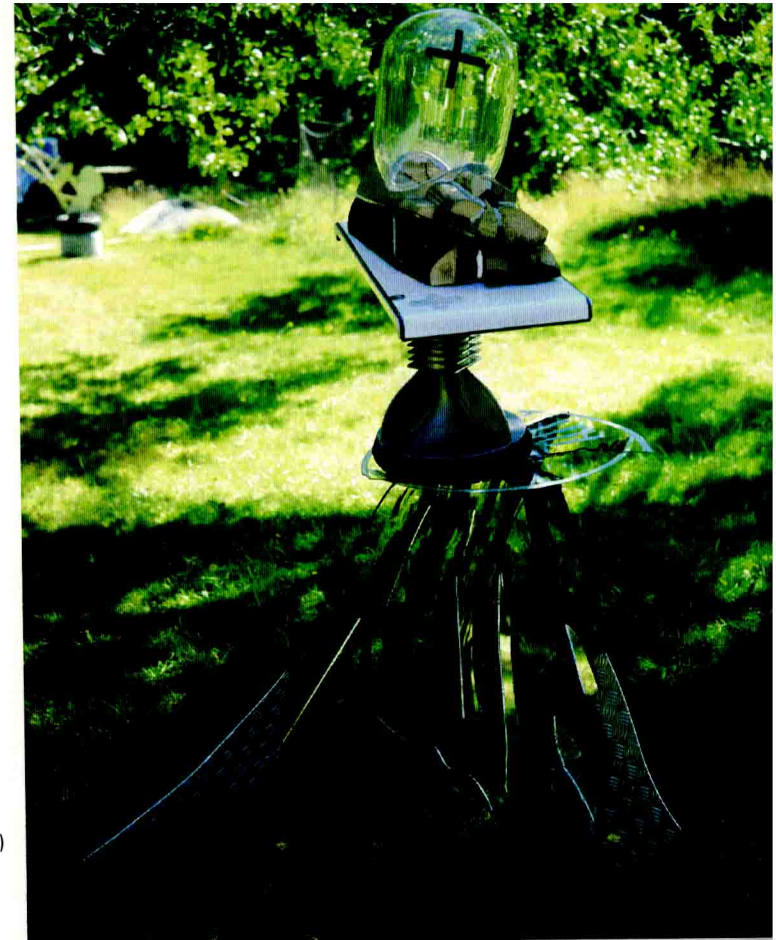
The concept of the array by dictionary standards relies on the notion that each entity be similar or identical, but the general use of the word has come to indulge slight irregularities of differing elements. The pattern seems to allow dissimilar component parts until the recognisable structure dissipates into a chaotic organisation; maintaining some pattern while introducing totally differing objects has been an exploration that moves from chaos to the eye of cognitive recognition.

In the photos it is more apparent that a single photo, in and of itself, can vary in intrinsic quality. The occasional dark, fuzzy image averages out, or is insignificant in the larger number of the total composite image, unlike stereo prints that are each important because there are only two pieces of information, one going to each eye. Yet even with stereo, the quality of the two photos average out in reconstructing the illusory depth, but the image is more reliant on higher resolution.

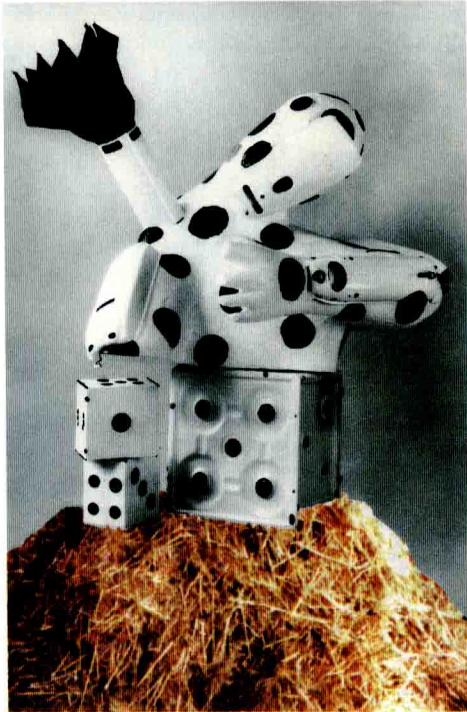
The array seems to operate in a somewhat different way. By allowing peripheral vision and freedom of movement, the reconstruction presents itself primarily as a space and the detail, or lack of it, repercussions on the quality of space reconstructed; so that there is a relationship akin to daydream space that seems dependent on content and resolution like the collection and configuration of dissimilar objects. These flutterings into unrecognised configuration have unearthed again the question of the eye and brain participation in the array's reconstruction that leads to the edge of the boundless abyss of perceptual processing.

Observer participation is a necessity in that the eyes are given pieces of information to construct a space and there is an assumption that we need at least two pieces of information to see three-dimensionally. But with these large format integral arrays and large diameter lenses, the still unanswered question arises as to why they work the way they do: even if one views the scene through one lens, it still gives enough clues to convince the brain of a dimensional reconstruction. These reconstructions, with their low resolution and defocused vision, may be closer to the spatial image created in one's head as imagined space, the immaterial imaginings of remembered scenes and spaces and not the reconstituted landscape that was recorded and represented by the photo with the lens reconstruction. Some earlier and smaller works have given a closer, more detailed representation of the original vision. The large format virtual and magnified reconstruction only allude to an original dream.

In the sculptural elements of my work there is a resonance of component parts that



*Stumping the
Heroes, 1986
(photo: Bob Cain)*



1st and 2nd Growth, 1985 (photo: Christian Bahier)

reflects the multiple reality of the array; the objectness of these assembled material elements is often made from a collection of items that suggests, as does the imagined vision of the arrays in much the same way, another fuller or more complete world where echoes are fulfilled with the original and the delay. These clusters of emanations of formal perceptions are still dependent on visual decisions that try to organize the auric history that exists through their associative function.

The compositional building of materials and their association construct in traditional ways the sculptural practice that was explored by Boccioni and Duchamp in the first half of this century. The arrays tend to assume a stance without a previous history, but Gabriel Lippmann, a French physicist,

formed this theoretical concept at the start of this century and Roger de Montebello continued with the work in the sixties. Where the arrays stand in artistic history is in the process of tuning the lenses to the photo images. By looking, then retreating to view the work, much like an artist drawing or painting, then returning to adjust or alter the work, and retreating to look again. This going back and forth of lookings has existed throughout history. The curiosity for another view.

The distance between the photos and the lens screen is close to the focal length of the lenses; any further away and you would start having a complete break-up of image through magnification, then the inversion of image that occurs with optics beyond the focal point. The nearness to the focal point carries some elements of scenes to an almost unrecognisable detail—abstracted or distorted until they gather another association; foliage sometimes gets more graphic and flat, somewhat like the idealised and surreal jungles of Henri Rousseau, they place you in an unrecognised environment. More than disorient, they question more than answer; the space remains in rapport with the material elements of the sculptural component which often acts as a bridge to this new space.

Jerry Pethick
April 1999

Works in the exhibition:

Homeship/Faux Terrain, 1989-91,

13' x 11' x variable

1st and 2nd Growth, 1985, 96" x 120" x 132"

Stumping the Heroes, 1986, 72" x 60" x 36"

Bifocal, 1974-93, 38" x 33" x 32"

Plummet II, 1990, 73" x 49"

Vermeeror, 1996-97, 85" x 89"

Trojan Earth, 1996, 66" x 65"

Blue Tobogans, Red Tongues, Flat Field, 1999,

120" x 152" (not illustrated)