Imagine a photographic view that acquires ten or twenty times its size before your very eyes. Imagine the space of that same image being suddenly in three dimensions. Then imagine losing that image and quickly recapturing it, or part of it, by moving slightly.

If you had to represent a dream, this is perhaps what you would do. What you see is granular, like a film-image or like an imagined representation of a dreamed reality.

Next to that dream is a fantasy of form and colour: all bright and solid and tangible.

As your eyes scan the gallery space, you notice that the room is filled with other such compositions. They have titles such as *Roof to Heaven*, *Out of the Corner of an Eye* or even *Drawing on the Street of Dreams*. Titles which not only depict what you have just experienced but which also seem to imply some other reality.

You have just entered the world of Jerry Pethick. A world of binaries and complementaries, where fantasy and geometric order, intuition and reason, presence and absence, ethereal and solid form, co-habit and lead from one form to another and back again.

Born in London, Ontario, but now residing on a small island off the coast of British Columbia, Jerry Pethick has been a practising artist for many years. Although well-respected, he is known to most people through a small number of sculptures. This is simply because there have been only a few opportunities to see his work, especially in central Canada.

However, this situation is changing rapidly, prompted by the types of works Pethick has been developing in recent years. The selections for this modest survey exhibition are recent, having been made between 1986 and 1992. All are composite sculptures consisting of a photographic wall-unit and at least one object-based, floor- and/or free-standing element.

It is not unusual, when discussing sculpture, to introduce the text with a definition of the notion and concept of space. The reason for this is quite obvious. One of the sculptor’s principal materials is space. The objects that they make exist in space, and they use space as a component in their works.

This is certainly true of Jerry Pethick’s sculpture. But the notion of space that Pethick’s work puts forth for consideration takes us beyond the mere idea of space as a material or as the environment in which a work exists. With Pethick, space is revitalized. It spells “presence” as it becomes almost tangible and serves to animate the frozen image of represented reality.

The mural-element of Pethick’s composite sculptures consists of Fresnel lenses and of an equal number of snapshot photographs—sometimes up to 300 images—which are mounted directly on the gallery wall. The lenses are placed immediately in front of the photographs and are focused only on a small portion of the images. Describing this process, Pethick has pointed out:

> Watching the space form and grow, gradually, with each lens that is added, gives a sense of controlling the aperture of space and its peripheral dimension. This close viewing and adjusting of each of these lenses...requires a back-and-forth motion of looking, altering, moving back, then looking again...to precisely tune these components into these single large whole views. This process of working is akin to drawing and painting. The space realm we identify as a scene or picture, but with the attendant space.

At first glance, the photographs appear to be exactly alike, but they are not. Each one is part of a minute survey of a scene taken from a slightly different angle each time. The lenses serve to reconstruct into a single three-dimensionalized image the various individual two-dimensional photographs. Depending on where one stands in relation-
ship to the work, the reconstructed image is apprehended differently each time. As the artist has remarked:

Lenses...alter the direction of light and reconstruct it differently. Using many lenses to reconstruct each particular point of view in an entire scene, a two-dimensionally recorded scene can be transposed into a spatial, composite image. The direction from which the light approaches the eye is a key factor in what establishes a particular viewpoint.

A snapshot—or any photograph, for that matter—freezes reality into an unchanging record. It gives what which is recorded a sense of eternal fixity. Through his use of lenses and the reconstruction of multiple images into a single view, Pethick addresses complex and difficult relationships which encompass this process, but which also transposes it one step further. His work brings together, within a single reflexive act and a unique sculptural experience, the actual (or what we might more properly refer to as the putative) subject, its representation through photographic means, and a re-enactment of a three-dimensional reality in the space of the gallery. The mural becomes a composite of photographic illusion, actual, and technically suggested space.

We are well-aware of the relationship of the photographic image to the actual world. It functions on many levels, one of them being that it distorts while also recording a multi-dimensional experience on a two-dimensional surface. When looking at a photograph, we know of the absence of actual space, yet we also perceive its presence. More often than not, the relationship between actual space, its photographic representation, and mental constructs, is not questioned. We know the “real” and are conditioned to perceiving it on a two-dimensional surface.

Jerry Pethick does not, perhaps, de-stabilize this perception, but instead raises other ways of reflecting upon it. By relying on Fresnel lenses, which are placed directly in front of the photographic images, he visually re-translates a still record of the “real.” Through this process, he also re-actualizes the spatial dimension absent from the photograph. Unlike the magic resemblances of holography—a medium the artist has also worked in—Pethick’s approach exposes the act of translation. In so doing, he clearly reveals the terms of the discussion.

One of these terms is that, while Pethick’s snapshots first appear to be all the same, they indeed represent a multiple reading of an actual scene or reality. In fact, collectively, they come closer to how the eyes might read the environment or even how a movie camera might reconstruct a lived experience. As in a series of film sequences, Pethick’s photographic scene is constituted of a series of broken-down fragments of a scene making up an image. Once it has been translated through the lenses, not only do we not lose this fragmented vision—the lenses remain the marks of that fact—but we also regain a sense of how, at first, albeit subconsciously, we might have seen the “real.”

Pethick’s work takes us a step away from photography into the recording of the real through actual vision, or through a video or movie camera. This passage, however, holds movement in abeyance, letting the image float between stillness and anticipated action. Because movies have led us to expect movement in an assumed three-dimensional space, so do we expect something to occur in Pethick’s sculptural space. But all remains still, until we disturb this vision. Movement is with us. We, the viewers, are action. Or, as Pethick has observed: “you exist at a particular point.”

This sense of control, however, has the fleeting quality of the sense of control we sometimes experience over dreams. Aware that we are dreaming, we try to hold on to the dream. But, despite our efforts, the dream escapes us. So it is with Pethick’s reconstructed images. They float ethereally in front of us. They recreate a semblance of the real but, at the same time, they give the real a vaporous essence. They are a bit like memory, which records but which also translates lived experience. This “tangible” space, which Pethick makes us reconsider, also has a somewhat fictive dimension, as it exists somewhere between actual vision and mental vision, or between dreams and the fact of being-in-place in the act of seeing. It is a special space that opens the discourse on vision and the capturing of vision through photographic means, while also reminding us of our own role in the act of seeing. We capture or lose the image by moving in front of the work.

Pethick's reconstituted images operate in a field where the concept of space takes its strongest and more complex meaning. His sculptures incorporate the notion of landscape in the pluralistic sense of the term. There are romantic views as well as industrial spaces and cityscapes. As a group, the images speak both to the quietude of country life and the harassments of city life. They refer to both the pre- and the post-industrial world. What this says is not only that Pethick's practice can encompass the full range of landscape notions, but that his interest in landscape is not only that Pethick's practice can encompass the full range of landscape notions, but that his interest in landscape is prompted by the desire to include an element recognized both as "space" and as "nature," rather than by an interest in a particular kind of space revealed by a particular type of landscape.

The importance of the land cannot be overemphasized. Not only does nature form the backdrop against which these works have been developed—here, I am referring directly to the almost paradisical island on which Pethick works—but nature, the environment, is also the provider of many of the various other elements which complement Pethick's sculptures. Most of these other components are indeed found objects, often refuse, which the artist has collected on his island or elsewhere during his travels.

With these components, which function at another level of "presence" and stand as concrete sculptural entities in the gallery space, Pethick develops yet another aspect of the reflection about visual perception and its reconstruction. In fact, through these actual objects, he brings the "real" into the sculptural object, completing and complementing the project of translation initiated within the photographic unit.

As our eyes leave the floating reconstituted image, they encounter solid objects in space. While thinking about the process of visibility and of its reconstruction, we are also led, actually and by contrast, to look and to try to relive the experience of seeing (and, if we wish, of mentally recording) actual objects in space. The tangibility of these objects forms a relationship with the tangible space that exists in the reconstituted photographs. The sculptural elements are indeed solid volumes in space offering a contrast to the "solidified" space of the photographic units.

Composed of a series of heterogeneous objects, the freestanding or floor-unit works are often restaged in the gallery. The sculptural elements consist of a single, massive, colourful unit. Almost all suggest movement; sculpture, here, becomes yet another way of capturing fleeting reality. In this sense, sculpture, like photography, also is a means of "freezing action."

Whereas Pethick's photographs draw from the "real"—and this sense of the everyday is also a characteristic that emerges through the range of landscapes on which Pethick concentrates—the sculptural components resist easy identification. For instance, while it is possible to recognize the form of an aluminum boat in Homeship/Faux Terrain, the object in its totality does not have such an easy referent. In fact, the boats—for there are two—have been transformed into a sort of simplified Christmas-tree-like form adorned with a variety of found objects. The initial use of these additional "decorative" objects also becomes lost in the process. Similarly, in Out of the Corner of an Eye, a series of rolled blankets are so arranged as to suggest a figure—the Venus of Willendorf or some other primitive form—rather than anything having to do with their usual purpose.

By de-stabilizing our relationship with the known, Pethick opens up yet another discursive level within the work. The recognizable and tangible elements of his sculptural components lose their initial identity once the sculptural act is completed. In contrast, by being three-dimensionalized by the lens, the photographs appear to take on a more "real" quality. Yet, in both cases, we know the "real" is being distorted—that, in fact, both translate the world further as they move from one transformative state into another.

However, despite these contrasting qualities, Pethick also establishes rapport between the sculptural and photographic elements of his works. In a way, they could be described as formal...
relationships, although “formal” tends to reduce the level at which this functions. In fact, the more the two disparate components are examined, the more it becomes clear that the freestanding elements are yet another visual translation of the content of the photographs, in which Pethick’s imaginative play functions at its best and where the fictive dimension that he suggests in the photographic components finds its equivalent.

Looked at again, for example, the so-called human being-like shape of the rolled blankets in Out of the Corner of an Eye becomes an echo, or re-translates the form, of the C.P.R. snowplow in the snapshot. Related equivalences are similarly created in other works, such as Drawbridge Dilemma or Prague Fraught. At other times, as in Homeship/ Faux Terrain, which functions around a view of the Grand Canal in Venice, California, a relationship is established through some sort of associative idea: in this case, a three-dimensionalized boat-like form which serves to unify the composition.

To my mind, the fascination with Pethick’s work resides within these layered dialogues and this sense of approaching, yet of almost simultaneously losing hold of, the exact nature of the relationships established by the artist. If there are absolute opposites, as between the whimsical quality of the sculptural component and the more geometricized and rationalistic photographic constructions, there are also gray zones where no easy distinctions are possible and where we are brought to re-examine the conclusions we may have drawn. This is perhaps better reflected in the notion of absence/presence, which seems to apply to each of the elements of the sculptural installations. This strategic process tends not only to increase our understanding of the interrelationship of both photography and sculpture, but it also leads to a reconsideration of representation and of its relationship to the actual world.

Pethick’s work functions at a level of involving and sometimes difficult relationships. Yet the work also retains an immediately engaging quality which encourages the probing of the many dialogues that are created within it. This carefully woven web of rapport, where opposites and complementaries tend to coalesce and reinforce one another, finds an echo in our world and in how we apprehend it, naturally, objectively, and through representation.

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\textit{Endnote}

1 This and all other subsequent quotations are from correspondence between the artist and the author.