



## ART

By Michael Turner

An artist mixes paint and photography to create an image of Stanley Park sure to make you do a double take

# Trunk L'oeil

STANLEY PARK is one of the city's enduring attractions, but until recently many Vancouverites knew little about it. Most could tell you only that it's among North America's biggest urban parks. Books such as Timothy Taylor's novel *Stanley Park* (2000) and Jean Barman's *Stanley Park's Secret* (2005), provide fictional and social histories, respectively, describing it as a site of human occupation, resistance and intrigue. (The 2001 homophobic murder of Aaron Webster, and the 2002 rape of a 22-year-old Korean language student, add further layers.) Yet it was not until December 15, 2006, that many people got to know the park for what it is—and what it is not.

That evening, a storm damaged up to 40 percent of the standing timber. In the weeks that followed, experts told us that the park was, in fact, an unnatural outcome, the product of civic officials unwilling to tamper with what some mistakenly believed to be a pristine forest; and that, had selective logging been allowed (as was proposed years earlier), many trees might have been saved.

An interesting proposition, and a starting point for artist Kevin Schmidt, who has devoted himself to exploring the fuzzy relationship between nature and culture. With a commission from Presentation House Gallery in North Vancouver, and permission from the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, Schmidt entered Prospect Point and, on a cut maple stump, painted a "trompe l'oeil" of West Vancouver. Once it was complete, he hired Blaine Campbell to take its picture. Two images were montaged together, creating a photograph of the "en plein air" painting that achieves a weird surreality.

Vancouver is renowned for its painters and photographers. Jack Shadbolt abstracted the natural landscape, while the canvases of Gordon Smith have, at various times, brought the city into view. Photo-based artist Jeff Wall has had a long-standing fascination with our suburbs, while his protégé, Roy Arden, documents the effects of modernity on the civic skin. Schmidt's accomplishment lies not only in his merging of our city's artistic histories, but in his sly way of reminding us, rather forcefully, that the only thing "natural" about Stanley Park is the storm that ravaged it. **vm**

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