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Two new CCA exhibitions focus on the work of Toronto photographer Robert Burley



Robert Burley: Photographic Proof. Installation view on the north façade of the CCA. © Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal.

Montréal, 11 September 2009 – The Canadian Centre for Architecture celebrates the work and career of Toronto photographer Robert Burley with two exhibitions.

Robert Burley: Photographic Proof

11 September to 19 October 2009, North façade of the CCA

For thirty years, Toronto-based Robert Burley has photographed built environments, exploring the relationship between nature, architecture, and the urban landscape. His work *Photographic Proof* (2008-2009) is a massive photographic mural installed on the north side of the CCA building facing Baile Street. Created in collaboration with Le Mois de la Photo à Montréal 2009, the work is an immense reproduction of a Polaroid photograph showing a crowd witnessing a great destruction of traditional photographic equipment: the dynamiting of the iconic Kodak-Pathé plant in Chalon-sur-Saône, France in 2007.

Robert Burley: The Disappearance of Darkness

11 September to 15 November 2009, CCA's hallcases

The work of the Canadian artist is also honoured with the exhibition *Robert Burley: The Disappearance of Darkness*, which documents the decline of traditional photographic equipment manufacturing brought about by new technologies. Since 2005, the evolution from analog to digital in photographic technology has resulted in the disappearance of

factories making conventional photographic products. This has caused upheaval in every occupation related to the industry, changes in the built environment, and the transformation of photographic practice and culture. The digital revolution, while initially technological and economic in nature and concerned with the production, dissemination and preservation of images, has also had an effect on our perception of images and the way the way time is visible in them. Factories belonging to multinational firms such as Kodak, Agfa, and Polaroid, which until recently produced cameras, photographic paper, film, and darkroom chemicals on a global scale, have been abandoned and demolished one after another.

Inspired by the significance of this turning point in the history of the medium, Robert Burley has created the series *The Disappearance of Darkness*, whose purpose is apparent in the six works on view here. “The goal of my work is to explore the places where the alchemy of the photographic process was practised on a massive scale over the last century. The essential feature of these factories was, ironically, darkness: manufacturing took place in the absence of light—a characteristic that has defined the photographic process since it was first invented in 1839. The act of photographing is often associated with a desire to record something on the verge of change or disappearance. In this case, my subject is the medium itself.”

BIOGRAPHY

Born in Picton, Ontario, in 1957, the photographer Robert Burley has been a passionate observer of the built environment for the past three decades. His works explore the relationships between nature, architecture, and the urban landscape. In his earliest projects, *Don Valley, Ontario* and *O’Hare, Chicago* (both from the 1980s), he set out to capture the continuity between landscapes both natural and artificial.

Robert Burley works with a 4 × 5 camera. The clarity and precision of his unique vision, matched by his exceptional technical ability, result in works of great sensitivity. Burley’s photographs reveal his continuing fascination with the subtle interplay of natural landscapes and the built environment.

The CCA has been collecting Burley’s work since the beginning of his career and currently holds some 350 of his photographs. The CCA has also commissioned him for several projects, such as *CCA Garden* (1990) and *Viewing Olmsted* (1988–1994). The Olmsted commission, a major project undertaken with the photographers Lee Friedlander and Geoffrey James, provided three strikingly different interpretations of the pioneering American landscape architect’s work. Commenting on this formative experience, Burley

describes time as an essential element of his work, while colour is “a kind of subtext to the image.”

In 2002, the artist donated a series on Toronto synagogues to the CCA. The photographs are a profound meditation on the buildings and their spaces.

ABOUT THE CCA

The Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) is an international research centre and museum founded in 1979 on the conviction that architecture is a public concern. Based on its extensive collections, the CCA is a leading voice in advancing knowledge, promoting public understanding, and widening thought and debate on the art of architecture and its history, theory, practice and role in society today. The CCA celebrates the 20th anniversary of its public opening throughout 2009 with an ambitious series of programs and initiatives that underscore the achievements of the CCA.

**The CCA wishes to thank Hydro-Québec, RBC Financial Group,
Loto-Québec and BMO Financial Group.**

**The CCA gratefully acknowledges the generous support of the Ministère de la Culture,
des Communications et de la Condition féminine, the Canada Council for the Arts,
the Conseil des arts de Montréal, and the Department of Canadian Heritage.**

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Source : Isabelle Huiban
Head of Press Relations
Tél. : 514 939 7001, poste 2607
Courriel : ihuiban@cca.qc.ca