



UNDERSTORY
JANE EVERETT

Jane Everett: The Unfixed Locus of Longing

Barbara Tyner, MA

Sixteenth-Century Japanese Buddhist painter Tōhaku Hasegawa knew how to fill us with longing and empty us at the same time, with simple sweeping ink and brush paintings of pines on rice paper. Contemporary B.C. artist Jane Everett's work, especially her most recent, offers this same dual pleasure, through her charcoal and conté-crayon images on drafting film, presented as glimpsed experiences of moments in nature. Imagery is not the point, although she and Hasegawa share a thing for trees. Neither of the two artists is really making work about trees. Both, through line, form and space, invite us to recall unnamed, unfixed longings—emotional and physical—we may not even know we have.

Love and longing motivate Everett's work, she says. *Longing* is a direct hit. We feel it in her tree figures: rootless, unresolved, smoky edges, unwinding in space. We sense it in her fragmented forest puzzle-views. Her glimpse-slices of life among trees whomp us with synesthetic memories of solitary childhood explorations in nature—moist ferns, the squeak of a water pump, shadowy lake light through slim trunks, breeze-rattled leaves. Everett's consistent focus in her thirty-plus year career is distilling the profound feeling of nature-based beauty into visual form, but without resolving it into narrative or pinning it down. In the Japanese aesthetic concept of *wabi sabi*, this is *kanso* (simplicity) plus *yugen* (subtly profound grace), plus *seijaku* (tranquility). In a Western way, we see six constants in her work, regardless of subject: Stopped Time. Erasure. Movement. Breathlessness. Nostalgia. Stillness. All this we read as longing.

Longing is something we know in Canada; it is the characteristic flavour of our arts. We know it in the melancholy thrill of geese flying overhead in the silvery end of a winter-stunted day; we know it in the songs of Joni Mitchell and Gordon Lightfoot, and the plaintive sounds of Neil Young. Longing is what fills and kills us in kd lang at her best, and in all of Leonard Cohen. Everett captures an impression of this undefined longing, and, like the best poets and musicians, doesn't name it, but allows for our myriad projection. This longing is her work's core.

What is the colour of longing for some unnamed thing, a passion or loss or time gone by? How does an artist visually describe it, and how does she invoke it in us? JMW Turner used space, scale, and colour; John Constable and Thomas Cole, subject and context. Everett subtracts. Her tools are twilight greyscale—the subtraction of colour—and the erasure of complete narrative and resolved form. Erasure imbues the works with not just the physical tonal variations of her sooty media, but temporal gradations that speak to the unfixed-ness of memory and



Jane Everett,
Understory II,
2018, charcoal
on drafting film

dreamtime. What is unseen gains psychological heft. Everett is deft with her eraser, motion-charging her works, carving lines in charcoal-stained surfaces, subtracting direct references. Like Hasegawa, by removing she makes us want more.

I want to express both a sense of longing and the genius (or spirit) of place. I think all places have their spirit but certain ones I respond to more deeply than others. It's not just the beauty (I can appreciate a spectacular view of the Rockies or English Bay without being driven to paint it), but a complex brew of memory and sensation that engenders it. That is my true subject matter. It's a momentary, ephemeral thing....

If longing is best described in sooty half-light, Everett's colour palette—greys with greyed-out colour pops—makes sense. She says greyscale conveys gravitas. I can see that. Darker tones certainly impart a nostalgic, cinematic quality. Greyscale suits Everett's subtle content, just as her materials suit her very physical way of working. It also mitigates the nature-painter's problem of green, which can be loud and unmanageable, popping to the foreground like a bad party guest. No one does it very well except Emily Carr, and Everett doesn't need comparison to Canada's most important woman artist who also painted trees (are male artists ever compared to Carr?). Greying out green makes the trees less tree-ish. We focus on other things: the tension between figure and emptiness, and Everett's signature calligraphic scrabbling textures we would maybe miss in living colour.

Although we know her for her drawing, Jane Everett is a painter. While wan colour seeps into some of her work, her new oil-on-canvas pieces feature rich Edgar Degas-hues, periwinkle, ochre, seafoam, adding new dimension and emotional resonance. This is the *Slipstream* series: furtive views through trees influenced by Gordon Smith, she says, painted for a show at Toronto's Ingram Gallery. They are emotionally generous, less literal than her monochromatic works. She isn't a fan of pink, almost as if pink still equals feminine and being relegated to that corner where women artists are paid less and taken less seriously. I am a fan of pink, and I have seen something spectacular in her studio: an oxymoronic *sombre pink*. Everett struggles to *not* grey out the colour here, and maybe this is how she creates what Pantone would surely name *gravitas pink*. These gorgeous, moody colours combine with the unresolved in form and content to further convey that gripping, nameless longing.

She works in series: horse races, heavy equipment, windshield-view highways, songbirds, water, trees. But in a Buddhist way and also literally, her subjects are immaterial. Each could stand in for the next. Her Port Mann series is not about the bridge spanning the Fraser River, but longing, as she sets nature and technology in trembling complementary tension. Her horse race pictures are pictures of power, the pounding rush of nature reined and released. Her bird works are studies of the sublime glimpsed in flitting, twig-lighting moments. Gravitas can have a laciness, it seems. Everett frames nature and technology together, creating tension both visual and ideological. We're never sure which side this Winnipeg native is rooting for, but assume it's nature.

I don't want us to be bigger than nature. Maybe that's a Prairie-girl thing. You grow up small on a prairie, compared to the size of nature around you, especially the sky ... I like that nature overwhelms us, lets us know pretty regularly that we're not in charge....



Verisimilitude is something Everett can do blindfolded. But she's after more than a camera click, and what that is, thematically, she's not really telling. Our hints come from stringing her series together for consistent theme, if not imagery: glimpsed nature, as if transitory, conjured by memory, more wistful than actual, a suggestion of loss, and that unfixed longing. Hers or ours? In presenting our dreamed or nostalgic nature-longings, even in this nonspecific way, she keeps them alive for us. In this way, her art has a conservation effect, intentional or not.

Her work process begins with the concrete and a walk in the woods. For her tree series she wanders through morning-lit trees near her summer studio in the Shuswap, photographing what she *feels-sees* in a visually haptic, multi-sensorial way. Later, she works the experience into drawings and paintings in her studio. The results aren't so much pictures as visual touchstones; distillations of moving through the forest. She presents her specific sense of it, but somehow the works elicit in us our own nostalgia for things glimpsed and gone, regardless of our own experiences among trees. Because, echoing Georgia O'Keeffe, Everett says, "I want to capture the experience of the thing, not the thing itself."

Hasegawa specialized in large screens, each panel separate but integrated into an evanescent, whispered narrative for our subjective contemplation. *Understory*, Everett's current work at the Kelowna Art Gallery, features a similar glimmer of narrative: a handful of slender trees drawn on drafting film panels, diaphanous, just taller than human-sized, grouped together into a small grove. Each suspended from an individual ceiling mount, the anthropomorphic figures are personalized, and somehow totemic. We read them as whispering together, swaying in murmuring accord.

As in Hasegawa, what is most interesting here isn't what Everett is depicting, but what she has taken away. Her scumbling deconstruction of the flawless drawings she could have given us—but didn't—leaves us quiet space, a place for contemplation. Remember, Everett's power tool is *erasure*. She goes after these perfect pictures, extracts from them, scratches their surfaces, slices them, and re-presents them in an altered, amplified context, shattering continuity and our expected readings. This work is fresh. Those vertical slices create sway, yes, but also suggest the multiple ways we can think about trees (and other things and non-things). Leaning in, we find exquisite mark-making passages, where nuance of line, erasure and smudge reward the close-reader, and suggest what the artist might do if unhinged from figuring figures. For me, her works are more interesting the more abstract and unresolved they become. Longing lies in the aching space of what is suggested, unconcluded.

Her body of work has ranged in size from small paintings to large, gallery-swelling installations. Size matters for an artist who wants to make her mark. When Louise Bourgeois gave us a spider, she gave us one the size of a bank building. Everett's works could easily scale. This cluster of trees-that-aren't-trees could grow, without losing meditative power. Give us fifty trees, no, one hundred fifty, hanging together in a big space, murmuring a chorus we could never ignore. Overdo it in your understated, erase-based, evasive way, and let us forest-bathe luxuriously, longingly. You don't have to label it, or pin it down. Keep us in the delicious, unfixed longing for something we can't name. But give us more.

Selected biography

Jane Everett

Education

B.F.A., 1979, Queen's University

Selected Exhibitions

(solo unless otherwise noted)

- 2019 *Slipstream*, Ingram Gallery, Toronto, ON
Understory, Kelowna Art Gallery, Kelowna, BC
- 2018 *Almost Home*, Arte funktional, Kelowna, BC
Running with the Ball, group show, Headbones Gallery, Vernon, BC
- 2017 *Road Less Travelled*, Bugera Matheson Gallery, Edmonton, AB
Summer Series X, group show, Ingram Gallery, Toronto, ON
The Big Picture, group show, Kelowna Art Gallery, Kelowna, BC
Naturally Inspired: Memory, Meaning & Courage, Jane Everett, Ann Kipling & Shirley Brown, Galerie Buhler Gallery, Winnipeg, MB
Subject Matters II, group show, Ingram Gallery, Toronto, ON
- 2016 *Journeying*, group show, Arte funktional, Kelowna, BC
Drawing from Life, Kelowna Art Gallery, Kelowna, BC
Epp + Everett, ARTE funktional, Kelowna, BC
Lake of Tears, Rotary Centre for the Arts, Kelowna, BC
- 2015 *Raft*, Kelowna Art Gallery, Kelowna, BC
Port Mann, The Reach Gallery/ Museum, Abbotsford, BC
Canopy, Bugera Matheson Gallery, Edmonton, AB
Gone, Anne Simpson & Jane Everett, Carnegie Gallery, Dundas, ON
- 2014 *A Sense of Place*, Tantalus Vineyards, Kelowna, BC
Gone, Anne Simpson & Jane Everett, Lake Country Art Gallery, Lake Country, BC
- 2013 *Landings*, Bugera Matheson Gallery, Edmonton, AB
- 2012 *Balance*, Granville Fine Art, Vancouver, BC
- 2011 *New Faces New Work*, Virginia Christopher Fine Art, Calgary, AB
Public Art, City of Kelowna, Leon Ave. Street Art Project, permanent installation, Kelowna, BC
- 2010 *Constructions of Identity*, group exhibition, Kelowna Art Gallery, Kelowna, BC
Boreal, Agnes Bugera Gallery, Edmonton, AB
Drawing Aspects, group exhibition, Vancouver Drawn Festival, Granville Fine Art, Vancouver, BC
Kelowna Collects, group exhibition, Kelowna Art Gallery, Kelowna, BC
Under the Bridge, Kelowna Art Gallery Airport Satellite, Kelowna, BC
- 2009 *Watermark*, Vernon Art Gallery, Vernon, BC
Alte Musik, Bilton Centre for Contemporary Art, Red Deer, AB

- 2008 *Acqua Alta*, Agnes Bugera Gallery, Edmonton, AB
- 2007 *Waterscapes*, Atelier Gallery, Vancouver, BC
Equus caballus, The Kelowna Museum, Kelowna, BC
- 2006 *C for Water*, The Art Ark, Kelowna, BC
- 2005 *Six Furlongs*, The Art Ark, Kelowna, BC
- 2004 *Wassermusik*, Herringer Kiss Gallery, Calgary, AB
Drawings, group exhibition, The Art Ark, Kelowna, BC
Landscape & Memory: Six Okanagan Artists, group exhibition, Gallery of the South Okanagan, Penticton, BC
- 2003 *Landscape & Memory; Six Okanagan Artists*, group exhibition, The Triangle Gallery, Calgary, AB
Waterborne, The Ark Gallery, Kelowna, BC
- 2002 *Flowing North*, The Ark Gallery, Kelowna, BC
- 2001 *The Land*, group exhibition, The Ark Gallery, Kelowna, BC
- 1998 *Faces in the Hall*, Kelowna Art Gallery, Kelowna, BC
- 1997 *Seven Figure Painters*, group exhibition, Richmond Art Gallery, Richmond, BC
- 1994 *Still Lives*, Myxdmedia, Calgary, AB
- 1993 *We Say it is a Pipe and It's Our Show*, Kelowna Art Gallery, Kelowna, BC
- 1992 *Aquariums*, Okanagan Artists Alternative Gallery, Kelowna, BC
St. Francis Xavier University Art Gallery, Antigonish, NS

Catalogues

- Visual Celebrations II*, Patricia Bovey, FRSA and Leona Herzog
- Drawing from Life*, Liz Wylie (curator), Kelowna Art Gallery
- Jane Everett & Anne Simpson: Gone*, Katie Brennan (curator), Lake Country Art Gallery
- Constructions of Identity*, 2010, Liz Wylie (curator) Kelowna Art Gallery
- Jane Everett: Watermark*, 2009, Lubos Culen (curator) Vernon Public Art Gallery
- Equus caballus: Equine Works by Jane Everett*, 2007, Gayle Liman (curator), The Kelowna Museum
- Landscape & Memory: Six Okanagan Artists*, 2003, The Triangle Gallery

Collections

- Galerie Buhler Gallery, Winnipeg, MB
- The Delta Grand, Kelowna, BC
- The Reach Gallery Museum, Abbotsford, BC
- Colart Collection, Montreal, QC
- ATCO Gas, Edmonton, AB
- University of British Columbia Okanagan, Kelowna, BC
- Vernon Public Art Gallery, Vernon, BC
- Kelowna Art Gallery, Kelowna, BC
- Kelowna General Hospital (Library), Kelowna, BC
- Talisman Energy, Calgary, AB
- Cancercare Centre, Kelowna, BC
- Royal Canadian Securities, Winnipeg, MB
- Investors Group, Winnipeg, MB

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Jane Everett

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