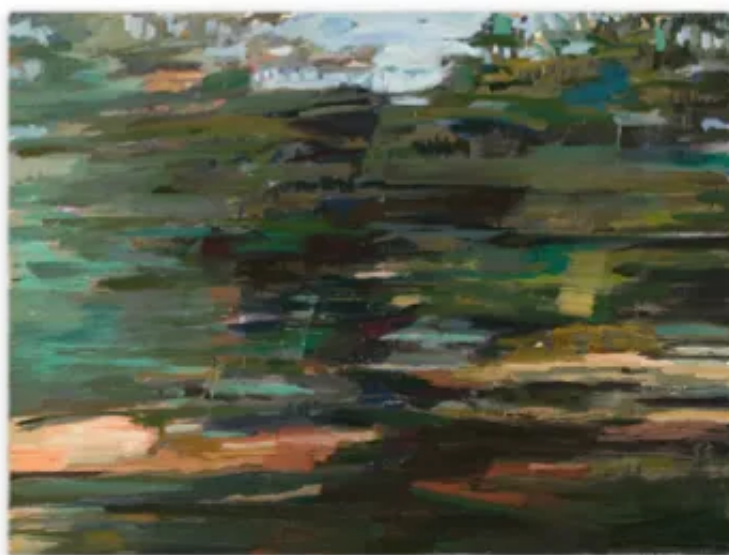


October 31, 2024 : Issue #79



LAWRENCE WESCHLER

OCT 31, 2024



WONDERCABINET : Lawrence Weschler's Fortnightly Compendium of the Miscellaneous Diverse

WELCOME

Some thoughts and resonances, this dread-filled moment, on the eve, no matter of a new world—by way of a visit with Canadian landscape artist Monica Tap.

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The Main Event

SOME THOUGHTS (AND RESONANCES) ON T EVE, NO MATTER WHAT, OF A NEW WORLD

Aye, what can possibly be added regarding the days ahead, so much too much verbiage already been spilt (can we please if nothing else resolve to find some way to have short focused campaign seasons instead of these marathon slogs that only seem to bloat political comment- and consult-ariats and television revenue streams, to the detriment of everything else in the body politic?) For my own part I found a way in New York to endorse Harris/Walz while still registering my almost overriding Gaza-protest by doing so on the Working Families line rather than that of the Democratic party, I wonder if others will be doing likewise and whether it will matter. (Do check out [Bernie Sanders's sage comments](#) specifically aimed at those who would sit out this election on account of Gaza, however it will see what we will see, and moan and groan accordingly, though even that may not be over, who knows how long it will take to determine any sort of solid outcome? Aye, as it is and aye.

Meanwhile, there's this. Bear with me. For several decades now, ever since I first encountered her work during an overlapping stay at the Banff Centre back in 2005, I've enjoyed following the evolving production of the always surprising, reliably vivifying Canadian landscape artist [Monica Tap](#). For example, a series of vantages she perpetrated back in 2007, based on a view out the side window of speeding cars



“One-second Hudson, Numbers 4 & 5” (2007)



“One-second Hudson, Number 7 & 9” (2007)

(for more of which [see here](#)), or else a more recent series, from the late 2010s, in which I dug up vintage landscape art auction catalogs and collaged the results as the basis for a set of subsequent paintings, as here



“Dragonfly” & “Sidestream” (2018)

and for more of which [see here](#). I love the way they play with the prior cannon (and I appreciate that even more if I had more of a sense of the rich history of Canadian landscape painting), and also the way they play with time and memory across the canvas (how for example the reflections in the water don’t actually align with the world above them, a world of painting, whyever need they?).

ANYWAY. I mention all this because I got a letter from Ms. Tap the other day, as follows:

Hi Ren!

Years ago, you introduced me to W.S. Merwin’s poetry and then back in 2011 you provided an introduction that made possible a visit to his [Palm Conservatory on Maui island](#). I’m sure I told you how star-struck I was to meet him, not to mention how bowled over when he gave me a copy of *Unchopping a Tree* and signed it too.

(Veterans of this Cabinet may recall how seminal that particular prose poem has been and for that matter for other artists I’ve commended it to—see the last half of [Issue 4](#) for the poem in its entirety and the uses to which Maya Lin, for example, put it.) But I

Monica's note:

I've often returned to that prose poem and recommended it more often than I remember to students and friends.

This past year it took on extra significance to me. I won't get into the whole story now, but suffice to say that the current provincial government here in Ontario is planning to sell off or more accurately enter into a 95-year lease with, an Austrian outfit intent on building a "wellness centre" atop the West Island of Ontario, a shoreline gem of modernist landscape architecture that had matured into a glorious forest ecosystem supporting almost 200 species of birds and count other creatures; an island one could reach via footbridge that was fully accessible with a protected beach and the best sunset views in the city...

(For more on which, see [here](#).)

The worst part of the deal? To make room for this "wellness centre," they razed the island flat, clearing over 850 trees under cover of darkness (they started work on October 3rd) and obliterating a beloved public park and ecological jewel.

The paintings in a new exhibition of mine paralleled many art-based communications I was involved with over the past year, several around the now seemingly defeated effort to save that island reserve.

Before and after October 3rd photos from the kayak vantage of Francesca Bouaoun.

The exhibition takes its title, as you've no doubt already guessed, from the l of Merwin's poem. Likewise, every painting in the show quotes a word or p from that text.

The show opens tomorrow and will be up through mid-November.

I hope this finds you fully recovered from your own donut hole ordeal! ([My, tale that was!](#))

xo Monica

From the [MKG Gallery in Toronto](#)'s own entry on their current show:

In the poem “Unchopping a Tree,” American poet W.S. Merwin walks us through the steps necessary to accomplish the impossible: reconstruct a felled tree. Matter-of-fact instructions and detailed play-by-play recounting serve to gently remind us of nature’s complexity and generosity.

Start with the leaves, the small twigs, and the nests that have been shaken, ripped broken off by the fall.

Monica Tap’s practice celebrates the natural world in all its life and vigor. She begins by harvesting images from decommissioned auction catalogs—depicting the natural world. From these fragments new collaged compositions are built and become the source for the paintings. The first act can be understood as deconstruction, literally tearing the canon [CHANGED FROM CANNON] into pieces. The second act is reassembly, integrating multiple viewpoints into a new form. Then, reanimation through the act of painting.

With spider’s webs you must simply do the best you can.

The works in this exhibition expand Tap’s exploration of living systems to contemplate loss and the possibility of loss. In some paintings, small figures witness to the enormity of the task of undoing the destruction facing us today.

Practice, practice. Put your hope in that.

As observed by poet Hannah Fries, “Which is to say, there’s hope and beauty in the act itself—the act of restoration, of attending to something with such precision. You do what you can, one piece at a time. Or, as Merwin concludes:

Everything is going to have to be put back.

And some images:

“Start with the leaves” & “Hope for sun”

“Like something dreamed” & “Everything will have to be put back”

Anyway, as I say, I mention all of this because, as many of you will already have sense seems to rhyme with our own current political impasse. No matter how events play out next several months, we too are all going to need to engage in an epic labor of reconstruction. How have we as a country come to this pass—a situation in which at least half of the country has found itself flirting with fascism—and no matter who wins, how are we going to cope with it? Not put everything back so much as reconceive things from the very roots. And we have much time.

To quote the undying benediction of [another essential master](#),

The world only spins forward. We will be citizens. The time has come...
You are fabulous creatures, each and every one. And I bless you: More Life!
The Great Work Begins.

* * *

ANIMAL MITCHELL REPRISE

Cartoons by David Stanford, from the [Animal Mitchell archive](#)

animalmitchellpublications@gmail.com

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your hesitancies?

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