

has produced in the last half of the twentieth century. This book is both a valuable research tool and an important stepping-stone towards esta-

blishing the full breadth of Roy Kiyooka's contribution to Canadian culture.

### *Sights of Resistance: Approaches to Canadian Visual Culture*

Robert J. Belton

Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2001. 398 pp. \$59.95 hardcover with interactive CD-ROM and website <[www.uofcpress.com/Sights/](http://www.uofcpress.com/Sights/)>.

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**B**ELTON'S BOOK/CD is a significant step forward in Canadian art history and pedagogy. Like his predecessors (Russell Harper [1966], Barry Lord [1974], William Withrow [1972], Paul Duval [1972], Douglas Fetherling [1987], and Gerald McMaster [1992], to name only a few), he provides a sumptuously illustrated critical overview. Unlike them, he covers a range of art from fine to commercial, folk, Native, and queer; architecture good and bad, colonial and postmodern; photography, performance, and media (omitting only film and broadcast television). Unlike them, he claims no canonical status for his choices and allows the reader/student access to a diversity of competing critical theories besides his own. The lavish illustrations (almost 100 in the colour section, indicated by a palette icon beside the text or monochrome reproduction) are juxtaposed with italicized quotations from contemporaries of the artists as well as later theorists and Belton's own comments, which are based on decades of teaching and are intended to provoke critical thought rather than to

invoke closure. The CD contains the whole book in hypertext, allowing instant cross-reference to pictures, text, and any part of the scholarly apparatus as well as to online discussions at <http://www.uofcpress.com/Sights>. This alone is a significant achievement, but there is more.

Structurally, *Sights of Resistance* contains Belton's introduction to visual poetics, explaining his pedagogical principles in exercises that help one to discern form, content, and context online at his website <http://www.arts.ouc.bc.ca/fiar/hndbkhom.html>, followed by a historical survey of Canadian visual culture, its chronology from 5000 BC to 2000 AD, and a hundred case studies with full scholarly apparatus.

In one of them, Shelley Niro's 1962 photograph "Rebel," her fortyish Mohawk matron poses (mock-odalisque) on the trunk of a Nash. Belton comments that "'Rebel' also operates as a verb, deriving from the Latin word meaning 'renew the war.' The injunction opens a site of 'resistance' ... The viewer is solicited, in effect, to make war on white sexist oppression" (296). Our White-man response to

this lovely joke from the rez may be puzzlement – is this Art? Jane Gallop’s theory of the “erotics of engagement” (suggests Belton) characterizes our culture-bound response as “a search for meaning driven by the fear of castration – that is, the critic’s powerlessness [against the full humanity of the aware subject]” (296). He aims this Lacanian critique lightly, but deftly, at conventional ways of seeing. A Mohawk would already know that woman’s assent must never be taken for granted because in sex, peace, and war she has the final say. No odalisque this, subject to the masculine gaze.

The selections and interpretations in *Sights of Resistance* seek to make you aware of cultural blind spots: regional, ethnic, colonial or historicist, class- or gender-based. Through juxtaposition of images, opposition of theories, deconstruction of power positions, Belton’s approach(es) force(s) readers to examine their own position(s), as well as the cultural clues in the work itself, in order to construct new questions and to create a network of possible meanings. This is very fine pedagogy.

Each of the 100 works selected is accompanied by its provenance, a glossary of critical theory, footnotes, and bibliography. Controversy in social history and aesthetics is emphasized, not reduced to a univocal judgment. *Sights* is thus a model of critical inquiry, intercultural comparison, and discovery. What is most exciting is that the CD hypertext (illustrations, glossary, notes, and bibliography) allows computer-literate students to make their own links and to have their own online discussions, thus constituting an electronic common room limited in neither time nor space.

The glossary for “Rebel” alone cites sixteen theoretical terms, ranging from “Althusserian” to “scopophilia” (found

on the CD or website), while the bibliography points to fourteen different studies, including McMaster’s *Indigena*, Edward Said, and Alfred Young Man (in the printed version as well as the CD). The entire hypertext glossary may be viewed either at *Sights*’s website, or in Belton’s ongoing *Words of Art* at <http://www.ouc.bc.ca/fiar/glossary/gloshome.html>.

*Sights*’s regional coverage avoids the usual aporia. Selections include the North, Atlantic, Ontario, Quebec, and the West. British Columbian readers will find, among other things, a 3,600-year-old Sechelt stone sculpture of astonishing power and ambiguity (20, 86, 114-5), clues to pre-Columbian sacred exchanges between Aboriginal cultures in the symbols on a Naskapi skin (138, 118-9), a Micmac cradle (142, 176-7), and Frances Hopkin’s 1869 painting of her voyageur canoe (143, 178-9). You are invited to look for meanings in a CPR Banff poster (152, 230-1), an Ogoopogo apple box (155, 242-3), the snapshot of a Vancouver boatperson (“Tran duc Van” 166, 312-3), or the Ismaili mosque in Burnaby (164, 298-9).

*Sights of Resistance* is particularly rich in invitations to make your own comparisons between works – inter-regional, intercultural, and over time. For instance, the Mohawk “Rebel” of 1982 may be compared with Francis Lennie’s 1934 mountain-woman sculpture “Repose” and Harold Kells’s 1935 semi-porn art deco “Grecian Nocturne” (237). It points to clues such as the absence of real women and Aboriginals in Napoleon Bourassa’s 1904-12 “Apotheose de Christophe Colombe” – blind spots that have particular importance in the Québécois nationalist *survivance* ideology of that period but that persist today in Euro-American high culture at large.