both contributes to and reinforces the 'art smog' aspect of the show. Just as in La nuit américaine, the exhibition feeds on its own production process. Wherever you look, the smog seems never to dissipate. This makes it difficult for viewers to follow a linear path. What emerges, instead, is a subjective linearity, constructed post-viewing by each visitor; a personal itinerary through uncharted waters.


Jean-François Bélisle is an art historian who lives in Montreal.

VISUAL ART

Mary Kavanagh
Anne Dymond

"You're being very, very serious with me... You're not really responding to all of my attentions," remonstrates artist Mary Kavanagh to a cast bronze bust of Georgia O'Keeffe made in 1967 by Una Hanbury. With video, photographs and handfuls of earth, Kavanagh's installation Seeking Georgia explores the cultural residue of O'Keeffe's New Mexican landscapes, which are inevitably filtered through the powerful O'Keeffe industry. The intersection of academic, museological, commercial and tourist practices, all gender inflected, produces a rich field of inquiry that Kavanagh mines with acuity and deadpan humour. The artist's meticulous, almost compulsive, record of her pilgrimage to O'Keeffe's painting sites manages a delicate balance: it is at once a powerful critique of disciplinary paradigms that authenticate the art world and a genuine tribute to a feminist pioneer.

Dominated by a grid of 24 square plinths, each containing handfuls of earth, Kavanagh's installation invokes the authority of museum display techniques. From a distance, the soil resembles a scientific collection of earth pigments: burnt sienna, burnt umber, raw umber. Aesthetically in their glass cases, each collection becomes an object of visual interest, yet the included debris—broken glass, twigs and rocks—disrupts any ideal of purity that might have been expected. The realization dawns that sites, reproductions of O'Keeffe's paintings linked to the sites and academic documentation of each painting's various titles in supposedly authoritative texts. The result is an obsessive record of places, paintings and texts that lays bare the impossibility of understanding O'Keeffe's works outside the cult of personality.

The wall texts parody the kind of scholarship began almost a century ago when Picasso's dealer, D.H. Kahnweiler, photographed Cubist landscape sites to lend realist credence to Cubist abstraction. The comparison of photograph to painting can be illuminating, but too often it reduces landscape painting to a transcription of the visible. It can deaden any broader inquiries.

Mary Kavanagh's Seeking Georgia exhibited at the Southern Alberta Art Gallery in Lethbridge, Alberta, from January 22 to March 5, 2006.

Anne Dymond teaches art history and museum studies at the University of Lethbridge.

VISUAL ART

Sandra Meigs
Wendy Welch

Painting as a visual manifestation of language is emphatically stated in Sandra Meigs's series "Mary," on exhibit at Deluge Contemporary Art in Victoria, British Columbia. The inspiration for these 13 paintings came from a Nick Cave song, "Sad Waters." With images from Cave's lyrics as a point of departure, an evocative and mysterious narrative is developed. While Meigs's translation is literary, it is not literal: the narrative here is both specific (coming from particular sources)