

## Rose Kallal

"Kallal takes us to a mysteriously sinister and yet profoundly beautiful view of our contemporary post-industrialist landscape compelling us to question our relationship to the natural world."

Displaying lushly coloured visceral forms against surfaces so glossy that they seem wet, Rose Kallal's recent photographs create a provocative sense of organic ambiguity, fascination and dread. They suggest a dynamic polymorphous body, imagining sensuously folded flesh in saturated hues of glistening red and yellow. Though their association with the body is immediate, they are less likely to evoke discrete bodily parts, than spectacular landscapes of flesh against fantastical coloured skies. Their soft-focus ambiguity deliberately adds to the fascination of their seductive and repulsive tensions - appearing simultaneously familiar, yet disturbingly strange.

Though fully photographic in their detail, the images seem to document shifting, intangible phenomena which exist beyond the purview of western rationalism. Given its patriarchal belief in the stable and quantifiable identity of things, western society has historically imagined that through technology, it will achieve eventual mastery of the material environment. Nearing the end of the century, this utopian ideal appears both horrible and naively heroic: at best, quaint and anachronistic, at worse, brutally destructive and apocalyptic. Through several series of earlier works, Kallal has represented the concomitant anxieties associated with the rapid transformations of science and technology specific to modernist culture. In her previous pin-hole camera series, she intentionally uses an anachronistic representational technology to document views of an equally archaic anticipation of the future - the modernist metropolis. Her red tinged images of the 1939 World's Fair grounds in contemporary decay, and other depopulated vistas of decrepit urban wasteland, seem to envision a post-technological time after society's apocalyptic annihilation.

In the series of oil paintings which followed, Kallal presented a nostalgic imagery of extraterrestrial landscapes and radiolarians - microscopic organisms shaped like early satellites. Referencing 1950s imagery, she again evoked the failed ideal of an antique future: one in which space-age technology held the transcendent promise of an escape from the problems of earthly existence, but delivered instead; only barren uninhabitable lunar landscapes.

Kallal's new photographs return to the body, only to find that there is no idealised solace to be found there is in her earlier photographs, these works employ technology as an agency of hallucinatory distortion, here truthfully revealing the body as an amoral site encompassing both bliss and danger. The liquidity and glistening wetness of their surfaces plays on a patriarchally trained revulsion at such lubrication. This slickness-

allows for swift critical movement, offering up a series of slippery slopes which . seem to dissolve just as they are about to be encountered. Like the pleasures and pains of physical experience - these mutations elude the stable closure of singular classification, directing attention instead to the endless thrill of plural and transformational identities.

- Sharon Brooks

#### Biography:

Rose Kallal was born in Edmonton Alberta in 1965. She studied at the Ontario College of Art in Toronto and at the off campus programme in New York City. Solo exhibitions include YYZ Artist's Outlet, Toronto (1992) and Willoughby Sharp Gallery, New York (1989).

Kallal's photographs have been published in *The Culture of Nature. North American Landscape from Disney to the Exxon Valdez* (1992) by Alex Wilson and *Public VI: Violence* (1992).

#### **"grapes, ghouls, ghosts and green moonlight" (1999): a curatorial essay**

**grapes, ghouls, ghosts and green moonlight** is an essay that accompanied a show of landscape photographs by Rose Kallal and Normand Rajotte that I co-curated with Marsha Wineman. The show, *Terra Incognita*, was at Gallery TPW in Toronto from June 12 to July 10, 1999. My 1500-word essay lives on (with its companion, **terra incognita**, by Marsha), in the brochure created to accompany the show.

The title of the show and of my essay derives from a poem by D.H. Lawrence.

(Gallery TPW is the exhibition space of Toronto Photographers Workshop, an artist-run centre in Toronto, Canada. From 1995 to 2000, I served as a TPW board member, assisting with programming, operations, and governance.)

The challenge here was one of articulation: how to communicate what I found compelling and mutually reinforcing about these two photographers' works. That was, in part, their intuitive working processes, but more profoundly, the similar kinds of experiences that each offers a viewer. These experiences are body-felt and emotion-based: inchoate, pre-verbal. Putting those into clear, simple words that might enhance a gallery visitor's experiences or reminiscences of looking, that was my writer's goal.

When describing their image-making, both Rose Kallal and Normand Rajotte indicate that they leave home without knowing the specific content they're looking for. These artists move expectantly through their turf -- Rajotte the back country, Kallal the back streets -- with senses open, scanning, alert. The similar quests on which they embark as they leave their homes, photo gear at the ready, are not simply for the pleasing image. Their quests are for the pleasing image that may serve as portal to an unknown world. The next few paragraphs will explore three means by which Kallal and Rajotte move us from the known world -- after all, their medium of photography relies on an actual external -- to terra incognita.