Danica Jojich
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Looking Back, Looking Forward: Canadian Women Artists with Eastern European Connections and Postmodern Remembering

ABSTRACT/RESUMÉ:

This inquiry considers the works of eight contemporary Canadian women artists of European origin whose explorations have focused mainly on eastern Europe, shaped by the Second World War and its aftermath to the present. Following the forms of postmodern remembering defined by Cheetham and Hutcheon (1991) in considering recent Canadian art, this study also emphasizes a women's reading of history and geography in how these artists react to the art of the past, reconstruct the subject and examine society. The specific countries and artists are: Latvia for Inese Birstins and Vita Plume, Hungary for Caroline Dukes and Yvonne Singer, Ukraine for Natalka Husar, Slovenia for Miriam Fabijan, Serbia for Danica Jojich and Germany and Austria, in its socio-historical connections to eastern Europe, for Wendy Oberlander.

Cette recherche étudie les oeuvres de huit artistes canadiennes contemporaines d'origine européenne dont les travaux sont principalement centrés sur l'Europe de l'Est, façonnée par la Seconde Guerre mondiale et la période qui l'a suivie jusqu'à nos jours. Selon les formes de la souvenance postmoderne définies par Cheetam et Hutcheon (1991) dans l'analyse de l'art canadien moderne, cette étude met aussi l'accent sur la lecture féminine de l'histoire et de la géographie dans la manière dont ces artistes réagissent à l'art du passé, reconstruisent le sujet et observent la société. Les artistes et les pays dont il est question sont : la Lettonie pour Iness Birstins et Vita Plume, la Hongrie pour Caroline Dukes et Yvonne Singer, l'Ukraine pour Natalka Husar, la Slovénie pour Miriam Fabijan, la Serbie pour Danica Jojich et l'Allemagne et l'Autriche, dans leurs liens socio-historiques avec l'Europe de l'Est, pour Wendy Oberlander.

In *Remembering Postmodernism: Trends in Recent Canadian Art,* Cheetham and Hutcheon (1991, ix) examine manifestations of Canadian postmodernism of the past twenty-five years as "reactions to art's history, the construction of the subject and the social uses of memory." Interweaving themes of memory and the postmodern, they show how visual, mainly non-verbal memories and recollections have been manipulated and re-created along pathways of remembering and forgetting that project the present and hopes of the future through reconstructions of the past. Within the framework that Cheetham and Hutcheon provide, this inquiry considers some recent works by eight Canadian women artists with eastern European connections who have focused on the Second World War and its aftermath.[1]

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99. Glenbow Archives, Lillian Turner Fonds, M8244, file "1907," Lillian Turner to Mother and all, 3 March 1907.

100. See Paul Voisey (ed.), *A Preacher's Frontier: The Castor, Alberta Letters of Rev. Martin W. Holdom, 1909-1912* (Calgary, 1996), for a classic example of the pretensions held by Castor, Alberta in its early years.

101. 17 Dec. 1906.

102. 31 Jan. 1907.

103. For example, in early February 1907 the Canadian government received an appeal for enough money for bread and seed from a group of destitute Mennonites who had settled in the Star City, Saskatchewan area the previous summer but because of the condition of the roads arrived too late to put in a crop. Immigration authorities translated the request but there is no evidence that any action was taken. RG 76, Vol. 416, file 602204, part 2, Rev. G.P. Neufeld to "our honourable Government, Ottawa," 3 Feb. 1907.

104. Just after the 16 November 1906 storm which officially began the winter, the Mounties received a complaint from new homesteader Malcolm Cole that if he could not get any fuel he and his family would perish. The Officer Commanding C Division, Battleford, J.A. MacGibbon wrote Immigration "I am afraid that before spring we will have numerous cases of this kind, as so many of the new homesteaders taken this year are so far away from fuel of any kind." NAC, RG 18, Vol. 2767, MacGibbon to Commissioner, Regina, 19 Nov. 1906.

105. NAC, RG 18, Vol. 1594, file No. 49, pt. 2, (RCMP 1907), Greenlay to O.C. Regina, 14 Feb. 1907.

The emphasis of this study is on women's approaches to postmodern remembering. In the social and frequently political possibilities of the postmodern uses of memory, female gender is a compelling vehicle for criticizing history and perceptions and relations of the self to the world. Time and history are to be configured differently in what Kristeva (1981) refers to as a woman's probing of "women's time." The corporeal particulars of the body, female psychology and the sexuality of women in its symbolic and metaphorical incarnations are forms into which ideas of society can reside. Navigating through the geographical spaces of eastern Europe, these women artists of hyphenated Canadian consciousness have explored memories that relate to the cultural, political and intellectual upheavals of the Second World War period into the present day. For Inese Birstins and Vita Plume, the starting place is Latvia, for Caroline Dukes and Yvonne Singer, Hungary, for Natalka Husar, Ukraine, Slovenia for Miriam Fabijan, Serbia for Danica Jojich and, for Wendy Oberlander, Austria and Germany in relation to eastern Europe.

Art's Past

Cheetham and Hutcheon (1991:11) explain that through the "specifics of art-historical referencing" the postmodernist artist illuminates the memory of art's past, construing and re-construing the past and continually reconsidering the status of what we regard as historical. An intentional association with art citations from the past is not a "pastiche" of historical allusions and simulations because "for the postmodern mnemonist, there is no real history to retrieve and the present cannot therefore be a pastiche of the past" (Cheetham and Hutcheon, 1991:18-19). Rather, because of interceding circumstances and events, we always in certain ways understand more about the past than that past did in its own time. Even in the enclosed realm of art-historical citation, memory is profuse and it operates historically, personally and politically, as it is reconfigured through art.

Inese Birstins

Inese Birstins, born in Latvia, immigrated to Canada in 1969 after twenty years in Australia. Returning to her Latvian roots, Birstins plays with the links between the origins of cloth and her own origins, revering a textile art that memorializes the Latvian woman, but also expressing a freedom with and from her past and inheritance. As a child, she says: "I did the customary cross-stitched cushions as a child ... I also participated in Latvian folk dancing, wearing Latvian folk dress and jewellery" (Birstins, 1998). Producing life-sized figures out of layers of felt, works like *Fragments* (1982-83) (fig. 1) reflect her fascination with the processes of metamorphosis. Her felted bodies, arrested in the semi-conscious state prior to sleep, suggest the time when an individual's consciousness is most susceptible to change. The felt skin of these figures is symbolic of what she considers the psychological barrier and protective covering that people erect to shield themselves, yet which ultimately discourages true communication and real human connections.

For Birstins, the redefinition of subjectivity begins with a new construct of materialism, one that extends the concept of "corporeal materiality" by stressing the corporeal and also sexually different form of the subject (Braidotti, 1994:3). The body, or rather the embodiment of the subject, is neither a biological nor a sociological entity but rather a confluence of the physical, the psychological, the

symbolic and the sociological. Manipulating the supple, downy felt to imply both skin and covering, and suspending the felt bodies in isolated adjacency, they speak about temporary relationships rather than pre-given forms, of hesitant identifications and tentative affiliations.

Birstins's artistic journey was motivated by a sequence of art historical linkages to eastern Europe, starting in the 1970s with a "patterning period" based on traditional textiles that she worked at "systematically to understand it, control it, and get it out of my system" (Birstins, 1998). In the early 1970s Birstins sojourned to Poland for three weeks, went to museums, and visited the studios of textile artists. She was impressed that there was serious contemporary work being done, including abstraction and political statements, since social realism was still the officially sanctioned norm. At around the same time she met the Polish artist Magdalena Abakanowicz with whom "there was a certain kind of recognition, a common source of some kind an implied permission to express an emotional base (versus a more intellectual and analytical base, more common in North America at the time)" (Birstins, 1998). In a process akin to dreaming, *Fragments* speaks of the collapse and nonfixity of art historical boundaries that can metamorphosize, allowing for the play of a personally emotive visual language.

Vita Plume

Vita Plume was born in Montreal, a generation after Birstins, soon after her parents left Latvia following the Second World War and came to Canada from England in 1954. In contrast to Birstins, where the convergence of art referencing and postmodernism is implicitly psychological, Plume has used her art to examine the social and political ramifications of the massive post-Second World War Latvian emigration to the West and the forced Soviet occupation of Latvia. Concerned with the sensations of displacement and duality that are a part of living two cultures simultaneously, Plume (the first in her family to do so) has returned to Latvia on numerous occasions, in 1988 with a brief two-week visit, in 1989 for a three-month stay at a Fibres Symposium, and in 1992 and 1997 for exhibitions of her work there. In attempting to express the transformations of Latvian culture as she has experienced them, Plume's textile work is informed by traditional Latvian language, techniques and symbols, yet she refuses to adhere to strict traditional dictations on colour and pattern. She insists that "change is necessary and vital as a sign that culture is alive" (Plume, 1998). Often combining these shirts and belts with the disturbing contrast of barbed wire and other metal, Plume comments on this darker side of cultural preservation, on culture as a belt or constricting device. She challenges the notion of people dancing in traditional costume and singing their cultures in a Canadian multicultural mosaic, happy within the ideal picture Canada projects as a haven safe from the harms that drove these people from their countries of origin. Locating and expressing the pain, trauma, fear and exclusion that she felt through her own and her family's encounters, she presents her real experience of being Latvian as far from this happy picture.

Concurrently, Plume takes aim at the cultural oppression that has been particularly present in the history of Latvia and other eastern European countries. As she puts it, "although I access historically correct techniques, colours and patterns, I distort, destroy and despoil these aspects to accentuate the political and social dilemmas that Latvians the world over face" (Plume, 1989). The installation, *Rescuing the Fragment*

from Triviality (1991-92), consists of a work titled *Object of Ethnicity* (fig. 2). Hundreds of straight pins pierce a Latvian shirt imprinted with texts by Barbara Kirshenblat-Gimblett, which critique the trivializing notions of ethnicity and ethnography that can occur in the exhibiting of so-called cultural ethnographies. Juxtaposed to this piece, *Neither Here Nor There* has barbed wire shirts facing each other across a border line, expressing the emotions that Plume felt during her trip to Latvia last spring: "Though the wall may seem to come down, the traces of that border are not so easily erased" (Plume, 1998). With long awaited independence from the Soviet Union now a reality, Plume sees many issues being raised that were latent or repressed for almost fifty years and how attempts to settle these are replete with complications further splitting individuals and families. Positioning herself as a postmodern nomad, both here and there but neither here nor there at the same time (Braidotti 1994, 37), Plume's works act as tracings of relationships with powerful geographical, historical, and political connotations through new configurations of traditional Latvian women's fibre art.

Remembering the Subject

The postmodern focus on subjecthood in the visual arts, Cheetham and Hutcheon (1991, 41-42) explain, is a fragmentary, provisional "impossible self" immersed in the past and its partial memories, reinterpreted within the contextual specifics of the present and future. Radically rejecting essentialism, the postmodern subject, "women," is therefore not a "monolithic essence defined once and for all" but rather the locale of multiple, complicated and possibly contesting experiences, with overlayers such as class, race, religion, age, geography and others (Braidotti, 1994:3). In a subjectivity often accentuated with an almost metaphysical belief in art's therapeutic potential (Cheetham and Hutcheon, 1991:53-54), personally meaningful subjects and objects are arranged visually, prompting personal memories and correlations that at least temporarily converge into individual narratives.

Caroline Dukes

Caroline's Dukes's *Remember . . . Relate . . . Retell* (1996) is an intensely personal, multi-media installation of works on paper, photographs, text, ready-made objects, video projection and audio tapes that recounts Dukes's efforts at memory recovery through a regression type hypnosis. Realizing that there were no more ways of knowing about her past after her mother died in 1988, she weaves a story of her own childhood and connections to her father, who died when Dukes was four years old, against the cultural and political history of living as a Jew in Second World War Hungary. Dukes recaptures her child self by means of a few family photographs and artifacts, archaeological relics of a forgotten past, that she retrieves, like edited fragments of the invisibly visible. *"My father really wanted a son, my name was to have been Erin"* she writes on an enlarged black and white photograph of herself as a child reaching for a coloured toy, transposed onto a charcoal sketch of a parlour with glimpses of Old World household objects.

In the simple figural gestures of photo-portraits captured by the camera, Dukes contrasts the composed, tranquil and ordinary with discomfiting memories. Reminiscent of Freud's (1919) notion of the uncanny, familiar childhood events that have been repressed, like "father wanted to buy cigarettes; it was Sunday morning and we

walked beside," become shadowed illuminations of Dukes as a little girl, reaching again and again in defamiliarized confrontations whose repetition has an unsettling effect. Probing her father's death, Dukes also induces memories of traumas she experienced under Nazi siege and recollections of those who perished in the Holocaust. A smiling portrait of her mother with a charm around her neck (fig. 3) is accompanied by this text: "And they made us march to an undisclosed destination in a group of hundreds of people. Mother had an amulet which hung from a small chain around her neck. She said we will take each a pill from it if something horrible happens to us."

Analogous to Dukes's quest for subjecthood are the modes of communication routinely distinguished in psychoanalytic therapy (Fischer 1986). The first is Dukes's narrative, in how her story assumes a cognitive, rational and conscious sequence. The second is her memory, which translates dreams into linear, text-like verbalizations. The third is a conflation of these first two conveyors, articulated visually as fragmentary transferences and repetitions that pattern a sense of self shaped elsewhere, in Hungary, by childhood, death and mourning. Along this same trajectory, in her recent series *Cities* (1998), she reconfigures a self in places defined by an inheritance of loss, death and displacement. Superimposing the personal onto geographical space, she bears witness to the tragic destruction and dislocation of the centuries in Budapest, Berlin and Jerusalem (Majzels, 1998).

Yvonne Singer

Caroline Dukes was a young woman in her twenties when the Nazis occupied Hungary and she lived in Budapest another thirteen years, arriving in Canada in 1958. Yvonne Singer was born in 1944 in Budapest and was only five when her family emigrated. As the oldest child and the only one born in Hungary, she is closest to her parents' experiences, and her awareness, sensitivity and identification with their lives during and after the war dominated her life as a child growing up in Montreal. Her biography is the "raw material," as she puts it, "the vein that I mine like an author" to deal with the "very shifting line and very permeable boundary" of a public-private dialogue (1998a). Challenging the way history is represented, *In Memoriam: Remembering and Forgetting, Fragments of History* (1993) is an installation that recounts the story of Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat who lived in Hungary during the Nazi occupation and helped save 100,000 Hungarian Jews. The work encompasses two adjacent rooms. The first, the Felt Room, has brown felt walls built around a steel frame which is suspended by airplane cables. An electronic sign board is programmed with excerpts of old headlines and stories about Wallenberg, interspersed with phrases such as "Sorry, I can't hear you," and "Sorry, I can't see you." The textual narrative is broken, filled with lapses and gaps, leaving the viewer/reader with many questions regarding the circumstances surrounding Wallenberg's disappearance and his subsequent imprisonment in Russia. Private voices, "I remember," "don't forget," "this is important," that could be Wallenberg, Singer or anyone else, interject public newspaper headlines, "single handedly saved more Jews than whole governments ... Classmates recall him as warm, friendly, not snobbish." In the Glass Room, observations about solitary confinement are etched onto glass shelves, light from above throwing the words into shadow. The words on the shelves are discontinuous and disjointed, as memory in its very essence is selective and incomplete, like echoes suspended in time.

Entering these rooms we are invited inside a life, inside a fabric of memory with its complexities, to understand phenomenologically the diverse ways in which "we are what we remember ourselves to be" (Casey, 1987:290). Seeing, hearing and feeling the textures of memory in materials such as glass, felt and steel and words that elicit associations and images, we begin to understand how memory creates a narrative, however evasive and fragmentary. Omissions in the narrative also reflect the struggle to recover one's past as "presence and absence, people and places revealed and concealed" (Singer, 1998:110) to fill in the gaps in a history mediated through others, and to retrieve pieces to make a history authentically one's own. "What belongs to them? What belongs to me?" Singer asks of herself in relation to the war in Hungary and her parents' experiences, particularly when they do not want to talk about the past. From a front page article on Raoul Wallenberg in *The Toronto Star*, Singer discovered the connection to Wallenberg that had been hidden from her. In a paragraph she learnt about a young Jewish couple refused access to a hospital for the birth of their child. "Wallenberg had offered his private apartment for the birth while he slept in the corridor. At 7:00 a.m. the next morning, he was called in to see the baby girl, who had been named Yvonne Maria Eva. Wallenberg was asked to be the child's godfather. The young parents were my parents. I was that child" (Singer, 1998:114). Confronting this hidden legacy, Singer asks questions of her own identity, and how identity is continually constructed and transformed in the choices we make for ourselves and others make for us, in the histories, personal and private, that we attempt to integrate, and the memories we select to keep or forget.

The Veiled Room (1998) (fig. 4) was first exhibited at the ACC Gallery in Weimar, a place with a charged history because Hitler rose to power during the Weimar Republic, and in 1933, fifteen years later, ended the Republic when he became Chancellor. Singer used a triangular room in a gallery where the author Goethe had once lived, veiling it with two layer of curtains, made from polyester sheer, like a regular domestic curtain. Printed on one side in German gothic font are the names of German artists, politicians, scientists and intellectuals, people like Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht, Albert Einstein, Wassily Kandinsky, Kathe Kollwitz and Friedrich Nietzsche. An alphabetical list of about forty-six seminal figures, people who were unable to confront the Nazis and fascism or circumvent the Second World War and the Holocaust, yet have influenced our modern interpretive culture in what is this very complex inheritance. Searching for an explanation to the unexplainable, Singer places a second transparent curtain underneath the names, with excerpts from the English and German *Standard Edition* of Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents* and *Short Account of Psychoanalysis*, passages with diagrams that focus on theories of familial conflict and aggressive impulse. Anchoring an analysis of social and political life in a theory of the human species very much his own, Freud aimed to explore how the events of human history interact with human nature. In his disillusioned look at modern civilization on the verge of catastrophe (in 1930, with Hitler's resounding electoral victory), Freud coalesced the instinctual drives of life and destruction, reflective of the conflicts of the individual, with the violent struggles at work in religious, social and political entities. Freud had also increasingly shown that a patient's history did not contain some truth to be deciphered behind the chain of associations that surfaced in the analytic process but dwelled within that chain and was revealed in the process of emergence that the

psychoanalyst brought about (Rose, 1986). Singer questions the conjoining of these names like a chain of markers in a socio-historical arena of associations. Rejecting a monolithic view of history, she challenges the ethics of memory and its representation of a homogenous narrative.

Once more converging public and personal histories, Singer includes in this piece behind the curtains within the triangular space a video loop of her mother and father, a home movie, wilfully re-mapping the memories of her parents. As the film is slowed down and replayed, she reconstitutes as woman author a past that she redirects as her own. Her father was original director and actor, playing for the camera in a mock love scene with her mother in which he then pretends to slip and fall, her mother thinking this is for real. The tension is between her father's authorial construction of history acted out like a trickster with everything in its proper place and order and Singer's own view of history as disjunctive relations of names and events revealed, concealed and repressed over time. The ambiguity of the narrative speaks of the instability of memory, the impossibility of a circumscribed past, and how it is often in the presence of someone else's recollections and history that we may reconstruct our own. Further, encompassed as we are visually and bodily within an interior space, the sheer walls of the curtain also act as a public/private enclosure, like membranes of a sanctum we enter in a search for identities as profound as longings for a home that is the mother's womb.

Intentionally restrictive in her use of visual images, Singer's logos in these installations are not ocular-centric, but a paradigm grounded in linguistic communication processes with a keen awareness that the postmodernist subject is itself an effect of language, marked and ruptured by language and the unconscious ((Levin, 1993; Bugin, 1973; Rose, 1986). "I acquired English at six years of age but have no memory of a mother tongue before then (although) I spoke Hungarian, German and Dutch and then English by six years of age," Singer (1998a) writes. "English felt like an adopted language but no other language felt like home. My self-consciousness about language and its importance to my work is the most direct manifestation of my connection to eastern Europe."

Miriam Fabijan

Like Yvonne Singer, Miriam Fabijan also explores a subject-centred definition based on the hermeneutics of language, using signs and signifiers, in attempts to reconnect with the Slovenian homeland her parents left, having immigrated to Canada as refugees in 1949 where she was born in Calgary, Alberta in 1960. Miriam Fabijan's visits to Slovenia in 1966, 1976 and again in 1992 marked the beginning of her investigations into her Slovenian heritage to consider what Salman Rushdie (1991) has referred to as the triple displacement of migration – loss of roots, loss of language and loss of cultural codes – three of the most meaningful components of the definition of what it is to be a human being. Her art takes the form of multimedia installations, sharing with Dukes and Singer an interest in family photographs, using different ways of integrating the photograph as memory and conduits of partial incomplete narratives within a "sculptural language" (Fabijan, 1998). In *Translations; My Hat Has Three Holes* (1992) (fig. 5), Fabijan juxtaposes photographs of herself, her paternal grandfather from Slovenia and her father with the text of a popular Slovenian children's rhyme, which Fabijan had learned as a child. The poem

was written in Slovenian in Fabijan's mother's handwriting and the English version was written by the artist. Slovenian words pervade the *Translations* installation intermixed with photographic combinations. Hisa, the Slovenian word for house, is a photograph framed in a decorative oak frame and stand of Fabijan's mother's ancestral home, taken by Fabijan during a trip to Slovenia in 1992. Included is the voice of a Slovenian woman, speaking in Slovene and not translated, reflecting Fabijan's own struggle with her partial comprehension of the Slovenian language in attempting to reconnect to her roots. "Slovene, my first language which I no longer use nor remember, except in fragments," Fabijan says, "was lost to me as my family adapted to a new environment and adopted a new culture" (Fabijan, 1992). Another installation, *Ena pticka mi poje, pa sam ne vem kje* (A little bird sings to me, but I do not know from where) (1993), incorporates a sound installation placed in an oak suitcase engraved with chromatec lettering. The phrase refers to Slovenia as reminiscent of a bird, in a passage that appears on a wall of a monastery designed by the Slovenian architect Jose Plecnik. Attached is the outline of the map of Slovenia. Fabijan explains that the map of Slovenia is reminiscent of a bird, a theme which is referred to in the text from the monastery.

While focused on the photograph, Fabijan uses all the different modalities of visual language, drawings, pictograms, images, sign languages and her mother's handwriting, as well as the pure emotion conveyed by the tone of the Slovenian woman's voice, to translate and infuse the beliefs and sensations of one culture into her own subjectivity and to share that sense of belonging with the viewer. Eva Hoffman (1989:107-108) writes of hearing, speaking and thinking in English upon leaving Poland, that she was "lost in translation" because the word and thing did not relate, causing "a dissecting alchemy, draining the world not only of significance but of its colours, situations, nuances, its very existence." Whereas river in Polish "was a vital sound, energized with the essence of riverhood, of my rivers, of my being immersed in rivers" in English it was cold, non-evocative "a word without an aura" with no stored associations or illuminating connotations. Fabijan ventures to retrieve this picture-and-word attachment, the Slovenian multi-layered concept of bird, for example, to reunite language and image to reconstruct a world, to take it in, love it, and make it her own. But as an exile in reverse, revisiting a Slovenia she first knew through her parents and grandparents, the inability to speak the native language denies her ready access to that living world.

The *Translations* rhyme, "My hat has three holes/Three holes has my hat/If it would not have three holes/Then it would not be my hat," Fabijan explains, is a rhyme about identity in that the subject identifies one's hat by what one's hat has or has not. Father and grandfather are imaginary performers acting out parts of the rhyme as a trapeze artist, a magician pulling a rabbit out of a hat and an animal trainer taming a wild beast (fig. 5). Fabijan tells the story as a child's disconnected fantasy that is also very real, as she stands on a swing nearby, this way also joining in the action. The tale stages the paradox of the postmodern narrative, straddling the border between the imaginary and the realistic, between a unified structured plot and a "decentered narration, with its wandering point of view and extensive digressions" (Hutcheon, 1988:61) The setting and temporal regression captures allegorically the fluid, unstable and impossible notions of balance, transformation and mastery that cultural becoming and belonging suggest as a kind of magic or wizardry. Playing out

the limerick in this carnival-like performance also elicits a metaphor for communication across generations and its subjective regeneration in new and curious ways. As such, her approach is reminiscent of Diana der Hovanessian's poem "Learning an Ancestral Tongue": "Transference/My ancestors talk/to me in dangling myths./Each word a riddle/each dream/heirless.On sunny days/I bury words./They put out roots/ and coil around/forgotten syntax./Next spring a full/blown anecdote will sprout" (quoted in Fischer, 1986:204).

Natalka Husar

While the search for a sense of belonging with Fabijan is the site of multiple connections not reducible to a linear, teleological form of subjectivity, it is finally coherent, grounded in discoveries and reinventions abstracted from the past and reworkable for the future. For Natalka Husar the engagement provokes ethnic anxiety (Fischer 1986), a prevailing condition of estrangement and conflict, as she struggles for recognitions and connections between the place of her parents' birth, as a memory of Ukraine that is not her own, and the place she now inhabits. Born in 1951 to parents who came to the United States in 1949 under the Displaced Persons' Act, Husar grew up in New Jersey before moving to Canada in 1973.

In the series, *Black Sea Blue* (1992-1995), the effect of returning to Ukraine with her mother for the first time since 1969 leads to uneasy, discomforting places in relation to the designation "home." In *Torn Heart* (1994) a portrait of her mother juxtaposed with a Ukrainian aunt is unsettling for, except for outlines (the noses are the same), the yellow crooked teeth and crude make-up of her aunt speak of impossible differences between the land of riches (America) and the land of poverty (Ukraine). Husar reminds us that we never see our own faces, one of the most compelling signs of who we are as subjects (Cheetham and Hutcheon, 1991) except as they are reflected in a mirror, photograph or painting, or as they are metaphorically projected in the responses other people have to us and we to them. From the disparities of identification, communication and inheritance, a tension arises, in that the face that reflects her mother's features should be, but is not, a meaningful part of Husar's self-understanding. Sentimental deers peering out from the landscape behind are reminiscent of mediocre animal paintings (e.g. Karl Blechen's *Forest Ravine with Red Deer*, 1828), parodying the experience of the romantic hoping to reconnect with primordial ties.

Referring specifically to the painting *Pandora's Parcel to Ukraine* (1993) (fig. 6) Husar writes: "And once I opened to that reality it was like some Pandora's Box – I couldn't fit my feelings back neatly again. Though my mother's house seemed romantic, with big fat peaches against the blue-washed walls, it wasn't in the Theme-Park Ukraine of my Canadian mind." Embodying the Freudian concept of the uncanny (1919), Husar upsets what originally began as a child-like sketch of the house where her mother grew up. Grotesque and vulgar memories of her trip turn into ghostly remains of a meagre banquet, a black-market dollar dealer, a woman from the old regime and her puppet sidekick, and a care package with cast off shoes and stale Valentine's chocolates. Shaken out from the tablecloth these images exude a kind of madness, a wild fantasy and demonic quality, reminiscent of James Ensor, the late nineteenth century artist whose cacophonous affairs were also unconventional, satirical and decadent. The frontal staring intensity of ghoulish characters is jarring,