



JEREMY BORSOS *14 Mile Creek Lands* 2001–03 Light-jet print  
76 x 61 cm

YVONNE SINGER *you are on my mind* (detail) 2003 Bronze, glass  
and DVD PHOTO ISAAC APPLEBAUM



## Jeremy Borsos

◀◀ OAKVILLE GALLERIES, OAKVILLE

In 1938 an envelope was sent to a Dr. A. W. Chase living in Oakville. It was addressed with an old-fashioned nib pen—the ink a thin watery black, the paper a soft cream. What kind of message was concealed within its flaps? A prescription request? A perfumed love letter? A death notice? We'll never know. What we do know is that the place to which the envelope was sent no longer exists. Sixty-five years later, the site of the doctor's address is home to a women's fitness studio and Liquidation World, a bargain store—a strip mall with a generic, modern veneer.

Jeremy Borsos has an unerring ability to turn the mute document into something momentous and marvellous. Based in Mayne Island, B.C., he has gained a reputation as a muckraker of local history. His latest enterprise, "Then Again," curated by Marnie Fleming for the Gairloch Gardens site of Oakville Galleries, is a form of civic sleuthing—a chance for local residents to be infected by Borsos's fanciful nostalgia; to conjure worlds that, if not vanished entirely, are a half-century past their heyday.

In this case Borsos collected envelopes with Oakville addresses dated between the 1870s and 1960s. Acquired from Oakville citizens, stamp collectors and eBay, these envelopes were traced back to the sites to which they were originally posted. Borsos's photographs, which document what he encountered at the destination sites, are displayed above the envelopes.

The juxtapositions are disarming. Borsos's photographs use a direct, frontal viewpoint, often concentrating on building facades and surfaces. They have the overall composition of real-estate pictures, usually shot from a flattering view. The envelopes, by contrast, are dim with age. Time has given them shadings they did not have before. They are full of anecdotal markings—little handwriting mishaps, a frayed corner or tear, an oil stain, the overall accumulation of fingerprints—which invite all kinds of amateur or connoisseurial peering.

Occasionally there is a match-up. A house appears antique enough to correspond with an envelope. But in many instances, there is no trace of former life: just a Starbucks where a house once stood; an ugly brown apartment building rising like a mortuary headstone on the former "McDermott" residence; a copse of trees, once a significant address, now an emblem of nature reclaiming her territory.

The plangent tone of the exhibition is reinforced by the epistolary medium itself. The envelopes evoke a time when letter-writing was a matter of pleasure and not just custom and commerce: a time of small-time grocers, stoop-sitting neighbours, slow trains. Today, with their fussy curlicue penmanship, they look incongruous—evoking the image of a guest who commits the double faux pas of arriving both overdressed and hours late to a dinner party.

"Then Again"—the title of the exhibition emphasizes Borsos's impression that something restive runs beneath the placid surface of the town of Oakville, something that requires a double take. Oakville might be one thing, but, then again, if one looks closely it might be another thing entirely. From picture to picture what accumulates is a reminder of the impending obsolescence of all things human. These places he photographs, too, shall change, even vanish. Then again, so shall we. KYO MACLEAR

## Yvonne Singer

◀◀ RED HEAD GALLERY, TORONTO

Referencing psychoanalysis in contemporary art practice is a brave move. It risks alienating a public wary of the inherent intellectualism of Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan et al., along with those who think theory and art never shall meet (successfully, at least). In defiance of these risks, Toronto artist Yvonne Singer has been incorporating psychoanalytic concepts into her mixed-media work for more than a decade. Rather than illustrating any particular theory, Singer uses psychoanalytic hypotheses to enrich her visual and spatial investigations into very human issues.



Her exhibition at Red Head Gallery consisted of two relatively small installations. The first, *le stade du miroir*, consists of six five-foot-high bronze mirrors (minus their reflecting glass) encircling a DVD projection of a huge moving eye on the floor. The second, *you are on my mind*, is made up of two related pieces: a double-faced bronze-cast head sitting on a glass plinth and a small LCD monitor mounted on the facing wall. The background of the rather mesmerizing DVD playing on the monitor is neutral. The camera oscillates around a woman (Singer) seen from the shoulders up. She is positioned back-to-back with a man of a similar age. In both the film and, then more literally, the cast piece, the faces are welded together, like two sides of the same coin.

For some time, Singer's overarching concern has been the boundaries that construct our identities: spatial, familial, religious, historical and so on. Psychoanalytic concepts appeal to Singer as tools for exploring how these boundaries are formed and how they function. This exhibition cites Lacan's notion of the mirror stage, which refers to the moment at which the infant first identifies with an external image of itself—the "I". Unfortunately, this momentarily coordinated and whole person is a mirage, an ephemeral image to which the infant will eternally aspire in vain.

In *le stade du miroir*, Singer explores how we cope with or try to resolve this schism in our psyche. For instance, the mirror installation makes us acutely aware of our habit and desire of looking for our reflection, because it refuses to reflect back our image; instead, the projected film of the eye makes us the object of the gaze. In *you are on my mind*, the schism of miscomprehension is assuaged by the intricate, bonding relationship with a partner.

Singer's use of psychoanalytic concepts is not really brave so much as it is playful, intelligent and, perhaps most importantly, restrained. Singer draws the viewer into an intellectual and emotional experience that attends to the aesthetic by employing rich tactile materials, like the bronze components that echo each other across the warm wood floors of the gallery. By isolating the concepts she wants to explore and never getting carried away with the technological tools at hand, Singer's focused works engage rather than alienate. SARAH PARSONS

## Jens Haaning

GOODWATER, TORONTO

What is a gesture? A threatening gesture, for example? It is not a blow that is interrupted. It is certainly something that is done in order to be arrested and suspended."

Arrested and suspended. Isn't it odd that the words Jacques Lacan uses are also those that describe the punishment for hoods and hooligans? Troublemakers, like Antonio, for instance? Danish artist Jens Haaning has photographed him seated on some steps, where he makes a fist with one hand and shields it with his other, clearly demonstrating some inner agitation. Or Faysal, Deniz and Ecevit? Each of these men has crossed his arms over his chest in a gesture that reads as an assertion of self-sufficiency, but which is just a bit ominous.

The dozen men in Haaning's portraits do not betray any overt awareness of being photographed, but they register it in every aspect of their appearance. These are men who seem to know instinctively how to dress and pose to create a forceful public presence. Shabeer and Dennis, for instance, act in perfect complicity with the photographer's slightly low point of view by placing one foot forward so as to subtly elongate their figures and seem more imposing. As first-generation refugees from Islamic countries living in Denmark, they likely have become accustomed to enacting the threat that they themselves are assumed to be—in the same way that marginalization forces them into activities already entirely expected of them.

If these men play to type, most Danes would be shocked to see them in the cities and streets from which they have originally come, where men like these enact entirely different public personae. Strolling on Istanbul's Istiklal Caddesi, confident in their command of public space and far from any



JENS HAANING *Faysal* 2000 Light-jet print on photographic paper 68 x 47.5 cm

Aurangzeb 2000 Light-jet print on photographic paper 68 x 47.5 cm

