

Courtesy of the artist



**David Ferguson, 2001. *Shelter*.** Acrylic on cast cotton, 6' x 6.'

tion, Ferguson's installations offer the opportunity to experience a vital quietude, a chance to locate ourselves, look around with a refreshed perspective and take new bearings. The effect on pulse and respiration of a gallery-goer immersed in a painted Ferguson sense-scape might well equate to the benefits of meditation.

David Ferguson — artist, writer and former swimmer — is also a principal dancer and choreographer with Suddenly Dance Theatre in Victoria. It's no wonder his visual works "speak" of motion. He uses complementary and contrasting colours to produce a pulsating optical effect. The vibrating surfaces of his paintings reveal other forms, defined by the pigments that flow through textural fissures and radiating lines. In *Shelter*, curved horn-like forms converge in a high, pointed arch, creating a gate or portal that invites the viewer to enter yet another dimension of movement. Energetic, wriggling lines rise from the bottom of the frame in *Wilderness*, like some kind of fantastical growth pattern caught in fast-frame photography; one imagines a vast, hyper-fertile field of wheat or succulent wild grasses. In other works, the cracked and wrinkled surfaces are more likely to evoke dried mud or

lake-bottoms, or the microscopic vegetal blossoming of lichen. The surfaces seem to writhe; there are poly-rhythms, accents and multiple variations on the basic theme: pure movement.

Paradoxically, one way in which this movement is emphasised is through the restful stillness that the viewer attains by contemplating each work. To be sure, Ferguson controls the way in which these works are viewed, in and as the environment, through lighting, placement and the relationships struck among the

installed works. But their effect is also to place the viewer into the same mental and emotional space from which they were created. Each of the works is a complex text, and decoding them is a synesthetic experience. Slight sensory distortions are a part of this. The paintings' animated fields of colour can give a vertiginous illusion of great height and distance — a telescopic view — but they can just as easily produce a sense of minute magnification. One might be gazing at the earth's surface from orbit, or plummeting into its complicated detail to have a look at its molecular structure. Serene, monochromatic fragment assemblages, on the other hand, have more modest aspects; their textures appear as the repeating patterns caused by wind on sand dunes, or by waves crashing and receding on a shore.

The "bird" in Ferguson's "courtyard" is the mobile, fleeting perception of the viewer, at lucid, meditative rest. The bird's-eye vantage point is that of the artist, creating from a still point a timeless moment of perception, or the trance-like state of creative meditation. When the viewer is placed in this relationship to the work, he or she shares in the creative state of heightened perception. In this sense, *Courtyard For a Bird* is also performative, for the audience

participates in both the creation and experience of vision.

In *Courtyard for a Bird* David Ferguson has choreographed a momentary respite from the world's dulling clamour, suggesting that visionary perception is itself a state of grace, a sanctuary. These works suggest that we "see" and "know" differently, according to factors of stillness and motion, distance and intimacy, activity and rest. They are an invitation to touch down and check in, even if momentarily, to allow this intimate connection with the experience of seeing. It beckons us to observe the play of light upon subtle, dancing surfaces, the sublime complicities of grandeur and simplicity, excess and refinement.

*Courtyard For A Bird* was presented at the Nanaimo Art Gallery, Nanaimo, BC, from Feb. 15 to April 16, 2002.

#### Yvonne Owens

Ms. Owens is a Victoria-based art critic currently pursuing graduate studies at the University of York, England.

#### "Dad's pencil"

Grandpa coughed a lot  
and wasted into death  
when I was young.

Trenches filled with poison gas  
began the slow decline  
which left just skin and bone,  
a trembling hand  
with weakened fingers  
barely strong enough  
to grip  
a mechanical pencil.

Slow crosswords drew him  
toward the last puzzle.

My mother saved the pencil  
in its box.

**Robert C. Dickson**  
Family Physician  
Hamilton, Ont.