

manticism, apprehending the Sublime with reverence and near-religious awe before Nature.

Grande begins each artist's chapter with a brief synopsis of the artist's oeuvre. He then launches into the interview by setting out the ideas he wants to discuss. One gets a mental picture of the pair discussing big ideas and practical details at the kitchen table, as when Grande discusses spiritual archetypes and the use of natural found materials and man-made forms with British sculptor David Nash:

JG — Your step and ladder pieces are unusual metaphors that maintain the integrity of wood, the natural undulations of tree forms, while integrating manmade forms. *Through the Trunk, Up the Branch* (1985), in Ireland, demonstrates this quite dramatically, offsetting a tree's base with a series of steps ... In this case the tree is supporting the structure that symbolises an ascent or descent.

DN — I was presented with a huge dead elm tree in Ireland that had been dearly loved by the owner. With an Irish woodsman, instead of cutting it at the root, we decided to cut it above the first big limb. I made about ten sculptures from the top and then I was left with this huge trunk and big branch. So it remained rooted and the steps had a gesture that was upward. A neighbouring farmer said he'd like to go up those steps and have a Guinness with God!

An idea that emerges from the alternating voices and viewpoints featured in the book is that environmental art is a potent antidote to artistic hubris. Water, wind, vegetal growth and the effects of time can only be set, framed, "staged" or guided. The "performances" of nature may be courted or cajoled, but not coerced or compelled. As Grande describes it in his introduction, there can only be a "working in tandem." The conditional, reciprocal nature of these artists' dealings with nature might be described as a kind of humility, a word whose spiritual overtones are not misplaced; respect and reciprocity are the fundamental moral precepts of environmentalism and ecological awareness. The idea of man as "the measure of all things" or "the crown of creation," awarded stewardship over the earth is attenuated by the pluralistic and decidedly nonauthoritarian dialogues presented here. There are "solo performances" but no privileged views by any one "art star," elite expert or

external authority. Grande himself avoids the role of objective (and therefore authoritative) commentator by being more of an involved documentarist, or environmental co-conspirator, engaging the artists in a lively, discursive approach to their art and the issues they address. Grande's respondents assume a co-operative stance in which old, Eurocentric models of colonization and control are abandoned. When Grande asks David Nash, "Is it an exchange process?" Nash replies "It has to be for it to work."

Weaknesses of the book include the failure of Lucie-Smith's foreword to address the revolutionary approach of both the featured artists and of Grande's format. Another, perhaps unavoidable, weakness is the unevenness in the clarity

of the artists' responses. Some are eloquent; others are not. I occasionally wished Grande would just paraphrase his respondents' answers and render them both readable and illuminating, as is typical of his own critical prose. But then, the artists' visual creations are eloquent, as 80 black-and-white photos of their works attest. If you can't wade through the artists' sometimes-murky descriptions of their art and intent, just look at the pictures. They speak. And Grande does do a good job of eliciting valuable insights as to why these artists do what they do.

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## Lifeworks

### Pnina Granirer: a dancing line

The soft body versus the hard world: perhaps this is the human predicament. Vancouver-based artist Pnina Granirer has been exploring this dichotomy for the past six years. The works included in her exhibit, *Synchronicity*, mounted

earlier this year at the Zack Gallery in Vancouver, evoke the complex relationships between humans and their contemporary settings. Her imagery features dancers and celebrates the inherent directness of their discipline.

Although Granirer initially worked from photos she had taken of dance rehearsals, the final versions are active responses rather than copies. Her translation of the dynamic presence of dance does not rest simply in the imagery, but in the innovative presentation of the pieces. Each of her figures, whether on canvas, Mylar or paper, are energized. They leap, stretch, fall, collapse. The images' defining lines have been erased, etched, scratched, blurred and overlapped, reflecting the way the body carries the traces of life's (mis)adventures. Her marks are made with values from the most ephemeral chalk lines to light-denying black paint. Granirer is one of Canada's veteran artists, classically trained in Israel and Europe, with over 40 years of work behind her, including many international exhibitions. Her interest in the human figure has been evident throughout her career, but in the past six years she has focused on the figure exclusively.



Pnina Granirer. *Leap* (2005). Monoprint on paper, 40" × 30".

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Pnina Granirer

“The purpose of these works is to express the synchronicity of these two basic, non-verbal human activities, dance and visual art,” she writes in her artist’s statement.

Even the viewer’s own physical movement affects how one sees these works. Their presentation includes images of dancers in Plexiglass boxes, which contain a flat drawing in the back of the box and another on a sheet of clear Mylar bulging toward the viewer. As one moves past the box, both figures shift in a simple but animated tableau. Other drawings of dancers revel on clear Mylar sheets suspended from the ceiling, removed from the rigidity of walls and frames.

In an earlier solo exhibit at the Yukon Arts Centre, Granirer had installed the clear Mylar drawings against the gallery walls. One was set forward across a corner, giving the artist the idea of hanging them freely in the gallery space. Not only do they shift and interact with each other as the viewer moves, but ambient lighting casts an entire troupe of shadows on the walls around them.

During this year’s Chutzpah! Festival in early March, graduating students from Vancouver’s Arts Umbrella dance program added a live, performative element by dancing in and around the drawings. They improvised in direct response to the images. Granirer



Pnina Granirer. *Apex* (2005). Mixed media on canvas, 36" × 48".

us that there is always a context, including boundaries that can be rigid and unforgiving. A liquid-blue couple embrace in a dark rectangle, which is in turn contained within a triangle where another couple dances. The woman’s hand reaches beyond a restricting line to an area of greater illumination. Two figures fold together in a quiet piece called *Wordless Moment*. Even here there is a pulse, perhaps of shared grief or imminent awakening.

mer 2005 issue of *Canadian Art*, “Over the last 100 years, figurative art hasn’t exactly been a hot category in art criticism or history.” Contemporary art often acknowledges the body indirectly through the scale of installations or through traces of the physical (including the representation of the body in photography and video) and the semiotic redolence of materials. Drawing or painting the figure has become distinctly unfashionable.

Fortunately, Granirer’s dignity and vision continue the grand traditions of figurative art. This tradition is not stagnant, but is a framework within which to adapt and respond to our time and its challenges. As Granirer points out, the soft bodies that house us are increasingly affected by industry and technology, yet they remain the constant vehicle of our expression.

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*Floating Dancers*, an exhibit on works by Pnina Granirer, is on view at the Seymour Art Gallery, North Vancouver, from Nov. 8 to Dec 3, 2005.

## Contemporary art acknowledges the body only indirectly ... . The figure has become unfashionable.

described this as an “interaction between the live body and the imaginary one.”

In Granirer’s paintings on canvas, figures are often set against hard-edged lines that contrast with a sense of flesh and warmth. If the figures on Mylar seem free, the paintings remind

Sometimes Granirer includes patterned foil as a border of unreadable glyphs, or the shiny side of a compact disc embedded in the painting medium, the hard, bright edge of technology making the human figures more vulnerable.

Lorissa Sengara writes in the sum-