

Arni Haraldsson

Citadel Height, Port Coquitlam, B.C., 1991

chromogenic print on photo paper
and resin coat
74.5 cm x 100.0 cm

Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund
VAG 98.10.1



Arni Haraldsson

Citadel Height, Port Coquitlam, B.C., 1991

Artist's Biography

Nationality:

Born: 1958, Reykjavik, Iceland

Arni Haraldsson has been active as a photo-based artist in Vancouver since the early 1980s. He received a Diploma from the Emily Carr College of Art and Design (1983) and a Master of Fine Arts from the University of British Columbia (1990).

Since 1990, Haraldsson has investigated Vancouver's urban and suburban landscapes through the lens of his camera. Choosing sites as diverse as the downtown West End, Burnaby, Coquitlam and West Vancouver, Haraldsson has recorded changes in building practices from the high modernist 50s to the postmodern 90s. In these images Haraldsson bypasses Vancouver's landmarks to focus instead on modernist apartment buildings, residential West Coast style homes, contemporary highrises and suburban developments. In these photographs, the artist explores how modernist architecture and contemporary development are "emblematic of larger social forces, as a symbolic system shaping human relations, and as a correlative of art historical discourse." While these general developments can be seen in a variety of sites and locations throughout the world, these images focus on specific manifestations in Vancouver, a city positioned at "the edge of the wilderness" whose growth relies upon urban development and the real-estate market.

Source: Acquisitions Justification

Artistic Context

Nationality: Icelandic-born Canadian

Training: Emily Carr College of Art and Design; University of British Columbia

Peers: Roy Arden; Howard Ursuliak

Group: Photoconceptualism; 20th century; 21st century

Provenance: the artist

Subject: building practices; architecture; Vancouver

Other Works in the Vancouver Art Gallery Collection

Arni Haraldsson
Westwood Plateau, Coquitlam, B.C., 1991
chromogenic print
Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund
VAG 98.10.2

Arni Haraldsson
Apartment Building, Vancouver, 1993-1994
chromogenic print
Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund
VAG 98.10.3 a-f

Arni Haraldsson

Citadel Height, Port Coquitlam, B.C., 1991

Arni Haraldsson
Nothing Will Have Taken Place But The Place, 1986
silver gelatin print
Gift of the Artist
VAG 98.66 a-h

Arni Haraldsson
Chilco Towers, Vancouver, 1993
chromogenic print
Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund
VAG 2004.37.104



Bibliography

Arni Haraldsson
Publication
1995

[transcription]

ARNI HARALDSSON
Presentation House Gallery, North Vancouver

Arni Haraldsson's recent exhibition exemplified how the work of an artist can participate in a number of discursive formations. Reflecting on modernity and the city, Haraldsson's project simultaneously lays out the parameters of his artistic practice and brings critical attention to Vancouver's own narrative as a city at the edge of the wilderness whose economy depends on urban development and the real-estate market. And while its financial economy turns on these industries, so too does its aesthetic economy, contrary to the prevailing local mythology that Jeff Wall has described as "orthodox Romantic aesthetics." The tension between realistic and romantic modes of representation led to fascinating contradictions in the reception of Haraldsson's work by the local press.

The exhibition consisted of fifteen colour prints of Vancouver apartment buildings and local suburban developments in Burnaby, Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam and West Vancouver as well as a twenty-minute videotape titled, *A Drive Through the Suburbs of Coquitlam and Port Coquitlam B.C.* (1994). In addition, there were fourteen colour photographs representing interior studies of two modern residences: the B.C. Binning house, designed by Binning himself, founding head of the School of Architecture at the University of BC; and the Shadbolt house, owned by Doris and Jack Shadbolt and designed by Douglas Shadbolt, also a former head of the UBC School of Architecture.

Haraldsson's work reads as part of the West Coast chapter of an international conversation on photography situated in relation to the work of Bernd and Hilla Becher and their former students in Dusseldorf. The *neue sachlichkeit* or new objectivity has been characterized by some in a quasi-scientific frame as cool and unemotional, trafficking in typologies and concerned with the paradoxical products of modernity, particularly architectural structures. In an essay on the work of another Vancouver photographer, Roy Arden, Wall clarified that the *sachlich* "marks the category of things in their alienated state" in contrast to "the aesthetic of rhythmic expressivism." The object becomes object and it is "at this moment that it truly comes into being as an object." Wall is as significant as the Bechers to this conversation, for he too is an influential voice in it and Haraldsson, like Arden, is a former student of Wall's. On close inspection

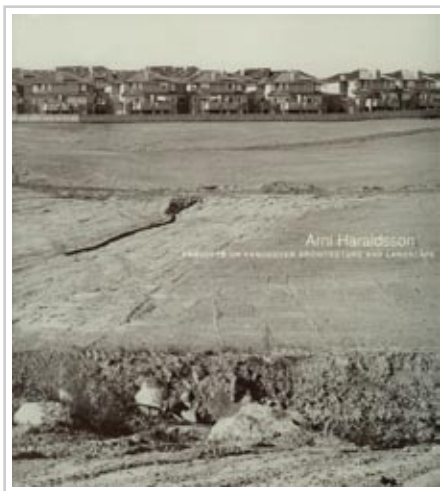
Arni Haraldsson

Citadel Height, Port Coquitlam, B.C., 1991

Haraldsson's work, like that of each artist working within this tradition, establishes its own unique chapter in the formidable project of redefining photography at the end of the twentieth century.

Haraldsson's contribution is that his images tell a specifically local story. Functioning as both portraits and landscapes, they refocus attention on the city's proximity to the vanishing edge of the wilderness, much as Emily Carr's paintings did over half a century ago in BC. They evoke a sense of pathos that many Canadians feel at the loss of our romance with the frontier in the face of the imperatives of that other international conversation, the economy.

Judith Mastai



Arni Haraldsson: Projects on Vancouver Architecture and Landscape
Publication
1995

[transcription of excerpt]

Notes on Contemporary Architecture and Landscape

Arni Haraldsson

Since the late 1980s, I've been interested in Vancouver as an expanding megalopolis, particularly those liminal spaces between city, suburb and country. After having worked within the realm of appropriation art, I came to a reconsideration of the potentially affirmative aspects of picture-making, of generating one's own images, as a perfectly valid and viable contemporary art practice. Space does not allow for a full explication here, suffice it to say however that this turnabout was the result of a dissatisfaction with the various dogmas and orthodoxies which had formed around the cult of appropriation and the suspicion of unmediated, so-called straight photography.

As an amalgamation of nature and culture, the megalopolis forms the most pervasive landscape today. Consequently, the idyllic landscape of tradition has in effect been rendered meaningless, usurped by the defeatured landscape. Littered with the vestiges of consumer culture, the unmediated photographic documentation of the defeatured landscape has, in turn, been stamped with the mark of obsolescence, criticized by some as a too simplistic emblemization of the post-industrial Western world.

Critiques of contemporary landscape photography, I think, often tend to view the genre in general as either outmoded and devoid of political agency (especially when a work recalls the conventions of the picturesque sublime or lacks a 'critical text' supplemental to the image), or as the last refuge of neo-conservatism —

the expression of an Iron John-like masculinity, rooted in the school of Ansel Adams. Counter to such views, I believe that a photographer, even while working strictly within the visual vocabulary intrinsic to the medium, can nevertheless critically address landscapes which exist within and without the fixed perimeters of the framed view: the geopolitical, demographic and inner-human landscape. And dare one say it, the beautiful. Landscapes which are not necessarily exclusive of one another.



Arni Haraldsson

Citadel Height, Port Coquitlam, B.C., 1991



Excerpt from advertisement, *The Vancouver Sun*, summer 1993

In comparing '70s architecture, such as *The Balsam* and *The Arbutus*, with a contemporary twin-tower complex like *The Westroyal*, similarities overshadow differences, as one structure forms a direct continuation of the other. The difference, then, is solely one of surface appearances. Yet even stylistic differences are reduced to a level of sameness, with the modernist credo of external legibility and the grid serving as recurring motif, but now emphasizing the monotonous and impersonal. To be sure, the primacy of a mechanized environment informs equally the architectural aesthetic of both the modern and the postmodern.

While a building's identity and character—its physiognomy—are formed out of a myriad of details which photography enables the isolation of, thus compelling the viewer to notice the otherwise overlooked, the suburbs are another matter. Perhaps the best way to view the suburbs as a whole is from within the airtight, tinted glass chamber of the passing automobile. Driving through Coquitlam and Port Coquitlam, the mechanical rhythm of the automobile enters into sync with the rhythmic visual sameness of the scenery. Here, neither the snapshot nor the singularly studied photographic view will suffice, since both tend to transform the suburb into a near abstraction of another type. A more 'natural' representation would therefore seem to be in motion. The cinematic succession of video images flashing by to form an electronically fluid continuum conveys, however vicariously, a sampling of the suburban experience.

Doubly so, since the rapidity of suburban expansionism transforms our perception of the surrounding landscape, whereby vision becomes increasingly determined by a vertiginous speed of change. A transmutation that renders the suburban site as a baroque-like, labyrinthian process of simultaneous construction and demolition. Pleasantville one moment, something else the next.

EXHIBITION WORKS

Citadel Heights, Port Coquitlam, BC 1991
c-print, 41 x 49" framed

Arni Haraldsson

Citadel Height, Port Coquitlam, B.C., 1991



Art BC: Masterworks from British Columbia.

Publication
2000

[transcription of excerpt]

Arni Runar Haraldsson

Arni Runar Haraldsson, who trained at the Emily Carr College of Art and Design and the University of British Columbia, has focussed his photography on architecture and its place within modernism. In the late 1980s, he began to explore the urban environment of Vancouver. Although his work is informed by the example of American artist Dan Graham and bears a superficial resemblance to the activity of Roy Arden and some of Jeff Wall's work, Haraldsson's aesthetic sense has defined a particular area of practice that is very much his own.

In the body of work that Haraldsson produced in the 1990s, he concentrated on two subjects. The first is early modernist architecture as seen in a small group of Vancouver apartment buildings and houses, often the homes of architects and artists. His photographs of the modernist buildings show an obvious fondness for the structures, but there is an interesting disjuncture between an image of a rectilinear building and the idea that it might be named "Del-Wood."

The second theme is the expansion of suburbs and what he calls the "overdetermined" landscape. He focusses his attention on the interstices between an urban development and a neighbouring building site. The issue of the denaturing of the landscape is accepted, informing us as we observe the images and contemplate their meaning within the large megalopolis.

Haraldsson makes the point that all landscape photography is urban. By extension, perhaps all landscape imagery today is, in fact, urban, because the majority of the population experiences only an urban environment, and our conception of the landscape is determined by that experience. Haraldsson's photographs do, however, question the nature of that experience.

Citadel Heights, Port Coquitlam, B.C. has associations with grand military history, suggesting a dominant fortress overlooking a city or countryside. The military allusion is quite obvious, as a phalanx of houses marches across the landscape, or, to put it in more natural terms, a plague of houses swarms across the landscape. The biblical story of the wise man and the foolish man building their houses respectively upon the rock and sand (Matthew 7:24-27) comes to mind. Is it too much to suggest that there is a hint of warning here? The sheer weight (literal and figurative) of the development seems to overwhelm the bare patch of land in the foreground. Certainly, the soil in the foreground could easily be washed away.

On one hand, the contrast between home-sweet-home and the wasteland beyond the fence could not be more dramatic; on the other, the folly of this building density and a decimated nature seem to be at a brief equilibrium. The balance of the composition is significant, with the sheer vastness of the foreground (the land) diminishing the buildings (architecture). The other irony of the image is the cookie-cutter nature of the buildings that make the unique in nature invisible. The promise of *Citadel Heights*—a view at the least—is dashed by the reality of endless rows of virtually identical houses.



Arni Haraldsson

Citadel Height, Port Coquitlam, B.C., 1991

Further Reading

At Last Sight: Arni Haraldsson. London: London Regional Art and Historical Museums, 2000.

Arni Haraldsson: Firmity. Vancouver: Contemporary Art Gallery, 2001.

Arni Haraldsson: Up and Down. Vancouver: Artspeak, 2003.

Beneath the Paving Stones. Vancouver: Charles H. Scott Gallery, 1993.

Broken Muse. Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1986.

Exhibition History

Exhibitions at the Vancouver Art Gallery

Recollect. October 16, 1999 - January 23, 2000.

75 Years of Collecting: The Road to Utopia. September 16, 2006 - January 1, 2007.

Selected Exhibitions Outside of the Vancouver Art Gallery

Presentation House Gallery, North Vancouver. *Arni Haraldsson: Projects of Vancouver's Architecture and Landscape.* January 7, 1995 - February 19, 1995.

2nd Johannesburg Biennale, Johannesburg. *Trade Routes: History and Geography.* 1997.

Archival History

Media Release

Miscellaneous History
1995-01-07

[transcription]

PRESENTATION HOUSE
CENTRE FOR THE VISUAL
AND PERFORMING ARTS

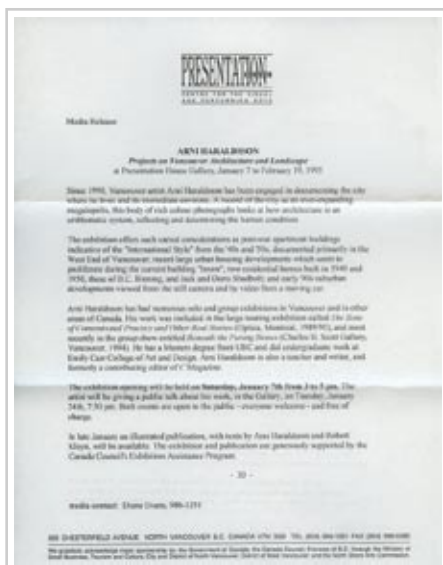
Media Release

ARNI HARALDSSON

Projects on Vancouver Architecture and Landscape

at Presentation House Gallery, January 7 to February 19, 1995

Since 1990, Vancouver artist Arni Haraldsson has been engaged in documenting the city where he lives and its immediate environs. A record of the city as an ever-expanding megalopolis, this body of rich colour photographs



Arni Haraldsson

Citadel Height, Port Coquitlam, B.C., 1991

looks at how architecture is an emblematic system, reflecting and determining the human condition.

The exhibition offers such varied considerations as post-war apartment buildings indicative of the "International Style" from the '40s and '50s, documented primarily in the West End of Vancouver; recent large urban housing developments which seem to proliferate during the current building "boom"; two residential homes built in 1940 and 1950, those of B.C. Binning, and Jack and Doris Shadholt; and early '90s suburban developments viewed from the still camera and by video from a moving car.

Arni Haraldsson has had numerous solo and group exhibitions in Vancouver and in other areas of Canada. His work was included in the large touring exhibition called *The Zone of Conventional Practice and Other Real Stories* (Optica, Montreal, 1989/90), and most recently in the group show entitled *Beneath the Paving Stones* (Charles H. Scott Gallery, Vancouver, 1994). He has a Masters degree from UBC and did undergraduate work at Emily Carr College of Art and Design. Arni Haraldsson is also a teacher and writer, and formerly a contributing editor of *C Magazine*.

The exhibition opening will be held on **Saturday, January 7th from 3 to 5 pm.** The artist will be giving a public talk about his work, in the Gallery, on Tuesday, January 24th, 7:30 pm. Both events are open to the public—everyone welcome—and free of charge.

In late January an illustrated publication, with texts by Arni Haraldsson and Robert Kleyn, will be available. The exhibition and publication are generously supported by the Canada Council's Exhibition Assistance Program.

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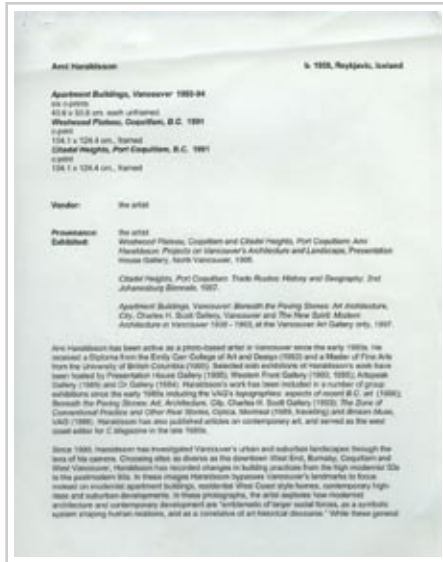
media contact: Diane Evans, 986-1351

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We gratefully acknowledge major sponsorship by: the Government of Canada; the Canada Council; Province of B.C. through the Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture; City and District of North Vancouver; District of West Vancouver; and the North Shore Arts Commission.

Arni Haraldsson

Citadel Height, Port Coquitlam, B.C., 1991



Acquisitions Justification

Acquisition Record
1998

[transcription]

Arni Haraldsson b. 1958, Reykjavic, Iceland

Apartment Buildings, Vancouver 1993-94

six c-prints
40.6 x 50.8 cm. each unframed

Westwood Plateau, Coquitlam, B.C. 1991

c-print 104.1 x 124.4 cm., framed

Citadel Heights, Port Coquitlam, B.C. 1991

c-print
104.1 x 124.4 cm., framed

Vendor: the artist

Provenance: the artist

Exhibited: Westwood Plateau, Coquitlam and Citadel Heights, Port Coquitlam: Arni Haraldsson: Projects on Vancouver's Architecture and Landscape, Presentation House Gallery, North Vancouver, 1995.

Citadel Heights, Port Coquitlam: Trade Routes: History and Geography, 2nd Johannesburg Biennale, 1997.

Apartment Buildings, Vancouver. Beneath the Paving Stones: Art, Architecture, City, Charles H. Scott Gallery, Vancouver and The New Spirit: Modern Architecture in Vancouver 1938 - 1963, at the Vancouver Art Gallery only, 1997.

Arni Haraldsson has been active as a photo-based artist in Vancouver since the early 1980s. He received a Diploma from the Emily Carr College of Art and Design (1983) and a Master of Fine Arts from the University of British Columbia (1990). Selected solo exhibitions of Haraldsson's work have been hosted by Presentation House Gallery (1995); Western Front Gallery (1990, 1985); Artspeak Gallery (1989) and Or Gallery (1984). Haraldsson's work has been included in a number of group exhibitions since the early 1980s including the VAG's *topographies: aspects of recent B.C. art* (1996); *Beneath the Paving Stones: Art, Architecture, City*, Charles H. Scott Gallery (1993); *The Zone of Conventional Practice and Other Real Stories*, Optica, Montreal (1989, travelling) and *Broken Muse*, VAG (1986). Haraldsson has also published articles on contemporary art, and served as the west coast editor for *C Magazine* in the late 1980s.

Since 1990, Haraldsson has investigated Vancouver's urban and suburban landscapes through the lens of his camera. Choosing sites as diverse as the downtown West End, Burnaby, Coquitlam and West Vancouver, Haraldsson has recorded changes in building practices from the high modernist 50s to the postmodern 90s. In these images Haraldsson bypasses Vancouver's landmarks to focus instead on modernist apartment buildings, residential West Coast style homes, contemporary highrises and suburban developments. In these photographs, the artist explores how modernist architecture and contemporary development are "emblematic of larger social forces, as a symbolic system shaping human relations, and as a correlative of art historical discourse." While

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these general developments can be seen in a variety of sites and locations throughout the world, these images focus on specific manifestations in Vancouver, a city positioned at "the edge of the wilderness" whose growth relies upon urban development and the real-estate market.

Arni Haraldsson is not currently represented in the VAG's collection. The acquisition of these works would provide the Gallery with a significant representation of the activity of one of the "second generation" of photo-conceptual artists in Vancouver. These works have links to a wide range of landscape work in the collection from Emily Carr to Jeff Wall, as well as work that addresses the relationship between modernist ideals and contemporary realities (Ian Wallace, Rodney Graham, Roy Arden, Richard Henriquez, among others).

Recommend purchase.

Grant Arnold
Associate Curator

Research: Linda Sawchyn
Assistant Curator

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