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Landon MacKenzie: The Animals in the Landscape

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Abstract

Landon MacKenzie: The Animals in the Landscape

R. Bella Rabinovitch

The present thesis examines the figurative work executed between 1981 and 1985 by Canadian painter Landon MacKenzie (b.1954). During this period MacKenzie produced five series of paintings employing landscape and animal imagery: Lost River, Gestation, Cluny, Winter 1984 and Crossing. In Chapter I, an account of MacKenzie's biography shows that these animal images function as disguised symbols for her own identity and its relationship to both her human and natural environment.

Critics have argued that the revival of figurative painting in the 1980's is a further manifestation of the voyage of self-discovery embodied by the 'Northern Romantic Tradition'. The validity of this claim is considered in Chapter II, and the three subsequent chapters examine the significance of such a strategy for a Canadian woman artist.

Consequently, it is argued that the paintings should be viewed as encompassing a positive progression through three stages. In Lost River, the subject is primarily MacKenzie's personal history, depicted through arcane animal imagery that inhabit a northern environment. Gestation and Cluny represent an intermediary stage where the emphasis shifts to the underlying bonds enjoining humans and their animal counterparts. Finally, in Winter 1984 and Crossing the journey is completed and the natural world itself, as mediated

by MacKenzie's personal history, becomes the primary subject of exploration and concern.

Acknowledgements

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Zacy Benner, Paul Perchal, Ron Ross, Jennifer Salahub, Eva Rabinovitch, and Naomi Zaritsky were my unwavering fan club.

Finally, this thesis is dedicated to Zorro who taught me the power of the animal.

Table of contents

Introduction

> In that long night
> the animals crept out
> through the burrows of my blind eyes;
> they went away to a different part of the forest,
> leaving their masks behind[1].

During the winter of 1979–1980, Landon Mackenzie (b. 1954) began to experiment with figurative painting that portrayed indistinct animals in a landscape setting. Trained initially as a printmaker at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (B.F.A., 1976) and Concordia University (M.F.A., 1979), she turned to painting, in the hope that she could capture through this fluid medium the elements of the northern terrain that preoccupied her imagination. Equally, she aspired to create images that were accessible to a general audience while retaining their ability to operate as disguised records of her personal life.

In the spring of 1981, Mackenzie won the first prize at the Third Biennale Of Painting in Montreal[2] and subsequently secured for herself, recognition as an important young painter within the

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[1] Margaret Atwood, "The Totems," The Animals In that Country (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1973), 22.

[2] Creation Quebec 81: 3rd Biennale of Painting, Centre Saidye Bronfman, Montreal, May 17–July 5, 1981.

Canadian milieu. Since that time,her series of paintings have been widely exhibited and critically reviewed. The works have been examined and praised for their rich formal values, as well as their multivalent symbolism.

The focus of the ensuing chapters will be an in depth examination of five series of Mackenzie's paintings executed between 1981 and 1985 that employ landscape and animal imagery. These works will be contextualized within a variety of themes pertinent to a holistic reading. However, the initial chapter must be devoted to Mackenzie's biography, for it was during her childhood and adolescence that the mask of the adult was formed, shaped by the exigencies of being female and Canadian in a contemporary world beset by personal dramas and ecological tragedies.

Chapter I

We go for walks
in the leaves, in the rising water, we
tell stories, we communicate
delayed reactions[3].

Landon Mackenzie was born on November 28, 1954 in Boston, Massachusetts[4]. A year later, her Canadian family resettled in Toronto[5], where Mackenzie received both her primary and secondary education. Although her childhood is not marked by early recognition of budding artistic talent, she was nonetheless nurtured by the creative milieu of her family and their friends. For instance, Mackenzie's paternal great-grandmother and grandmother both supported themselves as artists[6]. They presented, indirectly

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[3] Magaret Atwood, "What Happened," The Animals In That Country (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1973), 27.

[4] Biographical information has been culled from interviews with the artist, as well as two in depth letters, addressed to the author, dated June 18, 1985, and January 28, 1986. Whenever direct quotes are used, the source will be cited.

[5] At the time of Mackenzie's birth, her father, Michael Mackenzie was attending Harvard University.

[6] Mary Berkley Sawtelle was trained at the Corcoran School in Washington D.C.. After the early demise of her husband, she supported her family as an itinerant portrait painter. Her daughter, Alice Sawtelle Mackenzie attended the Art Students League in New York City. She worked as a commercial designer and watercolourist.

through family accounts, and directly by exposure to her grandmother, the possibility and viability of a woman as a serious artist. Her uncle, Hugh Mackenzie, one of Canada's leading realist painters, provided the early role model of artist\teacher[7]. While neither of Mackenzie's parents are artists, they did encourage artistic expression in the home[8]. As avid collectors of contemporary Canadian art of the fifties and early sixties, their home was adorned by works, which included paintings by Jock Macdonald, Gordon Smith, Michael Snow, and Harold Town.

Recalling her childhood, Mackenzie remembered that "a large collage by Harold Town in our front hall with some referential bird imagery always was my favorite. Harold was also a friend of my parents and perhaps his painting was more real to me because I knew him[9]." When I speculated in a catalogue essay[10] that Town's collage was an influential source for her own later animal imagery, the

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[7] Colin S. Macdonald, 'Hugh Seaforth Mackenzie," A Dictionary Of Canadian Artists (Ottawa: Canadian Paperback Publishing Ltd., 1974), 1038–1039.

[8] "Although the notion of becoming an artist came from elsewhere, both my parents were very prone to artistic expression in their own way. My mother was very 'tactilely' inclined, materials, colours, etc. and my father (son of Alice, brother of Hugh) is a good draughtsman....We always painted all our Christmas wrappings on plain shelf paper ...and were always encouraged to make our gifts and never to buy them. I'm sure this kind of upbringing demystified art quite alot."
Landon Mackenzie, Toronto, to R. Bella Rabinovitch, Montreal, 28 January 1986, 5.

[9] Landon Mackenzie, Toronto, to R. Bella Rabinovitch, Montreal, 18 June 1985, 1.

[10] R. Bella Rabinovitch, Landon Mackenzie (Lethbridge: Southern Alberta Art Gallery, 1986), np.

artist responded that "your line...read for me like old porridge because the bird influence has been much more pronounced in general through my grandmother Alice who used them all the time in her design work[11]". I mention this incident here merely as a foreshadowing of the difficulty I encountered in establishing a hierarchy among the many factors that influenced Mackenzie's own animal imagery.

Mackenzie's initial interest in producing art was witnessed during her high school years (1967–1972) at Jarvis Collegiate. In 1970, the teenager won a scholarship to study art at the Ontario College Of Art on Saturdays. The funds, provided by the Art Gallery Of Toronto, were awarded to one student from each inner city Toronto high school. These Saturday classes continued until her graduation in 1972 and her subsequent enrolment at the Nova Scotia College Of Art And Design in the fall of that year.

Certainly, if one views Mackenzie's personal history within the parameters I've outlined above, her decision to become an artist seems somewhat pre–ordained. However, many of the factors that led to her career are entangled in a childhood that was considerably more complex. In 1965, when Mackenzie was eleven years old, her parents were divorced, thus destroying the congenial and secure atmosphere of her home life. As the eldest of four children, she endured an adolescence marked by both untimely responsibilities and heady independence[12]

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11 Landon Mackenzie, Toronto, to R. Bella Rabinovitch, Montreal, 28 January 1986, 4.

12 "My parents separated in a very dramatic and upheaving way...My

Until the time of her diplomatic escape[13] to an university as far as possible from Toronto, Mackenzie found a respite from the city and its tensions during her summer vacations. The family cottage situated on a small island on the remote end of Stoney Lake provided an alternate lifestyle. "Windhaven", built in the 1880's, had no electricity or running water; nonetheless it offered amenities that would leave a lasting legacy.

The rural surroundings provided her with a deep respect for nature- one touched yet not scarred by humankind. Coincidentally, it was this very pocket of wilderness that had inspired the explicitly Canadian imagery found in the writings of Susanna Moodie and Catherine Parr Trail over a century ago[14]. Here then,she discovered unsevered connections-a binding kinship with the land and those settlers who exalted this romantic identification.

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mother had a nervous breakdown. We lived with my father for a very short time and then the kids returned to live in the family house, temporarily with a close friend of the family as care giver until my mother came home from the hospital. I took a huge part of household responsibility (as did my sister) from this time on." Landon Mackenzie, Toronto, to R. Bella Rabinovitch, Montreal, 18 June 1985, 3.

[13] "During grade 12 wrote away to N.S.C.A.D. and Mount Allison U. figuring that this was the only diplomatic way I could leave home. Felt I desperately needed to get away from Toronto."
Ibid, 4.

[14] Stoney Lake is near Lakefield, Ontario in Peterborough county. Lakefield "was settled by many half-pay officers of the British Army, including Col. Samuel Strickland and his sisters, Mrs. Susanna Moodie and Mrs. Catherine Parr Trail, all three of whom wrote books now considered classics on pioneer life....As a result, the area has been looked upon as the cradle of literary culture in Upper Canada."
John E. Robbins, ed. "Lakefield," Encyclopedia Canadiana (Toronto: Grolier of Canada, 1966), 52.

The region was also home to many of Mackenzie's older relatives who bridged the gap between the idealistic 19th-century pioneers and their 20th-century counterparts. George Douglas and his wife 'Chinka' Mackenzie Douglas, Mackenzie's great-uncle and aunt, imbued the artist with an awe of northern terrains and their animal inhabitants. Douglas, an explorer during the early years of this century, had been one of the first white men to navigate the Coppermine River in the Northwest Territories. In 1914, his account of this expedition was published in a text entitled Lands Forlorn. Although Douglas died when Mackenzie was only eight years old, his much younger wife extolled the virtues of this adventurous man, keeping his memory alive for the younger generations of the family. In 1985, the artist wrote, "I see her ('Chinka') regularly and she keeps George very alive to me. It has meant alot to her that I've travelled to the far north and have made my art about some of my experiences there. She is a very exceptional woman and for her I am carrying on a very important Canadian tradition[15]".

The exploration of Canadian traditions was broached by Mackenzie while still an undergraduate. Most intriguingly, and certainly foreshadowing future events, it occurred outside the confines of the safe academic milieu during a period of emotional turmoil. This crisis was in part instigated by her romantic involvement with Donald MacPherson[16]. Mackenzie had met

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[15] Landon Mackenzie, Toronto. to R. Bella Rabinovitch, Montreal, 18 June 1985, 5.

[16] Donald Macpherson is the father of Mackenzie's three children. His person, at times disguised as an animal, is an important aspect of the artist's personal iconography in her painting series.

MacPherson soon after her arrival in Halifax in the autumn of 1972. Although they eventually began to live together, there was "no demand for a commitment from one another for years[17]". During the spring of 1973, MacPherson, an itinerant musician at that time, decided to relocate to St. John's, Newfoundland. Several months later Mackenzie, overcome by loneliness, followed, consequently abandoning her fall semester at N.S.C.A.D.

Ever mindful of her still precarious identity as an artist, Mackenzie spent Monday to Friday at the St. Michael's printshop in Burnt Cove, approximately thirty miles from St. John's. Here she compleied a series of monotypes that on one level examined the controversial Canadian seal hunt.

The reality of the seal hunt presented Mackenzie with the dilemma of being a foreigner standing in judgement of another's culture. In retrospect, she noted, "Being an Ontario vegetarian in a fishing village made me personally very uncomfortable about the problem[18]". Mackenzie has been a vegetarian since the age of fourteen. Her decision was prompted after the grisly incident of preparing a chicken for cooking. Cleaning its innards left her with a distaste for meat, including fish. Here then, a longstsanding tradition that provided financial survival for its adherents, a tradition associated with Canadian identity (trapping, hunting, and fishing not defined solely as a regional activity) had to be called

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[17] Landon Mackenzie, Toronto, to R. Bella Rabinovitch, Montreal, 18 June 1985, 7.

[18] Landon Mackenzie, Toronto, to R. Bella Rabinovitch, Montreal, 18, June 1885, 8.

into question for its brutality and personal repugnance.

The differing vulnerabilities of the fishermen and certainly the seals paralleled the fragility Mackenzie was experiencing in her own life. Her desire for love had distanced her from the academic environment and equally frightening from the sensation of emotional independence. Here she was both an alien externally and alienated internally. Notably then, she employed the monotypes as a cathartic record of these many disturbing exterior and interior events.

It is important to note that Mackenzie's seals were not realistically portrayed. Instead, she created "a bulging female pear" to operate as a multivalent symbol. In this way, the artist felt it was possible to employ the 'seals' as arcane personal stand-ins: "In the pictures one (or all) are me much in the way they are at the beginning of Lost River[19]", thereby heralding Mackenzie's first important series of paintings.

This two-fold strategy of addressing ecological issues while at the same time creating disguised autobiographical art is akin to the process that is a constant in her future series of paintings[20]. Formally the monotypes also set a precedent for her later works. The artist recalled, "Technically I used the old technique of oil paint on glass with rubbing that my grandmother had taught me. As I started to experiment I found by diluting the paint with different media like lithotine (refined turps) or silkscreen gel I could get layered effects that were very rich and pleasing to me. Each print

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[19] Ibid, 9.

[20] The iconographical and iconological implications of this strategy will be closely examined in the following chapters.

probably has thirty layers of colour with the image slowly taking form and then sharpened at the end[21]". This use of multiple layering gradually evolving into a sharper image is a mainstay of the artist's later working method.

Mackenzie returned to N.S.C.A.D. for the winter semester of 1974. Pleased by the monotypes she had created on her own, she was dismayed to find that while her teachers praised the work's technical quality, they dismissed the figurative aspects. In fact, the artist was encouraged to explore a more abstract vocabulary.

This predominant disinterest in her figuration is not surprising when viewed within the context of the school's direction. In the early 1970s the Nova Scotia College Of Art And Design was the center for conceptual art in Canada. In essence, students were encouraged to eschew figurative formats in the hope of creating self-reflexive art.

Mackenzie complied in part with the bias of the school, and over the next couple of years her art grew increasingly abstract. However, she did not entirely relinquish her interest in autobiographical art. "The work continued but became more reduced, eventually black and white with the images becoming more 'sophisticated', less recognizable, more camouflaged[22]".

At the end of the fall session of 1975, Mackenzie completed her course requirements for her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree[23]. The

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[21] Landon Mackenzie, Toronto, to R. Bella Rabinovitch, Montreal, 18 June 1985, 8–9.

[22] Landon Mackenzie, Toronto, to R. Bella Rabinovitch, Montreal, 18 June 1985, 9.

[23] She officially graduated in the spring of 1976.

following January she returned to the St. Michael's workshop where she contemplated both her artistic and personal future. Still torn between an uncertain life with MacPherson, and a serious career as an artist, that prescribed at this time a more structured existence, she hesitated before making a final decision.

She applied to graduate schools in Edmonton and Montreal. She also seriously considered moving permanently to the Yukon with MacPherson. In March of 1976, Mackenzie and MacPherson arrived in the Yukon after a cross-country trek with stopovers in Montreal and British Columbia. In Montreal, Mackenzie was interviewed by Irene Whittome in connection with her application to Concordia University.

Once in the Yukon, Mackenzie immediately found employment as a sign painter. MacPherson worked in the mill of a copper mine, recalling the memory of Mackenzie's maternal grandfather, Larrat Higgins. Higgins, a mining engineer who had spent many years in Chile, working in a copper mine, was regarded by the young artist as her "closest family figure[24]". In many ways, Mackenzie was living a romantic adventure that seemed to connect her with her family's history.

This period of the artist's life was also marked by her growing awareness and resulting commitment to conserve this vast northern terrain from insensitive development. Community hearings, relating to the proposed Mackenzie Valley Pipeline[25] were in progress, and

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[24] Landon Mackenzie, Toronto, to R. Bella Rabinovitch, Montreal,18 June 1985, 1.

[25] The Mackenzie Valley Pipeline was a "proposed pipeline for the transport of natural gas and later oil from the Arctic Ocean to Alberta....A federal royal commission, led by Judge Thomas Berger,

they subsequently radicalized the concerned constituents. Although the commissioner in his final report strongly recommended that this project be aborted[26], the abstract linear image of the controversial pipeline invaded Mackenzie's imagination, and would be summoned up later to represent encroaching civilization in her paintings.

In August, the young couple moved to a remote cabin in the wilderness. Mackenzie regarded the experience as a "real confrontation with nature[27]" Certainly it heightened her awareness of nature's fickle power to enchant as well as to terrify. Here too then, she found a wealth of inspiration for her paintings that would be rendered in distant southern cities.

Mackenzie's attachment to the northern terrain and her relationship with MacPherson were rivalled solely by her desire to create art. The wilderness offered a plethora of subjects ,but, Mackenzie failed to convert the stimuli into a physical form that fulfilled her expectations. The image of Emily Carr sketching freely as she explored the British Columbia landscape provided the young artist with a role model- unfortunately one that she could not emulate at this stage of her career. Eventually, Mackenzie had to face her polarized affinities. She could stay in the Yukon and begin a

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was appointed in March 1974 to consider the proposals and their social and economic impact on the north. The commissioners held community hearings across the North, beginning in 1975 and ending November 1976."
James Marsh, "Mackenzie Valley Pipeline," The Canadian Encyclopedia (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1988), 1273.

[26] Thomas R. Berger, Northern Frontier, Northern Homeland (Ottawa: James Lorimer & Co., 1977), xiii.

[27] Landon Mackenzie, Toronto, to R. Bella Rabinovitch, Montreal, 18 June 1985, 10.

family with MacPherson or continue to evolve as an artist by returning south to begin graduate studies[28].

In the autumn of 1976, Mackenzie entered the M.F.A. programme at Concordia University in Montreal. Elated by her opportunity to work with Irene Whittome and to develop her talents, she was nonetheless saddened by the great distance between herself and MacPherson who had opted to stay in the north. She partially resolved her dilemma by returning to the Yukon during school breaks[29]. MacPherson followed the artist to Montreal in November of 1977, however; the ensuing months were not without tension and sadness as the couple deliberated over their relationship.

There can be no doubt that Mackenzie's art grew increasingly autobiographical as she sought to find a mode of expression for her emotional turmoil. Many of her series of etchings were viewed by the artist as calendars that secretively recorded the events of her life. In these works, she tentatively began to experiment with the inclusion of text. Because the writing was "printed backwards and half scraped out[30]", the autobiographical content of the works was legible only to the artist. Soon this haifway measure would be replaced by a more explicit format.

In the fall of 1978, Mackenzie began work on a book of etchings

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28 "Accepted to graduate schools in Edmonton and Montreal but decide to go to Montreal to work with Irene (Whittome) and for the city. Also my father was living there then."
Ibid, 10.

29 "Went back and forth to the Yukon – Christmas, (1 month) 1976, summer, (4 months) 1977,"
Ibid, 11.

30 Ibid, 9.

entitled Love Letters. The 26 pages all pulled from the same plate defied the earlier cryptic diaries by their ability to be read by a general audience[31]. The artist commented, "This piece is the real resolution of alot of anguish between Donald and me....It's a real need to look at myself[32]".

It is interesting to note that Love Letters, completed in 1979, akin to the earlier cathartic mono-types, were executed outside the confines of the academic institution. Concurrent with its conception, Mackenzie had moved to a studio on Peel Street that she shared with other young artists[33]. Despite the continuing support of Irene Whittome, who had arranged the loan of a printing press from Concordia University, Mackenzie was conscious of the fact that she was now technically "out of school and aware of working totally for myself[34]". Certainly, the consecutive print series Moon Snow, executed in 1979, continued in this self-referential manner, although, Mackenzie did adopt a more poetic voice. For this work, she appropriated the cadence of a fairy tale to recount her life with MacPherson.

Mackenzie's abiding interest with the tactics of autobiographical art was not delimited by her own work. During the summer of 1978, the artist began writing her master's thesis that

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31 "I decided to write backwards, therefore to print forwards for Love Letters."
Ibid, 9.

32 Ibid, 12.

33 Michael Joliffe, Lynn Hughes, David Elliott, Elise Bernatchez, and Murray MacDonald.

34 Landon Mackenzie, Toronto, to R. Bella Rabinovitch, Montreal, 18 June 1985,12.

examined a multitude of strategies employed by contemporary artists commited to self–referential art. Entitled Autobiographical Art[35], the text reveals Mackenzie's evolving attitude towards an art that rejects the "art for art sake" tenet.

In her preface, the artist averred, "My thesis stems from my own need to bring art closer to my life and from my interest in its predominance elsewhere in current art[36]". Part I begins with a general definition of this current[37], one that is refined as the text unfolds in its discussion of diverse artists and their individual practices. It is in this section that the artist briefly addresses painting[38] and concedes, "It is difficult to include painting in this current tendency of autobiographical art[39]". She commented that, "Painting generally demands a high degree of technical competence

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35 Landon Mackenzie, Autobiographical Art (M.F.A. thesis, Concordia University, December 1978).

36 Ibid IV

37 "A conscious effort to record through art, the process of uncovering or revealing,who one is (or would like to be) to the viewer and to oneself. It must immediately be distinguished from the fact all art is, in part, autobiographical; indeed a lifetime of work by an artist constitutes an autobiographical statement of a sort. However, this is not a conscious move by the artist towards personal investigation, nor is it part of this current phenomenon." Ibid,3.

38 Mackenzie limits her discussion of painting and those autobiographical artists who employ this medium to nine and a half pages in a sixty –three– page chapter. Approximately one and a half pages are devoted to Freda Kahlo, although her death in 1954 places her outside the contemporary framework. Mackenzie states quite candidly, "There is an artist I feel deserves special mention in the area of autobiographical painting....She is the only artist I have found who has dealt solely with autobiographical material." Ibid,49.

39 Ibid, 49.

in order to be effective. This could be one reason why artists who are primarily interested in narrative and autobiography work with the more direct media of photography and video. It could be because the more traditional media still carry more formal concerns, such as colour, line, form and balance[40]". Ironically, it is at this very juncture that painting emerges from this formal stranglehold[41].

While Mackenzie's thesis does affirm her burgeoning interest in self–reflective art, there is no foreshadowing of her future commitment to painting. Equally, one cannot predict the exact parameters of her ensuing art. In the afterword of her thesis she averred her desire for "the content to be read and understood 'out there'[42]". However, the content was not defined as purely autobiographical. Instead the artist obliquely stated, "I want to work with subject matter that deals with relationships between people in a more general way[43]".

During the summer of 1979, Mackenzie returned to the Yukon for four months. Here she renewed her attachment to the rugged landscape with its mythopoeic overtones. Throughout this sojourn she kept a journal that recorded her own adventures, sketches of the landscape, as well as stories that captured her imagination. One particular canoe trip on Big Salmon River, filtered through her journal, would lead to a book of etchings and finally to her first painting.

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[40] Ibid, 48.

[41] The autobiographical tendencies of New Image Painting will be further discussed in chapter II.

[42] Ibid, 94.

[43] Ibid, 94.

In the fall of 1979, relocated in Montreal[44], Mackenzie began work on a book of etchings entitled Salmon River. The thirteen pages, which included images and text, were based on "fantasy stories (fictional autobiography)[45]", akin to segments of her journal. The journal was also the source for twenty gouache on paper landscapes that the artist experimented with during the following months.

Financially fortified by a Canada Council short term grant received during this highly productive period, Mackenzie acquired a printing press and with certain trepidation built a large 7' x 8' stretcher. Her desire to paint was manifested by the existence of the stretcher in the studio; however, for several months she was "too scared to start painting on it[46]". Finally, in late December she approached the empty canvas and completed her first painting in January 1980.

This acrylic painting, which bore the same title as her concurrent print series, Salmon River, was essentially a "stiff romantic landscape[47]". While not entirely pleased with her initial work, Mackenzie nonetheless continued to explore the medium. Throughout the spring of 1980, she stated that she "worked and reworked on several other paintings which were very confused learning how to paint, how I liked the paint to look. How best to use

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[44] Mackenzie shared a studio with Eva Brandl, Stephen Schofield, and Sorel Cohen on Clark Street.
[45] Landon Mackenzie, Toronto, to R. Bella Rabinovitch, Montral, 18 June 1985, 13.
[46] Ibid, 13.
[47] Ibid, 13.

this imagery of landscape, fish, people vs. no people, villages, etc[48]".

The following summer, she returned to the St. Michael's printshop in Newfoundland as a participant in a printing workshop led by Joyce Wieland. Although she executed several etchings, Mackenzie came to the realization that she would prefer to paint. The recognition of this fact played an important role in allowing the artist to take greater liberties with her painting upon her return to Montreal. This sojourn also nurtured her strong belief in the viability of the Canadian landscape as apt subject matter for her work. Thus in the autumn of 1980, Mackenzie completed two paintings, Salmon River II, and Red Canoe, which she soon after included in her solo exhibition at Articule[49], in Montreal, along with her print series Love Letters, Moon Snow, and Salmon River.

While Mackenzie received praise for her prints, she commented that there was "a certain quietness about the paintings[50]". With her show still up, and somewhat perturbed by the lack of reaction to her paintings, Mackenzie in December 1980 departed for England. She recalled, "I went by myself to England and Ireland for a month over the Christmas break to look at museums[51]". Closely examining paintings she had only seen in reproduction, the artist was struck by the fluidity of the oil and acrylic media. She noted as well that the "most memorable paintings seen were at the Tate: the Rothko Room,

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48 Ibid, 13.

49 Mackenzie was an active member of the artist run space, Articule, from 1980 to 1982.

50 Ibid, 14.

51 Ibid, 14.

a small Milton Avery, and really noticing, seeing for the first time how much looser the works of people like Picasso were in the flesh[52]".

The trip to Great Britain solidified Mackenzie's commitment to painting. Equally, it brought about a "new conviction about the Canadian landscape" and the self-knowledge that it was "time to really dig in[53]". Heeding her own inner voice, the artist produced the first four paintings of her Lost River series between January and March of 1961. These works ultimately paved the way for her recognition as a unique chronicler of the autobiographical landscape, and a practitioner of revitalized Romanticism.

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52 Ibid, 14.
53 Ibid, 15.

Chapter II

The question of identity is primarily a cultural and imaginative question and there is always something vegetable about the imagination, something sharply limited in range[54].

whether the wilderness is
real or not
depends on who lives there[55].

Landon Mackenzie's autobiographical landscapes are bound by the broad parameters charted by 19th- and 20th-century Romanticism, for these partially site-specific depicted regions have been overtly transformed by the artist's unequivocally personal projections. Indeed, Mackenzie's deliberate manipulation of pathetic fallacy in Lost River and the ensuing series, creates a resounding sign that allows the viewers to locate their bearings. Here nature is neither scientifically replicated nor relegated to a supporting role as a backdrop. Nature and 'her' animal inhabitants are employed both as an expression of themselves as well as an emotional extension of the artist.

When John Ruskin first coined the term pathetic fallacy in

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[54] Northrop Frye, The Bush Garden (Toronto: Anansi, 1971), i.
[55] Margaret Atwood, "Further Arrivals," The Journals of Susanna Moodie (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1970), 13.

1856[56] in volume III of Modern Painters his assessment of this strategy was marked by deep misgivings[57]. However, it is evident that even this 19th- century writer reacting to the excesses of Romanticism could not entirely dismiss "the modern painter endeavoring to express something which he, as a living creature, imagines in the lifeless object[58]", nor the power of pathetic fallacy to capture the essence of "prophetic inspiration[59]".

Pathetic fallacy is not the only form of poetic licence that allows us to site Mackenzie's work within the Romantic tradition. The use of distortion and non-descriptive colour are further indicators of her adherence to a personal interpretation of the exterior terrain. Ultimately, however, it is Mackenzie's overt subject matter that contextualizes this work within what Robert Rosenblum refers to as "the Northern Romantic tradition[60]".

In his edifying text, Rosenblum traces a vibrant and enduring Romantic tradition among northern European and North American artists. In opposition to Modernism's 'art for art sake' dictum these varied artists, who traverse many artistic movements, are joined

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56 M.H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1957), 64.

57 "The temperament which admits the pathetic fallacy is, as I said above, that of a mind and body in some sort too weak to deal fully with what is before them or upon them: borne away, or over-clouded, or over-dazzled by emotion."
John Ruskin, Modern Painters Vol. III, (New York: Fred De Fau & Co., nd), 158.

58 John Ruskin, Modern Painters Vol.III, (New York: Fred De Fau & Co., nd), 169.

59 Ibid, 159.

60 Robert Rosenblum, Modern Painting and The Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko (New York: Harper & Row, 1975).

by their involvement in a spontaneous programme to disclose, in their paintings, insights often spiritual in nature. This emphasis on art as a prophetic or didactic medium sets in motion a reading of these works as both vital formal revisions of painting, in keeping with a rigid definition of Modernism, as well as areas where content vies for equal attention. Reacting to changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution, wars, and the dissolution of organized religion,these artists,whether Symbolist, Expressionist, or Abstract Expressionist, responded with a revived pantheistic fervor. Nature filtered through this consciousness was no longer a topographical record but a mapping of the psychological state of the artist.

Mackenzie's painterly exploitation and exploration of the Yukon, the untamed north, as a symbolic and dramatic site confirms her affinity with earlier painters who employed a similar if not parallel strategy for the redefinition of the self. The markedly spiritual quest delineated by Rosenblum[61] has been replaced here by a secular mission. In essence, the viewer is witness to a contemporary odyssey, where the artist comes to terms with her identity, not through an affiliation with organized religion or even a transformed reading of god, but rather the recognition of nature as

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[61] Rosenblum documents the particular traits of Romanticism in the north and its profound relationship with nature in his opening chapter entitled "Northern Romanticism and the resurrection of god". The author states, "Yet in the Protestant North, far more than in the Catholic South, another kind of translation from the sacred took place, one in which we feel that the powers of the deity have somehow left the flesh–and–blood dramas of Christian art and have penetrated, instead, the domain of landscape."
Ibid, 17.

the framework in which an analysis of self can take place.

Within this 'natural' realm the public and private life of the artist unfolds. Distanced from the complexity of trying to unravel the mystery of her identity objectively, she studies herself in a mirror of her own making. Thus animals operate as extensions of this highly charged nature as well as disguised self–portraits. Mackenzie, akin to the Expressionist painter Franz Marc, has "extended the pathetic fallacy from the domain of botany to the domain of zoology[62]".

Mackenzie's propagation or even resuscitation of a figurative Romantic format is not an isolated occurrence. Rosenblum, in his chapter entitled "Romantic survival and revival in the twentieth century," offers us insight into this tradition that has been perpetuated on a conscious as well as unconscious level. The author states, "It is a token of how ubiquitous Romantic imagery and ideas have become in our time, as well as how difficult it is, in the more exclusive domain of high art, to speak of the precise influence of [Caspar David] Friedrich when, in fact, his ideas could also have been disseminated by Walt Disney or on picture postcards[63]". Despite its multitude of sources, we recognize the power this strategy has to extract from the viewer, "the kind of empathy one would expect only in a human situation[64]".

Rosenblum, while less autocratic in his pronouncements than

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62 Ibid, 141.
63 Ibid, 132.
64 Ibid, 141.

Ruskin[65], is equally aware of the pitfalls engendered by the appropriation of nature to represent the human psyche. Ultimately this disenfranchisement, seemingly innocent at first, can result in the psychological invisibility or equally destructive, the detrimental distortion of nature and its non-human inhabitants. Understood only as a potent symbol it is estranged from the perception of its actuality. What has been displaced is what John Berger in About Looking refers to as "an acceptance of the dualism at the very origin of the relation between man and animal[66]".

Romanticism by its very emphasis on subjective sensibility, emotion, and imagination, as opposed to reason belies to varying degrees the existence of the 'other'. Thus Mackenzie's autobiographical landscapes would appear to stand in direct opposition to the tenets proposed by the advocates of a radical revision of contemporary art[67]. They seem to disprove the belief that "Postmodern knowledge [le savoir postmoderne] is not simply an

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65 "That Romantic empathy into the lives of dumb animals, which increasingly humanized them and made ideologically possible not only the foundation of early nineteenth-century societies to protect them from human abuse but ultimately the entire animal mythology of Walt Disney ."
Ibid, 141.

66 John Berger, "Why look at animals?" About Looking (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980),26.

67 Here I am referring to a variety of scholars, philosophers , social historians and feminist theorists that assert that the contemporary individual must acknowledge difference if we are to succeed in shaking off the stranglehold of white bourgeois male dominance. For an interesting analysis of how this operates please see Craig Owens, "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism," The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays On Postmodern Culture (Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1985), 57-82.

instrument of power. It refines our sensitivity to differences and increases our tolerance of incommensurability[68]". These paintings then,obliquely address volatile issues about the significance of a woman artist employing the Romantic mode as an analytic and cathartic device when both women and nature have suffered from the emotional projections cast upon them. Are we merely witnessing a perpetuation of a flawed and outdated epistemology or can these works be indicative of a more self–consciously employed Romanticism, shaped by the exigencies of the contemporary world?

The answer to this question demands a detailed investigation not only of Mackenzie's paintings but also of the wider ramifications of their inclusion within the renaissance of figurative painting. This must be our starting point. Equally, an examination of their feminist import must be negotiated. Finally, are these issues of significance for a holistic reading of paintings by an artist committed to her Canadian heritage? First recognized as an alternative to Conceptual and Minimal art in the late seventies, and powerfully predominant in the eighties, 'New Painting', 'Neo–Expressionism', or 'New Image Art'[69] bespeaks of its genuine

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68 J.F.Lyotard as quoted by Craig Owens in "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism," The Anti–Aesthetic Essays On Postmodern Culture (Port Townnsend, Washington: bay Press, 1985), 57.

69 A survey of exhibitions and essays devoted to new figurative painting reveals the variety of terms that have been employed to cover this art form. Sandy Nairne for example in State of The Art aptly notes that" 'New Painting' like 'Neo–Expressionism', is one of several terms used to denote the exuberant figurative painting that gained prominence in the late 1970s and early 1980s."
Sandy Nairne, State of The Art: Ideas & Images in the 1980s

dualism through the myriad of terms that have been coined to denote this art. Prefixed by new or neo it is in essence a revitalization of an old format. For in this territory, "Art is once again a medium of dreams and memories, of symbols and scenarios of the affective life. It has reacquired its capacity for drama – most especially, the drama of the self in both its conscious and unconscious states[70]".

This desire to employ art in a markedly individualistic manner has been boldy addressed by Marcia Tucker in her 1978 catalogue essay entitled "'Bad' Painting" for the exhibition of the same name[71]. The fourteen diverse figurative artists were not chosen because their work was bad, in compliance with the generally accepted meaning of the word, but rather in light of their defiance of an 'art for art sake' dictum. Forsaking "the classic canons of good taste, draftsmanship, acceptable source material, rendering, or illusionistic representation[72]", these iconoclastic artists represent for Tucker a liberating force. Romantic in outlook, they belie the notion of progress in art; however, they do not create fossilized images. Their idiosyncratic subjectivity does not negate difference but forces the viewer to recognize the jumbled feelings and pieces that make up our universe. Tucker states:

> For these artists, content and form are used in a jarring juxtaposition that forces us to question not only how we see,but what we see and what kinds of images we value. These

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(London:Chatto & Windus, 1987), 25.

[70] Hilton Kramer, "Signs of Passion," Zeitgeist (London:Weidenfeld &Nicolson, 1983),18.

[71] Marcia Tucker, "Bad" Painting (New York: The New Museum, 1978).

[72] Ibid, n.p.

> artists use a deliberate deformation of form, a subversion of the rules of good taste, in order to pose the same metaphysical and spiritual questions that artists have always posed, regardless of the manner in which they worked[73].

Ambiguity strikes at the heart of this revitalized Romanticism, thus in the end invalidating an authoritative voice. This is aptly expressed by Marshall MccLuhan: "The method of our time is to use not a single model but multiple models for exploration–the technique of the suspended judgement is the discovery of the twentieth century as the technique of invention was the discovery of the nineteenth[74]". Mackenzie, in keeping with the strategy outlined above, offers her viewers a personalized landscape, rooted in an older pantheistic tradition, yet nonetheless transformed by the licence she allows herself to render her mythical and autobiographical North.

The permutation of Romanticism is indeed an important aspect in the defence of Mackenzie's strategy; however, it alone cannot negate the knowledge that women and nature have often been bound in a social construct that excludes them from male cultural power. The artist's desire to create "ecological pictures[75]" that recount simultaneously her personal female experience, seems "to reinforce sex–role stereotyping[76]".

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73 Ibid, n.p.

74 Marshall McLuhan as quoted by Marcia Tucker in "An Iconography Of Recent Figurative Painting," Artforum (Summer 1982): 70.

75 Landon Mackenzie, Toronto, to R. Bella Rabinovitch, Montreal, 18 June 1985, 15.

76 Ynestra King, "Feminism and the Revolt of Nature," Heresies Vol. 4, 13 (1981) : 12.

Ynestra King in "Feminism and the Revolt of Nature[77]", examines the polemics surrounding this issue. Noting the divisive positions taken by feminists, the author concludes that:

> As women, we are naturalized culture in a culture defined against nature. If nature/culture antagonism is the primary contradiction of our time, it is also what weds feminism and ecology and makes woman the historic subject. Without an ecological perspective which asserts the interdependence of living things, feminism is disembodied[78].

Mackenzie's ability to "assert the interdependence of living things" in her art complies with King's conciliatory position. The artist's manipulation of pathetic fallacy sensitizes the viewer to the kinship we share with animals and nature assailed by interior and exterior forces. Underscoring our connectedness paves the way for a psychological emancipation from the need to dominate and suppress that which is conceived as the terrifying unknown, whether it be nature or women.

The collective Canadian experience of nature has been marked by what Northrop Frye refers to as "the conquest of nature by an intelligence that does not love it[79]". Concurrently a Romantic reconstitution of our surroundings has formed the genetic material for our cultural identity. Roald Nasgaard's critical assessment of the Group of Seven is particularly relevant here. He unequivocally avers in The Mystic North that, "In the mythology of Canadian art the

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77 Ibid, 12–15.
78 Ibid, 15.
79 Northrop Frye, The Bush Garden (Toronto: Anansi Press, 1971), 224.

Group of Seven is acknowledged to have formed the first genuine school of Canadian Art. However many earlier artists devoted themselves to the Canadian landscape, the Group of Seven not only identified its wild and rugged character as uniquely Canadian, but also recast it in a stylistic form that would determine, for this century at least, how Canadians perceived their landscape. Out of trees, rocks and lakes the members of the group also established the basic symbols of national identity, however romantic and unrelated to the realities of contemporary life these may have been. In this they did for Canada what (Karl) Nordstrom and the national Romantic movement had done for Sweden two decades earlier, with sunsets and midsummer twilight[80]". Interestingly, for Frye the Romantic tradition as exemplified by Thomson, the Group of Seven, and Emily Carr[81] in Canada does not offer up for its viewers a a new found sense of harmony. Reviewing the paintings of Tom Thomson he states:

> Griffins and gorgons have no place in Thomson certainly, but the incubus is there, in the twisted stumps and sprawling rocks, the strident colouring, the scarecrow evergreens. In several pictures one has the feeling of something not quite emerging which is all the more sinister for its concealment. The metamorphic stratum is too old: the mind cannot contemplate the azoic without turning it into the monstrous[82].

One then ponders how Mackenzie can then reconcile the

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[80] Roald Nasgaard, The Mystic North: Symbolist Landscape Painting In Northern Europe And North America 1890-1940 (Toronto: University Of Toronto Press, 1984), 158.

[81] Northrop Frye, The Bush Garden (Toronto: Anansi, 1971), vii.

[82] Ibid, 200.

ecological feminist position presented by King, with Frye's macabre interpretation of Canadian Romanticism with its gothic frissons. Coral Ann Howells in her critical text Private and Fictional Words[83] responds to this challenge by discerning a considerable difference between the male and female experience of the Canadian terrain. The author states:

> The male response was either one of fear and recoil (which found its expression in Northrop Frye's famous 'garrison mentality') or an adventurous challenge to the unknown in journeys of exploration and later colonial exploitation and settlement. Gaile McGregor's recent book The Wacousta Syndrome offers an analysis of the Canadian myth of wilderness as alien and 'other'. This is arguably the male myth of wilderness[84].

She continues her discussion by pointing out that women facing the same challenge did not react in a corresponding manner. Formed by the limiting constructs of Victorian ideology, the wilderness offered a way out of their harsh confinement:

> The wilderness as the pathless image beyond the enclosure of civilized life was appropriated by women as the symbol of unmapped territory to be transformed through writing into female imaginative space. It provides the perfect image for the 'wild zone', the 'mother country of liberated desire and female authenticity'[85].

Out of this tradition initiated by Susanna Moodie and Catherine Parr

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[83] Coral Ann Howells, Private and Fictional Words: Canadian Women Novelists of the 1970s and 1980s (London: Methuen,1987).
[84] Ibid, 14.
[85] Ibid, 15–16.

Traill, contemporary female authors have forged an affinity with the natural surroundings that has been mutually beneficial. For example, Margaret Atwood's eloquent novel Surfacing[86] reveals "at once biological and ecological[87]" concerns that cannot be disassociated from each other. Atwood's protagonist surfaces out of the quagmire of her confusion to proclaim:

> The animals have no need for speech, why talk when you are a word
> I lean against a tree, I am a tree leaning
>
> I break out again into the bright sun and crumple, head against the ground
> I am not an animal or a tree, I am the thing in which the trees and animals move and grow, I am a place[88]

Self–identity is marked here by a circumference that allows us to recognize transcended territorial boundaries.

Mackenzie working as a visual artist attempts a parallel communion. Certainly, the Group of Seven and their followers have in part sponsored her credibility as a Canadian landscape painter, however, their Northern Romantic vision[89] has been

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[86] Magaret Atwood, Surfacing (Markham, Ontario: Paperjacks, 1972).
[87] Coral Ann Howells, Private and Fictional Word: Canadian Women Novelists of the 1970s and 1980s (London: Methuen, 1987), 16.
[88] Margaret Atwood, Surfacing (Markham, Ontario: Paperjacks, 1972), 181.
[89] Roald Nasgaard states concerning the Group of Seven and their influential Scandinavian progenitors, " Thus the landscapists discussed here fit within Robert Rosenblum's reading of a 'northern Romantic tradition' that spanned both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries."
Roald Nasgaard, The Mystic North: Symbolist Landscape Painting In Northern Europe And North America 1890–1940 (Toronto: University Of Toronto Press,1984), 6.

transformed. As a woman interested in decoding her own being as well as one committed to pressing ecological concerns, Mackenzie's is equally indebted to female literary traditions of this country. As a contemporary Romantic artist, her visual vocabulary remains to a degree open-ended because of its ability to be read on multiple levels[90], thus complying with the present state of this art form hauntingly akin to Atwood's metaphysical prose.

In essence, Frye's understanding of identity developing out of the imagination which is partially bound by its locale cannot be refuted[91]. However, the "vegetable" domain filtered through the cultural constructs of each individual is a shifting sign. Frye's insight into the nature of this alternating focus is best expressed in his essay on Lawren Harris. The author states, "For the artist, whatever may be true of the scientist, the real world is not the objective world[92]".

Mackenzie's depiction of the Canadian north is both national and international in scope. It is private and public, consisting of a complex network of visions that she is privy to on a conscious as well as unconscious level. Her paintings are a carnival's hall of mirrors that reflect interior and exterior realities. They map her route of self-discovery and they offer up to us a terra incognita made ready for our exploration.

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90 This aspect will be examined in depth in the following chapter, especially in light of the differing responses to Mackenzie's work expressed by male and female critics.

91 Northrop Frye, The Bush Garden (Toronto: Anansi, 1971), i.

92 Ibid, 208.

Chapter III

I can understand

the guilt they feel because
they are not animals

the guilt they feel
because they are [93]

In March of 1981, Mackenzie submitted two paintings, Lost River no. 1 and no.3 to the jurors of Creation Quebec 81, the official title of the Third Biennale of Quebec painting[94]. The paintings, part of a series begun two months earlier, paved the way for Mackenzie's recognition as a painter[95], for the members of the jury, John Fox,

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[93] Margaret Atwood, "The Trappers," The Animals In That Country (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1968), 35.

[94] The Third Biennale of Quebec painting took place from May 17–July 5, 1981 at the Centre Saidye Bronfman in Montreal. Mackenzie sent Lost River no.2 to the Concordia University faculty exhibition. The artist was a part–time instructor in the Studio Art Department from 1977 to 1985.

[95] In the Autumn of 1981, several of Mackenzie's Lost River paintings were exhibited at the Galerie France Morin in Montreal. This was followed by another solo exhibition, also consisting of Lost River paintings, at the Mercer Union gallery in Toronto in the spring of 1982. Selected works from this series were also included in group shows: "Montreal Painting Now" at the Sir George Williams Galleries, Montreal in the Spring of 1982, and "The Quebec Connection: New Art" at Harbourfront Gallery, Toronto in January 1983.

Claude Gosselin, and Rene Viau, singled out Mackenzie's works and awarded them First Prize. The Second Prize was shared by by Michel Martineau and Francoise Sullivan. The Third prize was awarded to Marie Forget, Christine Hardy, Michael Joliffe, and Margaret Mandzuk-Nicholson.

In all, only fifty-three paintings were selected for the Biennale from among the 1100 works that were presented for consideration[96]. Rene Viau, on behalf of the jury, explained the selection process in the catalogue that accompanied the exhibition:

> Without excluding mature artists, the emphasis of the choice falls on young and often unknown painters. With their uses of gesture, of texture, of a "new" imagery, and of at times, judicious use of quotations...the works chosen have in common, with all their diversity of attitudes, only the will to bring to light the expression of lived or perpetually renewed pictorial experience[97].

This strategy was greeted by varying degrees of derision by francophone art critics, partially diminishing Mackenzie's achievement and those of her peers. The most scathing review of the Biennale was by Jean Tourangeau, who avoided singling out one artist or painting, in his diatribe against conformity and the dominance of "New Image Painting[98]". Gilles Toupin in La Presse[99]

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[96] Musee Du Centre Saidye Bronfman, News Release (Montreal: Centre Saidye Bronfman, May 14, 1981), n.p.

[97] Rene Viau, Creation Quebec 81 (Montreal| Centre Saidye Bronfman, 1981), n.p.

[98] Jean Tourangeau, "Peinture au Centre Saidye Bronfman," Vie des Arts (Automne 1981): 49-50.

[99] Gilles Toupin, "La 3e Biennale de Peinture du Quebec a Securite Maximale," La Presse, 6 Juin 1981 C1 and C22.

prefaced his review of the Biennale with a somewhat ambiguous description of Lost River no.1 , noting "Les allusions au monde de 'réel' sont nombreuses mais tout est couleur, forme, dérogation à la représentation illusioniste. Et ces formes et cette couleur déversent leur trop plein de sensualité[100]". This ambivalence was echoed in his overview of the exhibition:

> Les peintres de cette exposition, sauf Sullivan et Leduc, ne semblent pas accorder beaucoup d'importance a la redéfinition de la peinture. Ils ont davantage misé sur une peinture bien faite, convaincante à l'intérieur même de ses limites et ce qui n'est pas à négliger, séduisante[101]".

In essence, Toupin was wary of the pronounced return to figurative Expressionism that dominated the exhibition, regarding it as a reactionary direction in painting. He concluded his article with the statement, " J'aurais souhaite cedependant que ces artistes s'aventurent dans des terrains plus glissants et moins conservateurs, question de rendre plus appetissante cette confrontation intellectuelle[102]".

Suzanne Joubert in Le Droit[103] also remarked upon the homogeneous look of the Biennale, interpreting both the works and their selection as a "carence collective d'imagination et d'optimisme[104]". While the author confirmed that Mackenzie did merit First Prize because in one of her paintings "la couleur

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100 Ibid, C1.
101 Ibid, C22.
102 Ibid, C22.
103 Suzane Joubert, "L'art Serieux Et Moins Serieux," Le Droit, 20 Juin 1981, 20.
104 Ibid, 20.

chante[105]", she did not refer directly to the title of the work she was praising. One was left to surmise that it was Lost River no.1, especially in light of Joubert's allegation that, "A propos de ce premier prix, il est curieux de constater que la seconde oeuvre presentee par le meme artiste ressemble aussi peu que possible a l'oeuvre primee[106]". Joubert, in fact, was reluctant to label the sombre Lost River no.3 as painting, decrying its strong affinity to graffiti.

Virginia Nixon's coverage in Canadian Forum[107] was acutely different in tone. Her assessment was that,

> Younger Quebec painting has been in the doldrums in recent years, its most visible proponents heavily involved with theory and not much concerned about food for the viewer's eye. So it was a relief and a pleasure to see canvases venturing into emotion and colour[108].

This overview marked a distinct departure from her francophone counterparts. Nixon also pointed out that anglophone artists were given equal representation, "even though approximately 70 per cent of the 600 artists who submitted were francophone[109]". For the critic, this confirmed her view that "the larger share of stimulating, innovative art produced in Quebec in the past few years has been by

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1 5 Ibid, 20.
106 Ibid, 20.
107 Virginia Nixon, "The Montreal Open," Canadian Forum (September–October 1981): 47–48.
108 Ibid, 47.
109 Ibid, 47.

anglophones[110]".

While Nixon remarked upon "a sense of ambiguity[111]" that obscured a direct reading of many of the selected paintings, she regarded this trait in Mackenzie's works as operating in an effective manner:

> The ambiguity in first prize winner Landon Mackenzie's two brooding lanscapes inhabited by poignant, vulnerable animals is more convincing. These creatures with their drooping aphid-like bellies might be deers, dogs, wolves or symbols for humans. Red patches suggest blood – but of birth, death or both? Mackenzie's intent was to express her feelings about the Yukon where she has spent seven summers (the last of the truly wild places, she says), and to chronicle her own inner autobiography. It works. Her inner journey becomes ours[112].

Mackenzie's multivalent paintings, in essence, represented for Jean Tourangeau, "comme a New-York, un courant New Image[113]", that was being embraced by the mainstream. For the majority of the avant-garde francophone art critics this constituted a defection from Conceptual art that had been prominent in Quebec throughout much of the Seventies. Ultimately, their uneasy acceptance of Mackenzie's figuration was marked by the same wariness the artist had faced earlier at N.S.C.A.D.

Ironically, winning First Prize at the Biennale did not fully legitimize Mackenzie's art but rather focused attention on the

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110 Ibid, 47.
111 Ibid, 47.
112 Ibid, 47.
113 Jean Tourangeau, 'Peinture au Centre Saidye Bronfman," Vie des Arts (Automne 1981): 49.

resurgence of figurative painting in Canada and abroad, and the discourses surrounding this volatile issue[114]. Mackenzie's 6 1\2' x 7 1\2' acrylic paintings were indeed seductive, transgressing the avant–garde taboo that shunned the emphasis on the artist and his/her "metaphysics of the human touch[115]". As well, emotionally charged with colour, the paintings undermined the preoccupation with a rational dissection of their process that characterized the self–reflexive quality of late Modernism. Instead, the visually stimulating paintings aimed straight for the heart and eye of the viewer.

In essence, this appeal to the emotions, ultimately to entertain while offering a moment of catharsis, engendered a suspicion of this form of art, that now, akin to other eras, resulted in varying Draconian responses. These invectives can be traced from Plato's Republic up to present day, in the mandates on both the Right and Left of the political spectrum.

The Italian semiotician and novelist, Umbertro Eco, in an article entitled "Reflections on 'The Name of The Rose'[116]", addresses this persistent prejudice, especially in light of the resurgence of "enjoyment" with its seductive powers that in part characterizes Postmodernist art. His reminiscence that, "Just

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114 [114] For a contemporary insight into the debate surrounding new painting: Douglas Crimp, "The End of Painting," October 16 (Spring 1981):69–86; Thomas Lawson, "Last Exit: Painting,' Artforum (October 1981): 40–47.

115 Douglas Crimp, "The End Of Painting," October 16 (Spring 1981):77.

116 Umberto Eco, "Reflections on 'The Name of The Rose'," Encounter (April 1985): 7–19.

recently I met someone who, because he had liked a certain product too much, had relegated it to a zone of suspicion[117]", aptly parallels the reticence that accompanied the reception of Mackenzie's paintings by avant–garde critics. However, Eco then proceeds to redeem Postmodernism and its seemingly manipulative and reactionary traits from the jaws of its detractors. The author, under the sub–heading "Post–modernism, Irony, the Enjoyable," states,

> The avant–garde destroys, defaces the past: Les Demoiselles d'Avignon is a typical avant–garde act. Then the avant–garde goes futher, destroys the figure, cancels it, arrives at the abstract, the informal, the white canvas, the slashed canvas, the charred canvas...But the moment comes when the avant–garde(the modern) can go no further, because it has produced a metalanguage that speaks of its impossible texts (conceptual art). The Post–modern reply to the modern consists of recognising that the past, since it cannot really be destroyed, because its destruction leads to silence, must be revisited: but with irony, not innocently[118].

Mackenzie's paintings are indeed tied to an age-old tradition that permeates both visual and literary art. The artist's depiction of the events that take place in Lost River are akin to the recounting of a sojourn in a wilderness Shangri La. However, as in every paradise myth, expulsion is inevitable. Even if you escape into its seductive realm, eventually you are turned out, because it never really existed; or, in the case of James Hilton's novel Lost Horizon[119], the price one

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[117] Ibid, 16.
[118] Ibid, 16–17.
[119] James Hilton, Lost Horizon (New York: Morrow, 1936).

has to pay for reaching this manufactured Eden is imprisonment or death. The irony resides in the foreknowledge that we all desire an escape route to paradise, but the latter is a mythic site, a locale inevitably diminished by the haunting refrain of Et in Arcadia Ego[120] or the fall from grace.

Every constructed idyll has its undertow, and in the end there is no escape. Utopia literally translates as no place. Eco explicating Leslie Fiedler's provocative defense of Postmodernist fiction, eloquently sums up this paradox: "He feels that today reaching a vast public and capturing its dreams perhaps means acting as the avant-garde, and still leaves us free to say capturing readers' dreams does not necessarily mean encouraging escape, it can also mean haunting them[121]". The final irony resides in the nature of our dreams, where our nightmares insidiously make themselves known.

The nature and repetition of this dual state has been closely examined by Northrop Frye in the Anatomy Of Criticism. In the section entitled "Rhetorical Criticism: Theory of Genres," the author

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[120] Erwin Panofsky interprets this Latin phrase as, " Death is even in Arcadia." Panofsky tracing the concept of Arcadia, states,"It was then, in the imagination of Virgil, and of Virgil alone, that the concept of Arcady, as we know it, was born–that a bleak and chilly district of Greece came to be translated into an imaginary realm of perfect bliss. But no sooner had this new, Utopian Arcady come into being than a discrepancy was felt between the supernatural perfection of an imaginary environment and the natural limitations of human life as it is."
Erwin Panofsky, "Et In Arcadia Ego: Poussin And The Elegiac Tradition," Meaning in the Visual Arts (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 300.

[121] Umberto Eco, "Reflectionson 'The Name of The Rose'," Encounter (April 1985): 17.

states:

> But when the vision of innocence becomes unified, the contrasting vision of experience often reappears, in a convention that we might call the poem of expanded consciousness, where the poet balances the catharsis of his view of experience with the ecstasis of his view of a spiritual, invisible, or imaginative world. Here as in corresponding forms of drama, we have not a direct mimesis of life but a spectacular mimesis of it, able to look down on experience because of the simultaneous presence of another kind of vision[122].

Indeed, Mackenzie does present the viewer with " a spectactular mimesis" in her Lost River series. In this imaginary realm we encounter elements of real life experiences, the artist's experiences as she attempts to unite the two visions of innocence and experience. Mackenzie, while fulfilling Eco's insistence on an ironic voice for this Postmodernist era, has not broken with or subverted tradition but embraced one that ultimately cannot escape the mental juxtaposition of " what could be" with " what is". Rick Rhodes' review of an exhibition devoted solely to the Lost River series in the spring of 1982[123], describes this haunting synthesis:

> Mackenzie goes past the lightness, the wistfulness, the cerebral quality of art that tries to embody a dream state. In bits and pieces her work always reaches down to a sensual plane. You never forget that the dreaming involves a body. You sense dimly, as dimly as the colours that hover inside one another, that the work is flushed with sexual overtones.

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122 Northrop Frye, Anatomy Of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 301.

123 Rick Rhodes, "Landon Mackenzie, Mercer Union, Toronto, March 16–April 3," Vanguard (Summer 1982),50–51.

> Nothing is explicit, but the animals and the landscape seem to play out human intimacies[124].

Human intimacies are a major component of Mackenzie's Lost River series, executed between the winter of 1981 and the spring of 1982. For in these "complex allegorical narratives[125]", each painting is an engrossing short story, seemingly complete in itself. However, the stories are connected by their formal similarities and their exploration of the mythical site of Lost River and its generic animal inhabitants. In Lost River no.1 [plate1] three deer-like creatures, balanced precariously on spindly legs, gaze intently upon a glowing pink river in the center of the foreground. Two schematized radiant yellow fish appear pasted onto the surface as if they were offering themselves up for the mammals' repast. But this is not an ordinary world, where such mundane activities as eating and drinking take place. There is little liklihood that the deers rendered in non-descriptive colour and flecked by the golden yellow of their fish companions will conform to a direct mimesis of animal behaviour. In this 'peaceable kingdom', bounded by silky black mountains in the middleground, the fish seem to offer only food for thought or reverie. In the distance, a pink, red, yellow, and blue early evening sky echoes the vibrant colours of the fore and middlegrounds, forming a perfect backdrop for this strangely beatific scene.

Upon closer inspection one notes the strange hierarchy among

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[124] Ibid, 50.

[125] Diana Nemiroff, "Rhetoric And Figure In Montreal Painting Now," Parachute 27 (Summer 1982), 25.

the deer. The central black and lavender animal stands on a fan of blood–red earth, on a higher plateau then its companions. One small fleck of yellow edged in red on its side, seems to mark its heart, while at the same time disallowing the animal's interpenetration with the dark mountains by creating a bond with the foreground. Indeed the blood–red indicates Passion that seems to invade and undermine the quiet mystery of the scene.

Certainly this work is Mackenzie's paean to the Yukon and other northern terrains that feed her imagination. The title Lost River was appropriated from a wooden sign she happened upon while cross–country skiing in the Laurentians[126], a sign that denotes a place that is lost, an oxymoron as confounding as the tamed wilds of her paintings. This stirring homage also allows us to metaphorically identify and perhaps take on the responsibility of conserving this terrain; however animals described in lavender, black or steel–blue demand art conservation akin to the cave walls at Lascaux-not the militancy of Greenpeace.

Paradoxes abound in this work but the poignancy transcends the contradictions. The poignancy is essentially reliant on the human aspect of this story, the commanding pathetic fallacy. This is a fancy dress ball, where both the disguise and the humans hidden beneath the animal masks become the subject of our inquiry.

Marcia Tucker in the article entitled "An Iconography Of Recent Figurative Painting: Sex, Death, Violence, and the

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126 Landon Macke·ie, Toronto, to R. Bella Rabinovitch, Montreal, 18 June 1985, 15.

Apocalypse[127]", notes that,

> The search for the self, allegorical as well as literal, is perhaps one of the most common themes in the present period....This search for self-knowledge also manifests itself in images of mythological journeys to unknown realms, in which the dream becomes a paradigm of the world-picture, and fantasy and reality are interchangeable[128].

This Romantic quest for identity is evident in Mackenzie's painting. However, the artist adds another dimension with her inclusion of animal inhabitants. Thus Tucker's insight that" animal images are frequently used in this [recent figurative painting] work to represent the "other" aspect of human personality, the unconscious, the uncontrollable, the taboo[129]", casts light on the tension that pervades Lost River no.1 and the ensuing paintings of the series.

In Lost River no.1, no.6, [plate 2] and no.13, [plate 3] the artist does indeed grapple with the taboo, by recording her simultaneous love affairs with MacPherson and another man[130]. The love triangle is then another element in the series, another puzzle that besets her mythical realm. It is then likely that it is Mackenzie herself

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127 Marcia Tucker, "An Iconography Of Recent Figurative Painting: Sex, Death, Violence, and the Apocalypse," Artforum (Summer 1982), 70-75.

128 Ibid, 72.

129 Ibid, 73.

130 "I was always aware in these pictures of which animal represented me, which one Donald and which one (where there are three) a third person in our life. The triangle is a love affair on my part. Goes from Fall 1980 to Spring 1982."
Landon Mackenzie, Toronto, to R. Bella Rabinovitch, Montreal, 18 June 1985, 16.

who is the central animal figure in Lost River no. 1 , standing on a fan of passion with her suitors on either side of her. In Lost River no.6, an incredibly sombre work in contrast to the first one, a large bovine animal occupies the top half of the canvas. A horizontal red slash isolates the creature from the bottom half of the painting where two white fish float awkwardly. Once again the disguised artist in animal garb is presented with a choice between two fish, in an embarassment of riches.

In Lost River no.13, the wintry scene is imbued with almost auditory anguish. A stormy blue–black sky in the background forms a startling contrast to the barren white snow drift where three animals are loosely assembled. The deer–like animal furthest from the foreground, head raised in a pleading gesture, is gashed by a red stain at the base of its neck. Another creature directly in front of the injured animal looks away, concentrating on the murky river with its one slash of red in the left foreground. The third animal, located alone on the right side of the canvas,is hunched over, partially surrounded by a yellow halo. Mackenzie has identified this animal as herself, and the halo as being akin to a fence, emphasizing the boundaries of her behavior[131].

Certainly, if the locale of Lost River is Eden, it is no longer an innocent site as the story progresses. The strains of love have cast the central character into turmoil as she acknowledges the pain of those she loves unfaithfully. The real world invades; jealousy and divided loyalties taint the landscape. A final resolution is enacted

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131 Ibid, 16.

in the last painting of the series. The author states, "No.17 is about death. It is also appropriately the end of the series as well as the end of the love triangle[132]".

Diana Nemiroff in her discussion of Mackenzie's complex narratives in the article "Rhetoric And Figure In Montreal Painting Now[133]", broaches the issue of the anthropomophic aura of the animal imagery. The critic states,

> It is a token of our alienation from nature that the animal image–half wild, half domestic–should be such a powerful catalyst for the contemplation of our own lost nature. He is our other self, our alter ego, constantly pressed back by the demands of conscious daily life[134].

Nemiroff's insight concerning the contemporary alienation from nature that empowers animal imagery with a vigorous psychological symbolism cannot be contested. Her evaluation is in part supported by the plethora of exhibitions devoted solely to animal imagery throughout the Eighties. "Animals in the Arsenal[135]", in the spring of 1981, and "The Animal Image: Contemporary Objects and the Beast[136]" in the Spring and Summer of the same year, were two American exhibitions that explored the renewed interest in animal

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132 Ibid, 16.

133 Diana Nemiroff, "Rhetoric And Figure In Montreal Painting Now," Parachute 27 (Summer 1982), 22–27.

134 Ibid, 25.

135 "Animals in the Arsenal" was held at the Arsenal Gallery in New York City from March 4–April 28, 1981.

136 "The Animal Image:Contemporary Objects and the Beast" was held in Washington, D.C. at the Renwick gallery from March 13–August 30, 1981.

imagery among contemporary artists. However this interest was not confined to contenporary art, An American Bestiary[137], with its historical overview was published in 1979, and the exhibition "Animals in American Art 1880's–1980's[138]" with its accompanying catalogue, searched for the connecting thread that would reveal the persistence of these varying yet interwoven images.

The keen interest in the rich resources of depictions of animals was not limited to the United States. Paul Overy's assessment of and possible directions for contemporary British art in 1982[139] is indicative of this renewed preoccupation.

> With the bankruptcy of the realist tradition and of "gestural" and non–inventive abstraction, animals, birds and fish (on their own or combined with human figures) offer unexplored possibilities for renewed symbolic meaning, mythical allusion and emotional invocation. Here as often in the past they are used to stand for aspects of ourselves and our ways of thinking and feeling. They are symbols or signs which point the way to an interior reality.
> The use of animal imagery is only one way in which art might be re–invigorated. But it is a rich vein which is only just beginning to be reopened. Animals have mainly been used to symbolise our different moods, the contradictory aspects of our inner life. They could also be used in other ways, to symbolise our outer life too, our relationship with the society and environment in which we live[140].

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137 Mary Sayre Haverstock, An American Bestiary (New York:Harry N. Abrams, Inc.,1979).

138 "Aninals in American Art 1880's–1980's" was held at the Nassau County Museum of Fine Art, Roslyn, New York from October 4, 1981–January 17, 1982.

139 Paul Overy, " Art Into Time: Inner Worlds," Studio International 195 (September, 1982): 41–43.

140 Ibid, 43.

What is revealed by Overy's statement is the duality at the center of the renewed interest in depictions of animals. On one level we see a rekindled interest in personal, inner exploration. The depicted animal akin to many past counterparts is only visible as a disguised human with a complex series of motivations. As Alex Potts notes in "Natural Order and the Call of the Wild: the Politics of Animal Picturing[141]",

> It might be said that in the nineteenth century animal pictures functioned as a symbolic arena in which irrational social and psychological forces repressed by the dominant ideology of the period could find indirect expression. What could not be stated openly about the violences of social being in bourgeois society was displaced onto figurations of the animal world. But to take a cue from Foucault's analysis of sexuality, should we not rather say this preoccupation with representations of wild animals, far from being symptomatic of the repression of ideas of atavistic violence from public discourse, actually testifies to a growing preoccupation with these ideas? The new imagery of a wild nature provided a vivid symbolic language in which to conjure up and dramatise the idea of a world governed by elemental conflict and raw instinct[142].

Thus, more than being a means to record the taboo, the animal image for Potts offers an alternate reading of human behaviour: an escape from rational control into a land of "raw instinct". While this Darwinian vision is not entirely applicable for the late twentieth century it does propose an easy way out of our existential dilemma if choice is replaced by instinctual behaviour. Perhaps being disguised as an animal, in essence provides a deeper identification

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[141] Alex Potts, "Natural Order and the Call of the Wild: the Politics of Animal Picturing," The Oxford Art Journal 13 (No. 1 1990): 12–33.
[142] Ibid, 20–21.

with animals and their seemingly pre-ordained comportment, the crux of the contemporary utopian construct offering an escape from the probing mind. The ensuing expulsion is then the acknowledgement that while humans do share animal instincts, we are separated by our self-consciousness and the responsibility for our deeds. The inner journey ends with a renewed sensibility towards animals and a reconciliation with the human animal we inhabit.

Both the reconfirmations of our affinities and differences are important in establishing a new mandate towards the exterior world we inhabit. The "outer life" that Overy refers to propels a resurgence of animal imagery that does not instigate escape from who we are, but rather forces us to reassess our beings in an ecologically sound manner. As Haverstock concludes in An American Bestiary,

> The revival of animal painting, although coming at a time of increased ecological concern, may be too late to have more than symbolic meaning. The ravages caused by centuries of human indifference will not be repaired by a few artists or even an aroused electorate. The violence to fragile species and to the natural habitat has already been done. Nevertheless, in the statute books, if not yet in the fields and forests, the foundations of a future peaceable kingdom have been laid[143].

Mackenzie's Lost River series documents the two major trends that characterize the revival of animal imagery. For instance, no. 4, no. 14, and no. 15 can easily be read as haunting depictions of

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[143] Mary Sayre Haverstock, An American Bestiary (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1979), 231.

civilization invading the terrain of these vulnerable animals. In Lost River no.14, [plate 4] two sickly black animals are constrained in the foreground. A skeletal tent-like structure in the middleground hints at human presence. Above this structure an angular white canal blocks access to the life giving river. In this work, the artist gives visual evidence of her fear of a pipeline and the destruction it would cause if it were to be undertaken. While the ecological concerns of the artist are present in this series, they are more pronounced in her later works, as the autobiographical aspects become less covert and the animals and the landscape tell their own story[144].

It is therefore fascinating to note the varying reactions that critics have expressed in regard to Mackenzie's non-specific creatures. Lawrence Sabbath's Short review of Mackenzie's solo exhibition at Galerie France Morin in the Fall of 1981[145] compares the overall look of the Lost River paintings to "the strange imaginings of Fuselli and Francis Bacon[146]". The critic continues with an assessment of the animals in the landscape as appearing to be far from a literal depiction, in fact being something other than the expected. He refers to the creatures as "lurking animals[147]", in this way reinforcing his macabre readings of the work.

This eerie interpretation is reinforced by John Bentley Mays'

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144 In particular several paintings of the Winter 84 series, and the Crossing series, which deals directly with the drowning of approximately 10,000 caribou in Northern Quebec during the Fall of 1984.

145 Lawrence Sabbath, "Landon Mackenzie," The Gazette, 31 October 1981, 26.

146 Ibid, 26.

147 Ibid, 26.

review of the exhibition that travelled to Toronto in the Spring of 1982.[148] Bentley Mays decribes the works and especially Lost River no.12 as,

> Emotionally galvanized, anxious meditations on the long nights, fears and hungers of the far north. Using dry, gloomy acrylic blues, blacks and browns, sparely and beautifully handled, she invokes ghostly, dog-like wolves which stalk and congregate in the near darkness, feast on their prey and (in the finest work on view) [Lost River no.12] stop by a lonely, haunted pool to drink[149].

This theme is expanded upon by the author in his seminal article "The Snakes in the Garden: The Self and the City in Contemporary Art[150]", Examining the contemporary malaise and alienation apparent in the works of Canadian artists, the critic cites Mackenzie's Lost River series as indicative of the anxiety expressed by many Canadian painters:

> Montreal artist Landon Mackenzie presents nature as a dense darkness haunted by violent dogs or wolves who seem to be further condensations of the darkness. No longer can we dream towards the Yukon, the mystical North of song, legend and longing, as a place of refuge from the city. The same fears would stalk us there[151].

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148 John Bentley Mays, "A Splendid Tale of Two Cities and Two Artists," The Globe And Mail, 27 March 1982, Entertainment 13.
149 Ibid, Entertainment 13.
150 John Bentley Mays, "The Snakes in the Garden: The Self and the City in Contemporary Canadian Art," Visions: Contemporary Art in Canada (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre Ltd., 1983), 157–191.
151 Ibid, 189.

The reproduction of Lost River no.4[152] [plate 5] in part contradicts Bentley Mays' evaluation. In the work, two yellow bovine creatures in the foreground belie the image of "violent dogs or wolves". These gentle, rather humble animals seem connected by a tender current represented by their shared coloring. The spindly-legged animal on the left stands on a red mound peering longingly down at its companion on the right. Both their bodies, while predominantly yellow, have layers of red paint that bespeak sexual passion rather than "Darwinian" aggression.

Certainly the terrain they inhabit, an overwhelming blackness that forms the major portion of the backdrop, can be construed as a threatening locale. Skeletal white fences in the distance must be read as encroaching civilization. However, a forked blue stream reminds us that the river, while manipulated and bridged, still flows. In the distance a reddish yellow early evening sky undulates against the dark terrain. Alive with emotional power, it connects with the animals in the foreground because of their shared glowing hues.

In this painting that addresses both the theme of the complexity of sexuality[153] and ecological concerns, Eden/Lost River is no longer an innocent site, but there does remain a magical and

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[152] Ibid, 190. Labelled incorrectly as Lost River no.14.

[153] Here I refer not only to the artist's intent but Rick Rhodes' recognition of the notion that the paintings in general are "flushed with sexual undertones...a fitful sex fantasy, a fantasy not visually desciptive so much as descriptive of the sensations moving across the skin, sensations which the dreaming brain turns into images." Rick Rhodes, "Landon Mackenzie: Mercer Union, Toronto, March16–April 3," Vanguard (Summer 1982), 50–51.

mystical residue that evokes a melancholy nostalgia. Fear or violence, or even the frisson of unspecified danger, is diminished in the light of its mythopoeic energy. The North and its animal inhabitants cannot be summarily dismissed despite the limitations of our psyches, recognized by Bentley Mays.

Indeed Sandra Paikowsky's reading of Mackenzie's animals stands in sharp contrast to one of "violent dogs and wolves". In the catalogue for her "Montreal Painting Now" exhibition[154], Paikowsky notes[155], that the artist's', "schematic fragile animals are drawn with child–like sympathy that becomes the iconography and the content[156]". This is explored in greater detail in Diana Nemiroff's critical review of the exhibition[157]. Nemiroff states,

> Yet the iconography of Mackenzie's – the river image, the animal forms, the dichotomy of light and dark, the hard wedge–like lines which press in from the darkness upon the animals – though suggestive, is essentially mysterious. The recognizable images trigger a storyline which is carried in formal, structural terms. Thus the somber blueblack and purple hues create an emphatic separation from the clear daylight of the urban world, while the space is layered like that of dreams and the unconscious, and all the forms a little blurred and ambiguous[158].

Perhaps it is the overriding ambiguity that results in the

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154 "Montreal Painting Now" Sir George Williams Art Galleries, Montreal, April 7–May 8 1982.
155 Sandra Paikowsky, Montreal Painting Now (Montreal: Concordia University. Sir George Williams Galleries, 1982).
156 Ibid, 7.
157 Diana Nemiroff, " Rhetoric And Figure In Montreal Painting Now," Parachute 27 (Summer, 1982) 22–27.
158 Ibid, 25.

vastly different interpretations of the paintings. Certainly, the paintings in the series proceed slowly from a glowing realm to a darker vision where the realities of nature take hold as we witness the death of an animal in Lost River no.17 [plate 6]. However, there is no indication that this mortal wound was inflicted by the victim's companion. The slain creature lying on a bed of shimmering snow in a barren forest is accompanied by an equally vulnerable deer–like animal. The weak survivor bends its head towards lines of blue, spurting forth from a black rock formation, in the center of the painting. Can this last trace of the river supply enough sustenance for survival? Is there enough magic left in Lost River to allow the animal to flourish despite the recognition of its waning powers? And how does the black spiral, a fertility image in the foreground, prescribe the future?

The answers must be manifold in compliance with the varying readings of the animals and their habitat. David Burnett and Marilyn Schiff In Contemporary Canadian Art[159] concede that, "Despite the darkness of the pictures, there is unity between the animals and their environment, a fundamental relationship of provision and acceptance[160]". This positive or rather optimistic response is rooted in a trust in nature-one that must acknowledge that nature, like Eden ,is not always a one– dimensional source of positive knowledge. It is fraught with our dreams and our nightmares, and confronting them allows for a renewed understanding of ourselves

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159 David Burnett and Marrilyn Schiff, Contemporary Canadian Art (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers Ltd., 1983).
160 Ibid, 287.

even if the initial impulse that instigated the journey was a desire for escape.

Ross Skoggard in his discussion of the animal sculptures of John McEwen[161] and their ability to conjure up both the human and animal aspects of our existence, sums up the dualities that result from employing this strategy. Skoggard states,

> It [the animal sculptures] dramatizes the dialectics of inside–outside, culture–nature and man–animal, and can be a metaphor for the fringe of civilization we have made along one border of Canada, or for the conceptual screens that exist between ourselves and nature, or for the animal aspects of our own personalities that exist uncomfortably inside our 'man–made' psyches[162]".

More encouragingly it can mean a movement beyond Margaret Atwood's assessment that Canadian Identification with animals is representative of our notion of ourselves as victims[163] -victims of our geography, and more emphatically victims of culture that "threatens the animal" within us[164].

Mackenzie's paintings poignantly address this facet of the Canadian imagination. This is most notably apparent in the varying reactions to the inhabitants of Lost River. However, Mackenzie's exploration of animal imagery continues in the ensuing series, allowing us further insights into the permutations of the Canadian

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161 Ross Skoggard, "Man and Animal," Canadian Forum (November 1983), 17–19.
162 Ibid, 19.
163 Margaret Atwood, Survival: A Thematic Guide To Canadian Literature (Toronto: Anansi, 1972).
164 Ibid, 79.

imagination shaped by a woman artist responding to the Postmodern condition [see chapter IV].

Mackenzie, akin to Marian Engel's protagonist in Bear[165], encounters a freedom to examine the varied strata of her identity, both natural and constructed, while adrift in the wilderness. Indeed, as Coral Ann Howells explicates Bear[166], we witness two key factors that underline the differentation of the female experience from its male counterpart. Firstly, "The animal with his own vitality gives woman something she needs: the free expression of her sexuality uninhibited by any male expectations of what a woman should be[167]", and secondly an understanding that the "response to the strangeness of Canadian landscape ...is finally not about hostility and victims but about the inviolability of natural order and the healing corrective power of nature to save us from ourselves[168]".

Certainly the Lost River series draws our attention to the many polarities that abound in the postmodern world that repudiates a closed reading of the paintings. Mackenzie's eschewal of conceptual art in preference for figurative painting is the first issue that invites conflicting assessments of her work. Her choice of animal imagery that addresses inner and outer realities is another area of ambiguity-one that is highlighted by the differing descriptons of her creatures. Finally, we must take into account

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165 Marian Engel, Bear (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976).
166 Coral Ann Howells, Private And Fictional Words: Canadian Women Novelists Of The 1970s And 1980s (London: Methuen, 1987), 108–118.
167 Ibid, 114.
168 Ibid, 110.

sexual difference, and how its essence can alter both the intentions and interpretations associated with a given artist and her body of work.

Chapter IV

Catch sight of the other creature
the one that has real skin, real hair,
vanishing down the line of cells
back to the lost forest of being vulnerable[169].

Violence, a latent
hook
locked in the ice[170]

In the late spring of 1982, Mackenzie and MacPherson returned to the Yukon for four months. It was during this period of emotional reconciliation, and spiritual renewal, derived in part from their northern environment, that their first child was conceived[171]. This event altered their relationship, confirming their love and "sense of mates[172]". It also marked the beginning of a new body of work that reflected Mackenzie's conscious kinship with nature and its cycles.

The Gestation series, begun in the fall of 1982, were prefigured by approximately twenty small canvases executed during

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169 Margaret Atwood, "A Fortification," The Animals In That Country (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1968), 16.
170 Margaret Atwood, "River," in Ibid, 25.
171 Landon Mackenzie, Toronto, to R. Bella Rabinovitch, Montreal, 18 June 1985, 17.
172 Ibid, 17.

Mackenzie's sojourn in the north. The Yukon Summer paintings, that varied between 9" x 10" and 10" x 12", depicted either herds of animals assembled in an almost abstract landscape or a single creature encircled in a protective womb[173]. This latter motif, while initially unconsciously employed by the artist still unaware of her pregnancy, was regarded by Mackenzie as a presentiment of her condition. Therefore its iconographic poignancy moved the expectant mother to adopt this image into her evolving artistic vocabulary. This encircled animal depiction was no longer a stand-in for the artist as an individual being or her lovers but representative of a new life, reliant on its protective environment and its progenitors to reach maturation. Variations on this motif appear in three of the four Gestation paintings.

The four works, no.1 and no.2 executed in the fall of 1982, and no.3 and no.4 during the early part of 1983, were first exhibited at Galerie France Morin from April 27-May 21 1983. The solo exhibition of the artist's works also included Lost River no.17. Reactions to the paintings were favorable, although once more the interpretation of the imagery varied amongst the critics. Lawrence Sabbath in The Gazette acknowledged that the new series was "concerned with birth[174]", but, his overview of the exhibition does not refer to this natural cycle. Instead the critic states,

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173 Mackenzie regards these paintings as personal mementoes, rather than fully accomplished works. However it is interesting to note that four of the Yukon Summer paintings were included in the 1986-1987 touring exhibition entitled "The Romantic Landscape Now", organized by Artspace in Peterborough, Ontario.

174 Lawrence Sabbath, "Landon Mackenzie," The Gazette, 21 May 1983, B8.

> The acrylics are large, the private images compelling and haunting, very much in the mode of narrative figure painting aligned with personal angst here in the form of small animals and bug shapes that conjure up Kafka[175].

Gilles Daigneault 's assessment in Le Devoir is equally laudatory, although there is no reference to either images of gestation or undercurrents of unease. Daigneault does note "des signes resolument abstraits (un cercle presque fermé et très voyant, une spirale ou une ligne brisée)[176]", but he interprets them in a purely formal manner. The critic emphasizes the ability of these abstract signs to reaffirm the two- dimensionality of the paintings.

Diana Nemiroff's review of the exhibition in Vanguard tackles both the formal and iconographical changes that appear in the artist's second series. Nemiroff discusses Mackenzie's use of a "brighter and wider range of colours, " as well as "a subtle change in the treatment of space[177]". The critic interweaves this formal analysis with a reading of the symbolic shapes. She recognizes "the references to conception and birth," and deems these works as "more immediately autobiographical than the earlier paintings[178]". However, her final paragraph does not fully support her own assumption about the inward looking nature of these works. She states concerning Mackenzie:

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175 Ibid, B8.
176 Gilles Daigneault, "Culture Et Society/Expositions," Le Devoir, 7 Mai 1983, 25.
177 Diana Nemiroff, "Landon Mackenzie, Galerie France Morin," Vanguard (September1983): 36.
178 Ibid, 36.

> If until now, her best work [the Lost River series] has been built up of a dreamlike chiaroscuro of velvety depths and pearly lights which veil the ever shifting boundaries of the country of the self, the heightened expressionism one detects in the recent work may offer an avenue for the exploration of conflicts between inner and outer worlds[179].

Nemiroff raises a key issue that permeates all five of Mackenzie's series. In essence, how does the creation of autobiographical art, that employs animal imagery anthropomorphically, escape the bounds of the inner personal world ? The answer is not readily forthcoming, but it must rely upon more than a "heightened expressionism," thus forcing the viewer to examine the depictions of the animals themselves, that represent the vital link to the outer world.

In Gestation no.1 , [plate 7] an opalescant almost human figure lies prone between a murky lake in the foreground and a red promontory in the backgroound. This snowy figure, its head resting on the fiery ground, is being kissed by a black male deer-like creature. At the base of the luminescent body ,a brown deer, its two front legs immersed in the charcoal water, watches intently as a partially submerged creature reaches out to grasp a leaf-like silhouette floating on the water. This swimming figure, depicted in pinkish red hues, cannot be clearly identified as either human or animal.

Ultimately the drama being played out here cannot be relegated to one category of mammals. The 'animals' and 'humans' seem to be locked into a symbiotic relationship. The insinuation of the birthing

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179 Ibid,36.

process underscores their connectedness. Is the mother of the floating child the snow queen or the vigilant brown deer whose belly is marked by a black spiral? The answer remains ambiguous and perhaps irrelevant as we become implicated in the unfolding drama. The tenderness and vulnerability implicit in the scene reinforce our loyalty to both species. This theme is less pronounced in the three following works, where the presence of human forms are absent. However, the easy identification of animals in protective circles is so reminiscent of wombs ,that to deny our link with this species would be fraught with insensitivity.

In Gestation no.4 [plate 8], a painting Mackenzie employed to depict the pelvic drop in the last stage of pregnancy[180], both the female animal and its offspring float in a white and pink circle in the center of the canvas. Their environment bears a striking resemblance to the first painting of the series. A line of trees in both works define the distance. However, here the red promontory has been replaced by an indented wave of red that blocks the circle's passage to the awaiting vertical channel at the base of the painting. The intensity of the painting resides in part in the downward thrust of the circle and the red wave. Its painterly turmoil is halted, literally contradicted/contracted by the irregularly shaped depicted framework that forms the bottom half of the painting. Mackenzie further emphasizes the birthing experience by leaving a portion of her canvas white, thereby drawing our attention to the almost impassable canal that diminishes in

[180] Landon Mackenzie, Toronto. to R. Bella Rabinovitch, Montreal, 18 June1985, 17.

size as it descends the painting.

Certainly there is no hint of animals as victims in these works. Rather they are forceful reminders of our shared biological affinities. Affinities that cannot erase the inherent violence in birth, part of the natural cycle. These shared characteristics do not end at birth but continue during the whole process of child rearing-a process that reinforces the knowledge that unknown dangers lurk despite the protective embrace and gaze of doting parents.

On March 15, 1983, Mackenzie gave birth to her son Cluny, and her subsequent series of the same name examines the joyous yet difficult task of parenting. Cluny I [plate 9] executed in the spring of 1983, was followed by three paintings completed during the summer months. The series of four paintings, once more appropriates animal stand-ins to record aspects of the artist's personal history. However here too ,it must be noted that the indistinct animals continue to possess a strong presence that transcends their anthropomorphic role.

In Cluny I, we encounter a dark four legged creature at the center of the painting . We are conscious of its sex for it is suckling a small brown deer-like animal. This central scene is partially framed by a glowing yellow ground. These contrasting hues of black, brown, and deep blue versus yellow, pink, and red,are employed throughout the whole painti] lending it the air of vibrant fireworks offsetting the night time sky. The joyous cacophony of the scene cannot be overlooked, but, a red vertical line that runs on either side of the black mother animal reminds us of the havoc often caused by

childbirth to the female body[181]. Here, as in Gestation no.4 , we are forced to acknowledge both the positive and negative effects nature bestows upon its inhabitants Also in keeping with the earlier series, a yellow line bisected by radiating lines encircles the animals on three sides reiterating the theme of a partially protected environment. Indeed only partial protection can be given, for the vagaries of natue cannot be tamed.

In the last work of the series this sobering concept is explored to a greater degree. Cluny IV, [plate 10] a large work measuring 7' x 14', has a prevading melancholy air. Three tree trunks that run the height of the canvas on both sides of the painting, placed in the foreground, enframe the proscenium. In the background two mature deer-like animals with crowning antlers are distanced from the foreground by a blue body of water. Above the body of the central adult animal, a black sun and crescent moon denote a sense of mourning[182]. The eclipsed sun and moon stand out in this fairly luminescent work emphasizing nature's ambiguous qualities. On the bank closest to the viewer, a small member of this animal species is vertically suspended, as though in the process of being thrown head first. The two adult animals are helpless bystanders, as are the viewers who witness this poignant moment, kept at bay by the enveloping trees. Mackenzie clearly establishes here the viewer's role as an impotent spectator, a device that is

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181 Cluny was delivered by caesarean section. Ibid, 17.

182 This work commemorates the death of a friend's child. For Mackenzie this event was a painful reminder of the limitations of her own role to protect Cluny from unforeseen events. Ibid, 17.

further explored in the following series.

It is interesting to note that the ensuing critical reaction to the Gestation and Cluny series was in part marked by a controversy that relegated the paintings to a secondary position, akin to the initial reception of Lost River no.1 and no. 3. Once more Mackenzie's works were selected for the biennale of Quebec painting. The three person jury composed of painter Paterson Ewen (of London, Ont., who represented Canada at the Venice Biennale), gallery director France Morin, and art critic Gilles Toupin, restructured Creation Quebec 83[183]. The jurors limited the exhibition to nineteen paintings by seven artists. No prizes were awarded, and the seven artists shared "la somme de $6,000, ce qui correspond au montant alloué à l'exposition par le ministre des Affaires culturelles du Québec[184]".

The often bitter reaction to the biennale focused on the approximately six hundred artists whose work was completely ignored in favor of a body of painting that Lawrence Sabbath referred to as "keeping up with the New York scene[185]". The critic in passing refers to Mackenzie as "still the best painter in the show," although this is to underline his assessment that, "to have a biennale viewed as the 'latest development' seems passing strange when Landon Mackenzie, who deservedly won first prize two years

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183 Creation Quebec 83 was held at the Saidye Bronfman Center from July 5-September 6, 1983.

184 Jocelyn Lepage, "Biennale De La Peinture, Sept elus, 600 refuses!" La Presse, 9 Juillet 1983, B9.

185 Lawrence Sabbath, "Painting Biennale a Major Disappointment," The Gazette, 16 July 1983, B9.

ago, is back with three paintings in about the same style[186]".

The three paintings, Gestation no.2, no.3, and Cluny I are only cursorily noted by the critics willing to accord them faint praise in their overall attack on the organization of the biennale. One exception is made by Denis Lessard in Vie des Arts:

> Tout le monde n'est pas nécessairement touché par les tableaux de Landon Mackenzie: ses agencements d'animaux à la Kandinsky, qu'elle répète depuis trois ans, constituent une thématique assez fragile si l'on ne se sent pas concerné par le sentiment romantique et anglo-saxon de la nature....The Cluny Picture ...est un titre bien trompeur pour ceux qui aiment dénicher des références. En effet, il ne faudrait pas se méprende complètement sur l'éventuelle portée historique et littéraire d'une telle dénomination, et chercher dans le tableau quelque splendeur médiévale. L'artiste a donné le prénom de Cluny a son premier garçon: de ce fait, cette peinture est plutôt une métaphore imagée de la maternité et de la naissance. Elle s'inscrit dans la grande traditions des hommages aux enfants et aux maitresses des peintres[187]...

Lessard's sarcastic condemnation of Mackenzie's paintings is highly revealing, for not only does it call into question her use of a revived romantic vocabulary, but the very subject matter of acceptable painting. The homage to children in art is implied here as an almost exclusively female preoccupation, and then summarily written off. (My interpretation is based on the cavalier way that he ends his paragraph with three periods.) The review reeks of both racism and sexism, underscoring in the latter case the difficulty women artists have had and still have in creating art that is not geared toward a

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186 Ibid, B9.

187 Denis Lessard, "Tout va tres bien, Madame la Peinture," Vie des Arts (September-Obtobre-Novembre 1983) : 52.

male precept of painting. Indeed, Lessard's honesty must be commended. Unlike his male counterparts in Montreal he does acknowledge the 'otherness' or marginality of Mackenzie's paintings. Both Sabbath and Daigneault in their reviews of Mackenzie's earlier solo exhibition at Galerie France Morin avoided the issues raised in the paintings, the former by relegating the work to discomforting narrative painting, and the latter by his refusal to address any area beyond the formal properties of the works.

Whether Mackenzie is a feminist artist is a moot point. What is certain, however, is her strong commitment to visualizing the female experience. To overlook this factor diminishes the import of her paintings and perhaps explains the paucity of critical reviews the artist's works received during the following two years, although Mackenzie continued to exhibit on a regular basis[188].

During the Winter of 1986, Mackenzie was involved in a group show at The Koffler Gallery in Toronto. The exhibition ,entitled "Anima(l)" included the sculptures of Cynthia Short, and the paintings of Janet Jones. The three Canadian artists were selected because of their use of animal imagery to explore facets of their own being. In the accompanying essay , Jennifer Karch-Verze[189]

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[188] Between 1983 and 1986, Mackenzie had six solo exhibitions, and was involved in twelve group exhibitions. The first catalogue devoted solely to her paintings was published in 1985 to accompany her solo exhibition at the Southern Alberta Art Gallery from October5-27, 1985. The essay ,written by R. Bella Rabinovitch established the artist within a neo-romantic tradition, focusing upon its relevance to the revival of landscape painting in this country. The import of Mackenzie as a Canadian painter overrode the uniquely female context of her imagery.

[189] Jennifer Karch-Verze, Anima(l) (Toronto: The Koffler Gallery,

described Mackenzie's Cluny II, III, and IV in the following manner,

> Each symbiotically portrays the different aspects of the emotional upheaval and acquired understanding that come from the universal [!] experience of giving birth and the parenting that follows. In this sense, the work creates a universal vocabulary, reached through the strength of the mother animal, creating a symbol of permanence and eternity[190].

Karch-Verze's assumption of "the universal experience" that leads to "a universal vocabulary," while eminently reassuring, is not based on factual evidence. Certainly, Mackenzie's paintings have not been interpreted in this manner by male critics. The author also fails to explicate why these three women artists have appropriated animal imagery beyond the superficial reading that, "It expresses the 'anima' that belongs to everyone and is the common patrimony of humanity and animals[191]". Essentially, the words 'anima' and patrimony underline Karch-Verze's failure to grapple with the question of female identity in a male-dominated world. C. G. Jung, who gave popular currency to the term anima, defines it in a rather chilling manner for women seeking an equal voice in society:

> Although it seems as if the whole of our unconscious psychic life could be ascribed to the anima, she is yet only one archetype among many. Therefore, she is not characteristic of the unconscious in its entirety. She is only one of its aspects. This is shown by the very fact of her femininity. What is not-I, not masculine, is most probably feminine, and because the not-I is felt as not belonging to me and therefore as outside

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1986).

[190] Ibid,n.p. Lost River no.16, and Gestation no.2 were also icluded in the exhibition.

[191] Ibid, n.p.

me, the anima-image is usually projected upon women[192].

Shelley Hornstein-Rabinovitch's edifying review of the exhibition, entitled "Interstices Of Romance[193]", examines the narrative codes that the women artists employ. Although she does not address the issue of the female perspective directly, she nonetheless uncovers a break with existing narrative frameworks that broaches the question of identity.

> This exhibition revolves around animals and women: women creating animals, animals creating animals. The essence is not the metaphoric, romantic vision of woman as heroine. On the contrary, its efforts are devoted not to the success of the new creative codes but more importantly to that which signifies upheaval: the undermining of existing narrative sequels and the quest for that which may lie beyond[194].

Mackenzie's autobiographical landscapes are intrinsically tied in with her identity as a woman. Her images of birthing and parenthood, no matter how disguised they may be by their animal attire, insist upon their recognition as human and animal activities. These images are not sentimental portraits of nature's cycle, but intense communions with Mackenzie's body, her animal body. They allow us to read what was essentially taboo in art on a myriad of levels[195]. They fracture the polite; however they do not replace it with the vulgar. Instead, Mackenzie's paintings offer up to us the

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192 C. G. Jung, The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 27.

193 Shelley Hornstein-Rabinovitch, "Interstices Of Romance," C Magazine (Spring 1989) : 64-65.

194 Ibid, 65.

195 Please refer to chapter 2 and 3 for a discussion of Mackenzie's iconoclastic figuration and her very choice of media.

the primal- the elemental region of existence. It is in this region that we can connect with all living matter. We transcend the inner/personal state to encounter the exterior world filtered through the eyes of a woman.

In an October, 1987 interview Mackenzie stated,

> I use the 'I am female', 'raised female' so that it indicates a difference between your sex and your gender, and how that influences how you make imagery, and how you go about making a space in your work so that you can understand more of these things. There is a sort of a crossover that might be a feminist position or a female voice position[196].

This position or strategy is a constant in the artist's work, highlighting her most overt difference from her Quebec contemporaries[197].

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196 Landon Mackenzie, interview at the Wynick-Tuck Gallery, 2 October 1987. Transcript, Wynick -Tuck Gallery, Toronto, Ontario.

197 David Elliott has proposed that Mackenzie's dismissal by Quebec critics relates to the artist's experimentation with figuration per se. Mackenzie's work for Elliot grows increasingly awkward as she tries to reconcile a diagrammatic approach with volumetric, hence more naturalistic forms.
David Elliot, "Interview with R. Bella Rabinovitch," 14 February 1991.
This movement towards naturalism is not addressed by the critics, but it is certainly a noteworthy theme to explore in the development of painting in a province with strong ties to Conceptual art.

Chapter V

> Have the wild things no moral or legal rights? What right has man to inflict such long and fearful agony on a fellow creature, simply because that creature does not speak his language[198]?

In the Fall of 1983, Mackenzie and her family moved to Toronto. She acquired a studio on Dupont Street where she attempted to redefine the direction of her painting[199]. Still commited to autobiographical art, she hoped to parallel its power with imagery that reached a wider audience. Equally present was her preoccupation with ecological problems that touched her in a very personal manner. The pollution of lake Ontario presented a real danger to her, in view of her new proximity to it.

During the fall months, the artist completed two landsape paintings that seemed so reminiscent of her earlier works, that she harshly criticized them as "Landon Mackenzie doing Landon Mackenzie[200]". Finally in the early winter, she began a new series.

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198 Ernest Thompson Seton, "Redruff, The Story of the Don Valley Partridge," Wild Animals I Have Known (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942), 297.

199 Landon Mackenzie, Toronto, to R. Bella Rabinovitch, Montreal, 18 June, 1985, 17.

200 Ibid, 17.

The six works were separately named until the following spring, when the artist recognized their uniting qualities. She entitled the series Winter 1984, however she subtitled each work, eschewing her previous system of numbering the paintings.

Winter 1984 (White Moon), [plate 11] the first in the series, recalls the framing device used in Cluny IV. Barren tree trunks in the foreground form a wooden curtain that keeps the viewer from entering the painting. Here the middleground is a frozen white lake that mediates the glowing embankment in the background. John Armstrong in the accompanying catalogue to the "the Romantic Landscape Now" exhibition notes that the inspiration for this work as well as Winter 1984 (Industrial River), [plate 12] the third work in the series, as having been derived from the artist's personal experience of a forest fire in the north. He states:

> The two large pictures in the exhibition from the Winter 1984 series present grim, sombre, near eschatological landscapes populated by charred trees, devoid of branches. Mackenzie's experience of walking through the afterburn of a fire that had threatened the Yukon town of Watson Lake in summer 1982, was the immediate visual stimulus. Each picture includes a dark strip of northern industrial skyline. The iconography of menace is promoted by dark colour sonorities and chromatic blacks. A thin and frugal application of saturated layers of colour seems metaphoric of the frailty of life[201].

The author's description of the actual work is equally overwhelming, and I quote it here so that I may compare it with my own reading of the work written the previous year. Armstrong

[201] John Armstrong. The Romantic Landscape Now (Peterborough: Artspace, 1986), 9.

continues:

> In Winter 1984 (White Moon) a slender line of conflagration is isolated within a hillside forest on the far shore of a lake. The fire is upstaged by a snow-covered lake brilliantly lit by a ringed moon. Mackenzie has included a 'witness' figure-a furtive nocturnal animal nudges into the picture on the right. The intensity of the moon's reflected light bleaches out definition in the blank expanse of the icy lake. The moon does not allow for great definition of the back-lit screen of trees and buidings, or of the distant embankment. The light beguiles; we, along with the 'witness', are left to ponder glaring overexposure, or the half-truth of indefinite shadow. The mysterious twilight discloses a void or clearing that is not the essence of landscape, but what remains[202].

Armstrong's poetic description of the work cannot be descried, but, his insistence on the void overlooks the mystical quality of the painting. The white moon with its emanating circles and the frozen lake conjoin to evoke a sense of wonder. In the 1985 catalogue for the Southern Alberta Art Gallery, I stated: "Similar to Van Gogh's Starry Night, this is only a landscape painting, but one inhabited by unnamed spirits[203]". Certainly the notion of the sublime must be acknowledged in this haunting work.

Armstrong's introduction to 'The Romantic Landscape Now" catalogue perhaps sheds light on his bleak reading. He recognizes that the nine artists[204] in the show have embraced a nineteenth-century tradition, one marked by a commitment to "untramelled

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202 Ibid, 9.
203 R.Bella Rabinovitch, Landon Mackenzie Painting (Lethbridge: Southern Alberta Art Gallery, 1985), n.p.
204 Jeffrey Spalding, Howard Simkins, Tom Hopkins, Landon Mackenzie, Douglas Kirton, Jim Reid, Richard Storms, David Bierk, and Peter Stephens.

emotions and a vision of the sublime[205]". While he notes that this "*retardataire* style grants the artist a fictive historical connection with the Romantics," he continues his discussion with a reminder that "in the case of most of the present artists, an ironic shadow is cast across the affective and the sublime[206]". Thus the irony would rescue the works and the artists from an area of 'artistic petrification', a theme I explored in chapter III.

Surely Mackenzie's paintings cannot be admired for their explicit irony. Whether exploring the saga of the love triangle or the vicissitudes of birthing or parenthood, the artist attempts to give voice to her own experiences in a direct, and poignantly raw manner. Irony would distant her from the emotional spectrum that marks her works. More emphatic than the question of irony here, is Armstrong's conception of a "fictive historical connection". Mackenzie's connection to the "Northern Romantic Tradition" is not in the least fictive. In chapter II, I traced the paradigms for her style, begining with an explication of pathetic fallacy. To read these two paintings above without the recognition of this device, is to render them impotent. To feel the outrage of the destructive forest fire, or less prosaically the burning red passion that is not exclusive to these works, one must identify with this foreign terrain on an emotional and unmediated level.

Mackenzie more than ever before was aware of "The Northern Romantic Tradition", and her attachment to it, during the period of

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205 John Armstrong, The Romantic Landscape Now (Peterborough:Artspace,1986) 1.
206 Ibid, 1.

the series conception. Between January 13 and March11,1984, "The Mystic North" exhibition was on view at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto. The Scandinavian, Canadian, and American Symbolist landscape painters had an outstanding effect on the artist[207]. They, through their works, reaffirmed the direction she was moving in with her new paintings. Here she saw the Group of Seven in a new light that allowed her ,once more, to avow her Canadian identity, while at the same time, permitting her to broaden the scope of her exploration into landscape art. In March, Mackenzie left for Europe, on a Canada Coucil B Grant[208], visiting museums in Paris, Koln, Dusseldorf, Munich, Berlin, Hamburg, Goteborg and Oslo. The three whirlwind weeks by herself in Europe allowed her to concentrate on both older expressionist art; The Blue Rider and Emil Nolde, and the Norwweigan sculptor Gustav Vigeland, as well as the Neo-Expressionism of artists, such as Anselm Kieffer[209]

It must be noted then, what truly sets these two Winter 1984 paintings discussed by Armstrong apart from her earlier ouevres is their almost non-existent use of animal stand-ins to represent the artist and her fellow protagonists. They reveal her growing preoccupation with exploring the boundaries outside the domain of the personal. Nonetheless, this strategy is employed in only two of the six paintings. In Winter 1984 (Dream Painting), the second work

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207 "Mystic North " exhibition was a powerful confirmation of direction. Loved many of the Scandinavian paintings, also Arthur Dove."
Landon Mackenzie, Toronto, to R. Bella Rabinovitch, Montreal, 18 June 1985,18.

208 Ibid, 18.

209 Ibid, 18.

of the series, Winter 1984 (Animal In Circle), the fourth, completed after her sojourn in Europe,and the mural Winter 1984 (Alberta), the penultimate work, she reverts to her established iconography of depicting animals encased in circles. The landscape they inhabit is more abstract than those viewed in the Gestation, and Cluny series. Floating in a topsy turvy sea of colour, punctuated by waves or lines of red, which the artist later identified as danger[210], her attention is focused on her family and the responsibilities and tensions inherent in this form of grouping. It is this factor that the artist views as the common denominator that binds the paintings into a series.

In May and June of 1984, Mackenzie enjoyed the tenure of visiting artist/teacher in residence at the University of Alberta in Edmonton. Here she accomplished her first 'mural' painting. While the work technically consists of her traditional medium of acrylic on canvas, its impressive size of 10' x 16' sets it apart from her earlier achievements. She stated that "the painting group really comes into focus doing the large painting....[It] gave title to the series[211]".

In Winter 1984, (Alberta), [plate 13] the central image of a blue four- legged mammal is contoured in red. Radiating from its back are four rising lines of red. On the right a small paler blue human baby floats atop a black deer-like creature. This inclusion of

[210] She states, "Once I knew what the colour meant, I could not use it anymore."
Ibid, 18.
[211] Ibid, 18.

a distinct human form is a departure for the artist, heralding her use of human figures in the landscape which culminates with her own undisguised image in the 1987 Island series[212].

The blue baby hovering above the white haloed black deer is balanced on the left by an encircled black deer. The work appears almost fugue like, as disguised and undisguised creatures form a pattern of harmony. Their harmony is conjoined by their equal vulnerability in this wintry landscape. The yearning for protection and conservation that the artist expresses, is focused upon her own child as well as the animal inhabitants and their northern environment. A somewhat similar view is expressed by Scott Watson in the accompanying pamphlet to Landon Mackenzie's exhibition at the 49TH Parallel in New York City in the spring of 1985. Watson states:

> In the later series, Winter 1984, the focus is less on the individual animals than on the landscapes themselves. The attention to the locale of the far north has been surpassed by a universal yearning for preservation, not only of the immediate environment but of the world. Still, they reflect Mackenzie's experience of the Canadian North with its vast wilderness space and half light[213].

In the last work of the series, Winter 1984(The Young Family) [plate 14], completed after the artist's return to Toronto from the

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212 In particular Island/Queen which was exhibited at the Wynick-Tuck Gallery from October 10-31, 1987.

213 Scott Watson, Anne Billy Pierre Dorion Angela Grossman Landon Mackenzie (new York: 49TH Parallel, Centre For Contemporary Canadian Art, 1985), n.p. Three of Mackenzie's Winter 1984 were exhibited: (Dream Painting), (Industrial River), and (Alberta).

Yukon, where she spent the month of July, two human images inhabit the landscape with a black deer in the foreground. Here the deer-like animal watches over a pale blue man who appears to be asleep, while a small child bends over to grasp his outstretched arm. Both species are situated close to the life-giving river that flows in the middleground. The water's blue shades echo the hues of the man and child. Mackenzie has given human form to MacPherson and Cluny, while retaining her own animal disguise. She is the vigilant protectress in this night time scene. The fiery reds of her earlier paintings have been suppressed by the admixture of other colours. Only one miniscule line of pure red is visible. It lies directly below the man's outstretched arm. The danger here has almost vanished. The young family of mixed species is a gentle image, a peaceable kingdom where humans and animals interact with kindness.

The quiet harmony of the last Winter 1984 painting is displaced by the Crossing series of 1984-1985. During September and October of 1984, approximately 9,600 caribou drowned while attempting to cross the swollen Caniapiscau River in northern Quebec. The river, which lies in the path of the caribou that migrate from Labrador to Hudson Bay each year, was artificially raised by the opening of a sluice gate at a dam upstream. This action was undertaken by the James Bay Energy Corp. "even though it knew that this would cause problems downstream[214]".

In June of 1985, a report prepared by the Quebec government office responsible for native affairs blamed the James Bay Energy

214 Daniel Drolet, "Caribou partly at fault in mishap: minister," The Gazette, 21 June 1985, A5.

Corp. for the tragedy, and recommended it pay reparations for the cost of "cleaning caribou carcasses from the Caniapiscau River[215]". Jean-Guy Rodrigue, the Energy Minister, denounced the report, claiming, "Caribou show behavior that is sometimes bizarre....Caribou, elephants and other species like whales don't have the intelligence of humans. They simply crossed over, danger or no danger[216]".

The insensitivity to the environment displayed by both the James Bay Energy Corp. and the minister responsible for energy, as well as the massive nature of the tragedy, itself moved the artist to dedicate a series to this event. Her ecological concerns were galvanized by the caribou disaster, and led her away from an investigation of her personal realm to the exterior sphere of action. Mackenzie's depiction of the terrible event is not objective. She employs her charged imagery to capture the drama and tragedy of the senseless destruction of animal life.

In Crossing(Long), [plate 15], the first painting in the series, completed in late 1984, we witness a herd of stylized caribou tumbled and tossed by the turbulent river in the center of the painting. A blazing sky on the left side of the painting, as well as the flecks of red that highlight the black animal bodies, reinforce the deadly danger that is depicted in this work. Closer inspection of the painting reveals a strange incongruent image. To the left of center, a silhouette of a small standing child can be distinguished amongst the water-tossed caribou, and the blue river that reiterates

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215 Ibid, A5.
216 Ibid, A5.

the colour of his body. In this work Mackenzie has incorporated the image of her young son. In his hands he holds a red offering to a strange biomorphic shape. Added to the drama is a sense of mystery or magic. Mackenzie has imbued Cluny with talismanic properties in the hope of mitigating this awful occurrence[217].

In the two following paintings,that complete the series, this form of human intervention gives way to the stark horror of the event. There is no way of undoing the damage, no gods to appease, and no human presence in body or disguise to share the caribous' misfortune. In Crossing (Tall), [plate 16] completed in 1985, Mackenzie adopts a vertical axis for her painting, thus accentuating the long drop of the animal bodies, as they cascade down a treacherous waterfall. At the base of the waterfall, caribou bodies lie heaped in a modern day 'Golgotha". In Crossing (Airlift), the sombre colours of the earlier work give way to a grave palette of rusts, black, and blues. There is no white or yellow as in Crossing (Tall) to mitigate the horror, or to relieve the eye from this gloomy reality. The painting refers to the airlifting of Caribou carcasses in the spring of 1985. The dead animals were brought to a pet-food plant in Montreal[218].

Certainly, in these works Mackenzie has entered a new domain. We are no longer in a dream state, or exploring the Romantic wilderness that leads us on both an inward and outward journey. In

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[217] Landon Mackenzie, Toronto, to R. Bella Rabinovitch, 18 June 1985, 19.

[218] Daniel Drolet, "Caribou partly at fault in mishap:minister," The Gazette, 21 June 1985, A5.

these works the artist's identity is fully established. She is the raconteuse of this horrific event. She is the vigilant voice that forces the viewer to acknowledge humankind's inhumanity to its fellow species and the planet it inhabits. There is no need for disguise. The animals represent themselves, but they also represent a new approach undertaken by the artist. This does not mean that Mackenzie eschews autobiographical art in her proceeding series: in fact this remains a constant in her works. However, a journey that began with her monotypes has been completed- a journey that has led her to a clearer understanding of her own identity and the world she inhabits with great love and care for its natural resources, and the vast Canadian wilderness that has nurtured her imagination.

Perhaps the last words should be those of the artist. In a 1987 interview with Liz Wylie, Mackenzie stated:

> The female figures function the same way the animals did, except I feel that I'm speaking in a clearer voice[219].

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219 Liz Wylie, "Birthing a Land of Female Imagery," Now Magazine (October 8-14 1987) : 54.

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CATALOGUE

Catalogue

Lost River Series

1. Lost River no. 1, 1981
acrylic on canvas
6 1\2' x 7 1\2'
198 x 228cm
Collection of the artist.

2. Lost River no. 2, 1981
acrylic on canvas
6 1\2' x 7 1\2'
198 x 228cm
Collection of Eva Brandl, Montreal, Quebec.

3. Lost River no. 3, 1981
Acrylic on canvas
6 1\2' x 7 1\2'
198 x 228cm
Collection of Concordia University, Montreal, Quebec.

4. Lost River no.4, 1981
Acrylic on canvas
6 1\2 'x 7 1\2'
198 x 228cm
Collection of Sheila Mackenzie, Toronto, Ontario.

5. Lost River no.5, 1981
acrylic on canvas
6 1\2' x 7 1\2'
198 x 228cm
Collection of the artist.

6. Lost River no. 6, 1981.
Acrylic on canvas
5' x 6'
Collection of the artist.

7. Lost River no. 7, 1981
Acrylic on canvas
6 1\2' x 7 1\2'
198 x 228cm
Collection of Annabel Mackenzie, Montreal, Quebec.

8. Lost River no. 8, 1981
Acrylic on canvas
6 1\2' x 7 1\2'
198 x 228cm
Collection of Gerald van Gurp and Sara Humphrey, Montreal, Quebec.

9. Lost River no. 9, 1981
Acrylic on canvas
6 1\2' x 7 1\2'
198 x 228cm
Collection of Nova Corporation.

10. Lost River no.10, 1981
acrylic on canvas
6 1\2' x 7 1\2'
198 x 228cm
Collection of Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Ontario.

11. Lost River no. 11, 1981
acrylic on canvas
6 1\2' X 7 1\2'
198 x 228cm
Collection of Petro Canada.

12. Lost River no. 12, 1981
acrylic on canvas
6 1\2' x 7 1\2'
198 x 228cm
Collection of Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Ontario.

13. Lost River no.13, 1981
Acrylic on canvas
6 1\2' x 7 1\2'
198 x 228cm
Collection of Michael Mackenzie, Toronto, Ontario.

14. Lost River no. 14, 1982
Acrylic on canvas
6 1\2' x 7 1\2'
198 x 228cm
Collection of Canada Council Art Bank, Ottawa, Ontario.

15. Lost River no. 15, 1982
Acrylic on canvas
6 1\2' x 7 1\2'
198 x 228cm
Collection of Gesta Abels, Toronto, Ontario.

16. Lost River no. 16, 1982
Acrylic on Canvas
6 1\2' x 7 1\2'
198 x 228cm
Collection of Sheila Mackenzie, Toronto, Ontario.

17. Lost River no. 17, 1982
Acrylic on canvas
6 1\2' x 7 1\2'
198 x 228cm
Collection of Musee d'Art Contemporain, Montreal, Quebec.

Gestation Series

1. Gestation no.1, 1982
Acrylic on canvas
6 1\2' x 7 1\2'
198 x 228cm
Collection of Rita Schaffer, Montreal, Quebec.

2. Gestation no. 2, 1982
Acrylic on canvas
6'3" x 7'3"
191 x 221cm
Collection of Lotus Why and Edward Pien, Toronto, Ontario.

3. Gestation no.3, 1983
Acrylic on canvas
6'3" x 7'3"
191 x 221cm
Collection of Musee de Quebec: Collection pret d'oeuvres d'art, Quebec.

4. Gestation no.4, 1983
Acrylic on canvas
5' x 6'
152 x 183 cm.
Collection of the artist.

Cluny Series

1. Cluny 1, 1983
Acrylic on canvas
6 1\2' x 10 1\2'
198 x 317
Collection of the artist.

2. Cluny 11, 1983
Acrylic on canvas
7' x 14'
213 x 426cm
Collection of Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto, Ontario.

3. Cluny 111, 1983
Acrylic on canvas
7' x 14'
213 x 426cm
Collection of Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto, Ontario.

4. Cluny 1V, 1983
Acrylic on canvas
7' x 14'
213 x 426cm.
Collection of the Royal Bank of Canada, Toronto, Ontario.

Winter 1984 Series

1. Winter 1984 (White Moon), 1984
Acrylic on canvas
6' x 7'
183 x 213cm
Collection of the University of Southern Alberta, Lethbridge, Alberta.

2. Winter 1984 (Dream Painting), 1984
Acrylic on canvas
6 1\2' x 7 1\2'
198 x 228cm
Collection of the artist.

3. Winter 1984 (Industrial River), 1984
Acrylic on canvas
6 1\2' x 7 1\2'
198 x 228cm
Collection of Hugh Gledhill, Toronto, Ontario.

4. Winter 1984 (Animal In Circle), 1984
Acrylic on canvas
6 1\2' x 7 1\2'
198 x 228cm
Collection of Canadian Council Art Bank, Ottawa, Ontario.

5. Winter 1984(Alberta), 1984
Acrylic on canvas
10' x 16'
305 x 472cm
Collection of the artist.

6. Winter 1984(Young Family), 1984
Acrylic on canvas
6 1\2' x 7 1\2'
198 x 228cm
Collection of the artist.

Crossing Series

1. Crossing (Long), 1984
Acrylic on canvas
5 1\2' x 11 1\2'
165 x 348
Collection of the artist.

2. Crossing (Tall), 1984–1985
Acrylic on canvas
7 1\2' x 6 1\2'
228 x 198cm
Collection of Macdonald Stewart Art Center, Guelph, Ontario.

3. Crossing (Air Lift), 1985
Acrylic on canvas
6' x 7 1\2'
183 x 228cm

Collection of the artist

PLATES

Plate 1 Lost River no. 1

plate 1 Lost river no. 1

Plate 2 Lost River no. 6

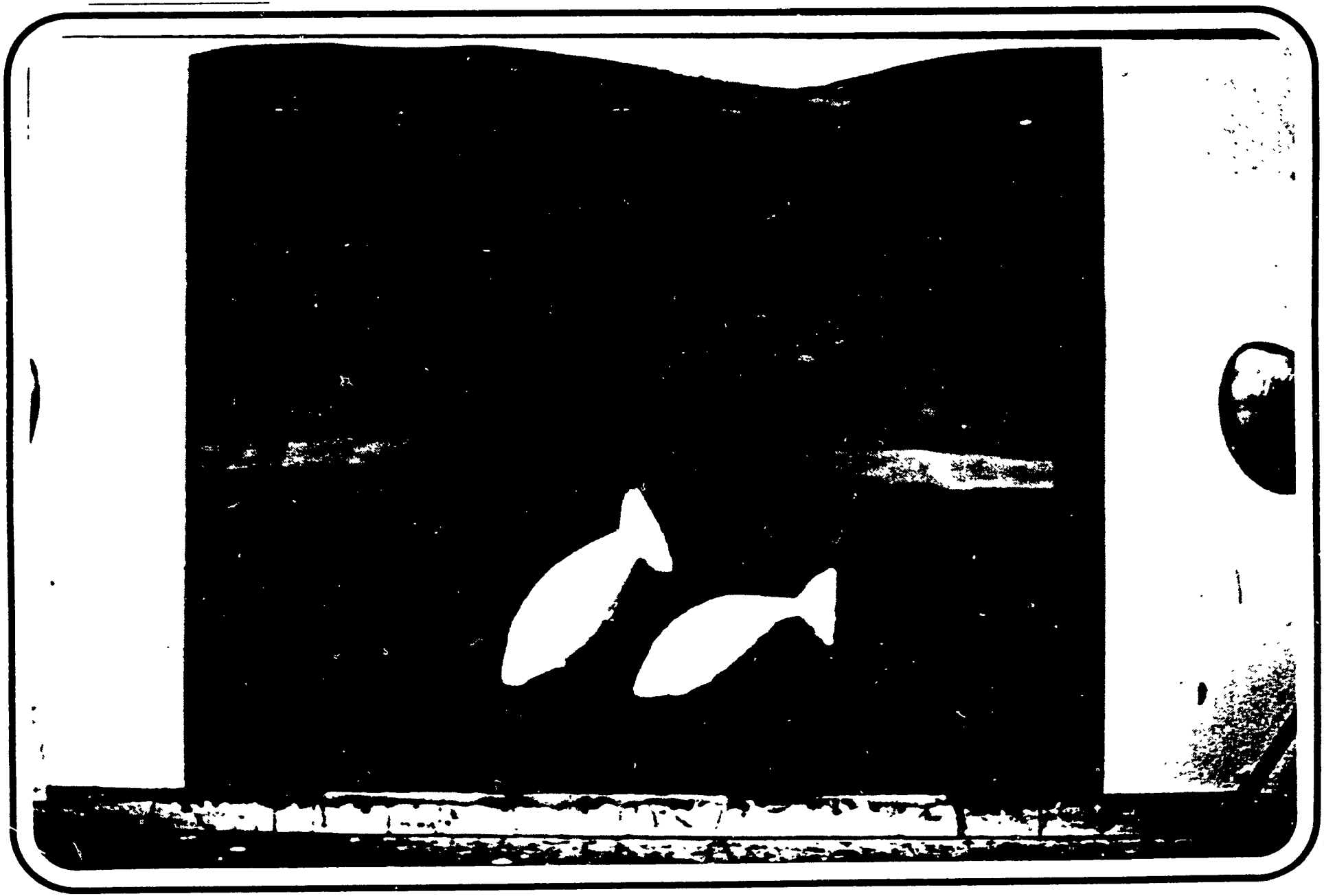

Plate 2 lost river no. 6

Plate 3 Lost River no.13

plate 3 lost river no. 13

plate 4 Lost River no. 14

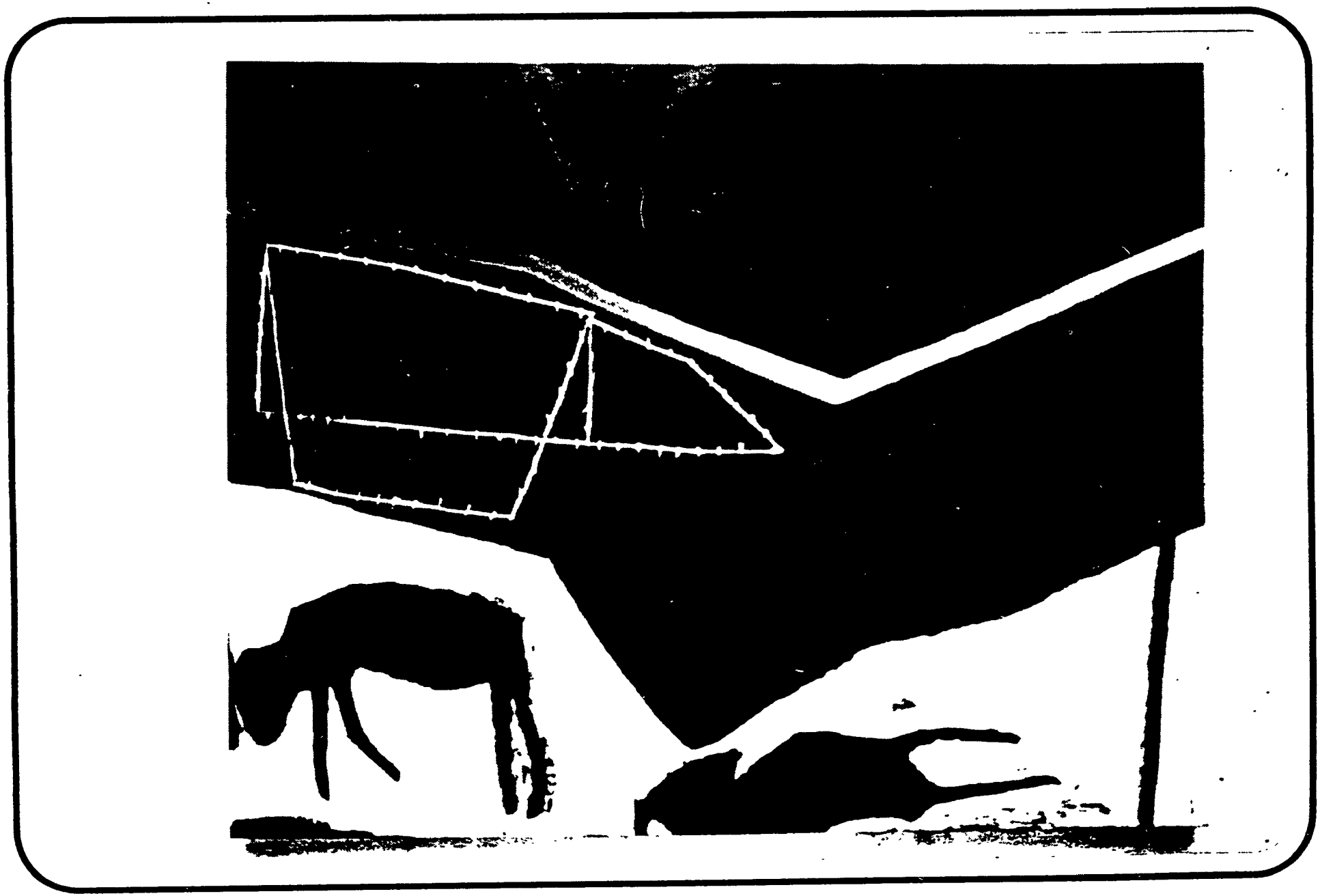

Plate 4 Lost River no. 14

plate 5 Lost River no. 4

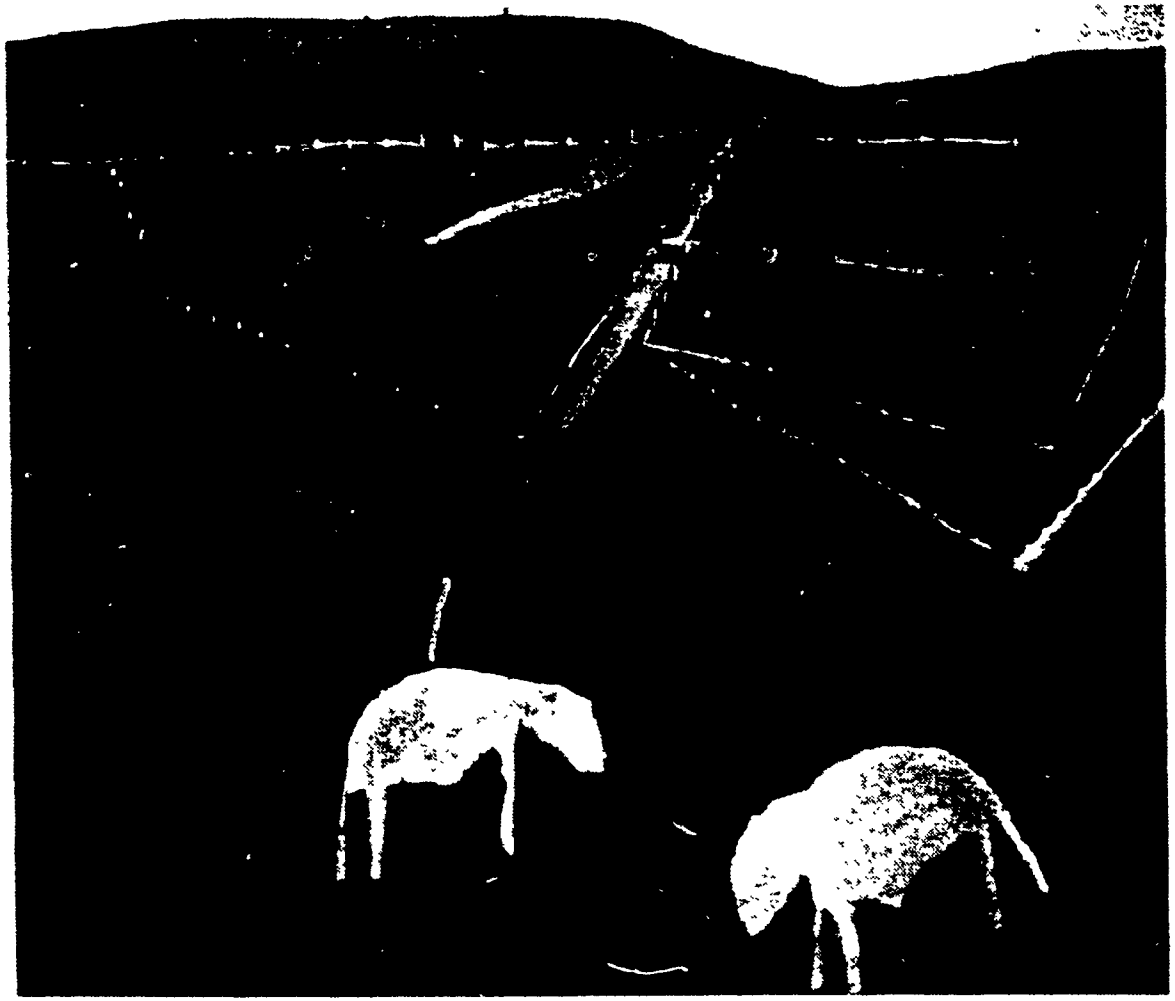

Plate 5 Lost River no. 4

Plate 6 lost River no. 17

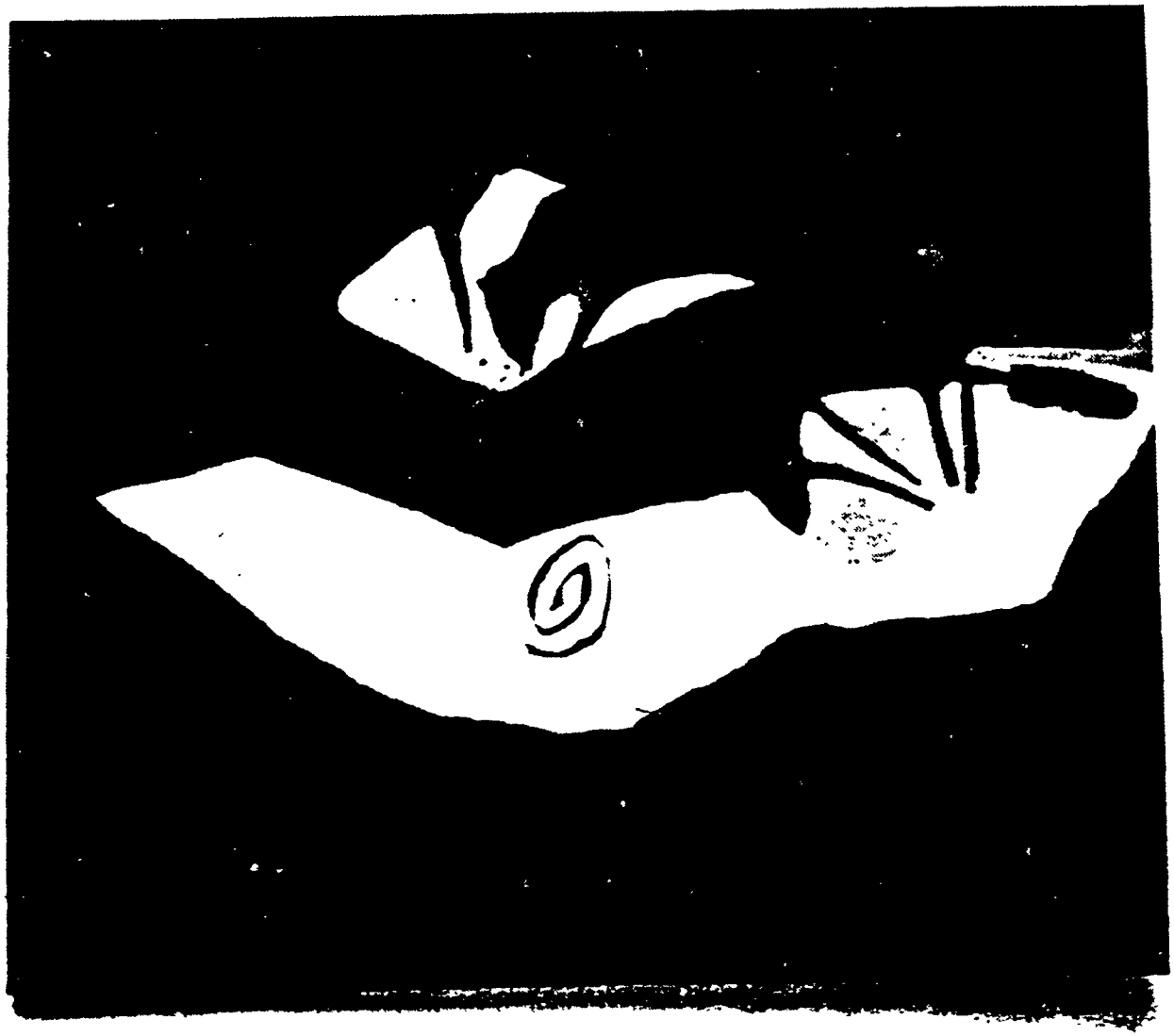

plate 6 Lost river no. 17

Plate 7 Gestation no. 1

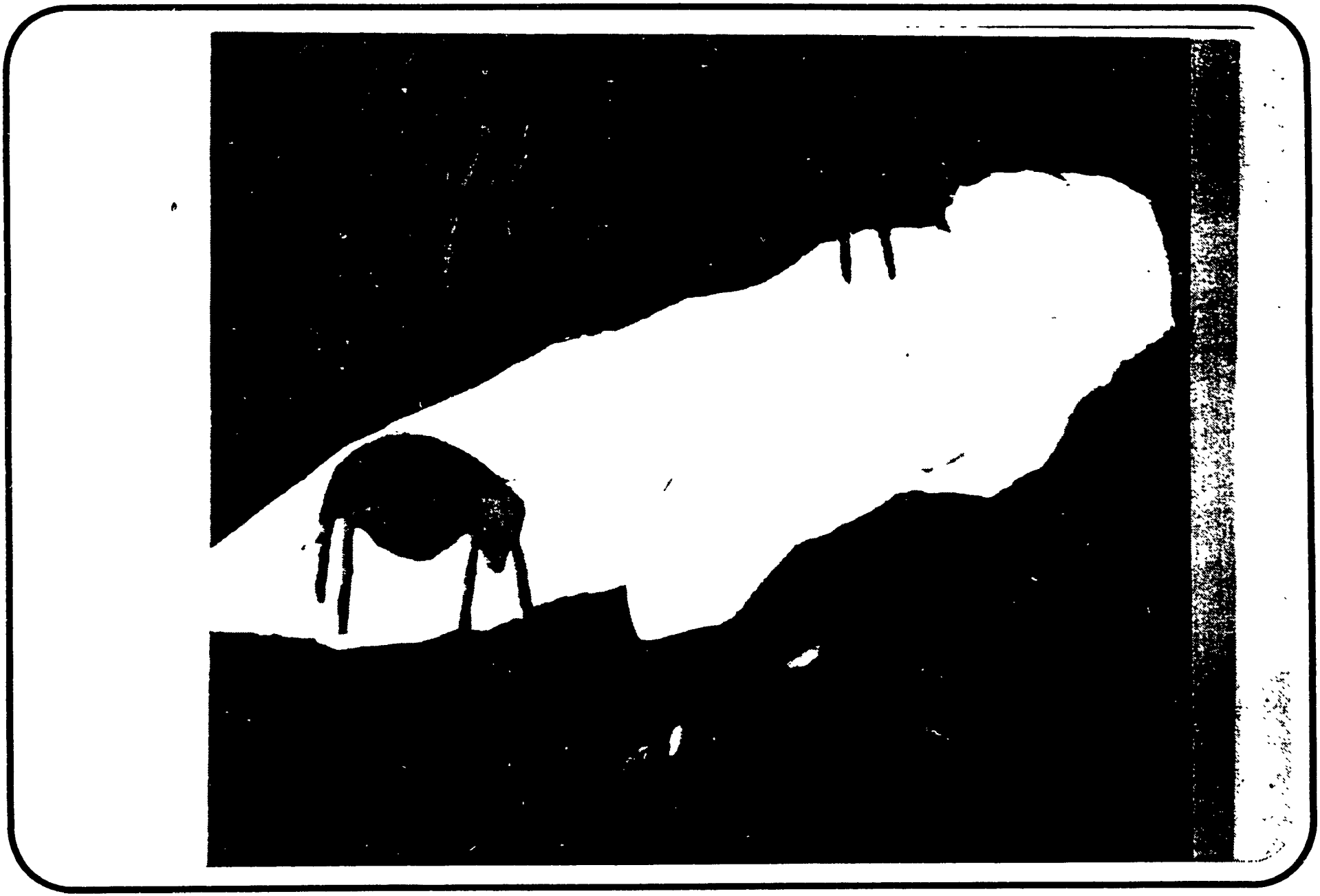

Plate 7 Gestation no. 1

Plate 8 Gestation no.4

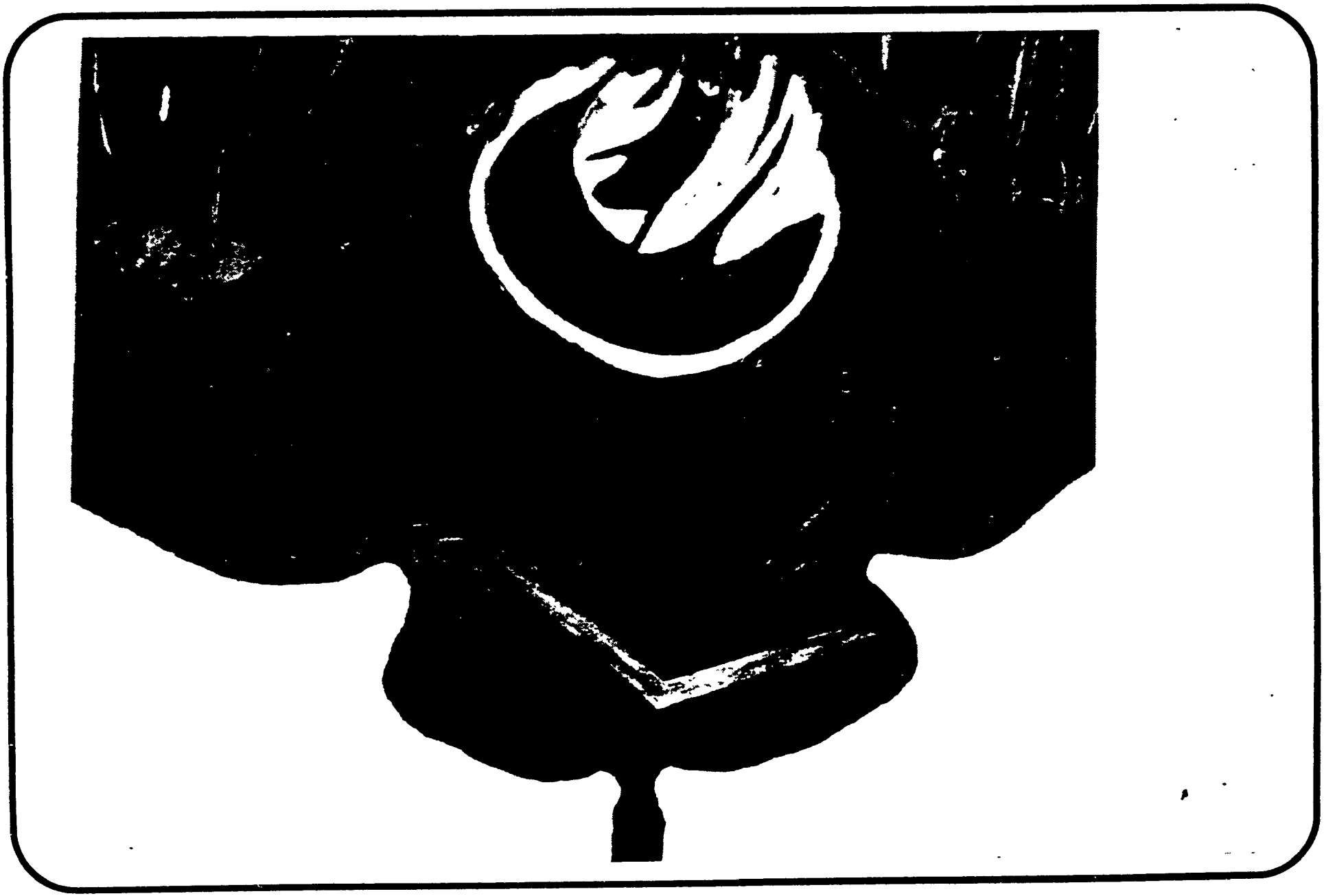

Plate 8 Gestation no. 4

Plate 9 Cluny I

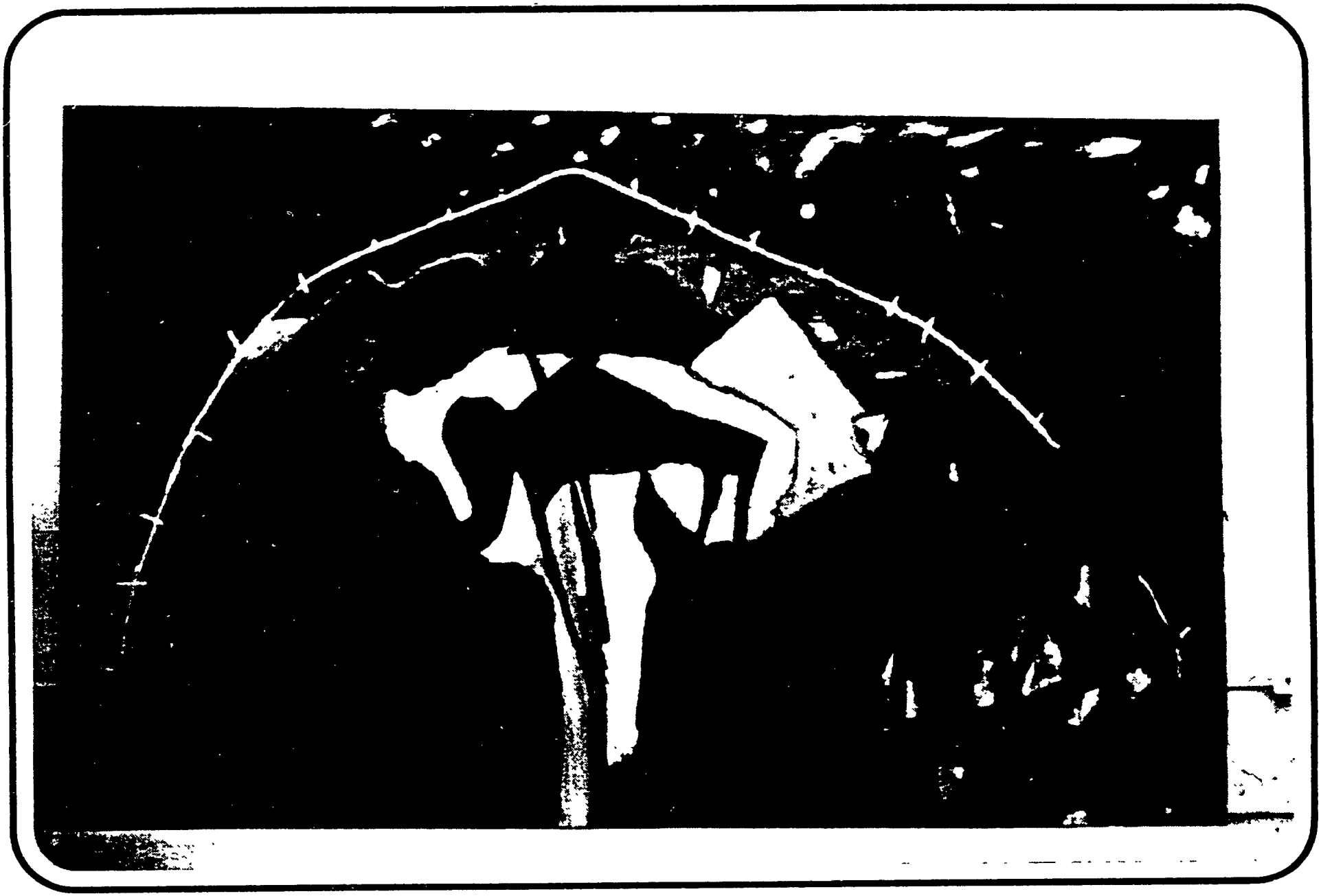

plate 9 Cluny I

Plate 10 Cluny IV

Plate 11 Winter 1984 (White Moon)

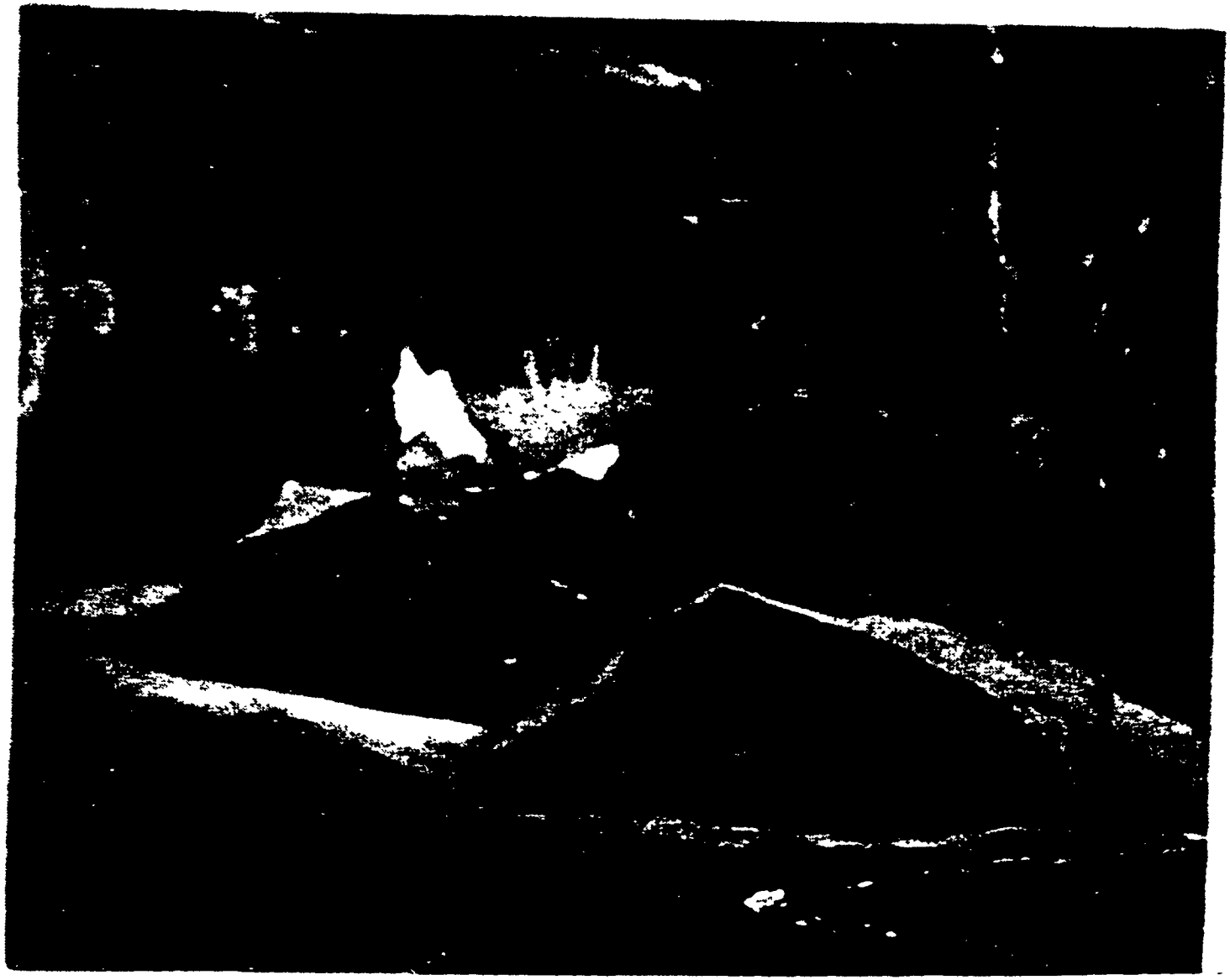

Plate 12 Winter 1984 (Industrial river)

Plate 13 Winter 1984 (alberta)

Plate 14 Winter 1984 (The young family)

Plate 15 Crossing(Long)

Plate 16 Crossing(Tall)