



Caroline Duker, *Landscape#6*, 1976, acrylic on canvas, Collection of the School of Art

Caroline Duker | *Being There*

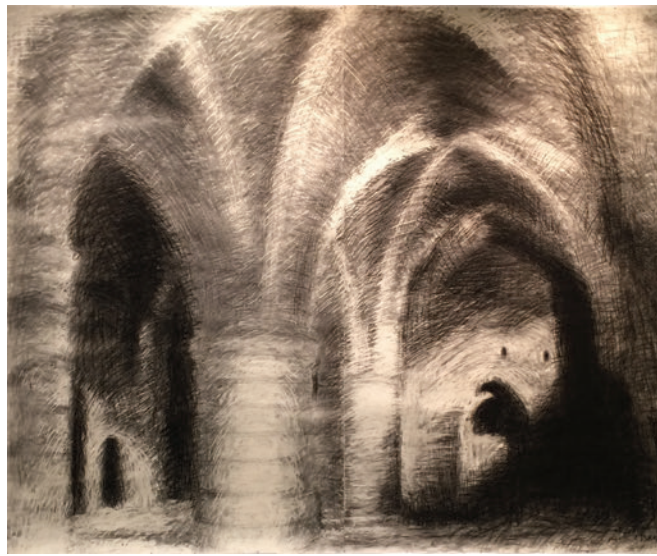
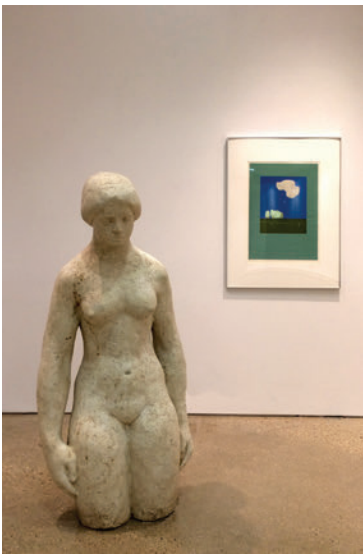
You lie prone on a deep, brown ground, spent. A monotonous and insistent river flows past you into a fork just up ahead. The far shore is lush, even the knobby finger of the distant peninsula has a softer, gentler look. The ground you are on is in no way sinister. It has warmth and a reassuring way in which it supports you. The heavy earthen tone is pleasant in its own right, once thought luxurious probably, now showing it has aged below its former status. All three areas, the ground you lie on, the river and the unknown lands, have a definite and equally weighted pull. The river could carry you effortlessly toward either of the two horizons, but it could also dash you against unseen hazards, or rush you into a wholly different scene. It is not benign and yet it is a placidly bucolic surface.

The knobby outcrop echoes your skin. Its tone and reflectivity is just the same as the inside of your elbow. It sits proud but barren on the surface. It could be floating or it could reach all the way to the other side of the world but you will never know either for sure. The vibrant green shoreline leaves the taste of yellow on your tongue. It has a hard line and a rhythmic gesture that suggests a persistent undulation on an otherwise flat expanse.

You yourself hug the corner of the frame and tilt your head back so as to make the panorama more immersive. You dive backwards and headlong into the vista while lying perfectly still. You are your stone self, participatory and passive in the scene, turned outward and receptive but immobile and impenetrable. You are dressed only in your skin. Perhaps we should all bare ourselves on an unknowable riverbank to be immersed in the possibility of that far shore; perhaps we all do.

On second thought maybe that rushing blue isn't a river after all. Or maybe you aren't the one laying prone beside it. Here is a woman cut off at the knees, standing silently. She looks down in a way that might have been called obedience once but now inspires a kind of sorrowful fear. She is naked and you can't stop thinking she is cold. But look at those hands and her shoulders. There is a strong core and an unbreakable presence. Her quiet face is closed neatly, her hair is secured simply, hands lie at thighs with ease. Over her shoulder you see the prairie in a tight, teal frame. The river is now the sky and you feel much closer to that promising and verdant shore.

Beside the woman is a stark scene that jolts you out of the landscape. You have been transported to a cavernous interior with buttressed heavy arches and solid pillars. Shadows obscure the corners and partially shroud a wooden door to the right. Two more doorways are framed by a hard light falling down their corridor. The whole space is claustrophobic and oppressive. Light bounces from the reflection off the stout pillars but is unable to penetrate the thick, black, depth. The ground disappears while the ceiling closes in from above. Across from this interior is a domed building of indistinct purpose. It looks as though it was hewn from the background with rough, deliberate strokes. The shading on its dome continues a



Caroline Dukes, *Untitled*, 1972, cast stone; *Prairie*, 1978, Silkscreen, *Building #16*, 1990, charcoal on paper, *Building #2*, 1988, charcoal on paper, Collection of the School of Art

sense of foreboding that has crept forward from a distant mid-ground. The dome looks too soft, pillowy, gelatinous, and hovering on top of the structure. It also influences the sky, lending the scene a dense atmosphere. Light strikes the surface head on, casting deep shadows in arches and windows. Both of the built spaces echo an uncertain refuge in an imposing landscape. You wonder what side of the river these lie on.

Caroline Dukes was born near Budapest, Hungary in 1929. After surviving the Second World War and ghettoization as a Hungarian Jew, Dukes would experience a decade of Soviet control and the heavy toll it would take on an already beleaguered region. During the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, Dukes and her young family were able to emigrate to Canada, eventually settling in Winnipeg.

Dukes began her formal art studies at the Royal Opera House in Budapest until political pressures forced her to quit in 1939. She then studied at the Free University and apprenticed with the sculptor Zsigmond Kisfaludi Strobl before attending the Academy of Fine Arts in Budapest in 1952. In 1972 Caroline Dukes graduated from the School of Art, University of Manitoba. She would become a significant figure in the Winnipeg Art scene for the next 35 years, being awarded numerous provincial and federal grants as well as the favour of collectors and critics.

The works in this exhibit date from the early 1970's and are from Dukes' existentialist period. The two large charcoal drawings are from a series completed after a trip to Jerusalem's Holy City in the 1980's. Her process was indebted to modernist traditions of subverting depth through flat delineated space and bold application of colour fields while also clearly participating in the narrative and experiential ethos of Prairie Surrealism. They reflect a deep connection to her personal memory, her Orthodox faith, and the collective memory of shared suffering experienced by Hungarians from the same generation. The donation of works by Caroline Dukes to the permanent collection was made possible by the generosity of her husband, Alfred Dukes.

Essay and Exhibition organized by Jamie Wright