



Detail, David McMillan, *Untitled*, 1978. In *The Banff Purchase: An Exhibition of Photography in Canada* (Toronto: John Wiley and Sons Canada, 1979), n.p. Courtesy of David McMillan and John Wiley & Sons Inc.

Producing and Publishing *The Banff Purchase*: Nationalism, Pedagogy, and Professionalism in Contemporary Canadian Art Photography, 1979

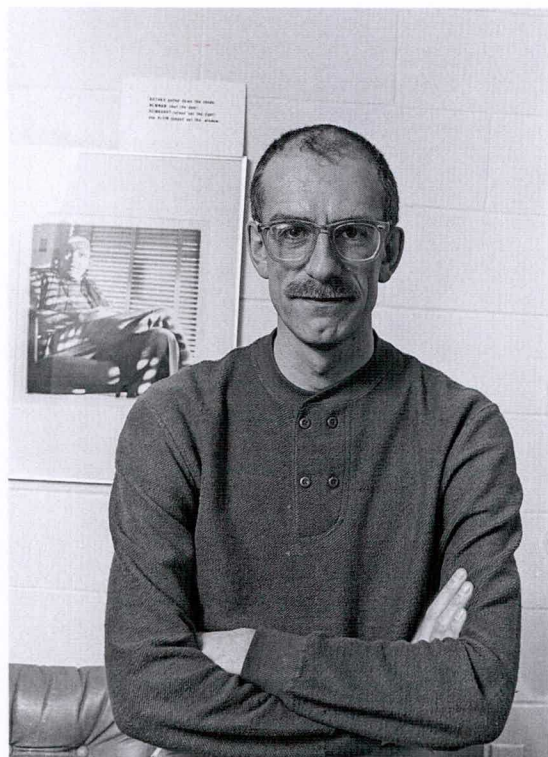
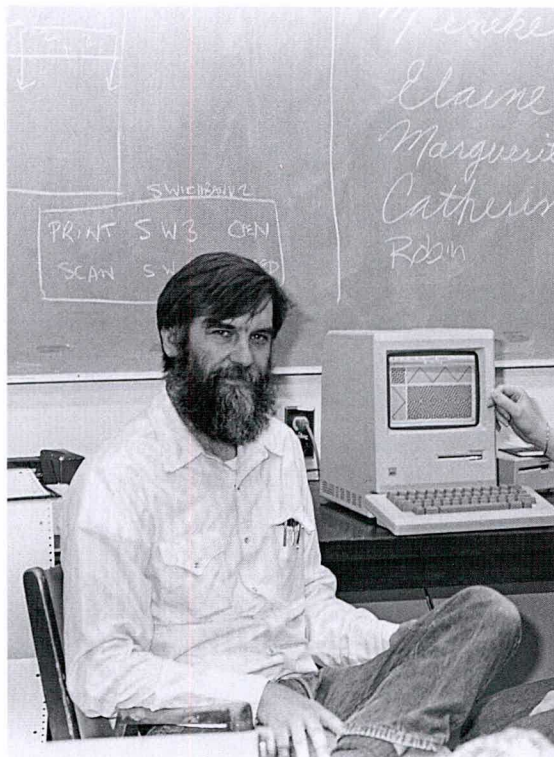
KARLA MCMANUS

On 13 July 1979, the Walter Phillips Gallery at the Banff Centre for Continuing Education opened an ambitious exhibition on contemporary Canadian art photography. Curated by Lorne Falk and Hubert Hohn (Fig. 1), the exhibition included a stellar group of photographers, with the goal of establishing the Banff Centre as a place for serious photographic study. Listed by geographical residency from West to East, the photographers that were selected for inclusion were: Nina Raginsky (b. 1941) in British Columbia, Orest Semchishen (b. 1932) in Alberta, David McMillan (b. 1945) in Manitoba, Robert Bourdeau (b. 1931) in Ontario, Lynne Cohen (1944–2014) in Ontario, Tom Gibson (b. 1930) in Quebec, and Charles Gagnon (1934–2003) in Quebec. An influential group, these seven photographers spanned most of the country, as do their images, including Raginsky's portraits of Victoria's citizens, Semchishen's images of small town Alberta, and McMillan's, Gibson's, and Gagnon's street scenes of Winnipeg and Banff, Toronto, and Montreal respectively. Only Bourdeau's spectacular landscapes and Cohen's modern interiors are less geographically secured. Photographers – or images – from the North and the Maritimes were noticeably absent.

The introductory statement to the exhibition at the Walter Phillips Gallery, quoted in the Fall 1979 issue of *Photo Communiqué*, expresses the philosophy and ambition of the curators:

The climate for change and direction in Canadian photography calls for greater support and action from the artistic community, as well as a greater public consciousness of the importance of the medium. It is our belief that there are significant photographs being made in Canada by photographers who deserve to be more seriously recognized nationally and internationally. The purpose of *The Banff Purchase* is to provide an opportunity for this recognition.¹

The underlying criticism in this statement, reflecting a belief that Canadian photographers had been ignored – at a great cost to the medium – by the



1A | Ed Ellis, *Hubert Hohn*, 1986. Courtesy of the Paul D. Fleck Library and Archives, The Banff Centre.

1B | Kim Chan, *Lorne Falk*, 1985. Courtesy of the Paul D. Fleck Library and Archives, The Banff Centre.

contemporary art world, calls for a reconsideration of the intentions and impact of *The Banff Purchase*, some twenty-five years later.²

While this nationalistic push was certainly a major influence on the direction of the exhibition, the objectives of the curators went far beyond the production of a solitary photography exhibition. At the same time as Hohn was producing the exhibition with Falk, he was redesigning the photography studio program at the Banff Centre's School of Fine Arts, a change that reflected a "turning point" for the institution as the centre moved towards a year-long training model.³ Newly hired by the Walter Phillips Gallery, Falk set out to establish a collecting practice for the growing institution, where works by visiting artists and prominent Canadians could be used for both teaching and curating. *The Banff Purchase* was part of this larger goal: the curators acquired the work of all seven photographers for the gallery's collection (an act echoed in the namesake of the project), created a carousel of

The Banff Purchase



An Exhibition of Photography in Canada

2 | Cover of *The Banff Purchase: An Exhibition of Photography in Canada* (Toronto: John Wiley and Sons Canada, 1979). Cover image reproduced courtesy of Nina Raginsky and John Wiley & Sons Inc.

study slides from the work to be made widely available, and planned a Master class workshop to coincide with the exhibition. Through their curatorial and pedagogical project, Falk and Hohn wished to challenge the place of the photographic medium in the Canadian imagination by using the exhibition

and its accompanying publication “as a catalyst” for growth and professional development within the photographic and photo curating communities.⁴

Alongside their ambitious curatorial and educational programming, Falk and Hohn produced a hardcover photobook (Fig. 2). *The Banff Purchase* is an exemplary object of its time: the book stands out in quality, materiality, and production values. More than an exhibition catalogue, the book is a “critical complication”⁵ and an object that functions on its own merit – and which was advertised as autonomous – as a reflection on the state of contemporary art photography in Canada at the close of the 1970s. The publication includes sixty-three photographic reproductions, in both black and white and colour (nearly half of the one hundred and fifty-three images from the exhibition), and an essay by photography critic and University of Ottawa professor Penny Cousineau. Printed by the Canadian subsidiary of the leading North American publishing house John Wiley and Sons, with help from the curators – particularly Hubert Hohn, who supervised the printing – the hard-cover book is a testament to the thought that went into the project. At a time when photographic exhibition catalogues were often done as cheaply as possible in Canada, when produced at all, the book strikes this reader as a serious statement – if not critique – that aimed to raise the standards in Canadian art photography publishing.⁶ Through an analysis of the object that remains, and through research into the exhibition and curators, I will ask the question: what has been the legacy of *The Banff Purchase*?

Making a Statement on Contemporary Canadian Photography

Conceived as an in-house exhibition for the Walter Phillips Gallery in January 1978, by July of that year *The Banff Purchase* had “assumed much larger proportions and a broader scope.”⁷ Falk wrote in the August prospectus for the project that, “taken in its entirety, a project of this magnitude is unprecedented in the history of photography as a visual art in Canada.”⁸ As is often the case with proposals for support, Falk’s language attempts to distinguish *The Banff Purchase* from any precedents, as a way to demonstrate the value of the exhibition to the Banff Centre, while also attempting to position the Centre as an important player at the national level.⁹ A strong political intention is articulated by Falk when Canadian photography is acknowledged as requiring assistance and support to mature, especially when faced with the influence of the cultural juggernaut directly to the south. Falk writes that, “The remedy is to be found in the recognition and appreciation of the outstanding photography that does exist in Canada.”¹⁰ Later echoing this rhetoric, although with a slightly tempered tone, the curators would declaim on the book overleaf that, “The Banff Purchase is a statement about

a Canadian attitude toward the use of photography as a vital medium for creative expression . . . The Banff Purchase will be a major influence on the immediate future of Canadian photography.”¹¹

Falk’s goals for photography in Canada were made further explicit in an article he wrote for the May/June 1979 issue of *Photo Communiqué*, a photographic arts magazine newly-founded by editor-in-chief Gail Fisher-Taylor based in Toronto. In it, Falk expressed the concern that photography’s “significant, if tenuous, recognition as a visual art in Canada,” would crumble without deeper self-evaluation and support from art institutions. Falk’s answer to this “dilemma” was a reasonable one. He argued that increasing the educational opportunities for photographers, strengthening the photographic publishing industry, and improving curation and critical writing on the medium would help to bolster the artistic production of young photographers in Canada.¹² “The Dilemma of Photography in Canada” was well-timed to reflect the ideas and aims of *The Banff Purchase*, especially as it was promoted to meet the needs of a generation of emerging photographic artists in Canada.

According to Hohn, the goal of *The Banff Purchase* project was not so much to produce an exhibition or a catalogue, but to provide photography students in Alberta with access to experienced photographic artists from across the country and their work.¹³ Hired to teach photography at the Banff Centre in 1977, Hohn quickly became involved with the development of the Centre’s new educational master plan, published in 1979 as “A Turning Point” and spearheaded by Director David Leighton, which transformed the school into a “creative arts colony.”¹⁴ Becoming Department Head of Photography in 1979, Hohn stayed on until 1986¹⁵ and oversaw the transformation of the photography program from its earlier emphasis on nature and technical photography towards an artistic model

PHOTOGRAPHY MASTER CLASS SERIES July 2 - August 10

Senior

Instructors

ROBERT BOURDEAU
PENNY COUSINEAU
CHARLES GAGNON
TOM GIBSON
HUBERT HOHN
DAVID McMILLAN
NINA RAGINSKI

Tuition Fee: \$385

The Master Class Series offers a limited number of serious photographers an opportunity to work with a group of Canada’s outstanding exhibiting photographers, teachers, curators, and critics. The format consists of six one-week workshops, each featuring a guest artist. The content will consist of discussion of the guest artists’ work, creative process and working method; print critiques of student work by the guest artist; and work with the guest in the field and the laboratory. An exhibition of work by the guest artists will be on display in the Walter Phillips Gallery during the workshop. An exhibition of works produced by the students in the workshop is also planned.

The Master Class Series is restricted to photographers who have recently completed programs at other institutions, photographers who have recently begun to exhibit, and other photographers whose portfolios indicate a high degree of artistic potential. Admission is by invitation or by portfolio and interview. Scholarship support is available to participants.

3 | “Photography: Master Class Series,” from *The Banff Centre: Course Calendar*, 1979, 74. Courtesy of the Paul D. Fleck Library and Archives, The Banff Centre.

that employed a studio style of teaching.¹⁶ The restructured Banff Centre photography program was meant to offer students the freedom to develop their own artistic sensibilities through experimentation and mentorship, a framework that has continued to inform and shape the educational policy of the Centre.¹⁷ Employing the exhibiting photographers to come and teach during the six-week Master class workshop was integral to the project.¹⁸ According to the advertising material produced for the Master class (Fig. 3), Robert Bourdeau, Penny Cousineau, Charles Gagnon, Tom Gibson, Hubert Hohn, David McMillan, and Nina Raginski all participated in the workshop.¹⁹ Nothing less than a complete revamping of the Banff Centre's photographic program was Hohn's aim and *The Banff Purchase* was an integral first step in this new direction.²⁰

***The Banff Purchase* in Context: Collecting, Exhibiting, Publishing Canadian Photography**

By the 1970s, the medium of photography was becoming more prominent in art galleries and museums around the world, with an increased interest internationally in photographic exhibitions, publications, and education.²¹ This growth was also taking place in Canada, as galleries, museums, and educational institutions began to focus seriously on the medium. Galleries such as the Edmonton Art Gallery, the Winnipeg Art Gallery, and an artist-run centre, The Photographer's Gallery in Saskatoon, were also beginning to exhibit photography, largely by supporting regional photographers.²² Institutions with national significance, namely the National Film Board of Canada's Still Photography Division, the Public Archives of Canada, and the National Gallery of Canada, all had growing collections of photography. The NFB had played an important role in publishing, exhibiting, and collecting contemporary photography in Canada since the 1950s,²³ but perhaps did not place as much emphasis on the notion of photography as *visual art* as some artists and curators might have wished.²⁴ The Public Archives was a strong source for historical Canadian photography but had little in their collection in the way of contemporary art.²⁵ The Art Gallery of Ontario began in the 1970s to exhibit photography but had yet to begin a collection.²⁶ The National Gallery of Canada was known for its interest in the international history of photography rather than the contemporary Canadian scene.²⁷ The Banff Centre and the Walter Phillips Gallery, unlike these powerful and historic Canadian institutions, were newcomers to national-level exhibiting and publishing of art photography. By comparison, Falk and Hohn's approach to curating *The Banff Purchase* stands out for its commitment to presenting –

as they saw it – the breadth of professional contemporary Canadian art photography in 1979.

On the surface, the expansion of photographic support in Canada might appear to have heralded opportunities for art photography, but Falk and Hohn expressed worry that unconsidered proliferation of photographic work would lead to “the dissolution and degradation of standards for excellence in visual growth,” which they believed was taking place in the United States’ art scene and market.²⁸ This put the curators in a difficult position vis-à-vis the design of their exhibition: on the one hand they wished to provide opportunities to young Canadian photographers, but they also wanted to use the exhibition to draw attention to the strong photography *already* being produced in Canada by well-established artists perceived as masters in their field, and to encourage further growth and to shape the production of images amongst emerging photographers. The decision was therefore made to focus the exhibition on a small group of photographers who could be universally acknowledged by both peers and art professionals as unfailingly talented, professional, and devoted to the medium of photography. Ultimately, this would mean that students of photography would gain access to this work at the Banff Centre, while being exposed to what Hohn and Falk, as well as the Canadian photographic world, considered exemplary.

The Photographers: Establishing an Exemplary Group

Throughout the 1970s, *The Banff Purchase* exhibitors had been featured in a number of Canadian group exhibitions, at a mixture of institutional and commercial galleries.²⁹ Many of them, including curator Hohn, had shown through the NFB’s Still Photography Division, the most significant institution for the promotion, exhibition, and publication of contemporary photography during the 1960s and 1970s.³⁰ A review of the NFB Travelling Exhibition Catalogue of 1979, a ring-binder booklet printed on thick card stock that was devoted to promoting the circulation of the NFB’s pre-curated collections across the country, demonstrates that the exhibitions-for-use included many of the same people involved in *The Banff Purchase*. Hubert Hohn’s *Alberta Landscapes/Paysages d’Alberta*, Robert Bourdeau’s retrospective “1969–1978,” Lynne Cohen’s self-titled exhibition of interiors, Orest Semchishen’s *Ukrainian Religious Architecture*, and Nina Raginsky’s Victoria portraits all existed as exhibitions available to be borrowed by community groups, galleries, and institutions.³¹ It is notable that under the direction of Lorraine Monk, the NFB published both monographs and surveys of Canadian photography starting in the late 1960s. Some were produced in hardcover

as special-themed books relating to national events and anniversaries, but most were produced as softcover books. Many included *The Banff Purchase* photographers.³² Although not produced to the design quality of Hohn and Falk's publication, the *Image* series, in particular, offered readers access to photographs rarely seen outside the gallery and helped to encourage Canadian printers "in developing lithography to a level at which sensitive and true reproduction of fine photographs and art work is possible."³³

Many of the photographers had been featured in major art periodicals, such as *artscanada*,³⁴ *Parachute*,³⁵ *Image*,³⁶ and *Creative Camera*,³⁷ and reviews of their exhibitions were frequently published.³⁸ Of note is photographer and curator Geoffrey James's (b. 1942) article from 1974, "Responding to Photographs: A Canadian Portfolio," which included Bourdeau, Gagnon, and Raginsky.³⁹ Introduced by an extensive art historically-grounded text in defence of the medium, James's thoughts on the art of photography read like a precursor to the criticisms brought out by *The Banff Purchase*: as an "overlooked"⁴⁰ medium, James calls for a more critical and aesthetic understanding of the "good' photograph."⁴¹ Aside from this exceptional article which included twenty-seven pages of single images, most of the publications of the 1970s (primarily exhibition catalogues and reviews) were produced with a limited selection of reproductions, sometimes several to a page, and rarely in colour.

Although David McMillan and Orest Semchishen were less established photographers, having only begun showing in the mid-1970s, they had been featured in several exhibitions across Canada and their work was found in prominent permanent collections, including the Canada Council Art Bank and the NFB Still Photography Division. On the other hand, Robert Bourdeau, Lynne Cohen, Charles Gagnon, Tom Gibson, and Nina Raginsky had shown extensively across the country, including at the National Gallery of Canada. Their status as prominent art photographers in Canada meant that they were part of a small but select network of artists known by curators, editors, collectors, and institutional workers, whose interest in photography was growing.⁴²

Many of the photographers, excluding Semchishen, who was a radiologist in Edmonton, and Bourdeau, who worked as an architectural technologist in Ottawa, were academics as well as artists who taught at various universities and colleges across Canada. While this was not a criteria for their inclusion, the fact that six of the chosen photographers were fine arts educators (beginning in 1979, Bourdeau was an adjunct at the University of Ottawa) as well as artists demonstrates that to achieve the level of artistic proficiency and professional experience sought by the curators, art photographers needed financial support beyond that which was produced from exhibitions

and sales. As well, the group's relatively stable employment status reminds us how important institutional support was (and continues to be today) for artistic creation, regardless of the medium. While some taught photography specifically, others, like David McMillan and Charles Gagnon, were originally painters who were hired as art professors first before expanding their practices and teaching to include photography. This reflects how few fine arts academic programs offered photography in Canada during the 1970s. In fact, McMillan at the University of Manitoba, like Gibson at Concordia University, established a photography department at his school.

Formally, there are strong similarities across the group: attention to composition, quality of printing, and eye-catching details of ironic or emotive juxtaposition stand out in all the works. Yet it would be impossible to generalize further about the group except to say that there is a seriousness to the use of the medium shared by all the photographers, described by Martin Parr and Gerry Badger as "the expressive documentary 'windows' mode," after John Szarkowski's (1925–2007) binary breakdown of the two styles of late modernist production.⁴³ Aside from this similar commitment to the formalist structure of the image, there are many differences in subject matter, aesthetic approach, and process. This is made clear by a close reading of the publication.

The Publication: The Object that Remains

The Banff Purchase was an extraordinary project and the photographs remain an integral part of the Walter Phillips Gallery's collection. Its publication, the only remaining part of the whole still readily available to a larger audience – albeit requiring some effort to track down through used bookstores or online – reflects this exceptionalism. A large (30.5 x 23 cm) hardcover publication, the layout and design of the book conform to the conventions of photography books today, with high-quality reproductions of the photographs and full-page single-image layouts. The book reflects a formalist aesthetic to photobook design: the images are each given their own full page, unencumbered by any distracting decorative elements and with nothing more than a small line of text at the bottom of each page identifying the artist, the title of the work, and the date of production. The book is the embodiment of rhetorical restraint.

The book begins with a title page, then a second title page with the names of the photographers, which is followed by Cousineau's short essay introducing the main section of the book. Each photographer's work is presented individually, separated by one blank page with their name printed on the bottom right. At the back, there is a one-page biography for each

photographer. The book ends with a scant three-paragraph “Afterword” by Falk and Hohn that describes the project in functional terms and concludes with thanks to contributors and funders alike.

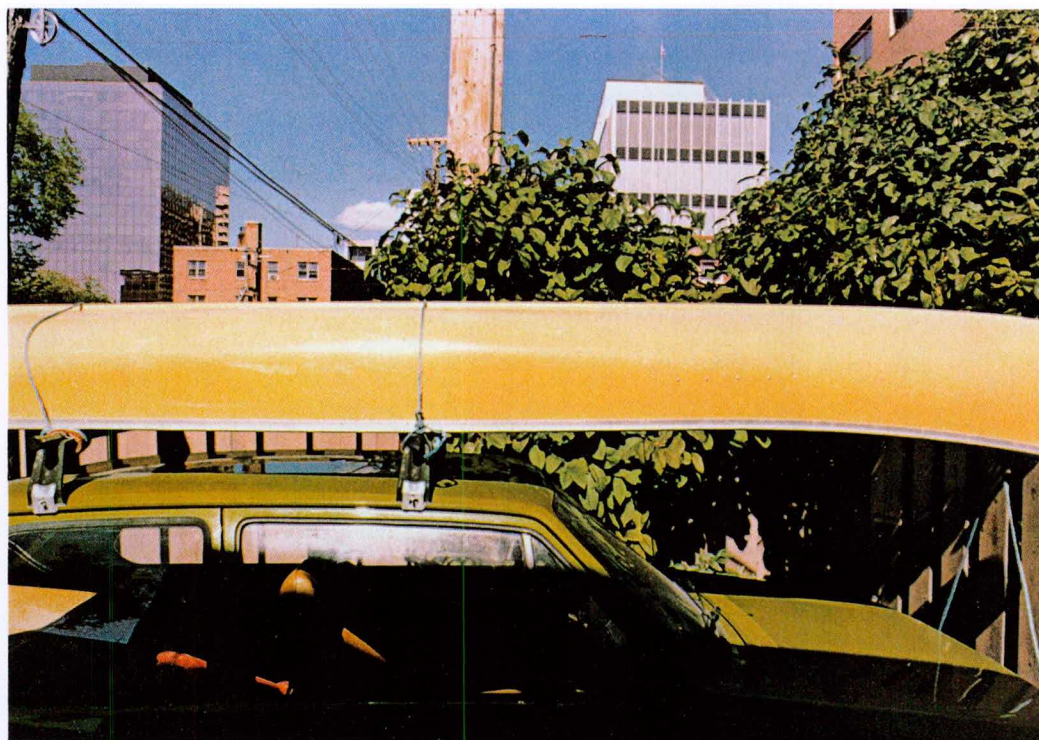
As early as August 1978, even before finding a publisher, a publication of some kind (catalogue or book) was detailed in an appendix to the prospectus. Outlining the curatorial expectations for printing, production, and financing, they wrote that “careful attention should be paid to the publisher’s willingness to co-operate on all aspects of the book’s production as regards quality control, and to the publisher’s distribution potential and marketing abilities for books of this nature.”⁴⁴ This was reinforced by the description of extensive production requirements that “all photographs . . . be reproduced duo tone with a varnish coat,” and the aesthetic layout decision, stating that “text will be minimal: title page, second title page, introduction, biographical information, credits.”⁴⁵ This attention to detail is obvious even today: in a time of inexpensive and high-quality digital printing, *The Banff Purchase* expresses a “classic” look and feel that reflects the late modernist design of influential photography publishers like the Museum of Modern Art.

Both Hohn and Falk were surprised to find that John Wiley and Sons Canada Limited, a prominent house with little history of publishing photography, was interested in the project.⁴⁶ Producing a book was not, according to Hohn, part of his intentions for the show and came about through interest from the publisher, or possibly management connections at Banff.⁴⁷ Falk, on the other hand, saw the book as an important component of the project. In an email, Falk wrote that the goal of the book was

To document the exhibition and promote photography as an art. It is often forgotten that in the 1970s, photography (and many other disciplines!) were not recognized as art – which is another way of saying they were not exhibited, collected, and written about, and in turn, this is another way of saying that the “high art” world was waning and a more inclusive art world was ascendant.⁴⁸

Through Falk’s words we get a better sense of which curator was more concerned with the philosophic and ideological aspects of *The Banff Purchase* and its legacy.

The main photographic section begins with the two photographers working in colour, David McMillan and Nina Raginsky, who have only seven images each. They are followed by fellow Western Canadian Orest Semchishen. We then move further east from Bourdeau to Gibson, Gagnon to Cohen. The seven photographers, meant to represent the breadth and



4 | David McMillan, *Untitled*, 1978 and *Untitled*, 1978. In *The Banff Purchase: An Exhibition of Photography in Canada* (Toronto: John Wiley and Sons Canada, 1979), n.p. Courtesy of David McMillan and John Wiley & Sons Inc.

quality of photographic production in Canada in 1979, show a variety of approaches that are nevertheless formally united by a broadly modernist sensibility⁴⁹ – whether aesthetic or conceptual – and commitment to print quality. The dizzying array of styles is emphasized as one flips through the pages of the book, yet the print quality and coherent design help to overcome the differences.

The colour section vibrates with intensity and the prints pop against the cream-coloured paper of the book (Fig. 4). McMillan's saturated colours and cut-off framings of street scenes rendered as abstractions make his photographs of human landscapes – cluttered with parked cars, groomed trees, electrical wires, and lamp posts – claustrophobic, as if the busy urban fabric is compressed by the camera, yet dissociated and stripped of people. The traditional compositions of Raginsky's Victoria portraits, full or three-quarter poses of her primarily smiling and self-aware subjects, are given a humorous twist when they are colourfully touched-up in a manner reminiscent of the hand-tinting of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century photographs. It is with some regret at leaving behind this glowing colour that the reader flips the pages to the black and white section, made up of ten images per photographer.

The section begins with Semchishen's townscapes of rural Alberta, which focus on architectural spaces and use roads, boulevards, cars, and electrical poles to shape the compositions. Semchishen's images draw the viewer's eye out towards horizons and up into the sky. Cousineau refers to a "nostalgia" in these images, perhaps picking up not only on the traditional vernacular architecture depicted but also on the more classic documentary-style framing. On the other hand, Bourdeau's black and white landscapes are more aesthetic than documentary, treating the landscape as a surface that is lush, textured, and layered. A wall of stone streaked by the slow passage of water over time in one picture echoes the rolling layers of a valley rising up towards the surrounding hills in another. The print quality of the images is most apparent in Bourdeau's work, where the tonality and variation in hue are most technically complex. In sharp contrast, Gibson's black and white urban scenes come across as unaffected. Instead of technical prowess, they simulate the snapshot, emphasizing the everyday movement and activity of city-dwellers who don't pose for the camera but move in and out of the frames like the busy people they are. In Gagnon's photographs, it is the photographer who seems to move the frame across the shapes and forms of contemporary life: window arches, the bend of an arm in an overcoat, piles of garbage bags, and architectural protrusions are carefully captured by the camera. Cohen's photographs end the book on a more critical note: the deliberate framing of interior public spaces – banquet halls, swimming pools, exhibition displays –

renders her everyday and faintly humorous subjects extraordinary in their very banality.

The introductory essay by Penny Cousineau⁵⁰ attempts to create a coherent whole from the show. Cousineau's essay focuses on the individual artistic visions of the selected artists or, as she dubs them, "the most accomplished members of a generation of Canadian photographers whose images began to be seen in the early and mid-1970s."⁵¹ Devoting equal space to the work of each photographer in the short essay, Cousineau briefly gives a description and interpretation of their work, drawing on her personal response to the images. Cousineau describes "the psychological and philosophical distancing of the photographer and the viewer from the environments or persons pictured"⁵² as central to a deeper understanding of the selected works. She articulates a series of complex ideas about contemporary photography, including the role of memory and time in the image, the psychological affinity or distantiation of the photographer from his or her subject, and the limitations of the photograph as "accurate transcription of physical reality."⁵³ Cousineau readily utilizes the discursive tropes of contemporary photography during this period, employing terms and ideas common to the North American context. Echoing the thinking of her teacher Nathan Lyons, whose influential essay from *Toward a Social Landscape* promoted an expanded understanding of the photographer's relationship to his or her environment,⁵⁴ Cousineau writes of the photographers' engagement with "unpeopled expanses of the natural and social landscape."⁵⁵ Surprisingly, little is said about the "Canadian" quality of the work, a move perhaps synchronous with Falk and Hohn's desire to engage Canadian photography in the larger debates happening outside of the country – what today would be called the "global art world" – but nevertheless at odds with the larger framework of the show.

Cousineau is heralded on the back flap of the book as "one of the most respected critical writers in Canadian photography"⁵⁶ and, according to the curators, was chosen to write for the publication because they felt Cousineau's reputation and experience – as a graduate of the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, NY, who had published numerous articles on photography in Canada and abroad – would give the publication an academic quality and help legitimate the promotion of art photography in Canada. Hohn and Falk chose not to include their own writing in the book, instead relying on Cousineau as an influential and critical voice. Falk explains this choice:

I was a budding curator and my curatorial writing was formative. Hu was a teacher through and through and his curatorial/critical writing interests were always secondary to his incredible passion for teaching.

It made sense to have someone else with a more authoritative voice represent the artists and the project in the context of Canadian photography and art.⁵⁷

Today, this assigned authority would be unquestioned: as Penny Cousineau-Levine, she would go on to write an in-depth study on contemporary photography and the Canadian psychological identity.⁵⁸ At the time, her essay, while well-written and thoughtful, had little to say about the purpose of *The Banff Purchase*: to encourage and raise up the quality of Canadian art photography in Canada and in the province of Alberta. Cousineau's essay is proficient at summarizing the aesthetic and photographic concerns of those represented, yet it lacks grounding in the pedagogical and ideological purpose that came from the truly "authoritative voices" of this project: the curators. There is no doubt in my mind that the intentions of this project would have been better articulated by Hohn and Falk. Over the years, their decision to remove their presence from the publication has leached the book itself of much of its critical content, rendering the meaning more conceptually neutral as concerns about Canadian identity in photography have become less about political action – or arts education and funding – and more about personal expression and the cosmopolitan art market.

***The Banff Purchase* in Circulation: Networking across Space and Time**

Over a two-year period, *The Banff Purchase* exhibition, made up of 120 of the photographs acquired, had a strong run: it travelled from the Walter Phillips to the Edmonton Art Gallery, the Glenbow Museum, Harbourfront in Toronto, the Art Gallery of Hamilton, the Vancouver Art Gallery, the Musée Marsil de St-Lambert, the Mendel Art Gallery in Saskatoon, and the Dunlop Art Gallery in Regina. This was a significant tour for an exhibition of contemporary Canadian art photography, matched only by the travelling shows organized by the NFB Still Division.

Photo Communiqué played a significant role in promoting *The Banff Purchase* in its pages as an exhibition, a teaching tool, and a book (Fig. 5). In addition to Fisher-Taylor's exhibition review, the first six issues of the magazine (March/April 1979 – January/February 1980) are peppered with adverts for the exhibition, the Banff Centre Master classes and workshops, and – later – *The Banff Purchase* photobook, although no book review is found in its pages.⁵⁹ Lorne Falk was a contributing editor to the bimonthly and it is tempting to see a reciprocal relationship as the institutional weight of the Banff Centre was used to support the fledgling magazine. It also reflects

THE BANFF PURCHASE

an exhibition of photography in Canada

**Bourdeau
Cohen
Gagnon
Gibson
McMillan
Raginsky
Semchishen**

The collection to recognize and celebrate the development of photography in Canada. THE BANFF PURCHASE is a long-overdue portfolio of works by seven of Canada's most significant photographers who have been producing, exhibiting and contributing to the medium over a period of years.

Herzig Somerville has painstakingly reproduced these 200-line screen, 4 colour reproductions and varnished 200-line screen grey and black duotones on 100lb Flokote, a fine gloss paper.

The photographs in this book, and the travelling exhibition which the book documents, are recent acquisitions of The Walter Phillips Gallery of The Banff Centre.



112 pages, 9 3/4 x 12
64 Duotones, 14 Full-colour
September
\$29.95 cloth

John Wiley & Sons Canada Limited
22 Worcester Road, Rexdale, Ontario, M9W 1L1

5 | "The Banff Purchase: An Exhibition of Photography in Canada." *Photo Communiqué* 1:3 (July/August 1979): 16. Courtesy of Artexte Documentation Centre. (Photo: author)

the goals of editor-in-chief Fisher-Taylor, who viewed the new magazine as a forum to address and resolve the problems facing the fine arts photography community, and especially what she saw as a lack of in-depth discourse, criticism, and communication about events and exhibitions important to the field.⁶⁰¹

With financial support from the Banff Centre, the Canada Council for the Arts, the National Museums Corporation, the Glenbow Museum, the Edmonton Art Gallery, and the Walter Phillips Gallery, the possibilities for *The Banff Purchase* were unlimited. Hence, the selection of only seven photographers was considered surprising and suggested to some a curatorial intention to establish a coherent baseline for Canadian photography – what reviewer Nancy Tousley archly described in her *Vanguard* review as the “new group of seven.”⁶¹ Referring to the included photographers as “skilful, technically expert, ‘straight’ photographers,”⁶² Tousley nevertheless argues that, “there is apt to be some discussion as to how representative of photography in Canada the exhibition really is.”⁶³ In her review, which was also published in *The Calgary Herald*,⁶⁴ Tousley goes on to denounce the curator’s selections as exclusionary, writing that:

For one thing, the many Canadian artists who use photography as a basis for their work but are not classified as ‘photographers’ in the purest sense have been excluded and a great deal of interesting and exciting work has been appearing on this front.⁶⁵

On a positive note, Tousley believed the debates prompted by the exhibition would be valuable. She was particularly hopeful that through the catalogue, not yet released at the time of exhibition opening, “the various energies and ambitions embodied in the photography project would come into clearer focus.”⁶⁶

The Banff Purchase promoted a particular style of photography, one based on a late photographic modernism.⁶⁷ What is noticeable in the work chosen is an absence of experimental and performance-based photography. Even Fisher-Taylor – who wrote glowingly about the project as a step in the right direction for Canadian photography – agreed that the exhibition was “quite conservative: all of the work arises out of traditional photographic concerns – both technically and aesthetically.”⁶⁸ In comparison, an exhibition of the work of Barbara Astman (b. 1950), Sorel Cohen (b. 1936), Suzy Lake (b. 1947), Arnaud Maggs (1926–2012), and Ian Wallace (b. 1943) by the Winnipeg Art Gallery, as part of its annual contemporary show of Canadian art, *The Winnipeg Perspective 1979*, demonstrates that a completely different and parallel direction was taking place in the photographic work of the 1970s.⁶⁹ Curated by Karyn Allen, the exhibition and its artists experimented with photography’s ability to document, lie, and play, while emphasizing the idea of the artist using the camera as one tool amongst many. Unlike *The Winnipeg Perspective*, *The Banff Purchase* sought to promote an understanding of the artist-photographer as someone *who made art photography*, rather than an artist who used the camera conceptually, without concern for technical mastery or aesthetic formalism. Through this decision, *The Banff Purchase* would end up on the wrong side of an increasingly irrelevant divide. As David Campany has argued, in the vanguard art worlds of the US and Europe, the “well-guarded terrain of art photography” would soon be surpassed by photo-conceptualism as artists became more concerned with textuality, mediation, and the social function of art than with any commitment to purity of materials or formal criteria.⁷⁰

Fisher-Taylor’s other writing about the project included reviews of the exhibition for *artmagazine* and *Printletter*.⁷¹ Her commentary of the show was – overall – extremely supportive and infused with concern about the state of the contemporary “Canadian photographic identity,”⁷² and with a need to create this cross-national connection. In her review for *artmagazine*, she reflects that, “it is easier for people from Halifax, Montreal, Toronto,

Winnipeg, Saskatoon, or Vancouver to place their photographs within an international context than it is to try to make sense of them inside a Canadian context.”⁷³ This reiterates a common thread amongst many writing about photography at the time: people including Fisher-Taylor, who was part of the American diaspora, as well as Canadian citizens, such as Falk. Yet a cautious shadow is cast on the show’s legacy when Fisher-Taylor “wonders if their photographs will continue to be visually stimulating or if they will look like the obvious products of a repetitive and boring formula.”⁷⁴ Today this sharp rhetorical question could be answered in more ways than one. Placed in context, it is clear that *The Banff Purchase* makes a powerful statement for the quality of work in Canada during the 1970s. If the photography included in *The Banff Purchase* seems less interesting today, it must be remembered that the photographers included were not chosen solely for their aesthetic visions or innovations in the medium but equally for their contributions to art photography in Canada, at a time when photography’s status as an art form (and what form that art would take) was being debated and questioned.

Conclusion

The status of art photography in Canada as a nationalist phenomenon, or even a regional one, reverberated throughout this period as writers, curators, and critics struggled to either explain or distance – sometimes both – Canadian photography within its geographical and social context. This ambivalence was not limited to art photography; artists of all media were caught up in post-1967 Canada’s growing pains, but it seems to have become a point of serious deliberation within the photographic community as it transitioned into an accepted artistic practice that was worthy of hanging on a gallery wall. *The Banff Purchase*, both the exhibition and the publication, was made with strong pedagogical and curatorial intentions and tried to express a vision of contemporary Canadian art photography grounded in critical vigour, formal exceptionalism, and artistic professionalism. In retrospect, the tension between the concept of “Canadian photography” and photography “made in Canada” – which was so central to their project – seems largely unresolved and, in the contemporary context of today’s global art market, practically – and sadly – irrelevant. A major achievement of *The Banff Purchase* was its role as a catalyst in the development of the Walter Phillips Gallery’s permanent collection, which continues to be displayed on the walls of the Banff Centre based on the work of artists who have participated in Centre programming over the decades, as well as a solid history of support for photographic arts education at the Banff Centre for the Arts. For this accomplishment, Falk and Hohn should be pleased. Today the photobook remains an object that can

only hint at the many concerns of this cultural moment – filled with growth, creativity, and contention. Nevertheless, *The Banff Purchase* stands out as an important contribution to the history of Canadian photographic publishing, one that, through careful re-reading, can offer insight into the past and ongoing dilemma of contemporary photography in Canada.

NOTES

- 1 Gail FISHER-TAYLOR, “A Journey to the West: Thoughts on the Banff Purchase,” *Photo Communiqué* 1:4 (October 1979): 6.
- 2 My deep thanks go to Jane Parkinson, former archivist and records manager at the Banff Centre, for her help at the archives, to Lianne Caron, archives assistant at the Banff Centre, and to Maegan Hill-Carroll for research assistance while completing a residency at the Centre in 2014. My special appreciation must also be extended to Artexste in Montreal, where I spent many hours researching in their important collection on Canadian art and exhibition history. My thanks also go to Lorne Falk and Hubert Hohn for taking the time to correspond with me.
- 3 School of Fine Arts, Banff Centre for Continuing Education, “A Turning Point: An Advanced Conservatory for the Arts in Banff” (Banff Centre for Continuing Education, 1979).
- 4 Lorne FALK, “Updated Prospectus ‘The Banff Purchase’” (Internal document, 11 August 1978), n.p., *The Banff Purchase: An Exhibition of Photography in Canada – Exhibition Files* Date: 1978–1991, The Banff Centre.
- 5 Wells describes critical compilations as “photobooks accompanying themed exhibitions involving work by several photographers.” *The Banff Purchase* book is missing what Wells identifies as a major requirement of an exhibition catalogue: a list of artworks from the exhibition. Liz WELLS, “Beyond the Exhibition: From Catalogue to Photobook,” in *The Photobook: From Talbot to Ruscha and Beyond*, ed. Patrizia Di Bello, Colette E. Wilson, and Shamooin Zamir (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 131.
- 6 In surveying the photographic publications produced pre-1979, I discovered primarily hardcover books on the history of photography: see for example A.J. BIRRELL, *Into the Silent Land: Survey Photography in the Canadian West, 1858–1900: A Public Archives of Canada Travelling Exhibition* (Ottawa: Information Canada, 1975); yet the majority of contemporary art publications were more modest and less costly affairs. Examples include: Winnipeg Art Gallery, *Three Manitoba Photographers Exhibition: David Barbour, Scott MacEachern, John Paskievich* (Winnipeg: The Gallery, 1977); Art Bank (Canada), *Transparent Things: The Artist’s Use of the Photograph: Works from the Canada Council Art Bank* (Ottawa: Canada Council, 1977). Exempted from this generalization, the National Film Board of Canada Still Photography Division produced a number of quality books, yet they were primarily printed in black and white with soft covers. See: National Film Board of Canada. Still Photography Division, *Photography in Canada, Image 2*, ed. Lorraine Monk (Ottawa, ON: National Film Board of Canada/Office national du film du Canada, 1968).

- 7 Lorne FALK, "Prospectus "The Banff Purchase"" (Internal document, July 1978), unpaginated prologue, *The Banff Purchase: An Exhibition of Photography in Canada* – Exhibition Files Date: 1978–1991, The Banff Centre.
- 8 Ibid., unpaginated abstract.
- 9 To give a sense of the breadth of Hohn and Falk's vision in practical terms, the updated prospectus for the exhibition, dated August 1978, proposed a budget of \$70,000 for the "acquisition of photographs for the exhibition, the production of the exhibition and printed materials, and the advertising campaign" (13). Funding for the publication of the book and the teaching programs was to be acquired separately, a fact that proves the pedagogical programming and book were considered valuable individual aspects, not merely addendums.
- 10 FALK, "Updated Prospectus "The Banff Purchase,'" n.p.
- 11 Lorne FALK and Hubert HOHN, *The Banff Purchase: An Exhibition of Photography in Canada* (Toronto: John Wiley and Sons Canada, 1979), front dust jacket.
- 12 Falk argued that, "because the history of photography in Canada is essentially an untapped resource, contemporary Canadian photography has had to go elsewhere for its inspiration and tradition." This "elsewhere," according to Falk, was the United States of America: a position that provoked a heated debate in the following issues of *Photo Communiqué* in the "Exchange" section. Lorne FALK, "The Dilemma of Photography in Canada," *Photo Communiqué* 1:2 (June 1979): 17.
- 13 Email correspondence with author, 31 Oct. 2014.
- 14 Emphasizing the school as unique in Canada, *A Turning Point* describes everything from the future student body, teaching and support staff, philosophy of planning and teaching, and the programming elements. The school is re-envisioned as an escape into nature where small numbers of students can work independently on their own creative projects in an interdisciplinary environment. Unlike a university setting, no tenured positions would be offered, and teaching would be based on a mentoring and workshop model. *A Turning Point* was the establishment of the Banff Centre for the Arts as we know it today. School of Fine Arts, Banff Centre for Continuing Education, "A Turning Point: An Advanced Conservatory for the Arts in Banff."
- 15 Hohn founded the Inter-Arts program at Banff with Michael Century before leaving Banff in 1986 to create digital art and design for the Massachusetts College of Art. His practice by this time had moved towards digital and computer art.
- 16 David LEIGHTON and Peggy LEIGHTON, *Artists, Builders, and Dreamers: 50 Years at the Banff School* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982), 131.
- 17 Hohn had strong opinions on how to teach artists, and expressed his opinion in a 1979 presentation that "schools have largely failed to provide opportunities for genuine individual expressiveness, artistic creativeness and critical aesthetic responsiveness." See: Hubert HOHN, "Why Is This Man Laughing? A Scary Synthesis of Other Peoples' Ideas Having Something to Do With Art Education," in *Canadian Perspectives: A National Conference on Photography = Canadian Perspectives: Une conférence nationale sur la photographie au Canada* (Toronto: s.n., 1979), 321.
- 18 A shorter three-week course was also planned in the winter of 1980 as part of the project, to be taught by Hohn and aimed at beginners.
- 19 According to the Banff Archives student records, photographers who participated in the Master class included Robert Boffa, Lawrence Christmas, Michel Gaboury, Pierre

Groulx, and Ernie Kroeger, who would later run the Banff Centre's photography program.

- 20 Unfortunately for the Banff Centre and the photography department, in December 1979 there was a fire in Crich Hall, where the photography studios were located. This deeply impacted Hohn's plans for the program and a new building was still not built to replace it by the time he left the Centre in 1986.
- 21 Parr and Badger write that, "For around two decades, the United States became the world's dominant photographic culture, until the improved status of photography spread to the rest of the world." Martin PARR and Gerry BADGER, *The Photobook: A History II* (London: Phaidon, 2006), 12.
- 22 The WAG showed the work of Winnipeg architect Henry Kalen as early as 1966. Henry KALEN, *The Photographs of Henry Kalen*, Exhibition catalogue (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1966); curator Hohn made a strong impression in Edmonton, teaching and curating locally and even publishing an exhibition catalogue from EAG. Hubert HOHN, *Edmonton Entrances: An Exhibition Organized by the Edmonton Art Gallery, November 3 to December 10, 1975* (Edmonton: The Gallery, 1975).
- 23 Carol PAYNE, *The Official Picture: The National Film Board of Canada's Still Photography Division and the Image of Canada, 1941-1971* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013), 34.
- 24 Payne notes in her book about the Still Photography Division that it was during the 1960s, under Lorraine Monk's management of the division, that more emphasis was placed on photographic modernism and art photography. *Ibid.*, 45-52.
- 25 Some of their highly successful exhibitions from the 1970s were published as books. See: BIRRELL, *Into the Silent Land*; Lilly A. Koltun and National Photography Collection (Canada), *City Blocks, City Spaces: Historical Photographs of Canada's Urban Growth, c. 1850-1900 = Espaces urbains: photographies historiques de la croissance urbaine au Canada, vers 1850-1900* (Ottawa: Public Archives Canada, 1980).
- 26 The AGO's 1975 exhibition *Exposure*, its first foray into the medium, was an open call that used a jury to narrow the final selection of exhibitors to 146 photographers from across the country. Shin SUGINO and Glenda MILROD, *Exposure: Canadian Contemporary Photographers = Photographes canadiens contemporains* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario; distributed by Gage, 1975).
- 27 One of the only exhibitions to include contemporary Canadian photographers was James BORCOMAN, *The Photograph as Object, 1843-1969 = La photographie: art et objet, 1843-1969* (Ottawa, ON: National Gallery of Canada/Galerie nationale du Canada, 1969).
- 28 FALK, "Updated Prospectus 'The Banff Purchase'."
- 29 One example, *5 Photographers*, organized at the Owens Gallery at Mount Allison University, Sackville, New Brunswick, in 1976, included Bourdeau, Cohen, Gagnon, and Gibson, alongside photographer Marianna Knottenbelt. These five photographers were exhibited by the same commercial gallery, Yajima/Galerie in Montreal, which was run by Michiko Yajima Gagnon, the wife of Charles Gagnon. Indeed, all of *The Banff Purchase* photographers, with the exception of Nina Raginsky and David McMillan, had shows at Yajima/Galerie during the 1970s.
- 30 In her introduction to the book, Penny Cousineau acknowledges the importance of the NFB Still Photography Division in promoting Canadian photographers. See: Falk

- and Hohn, *The Banff Purchase*. For a detailed history of the NFB Still Photography Division exhibition and publishing history see Martha LANGFORD, *Contemporary Canadian Photography from the Collection of the National Film Board = Photographie canadienne contemporaine de la collection de l'Office national du film du Canada* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1984).
- 31 National Film Board of Canada, Still Photography Division, *NFB Travelling Exhibition Catalogue = Catalogue des expositions itinérantes de l'ONF* (Ottawa: National Film Board of Canada, Still Photography Division, 1979).
 - 32 National Film Board of Canada. Still Photography Division, *Image 2*; Lorraine MONK, ed., *A Review of Contemporary Photography in Canada, Image 6* (Toronto: Martlet Press for the National Film Board of Canada, 1970); Tom GIBSON, *Tom Gibson, Signature 1* (Ottawa: National Film Board of Canada/L'Office national du film du Canada, 1975); National Film Board of Canada and Still Photography Division, *The Gallery = La galerie: An Exhibition of Canadian Photography* (Ottawa: The Division, 1973).
 - 33 This was stated in the "Publisher's Note" at the back of the book. MONK, *Image 6*, n.p.
 - 34 Hugo MCPHERSON, "Charles Gagnon: The Complete Artist," *artscanada* 31:2 (Autumn 1974): 79–81; Ann THOMAS, "Robert Bourdeau's Landforms: In Praise of the Lucid," *artscanada* 34:2 (June 1977): 18–26.
 - 35 Philip FRY, "Charles Gagnon: Making and Taking [Charles Gagnon: Faire et prendre]," *Parachute* (Autumn 1977): 8–13.
 - 36 W JENKINS, "Lynne Cohen: Interiors – Portfolio," *Image: The Bulletin of the George Eastman House of Photography* 17:3 (September 1974): 12–19.
 - 37 Tom GIBSON, "Photographs by Tom Gibson," *Creative Camera* 117 (March 1974): 98–103.
 - 38 Penny COUSINEAU, "Two Photographic Exhibitions," *Parachute* 4 (Autumn 1976): 6–9.
 - 39 Geoffrey JAMES, "Responding to Photographs: A Canadian Portfolio," *artscanada* 31:3–4 (December 1974): 1–36.
 - 40 *Ibid.*, 2.
 - 41 *Ibid.*, 7.
 - 42 This interest and critical concern is reflected by the fact that in 1979 three conferences on photography were organized: *Canadian Perspectives: A National Conference on Canadian Photography*, held in Toronto at Ryerson Polytechnical Institute, 1–4 March; *Canadian Images '79*, held in Peterborough at Trent University 23 March – 1 April; and *The City and the Camera*, held in Toronto at York University, also in March that year.
 - 43 In his introduction to the catalogue of *Mirrors and Windows*, Szarkowski describes two types of personal vision in photography: the "mirror" is a reflection and projection of the photographer's sensibility and the "window" is the photographer's clear-eyed response to the reality they witness through the camera. This dialectic was and continues to be both influential and controversial in photographic studies. See: John SZARKOWSKI, *Mirrors and Windows: American Photography Since 1960* (New York and Boston: Museum of Modern Art; distributed by New York Graphic Society, 1978); Parr and Badger, *The Photobook*, 12–13.
 - 44 FALK, "Updated Prospectus 'The Banff Purchase,'" Appendix A – The Book.

- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Both Falk and Hohn wrote me that they thought David Leighton had known someone at the publishing house: Hohn, 17 Nov. 2014; Falk, 6 Dec. 2014.
- 47 Email correspondence with author, 17 Nov. 2014.
- 48 Email correspondence with author, 6 Dec. 2014.
- 49 By utilizing the term “photographic modernism,” I am pointing to the understanding of photography’s formal qualities as quintessentially modern and artistic, which curators and writers such as John Szarkowski and others were promoting in the 1950s through the 1970s. In this, I am indebted to the critical understanding of photographic modernism that Richard Bolton, Abigail Solomon-Godeau, and many others have articulated, thereby helping viewers to appreciate how photographic modernism led to “the streamlining of photographic meaning and the broader depoliticization of artistic experience.” Richard BOLTON, ed., *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), xi.
- 50 Now known as Penny Cousineau-Levine, she continues to teach the history and theory of photography at the University of Ottawa.
- 51 Penny COUSINEAU, “Introduction,” in *The Banff Purchase: An Exhibition of Photography in Canada*, eds. Lorne Falk and Hubert Hohn (Toronto: John Wiley and Sons Canada, 1979), n.p.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 Nathan LYONS, “Introduction,” in *Toward a Social Landscape* (New York: Horizon Press, 1967), 4–7.
- 55 COUSINEAU, “Introduction,” n.p.
- 56 FALK and HOHN, *The Banff Purchase*.
- 57 Email correspondence with the author, 6 Dec. 2014.
- 58 Penny COUSINEAU-LEVINE, *Faking Death: Canadian Art Photography and the Canadian Imagination* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003).
- 59 Book reviews were rare. One, by librarian Tiit Kōdar in the *Art Libraries Society of North America Newsletter*, offers a superficial paragraph description that relies broadly on the aims of the book to promote photography as “worthy of the same kind of consideration as the other visual arts.” Tiit KÖDAR, “Review: *Canadian Photography: 1839–1920* by Ralph Greenhill; *Camera in the Interior: 1858. H.I. Hime Photographer. The Assiniboine and Saskatchewan Exploring Expedition* by Richard J. Huyda; *Benjamin Baltzly, Photographs & Journal of an Expedition Through British Columbia: 1871* by Andrew Birrell; *The Banff Purchase: An Exhibition of Photography in Canada*,” *ARLIS/NA Newsletter* 8:3 (1 May 1980): 103–104.
- 60 Gail FISHER-TAYLOR, “Editorial,” *Photo Communiqué* 1:1 (April 1979): 1–2.
- 61 Nancy TOUSLEY, “The Banff Purchase [Robert Bourdeau, Lynne Cohen, Charles Gagnon, Tom Gibson, David McMillan, Nina Raginsky, and Orest Semchishen],” *Vanguard* 8:8 (October 1979): 27.
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 Ibid.
- 64 Nancy TOUSLEY, “The Banff Purchase [Robert Bourdeau, Lynne Cohen, Charles Gagnon, Tom Gibson, David McMillan, Nina Raginsky, and Orest Semchishen],” *The Calgary Herald*, October 1979.
- 65 TOUSLEY, “The Banff Purchase,” *Vanguard*, 27.

- 66 Ibid., 29.
- 67 In a 1984 essay, later published in book form, Abigail Solomon-Godeau described the state of art photography of this era as “hostage still to a modernist allegiance to the autonomy, self-referentiality, and transcendence of the work of art” Abigail SOLOMON-GODEAU, “Photography After Art Photography,” in *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 123.
- 68 FISHER-TAYLOR, “A Journey to the West: Thoughts on the Banff Purchase,” 7.
- 69 Karyn Elizabeth ALLEN, *The Winnipeg Perspective 1979: Photo/Extended Dimensions*, Exhibition catalogue (Winnipeg, MB: The Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1979).
- 70 David CAMPANY, “Conceptual Art History or, A Home for Homes for America,” in *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, eds. Jon Bird and Michael Newman, Critical Views (London: Reaktion, 1999), 127.
- 71 Gail FISHER-TAYLOR, “Photography: The Banff Purchase,” *artmagazine* 11:47 (April 1980): 25–30; FISHER-TAYLOR, “A Journey to the West: Thoughts on the Banff Purchase”; Gail FISHER-TAYLOR, “Banff Purchase: A Photography Project in Canada,” *Printletter* 5:1 (February 1980): 3.
- 72 FISHER-TAYLOR, “Photography,” 25.
- 73 Ibid.
- 74 FISHER-TAYLOR, “Photography,” 30.

Production et publication du livre *The Banff Purchase* : nationalisme et pédagogie

KARLA MCMANUS

Le 13 juillet 1979, la Walter Phillips Gallery du Banff Centre for Continuing Education inaugurait une exposition ambitieuse sur la photographie canadienne contemporaine. Commissariée par Lorne Falk et Hubert Hohn, l'exposition comprenait les œuvres d'un groupe d'éminents photographes dans le but d'asseoir la réputation du Banff Centre comme haut lieu de réflexion photographique. Pour l'établissement, c'était une période de transition et de croissance. Engagé pour enseigner la photographie au Banff Centre en 1977, Hubert Hohn s'est rapidement investi dans le développement d'un nouveau plan directeur pour l'éducation. Publié en 1979, « A Turning Point » relatait la transformation de l'école en colonie artistique. Récemment embauché par la Walter Phillips Gallery, Lorne Falk avait entrepris de mettre sur pied, pour l'établissement en expansion, une pratique de gestion des collections où les œuvres d'artistes étrangers et de Canadiens de renom pourraient servir à des fins éducatives et de conservation. *The Banff Purchase* s'inscrivait donc dans ce plan plus vaste.

Dans les années 1970, la photographie en tant que médium gagnait en popularité dans les galeries d'art et les musées à l'échelle internationale, notamment aux États-Unis. Les préoccupations à l'égard du statut de la photographie artistique au Canada se répercutaient toutefois au cours de cette période, alors que les écrivains, les conservateurs et les critiques avaient peine à différencier la « photographie canadienne » de la photographie « réalisée au Canada ». Dans un article intitulé « The Dilemma of Photography in Canada », publié en 1979 dans le nouveau magazine *Photo Communiqué*, Lorne Falk s'inquiète de l'absence de normes professionnelles et artistiques, alors que les artistes de la relève commencent à expérimenter avec le médium. Avec leur projet de commissariat d'exposition à caractère pédagogique, Falk et Hohn souhaitaient remettre en question la place du médium dans l'imaginaire canadien en recourant à la fois à l'exposition, à la collection et à sa publication d'accompagnement « comme catalyseur » de l'expansion et du développement professionnel au sein des communautés vouées à la photographie et au commissariat d'œuvres photographiques.

Dans le cadre de leur stratégie de commissariat, Hohn et Falk ciblent un petit groupe de photographes unanimement reconnus par leurs pairs et les professionnels de l'art comme indéfectiblement talentueux, professionnels et dévoués à leur médium. L'exposition *The Banff Purchase*, qui a voyagé partout au Canada dans les années qui suivirent, faisait la promotion d'un style particulier de photographie basé sur le modernisme tardif. Bien que certains critiques aient considéré l'exposition comme élitiste et conservatrice, d'autres, au contraire, ont accueilli le professionnalisme esthétique et technique des photographies qui y étaient présentées.

Parallèlement à leur ambitieux projet éducatif d'exposition, Falk et Hohn produisirent un recueil de photographies. *The Banff Purchase* est une publication exemplaire, remarquable par sa qualité, son importance et sa valeur. À une époque où, au Canada, les catalogues d'exposition photographique quand ils étaient produits l'étaient souvent au moindre coût possible, *The Banff Purchase* était une prise de position sérieuse, sinon une critique, visant à élever les normes de publication de la photographie artistique canadienne. Si, de nos jours, *The Banff Purchase* ne laisse qu'entrevoir les nombreuses préoccupations de cette période culturelle, sa relecture attentive permet de mieux comprendre le passé et le dilemme auquel est toujours confrontée la photographie contemporaine au Canada. *The Banff Purchase*, tant l'exposition que la publication, exprime une vision de la photographie canadienne contemporaine articulée autour d'une critique vigoureuse, de l'exceptionnalisme formel et du professionnalisme artistique.

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