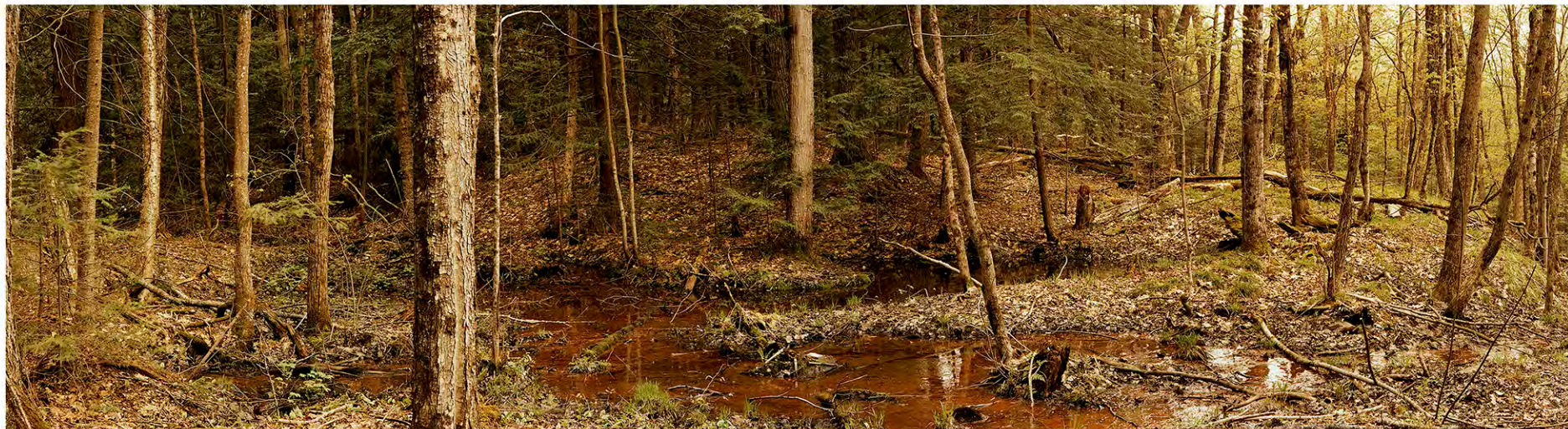


Hugh Martin



Silent Lake

May 5 - May 26, 2012

Essay by John K. Grande



Hugh Martin - Sanctuary

Nature is not a set up. And we are a part of nature. Hugh Martin engages in this elastic dialogue where there is a give and take, and where the seasons, and light are essential elements. The aspect of change and familiarity, of walking the land is part of his engaging visual dialogue, for which these new photographs form the body of work. A body of work about the earth body. While many artists engage in propagandizing nature as a vast reserve, or mega-scaled reality, or even as an aesthetic, Hugh Martin works in a more hands on way. His own family were painters, but not highly schooled, more intuitive and aware of the skies, and the landscape in a human scale. For this reason Martin's *Silent Lake* series, which documents and records the changing elements in one fixed place, much as John Constable did, capture an essence of being there in the place. These photographs are not self-conscious, and have an open accessibility, and they do not label or identify the landscape as a series of objectified object elements. Instead Martin introduces us to a flow of life, to an engaging theatre of nature where we humans are just part of the scene.

One is more likely to be reminded of Homer Watson the painter of light and trees, of the agricultural and agrarian heritage of Ontario,



Plate 2

whom J.A.M. Whistler called the “Canadian Constable” when looking at these photographs than of Ansel Adams' aggrandizing landscapes, or Edward Burtynsky's industrial scaled *National Geographic*-styled overviews. There is no dominance or search to encapsulate the scene in these engaging photographs by Hugh Martin. Nor do they, like another Canadian photographer, Geoffrey James, try to build an aesthetic that “looks like” a traditional landscape or set up view. As Martin comments, “When I consider the forest landscape at large, I understand it as a living thing, in motion. The forest floor, infinitely diversified, is continually in the process of becoming something else. An intricate puzzle within the cycle of life, it is modified by the specifics of light's sensuality and changed by time's passage.”

Hugh Martin's photographs are in a scale that is human. They are an interaction with the landscape in the scale of the landscape... And there is that brief primordial reminder of the impenetrable. Some of the interior forest shots of tree stumps disintegrating, returning to nature are fascinating, for the chaos and turbulence, and the silence these photographs engender. And that is part of the Canadian boreal forest experience, one that extends over vast areas of Canada.

In a way Canada's nature is almost European in the old sense, for it's natural, less controlled, and Martin is a Romantic and can catch nature in nuanced ways, for his works are in nature, in the place. Nature

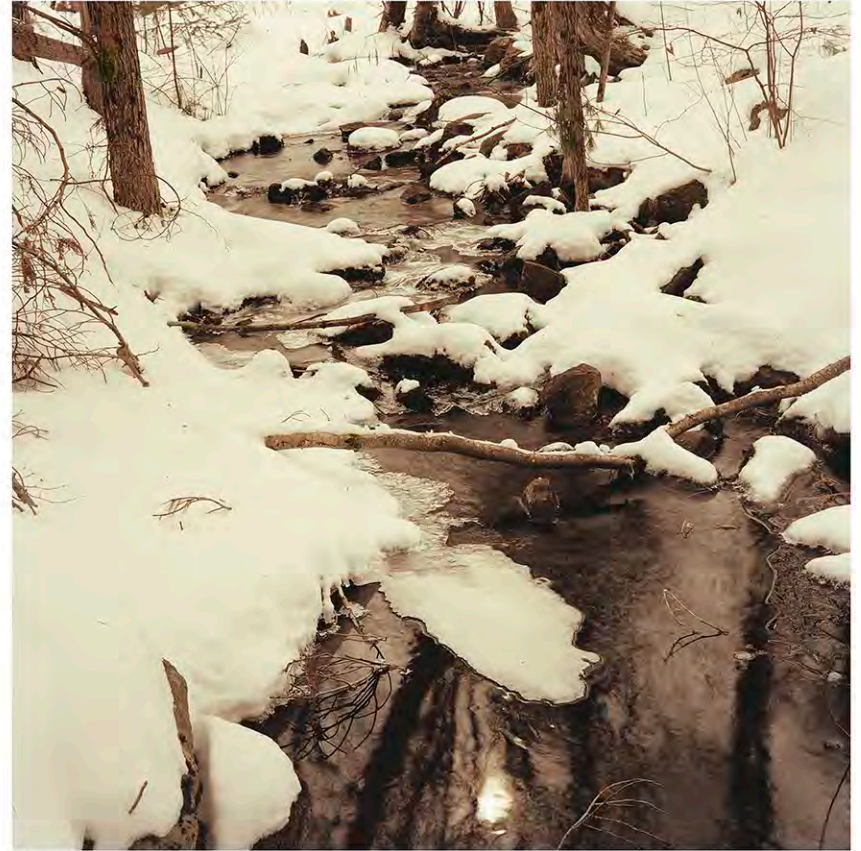


Plate 3



Plate 4



Plate 5

is a sanctuary, and a place where our instincts, and our connectivity to our past are awakened, particularly in a world that has become less about tactility and a sense of place, than of information, data, and distraction.

"Through my engagement with photographing the land around the lake, I experienced winter camping at minus forty degrees Celsius, struggling every couple of hours through the night to feed the yurt's wood stove. I saw the fresh tracks of a lone wolf toward twilight in the frigid dead of winter and heard the shrill cry of some unidentified animal slice through the otherwise silent atmosphere of the remote Canadian wilderness. And I felt a magnificent sense of solitude in early spring when the place was totally empty and the rangers had gone home for the evening. These sensations influenced my understanding of Silent Lake and affected how I photographed it. They also strengthened my belief in the importance of such protected landscapes, which serve as sanctuaries for animals and for the human mind." And that truly is what these photographs are about. Like Caspar David Friedrich they display a sense of wonder at the sheer power of nature's beauty, but they convey this without the trappings of orthodox conjecture, or an all too literal expression of God's message. They do it naturally, and so these photographs are like a walk in the woods, and capture that essence, that mercurial and magical sensation.

Like *The Avenue at Middelbarnis* (1689) by Hobbema, Martin's photographs conceive of nature from the human perspective, always as an interaction between the human, whose activity and presence influence a place and the way we read it, even the way it has become, and the human perception of space, light, and the various details of a scene. And likewise there is an ambiguity regarding whether a landscape is a "subject" of the photograph or an objectification of that which is represented therein. And Martin manages to achieve a fine sensitivity, without dominating the scene, describing the way we engage with this puzzle of growth and presence which is a forest, or nature in its growth, and cycle.

Among the strongest of Martin's photographs is *Forest Wall, Silent Lake* (2011), a work that captures the forboding, even overwhelming presence of a forest at its point of opening. The sheer variety of tree forms, and the light and dark areas, some that lead into that which we cannot perceive within, and other patches that are pure surface growth, all achieve a tension. And with its panorama configuration this photograph enables us to interpret what we really think nature is, and we are left with a question, as there is no ultimate answer. It's a continuum we are a part of. And yet the nostalgia and essentially romantic character of these photographs are easier to achieve in a country like Canada. As Northrop Frye once commented in *The Bush*



Plate 6

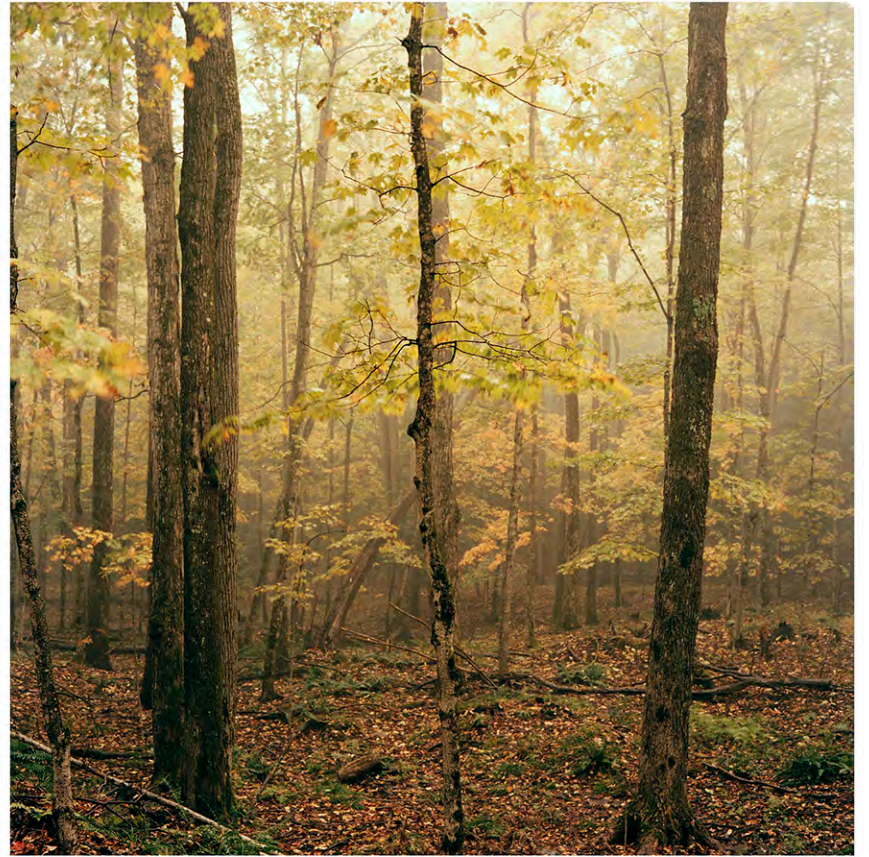


Plate 7

Garden, nature surrounded the islands of civility on Canada as it evolved into the present, whereas for our neighbours to the south, nature was always to the west, something one conquered and then moved on. Likewise the aesthetic that characterizes a Canadian view is that nature cannot be dominated, that nature is always there, and we can only learn to live with it, to understand its sensitivity, and force. *Spring Landscape, Silent Lake* (2011), another panorama, presents the mid range of a forest, swamp and wooded area. Here again it is the ambiguity of the way Hugh Martin presents nature that is so human, we arrive at no conclusion. Nature becomes a mystery, something we can only start to understand in its entirety through the microcosmic details we see in this scene.

As Hugh Martin has said, whether panorama, diptych or single photograph, these images are as much painterly in their way of seeing, as they are photographic. *Forest Floor #1* and *#2, Silent Lake* (2010) go even closer. What we see is all the autumn foliage, the leaf fall in the left panel, again with no vista. Instead we are looking in. And in the right panel a mature moss covered base of a tree stands in the middle of the scene. The implication is there is something more than meets the eye, and that is a spiritual presence, a cosmos this nature is part of. In *The Great Forest #30* and *#31, Silent Lake* (2010) there is a radiant golden glow to the light, and the entire scene is illuminated like a Dutch masterpiece. Here we do have a view and it moves seemingly endlessly through the forest, as if it



Plate 8

were part of a continuity of nature, as if nature were eternal, ongoing. And the implication of the forest interior photographs is that all bio-regions are inter-related, and that nature is a continuum, and each bio-region relates to the next and all bio-regions as species, elements are themselves varieties and related. And so nature in its place is mysterious, intriguing, exotic. It need not be far. It can be near. It can be where we are as much as elsewhere. Nature is a product of our own perception and consciousness, but it continues its course, its cycle of birth, life, death, decay and life again with or without us. Entropy and growth. Chaos and order. Nature in Hugh Martin's photographs is like a huge map or puzzle. We can enter into it, and it is approachable, human, in the scale of life.

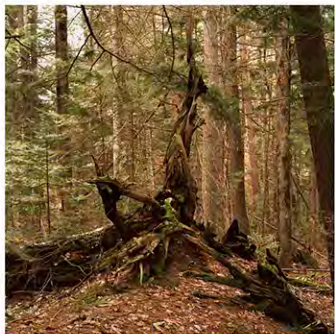
John K. Grande



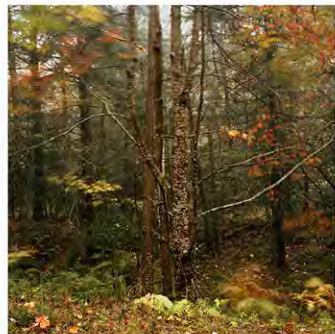
Plate 9

John K. Grande is a leading writer and curator in the Art & Ecology field worldwide. He is the author of *Balance: Art and Nature* (Black Rose Books, 1994), *Art Nature Dialogues: Interviews with Environmental Artists* (State University of New York Press, 2004, www.sunypress.edu), and *Dialogues in Diversity: Art from Marginal to Mainstream* (Pari, Italy, 2007, www.paripublishing.com). John K. Grande co-curated *Eco-Art* with Pia Hovi-Assad and Peter Selz at the Pori Art Museum (2011) in Finland and is curator of *Earth Art 2012* at Van Dusen Gardens, Vancouver, British Columbia. Upcoming books include *Art Space & Ecology* (Shanghai, China, 2012), *Black Peat* (Print Factory, Ireland, 2012) and *Art in Nature* (Borim Press, Seoul, Korea, 2012). Hyperlink: www.grandescritique.com

Hugh Martin was born in Hamilton, Ontario in 1973. He attended Ryerson University in Toronto and graduated with a B.F.A. in Photography Studies. Martin has been honoured with the Gold Medal, Faculty of Communication & Design, Howard H. Kerr Memorial Scholarship, J.L. Beaton Award and Roloff Beny Foundation France Study Abroad Award through Ryerson University, as well as receiving a du Maurier Arts Council Grant. Martin's work has been published in magazines including *PREFIX PHOTO* and *The Walrus*, and is included in various private, public and corporate collections throughout North America including Canada Colors and Chemicals, Deloitte, Four Seasons Hotel, OCAD University, RBC Financial Group (New York), Ryerson University, Scotiabank and Trimark. Martin holds an academic staff position within the Photography Centre at OCAD University and maintains his studio in Hamilton where he lives. *Silent Lake: New Photographs* marks Martin's tenth anniversary and third solo exhibition with Mira Godard Gallery.



10



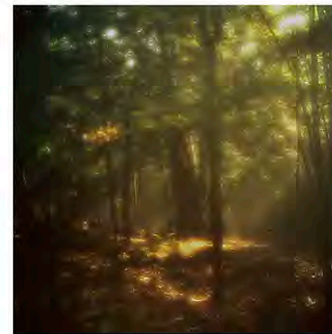
11



12



13



14

Plate 1 *Spring Landscape, Silent Lake (2011). Chromogenic print, edition of six, 52.5 inch x 14.25 inch image*

Plate 2 *Reflecting Pool, Silent Lake (2011). Chromogenic print, edition of six, 28.5 inch x 28.25 inch image*

Plate 3 *Winter Stream, Silent Lake (2011). Chromogenic print, edition of six, 28.5 inch x 28.25 inch image
& edition of nine in portfolio, 14.15 inch x 14 inch image*

Plate 4 *Forest Floor #1, Silent Lake (2010). Chromogenic print, edition of six, 28.5 inch x 28.25 inch image*

Plate 5 *Forest Floor #2, Silent Lake (2010). Chromogenic print, edition of six, 28.5 inch x 28.25 inch image*

Plate 6 *The Great Forest #30, Silent Lake (2010). Chromogenic print, edition of six, 28.5 inch x 28.25 inch image*

Plate 7 *The Great Forest #31, Silent Lake (2010). Chromogenic print, edition of six, 28.5 inch x 28.25 inch image*

Plate 8 *Summer Stream, Silent Lake (2010). Chromogenic print, edition of six, 28.5 inch x 28.25 inch image
& edition of nine in portfolio, 14.15 inch x 14 inch image*

Plate 9 *The Road Back, Silent Lake (2010). Chromogenic print, edition of six, 28.5 inch x 28.25 inch image
& edition of nine in portfolio, 14.15 inch x 14 inch image*

Plate 10 *Before the Howl, Silent Lake (2011). Chromogenic print, edition of six, 28.5 inch x 28.25 inch image
& edition of nine in portfolio, 14.15 inch x 14 inch image*

Plate 11 *High Winds, Silent Lake (2010). Chromogenic print, edition of six, 28.5 inch x 28.25 inch image*

Plate 12 *By the Shore, Silent Lake (2010). Chromogenic print, edition of six, 28.5 inch x 28.25 inch image
& edition of nine in portfolio, 14.15 inch x 14 inch image*

Plate 13 *Autumn Forest, Silent Lake (2010). Chromogenic print, edition of six, 28.5 inch x 28.25 inch image*

Plate 14 *Early Morning, Silent Lake (2010). Chromogenic print, edition of six, 28.5 inch x 28.25 inch image*

Plate 15 *Forest Wall, Silent Lake (2011). Chromogenic print, edition of six, 52.5 inch x 14.25 inch image*

Plate 16 *February Afternoon, Silent Lake (2011). Chromogenic print, edition of three, 25.25 inch x 48 inch image
& edition of six, 16.5 inch x 31.5 inch image*



Plate 15

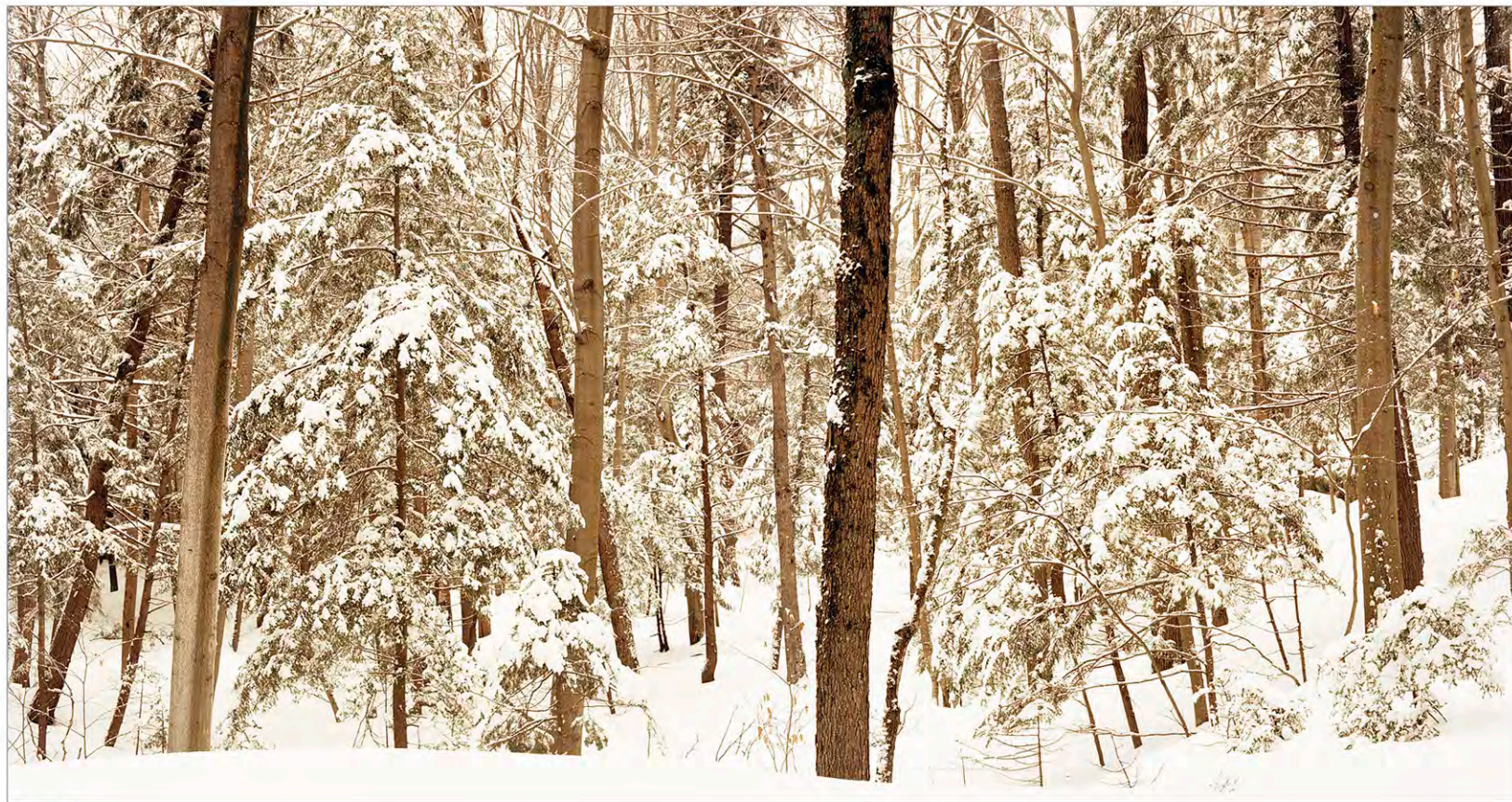


Plate 16