



SEEING WITH NEW EYES: THE HIDDEN LANDSCAPES OF ST. CLAIR WEST

PHOTOS BY

JOHN GROSS

OPENING THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 7-10 PM

SIDE SPACE GALLERY

1080 ST. CLAIR AVENUE WEST

GALLERY OPEN IN CONJUNCTION WITH ST. CLAIR ARTWALK, 1-5 PM SEPTEMBER 25 & 26

MORE INFO AT: WWW.SIDESPACEGALLERY.COM

Artist's Remarks

It has been exciting to mount this exhibit for a number of reasons: the nearness of the subject matter in our own St. Clair West neighbourhood; the aesthetic appeal of the images; the stories about where they were found and how they were 'captured'; and their power to summon memories of natural wonder and the feelings such 'inner-scapes' arouse in us.

Being both a part of and apart from our everyday world, the photos invite us to go back and forth between real objects and whatever they may conjure in us; to swing merrily and dialectically between figure and ground, illusion and reality. It has been a delight for me to hear of the places to which people have been transported: Iceland, Arizona, Atlantis, even to the moon. Small wonder some viewers of the works do not wish to know what they are looking at--that their impressions of sky, sea or land are really a rusting automobile, a weathered telephone pole, or a corroding bit of sheet metal.

The famous psychoanalytic theorist, Donald Winnicott, coined the term "transitional object" to describe the things that we perceive--first as children and, with luck, throughout our lives--in the intermediate zone between illusion and reality. Winnicott understood that the child, at play with sticks or buttons or buckets of sand, would be driven to distraction if asked, did you find that or did you create it? In a similar way it can be startling when people ask, how did you make it? and, how long did it take? "About 60 years," I am tempted to respond pointing to the rusting object in the photograph. But I could also say that it took a lifetime since my eyes have been waiting as long to see that particular object at that particular moment. Equally, it would not be incorrect to say that the image was made in about a half-a-second or the time the camera's shuttered eye opened on what was there.

But we humans are not only at play. We also seek to build and better our world. So there is a place for questions about how things are made, for example: what kind of camera was used? what were its settings? how were these images printed and on what kind of paper? As tool-makers we are naturally curious about technique and we come to appreciate art not just as viewers, but also as 'doers', imagining that we too might make something that is pleasing or useful. We should therefore take seriously the question, how did the artist do that?--for in the answer we may discover how we ourselves might make something wonderful.

My own particular pleasure in art-making is heightened at the very border of illusion and reality. It is on that edge that we know what it means to be surprised, when, for example, the sweep of a desert or the reaches of an ocean are suddenly punctured by a staple or stove-bolt. Borderlands are always places of paradox. No longer in the realm of 'either/or', they invite us to surrender to the transitional experience of 'both/and'. Like staring at the ambiguous shape of a Necker cube, we begin to experience what it is like to be inside and outside at the same time.

One of the viewers of the show made an important comment about the fractal nature of the work. Fractals, we are told, are the hidden dimension of the natural world, the structure that underlies the seeming wildness in the composition of matter. What fractals disclose is nature's 'self-similarity', seen for example in the way the branching of a tree-trunk is replicated in the further divisions of its boughs and twigs and leaves. I believe that it is the fractal infrastructure of the world that artists see, quite unconsciously, and seek to render in their copies of nature.

Nature even paints itself and does so like the *Drawing Hands* of M. C. Escher in a self-generating composition of fractals. No wonder that the molecules that align themselves in rust or wood grain or lime deposits should mimic the structure of clouds or rock formations or waves on the shore. The images you see here display the inescapable artistry of nature, decomposing and recomposing human products--a metal sign, a pipe, a retaining wall--that themselves were once fashioned out of naturally occurring materials.

Several people have commented that these photographs look like paintings. This does not surprise me since I actually am a painter and not a photographer. The picture-taking began only when I noticed naturally occurring surfaces whose color and composition were every bit as pleasing as the paintings I sought to make. Photography for me is painting with a camera.

The painter typically produces works on a two-dimensional surface, sometimes called a ground. The reason these photos read as paintings is that the objects photographed, though sometimes curved or bent or bisected horizontally, are invariably two-dimensional surfaces. Good painting succeeds because, despite being situated on a two-dimensional ground, it hints or points at *depth*--a third dimension that is second nature to the eyes. But the painting or the photograph cannot reach a deeper dimensionality without human assistance: depth comes to life only in the beholder. True art engages the viewer in the act of realizing itself.

If the works in this exhibit achieve some measure of self-realization, it is because they have been worthy of your engagement. I hope you enjoy the show.

John Gross
416-653-8768
mjgross@sympatico.ca

*"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeing new landscapes,
but in having new eyes."* -Marcel Proust

In our travels about St. Clair, everyday
objects surround us...

....some meet the eye--others catch it...



The eye of the artist takes a second look...



...hidden landscapes reveal themselves to
eyes that "...see a world in a grain of
sand, /And a heaven in a wild flower..."



These photos, taken in our
neighbourhood, invite us to discover
lost worlds and unseen vistas...



Algonquin in our own backyard, the setting sun on St. Clair West....

SUN IN DIM ECLIPSE



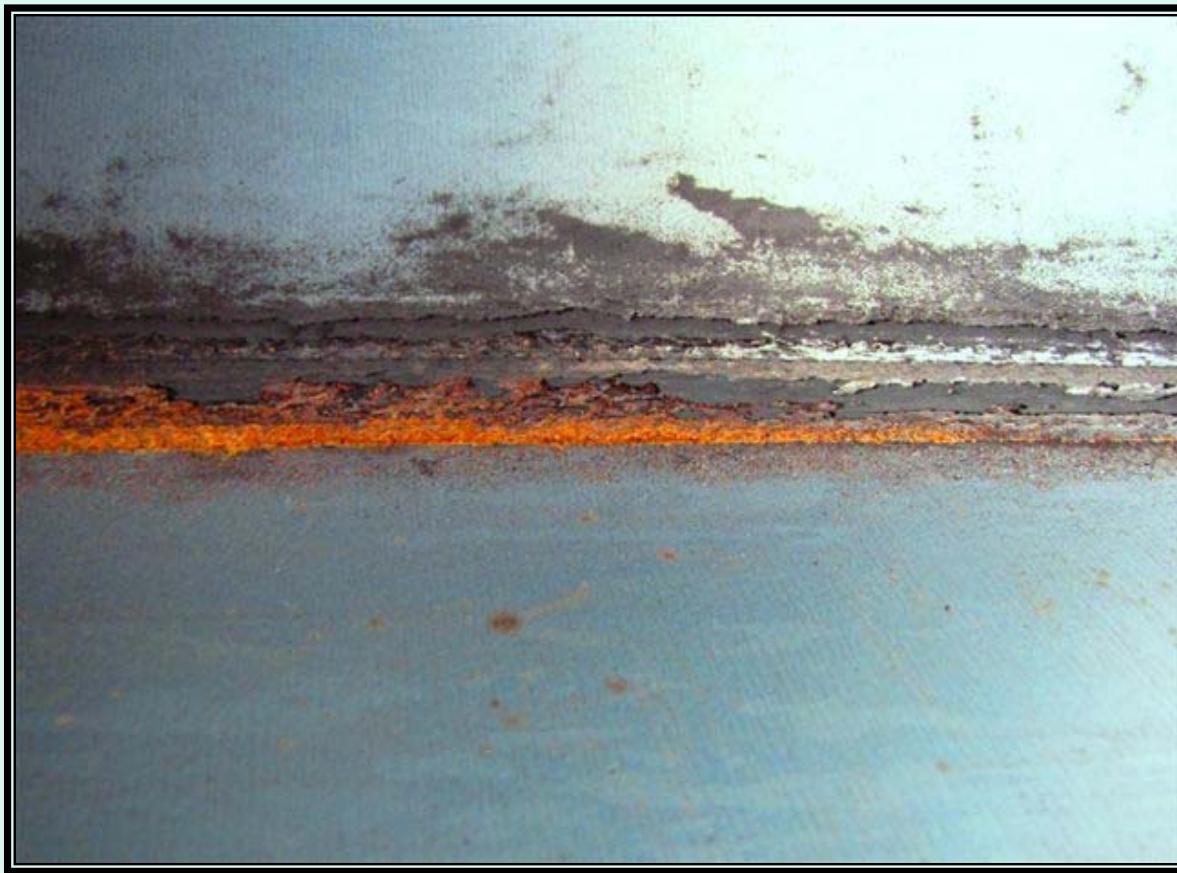
"Monet is only an eye, but my God, what an eye!" -Paul Cezanne

FIRMAMENT



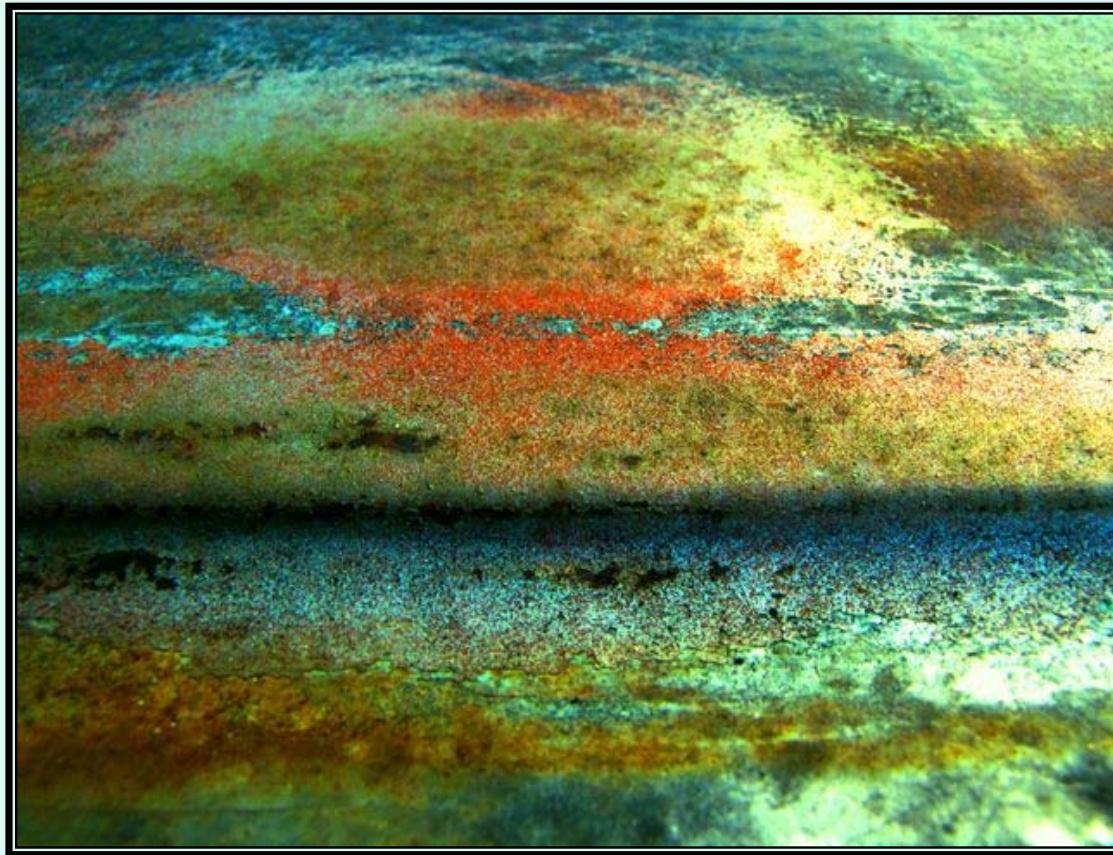
"The longer you look at an object, the more abstract it becomes, and, ironically, the more real."
-Lucian Freud

LATE NOVEMBER



"The eye of a human being is a microscope, which makes the world seem bigger than it really is." -Kahlil Gibran

LAURENTIAN SKY



"My current works are abstracts cunningly disguised as landscapes. It is the Canadian way."
-Ted Godwin

BLOOD-DIMMED TIDE



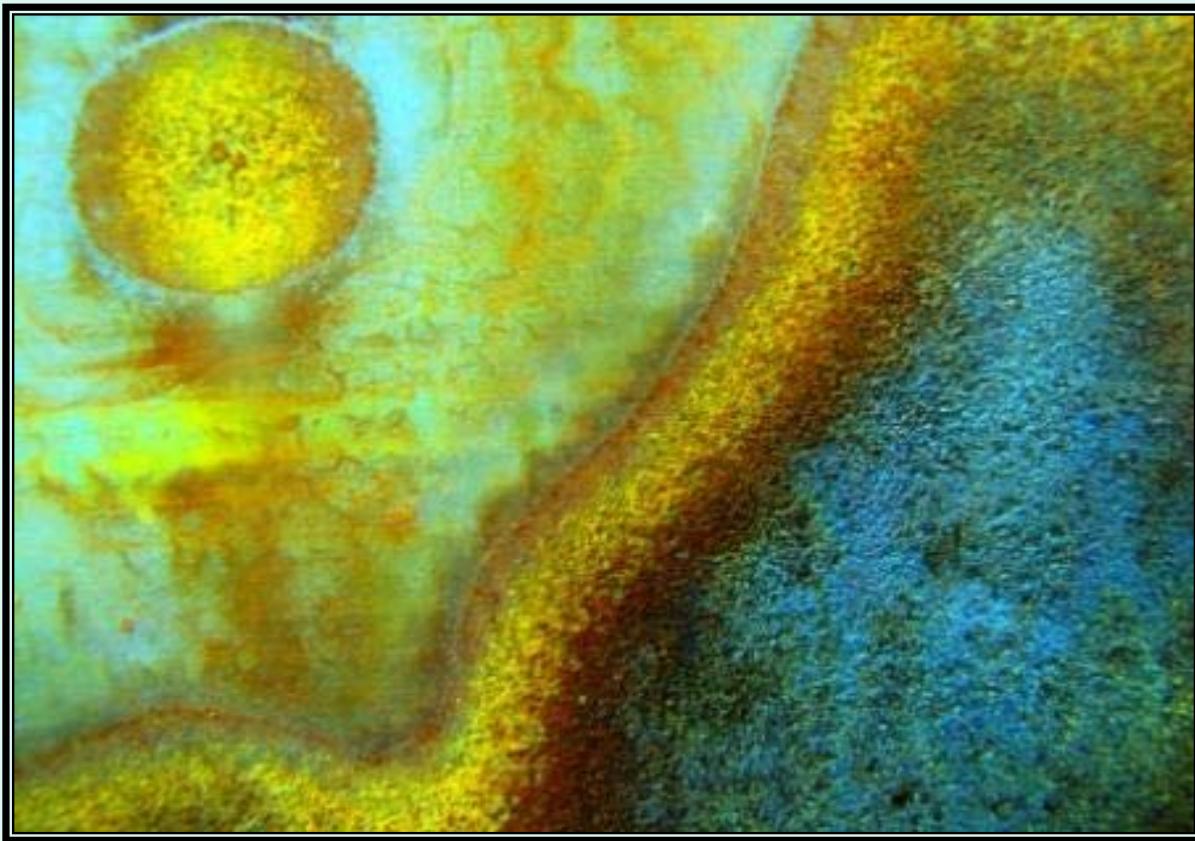
"The moment you cheat for the sake of beauty, you know you're an artist." -Max Jacob

DIVIDING THE WATERS



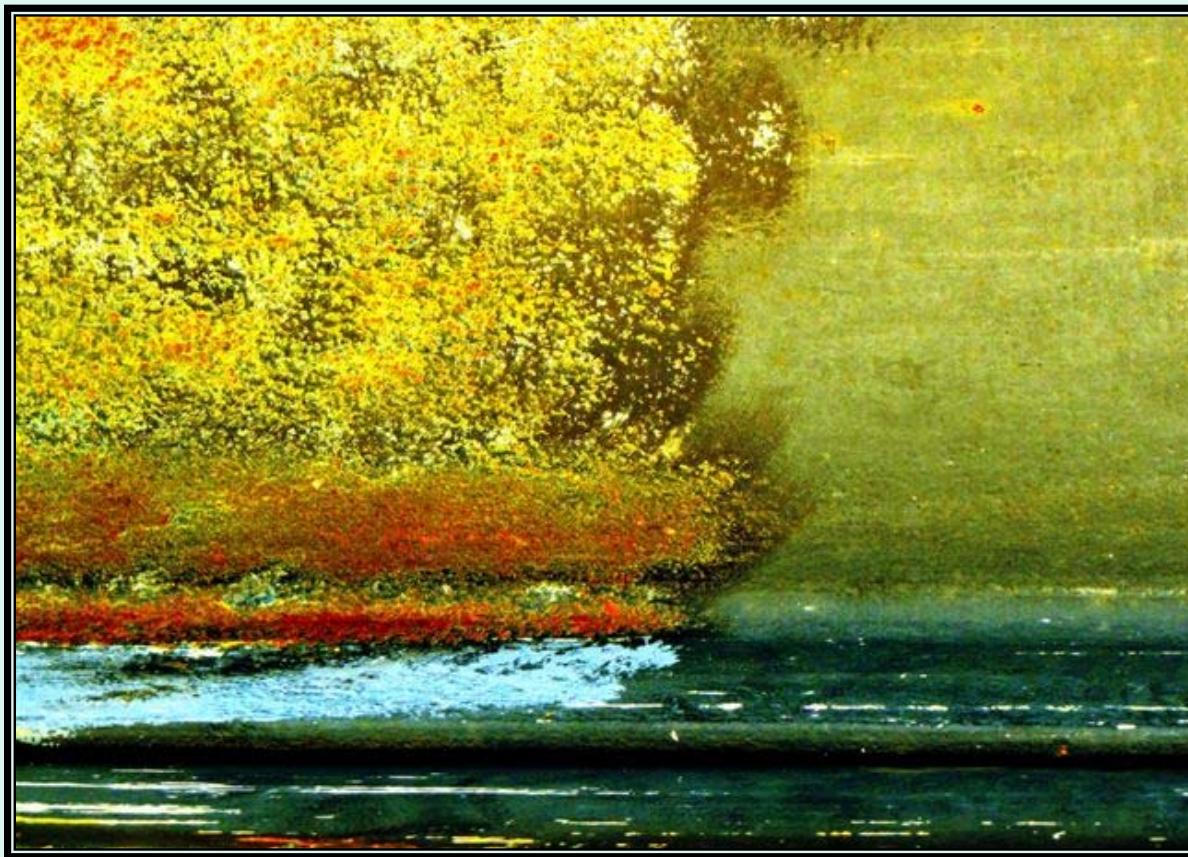
"One should photograph objects, not only for what they are, but for what else they are."
-Minor White

LET THERE BE LIGHT



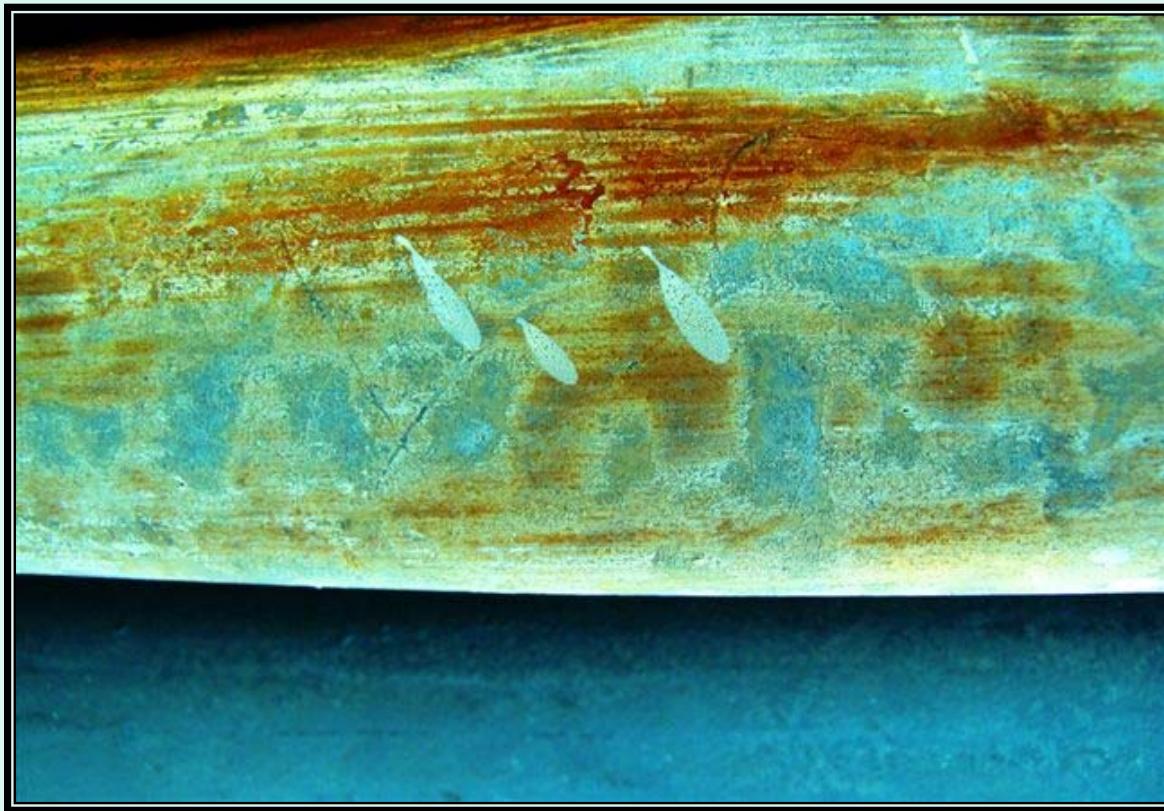
"All artistic discoveries are discoveries not of likenesses but of equivalencies which enable us to see reality in terms of an image and an image in terms of reality." -Ernst Gombrich

MEDITATION AND WATER



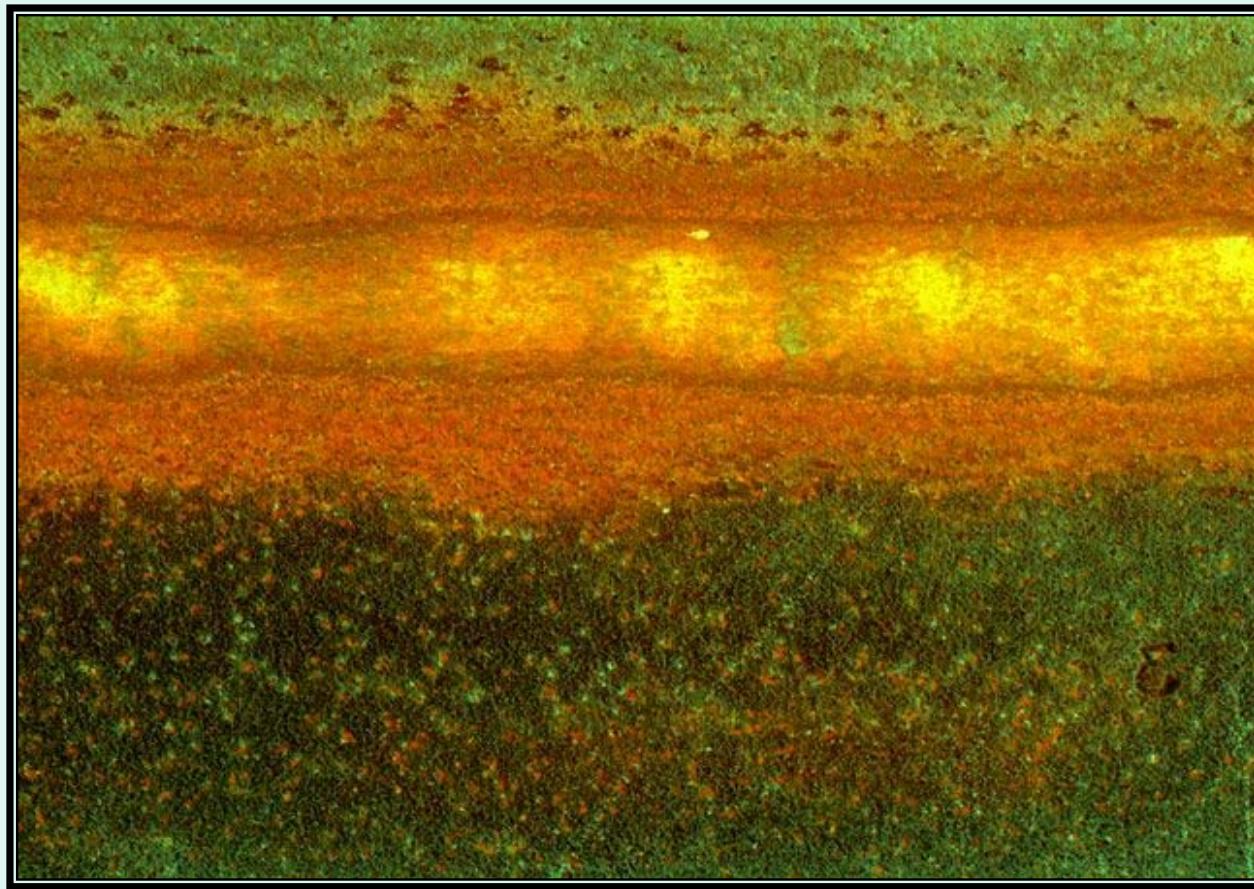
"The modern pantheist not only sees the god in everything, he takes photographs of it."
-D. H. Lawrence

SOFT SHOWER LEEWARD



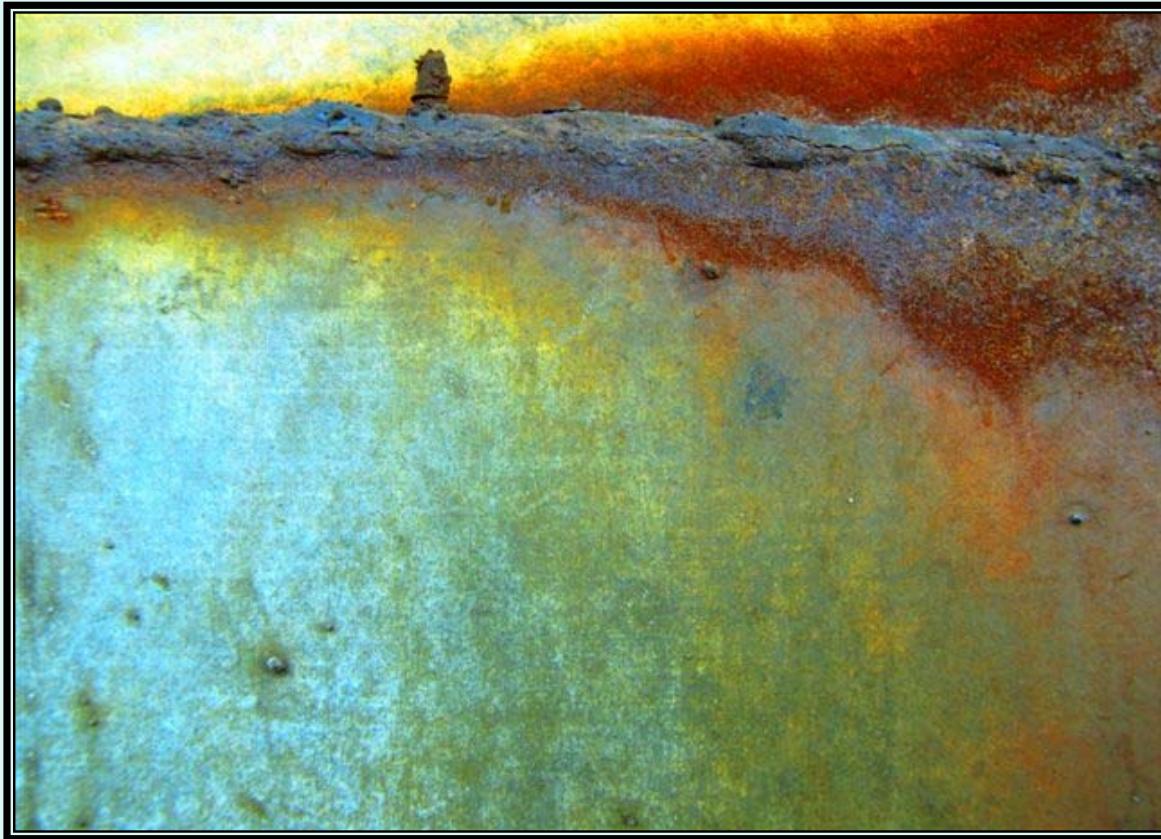
"It was accidental before but now it's become my method." -Hui Lin Liu

EPSILON



"A picture is an artificial work, outside nature. It calls for as much cunning as the commission of a crime." -Edgar Degas

FATHOMS DOWN



"In photography everything is so ordinary; it takes a lot of looking before you learn to see the extraordinary." -David Bailey

TO THE LIGHTHOUSE



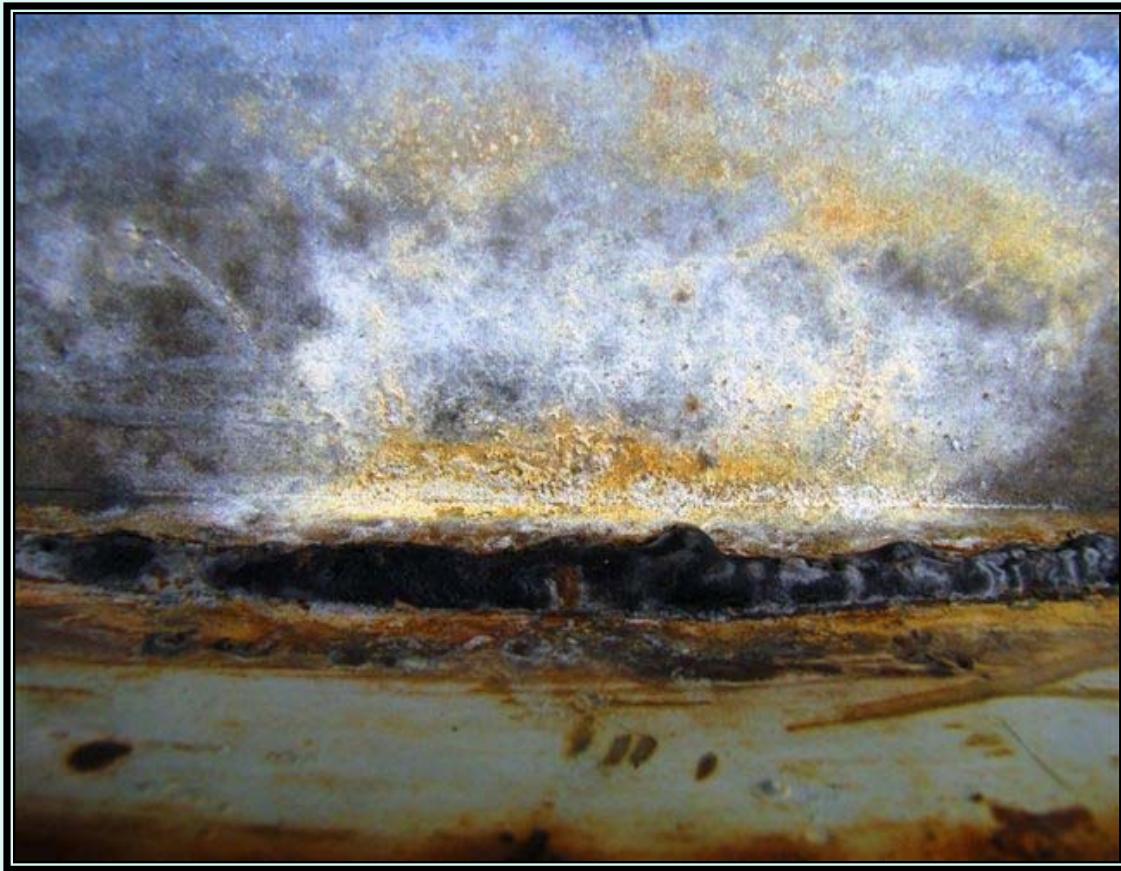
"Blessed are they who see beautiful things in humble places where other people see nothing."
-Camille Pissarro

WOOD FOR WATER



"If you look at a thing 999 times, you are perfectly safe; if you look at it for the 1000th time, you are in danger of seeing it for the first time." -G. K. Chesterton

ISLE OF SHOALS



"It takes little talent to see clearly what lies under one's nose, a good deal of it to know in which direction to point that organ." -W. H. Auden

BASE CONTAGIOUS CLOUDS



"It's not what you look at that matters, it's what you see." -Henry David Thoreau

SULLEN WHITE SURF



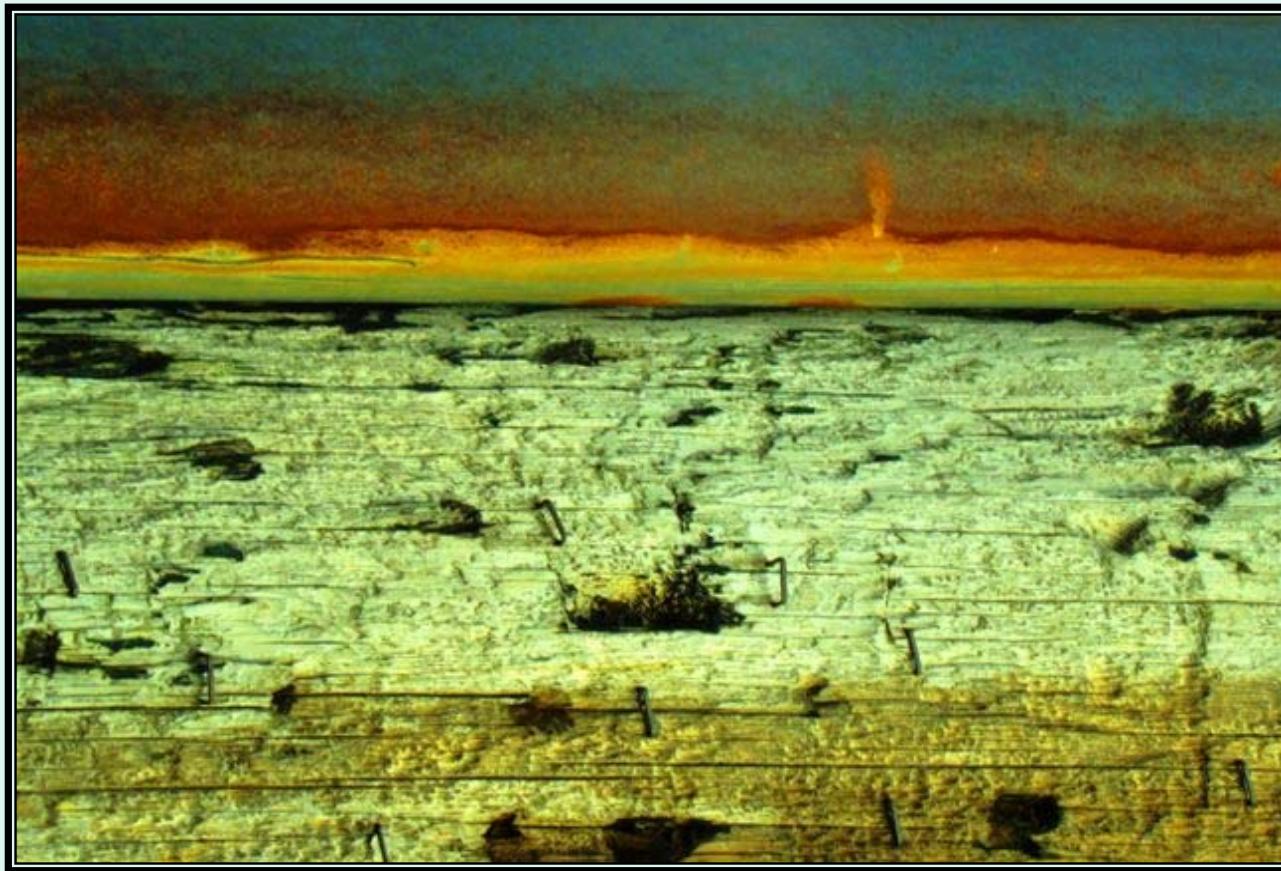
"If only we could pull out our brain and use only our eyes." -Pablo Picasso

LAKE LEBARGE



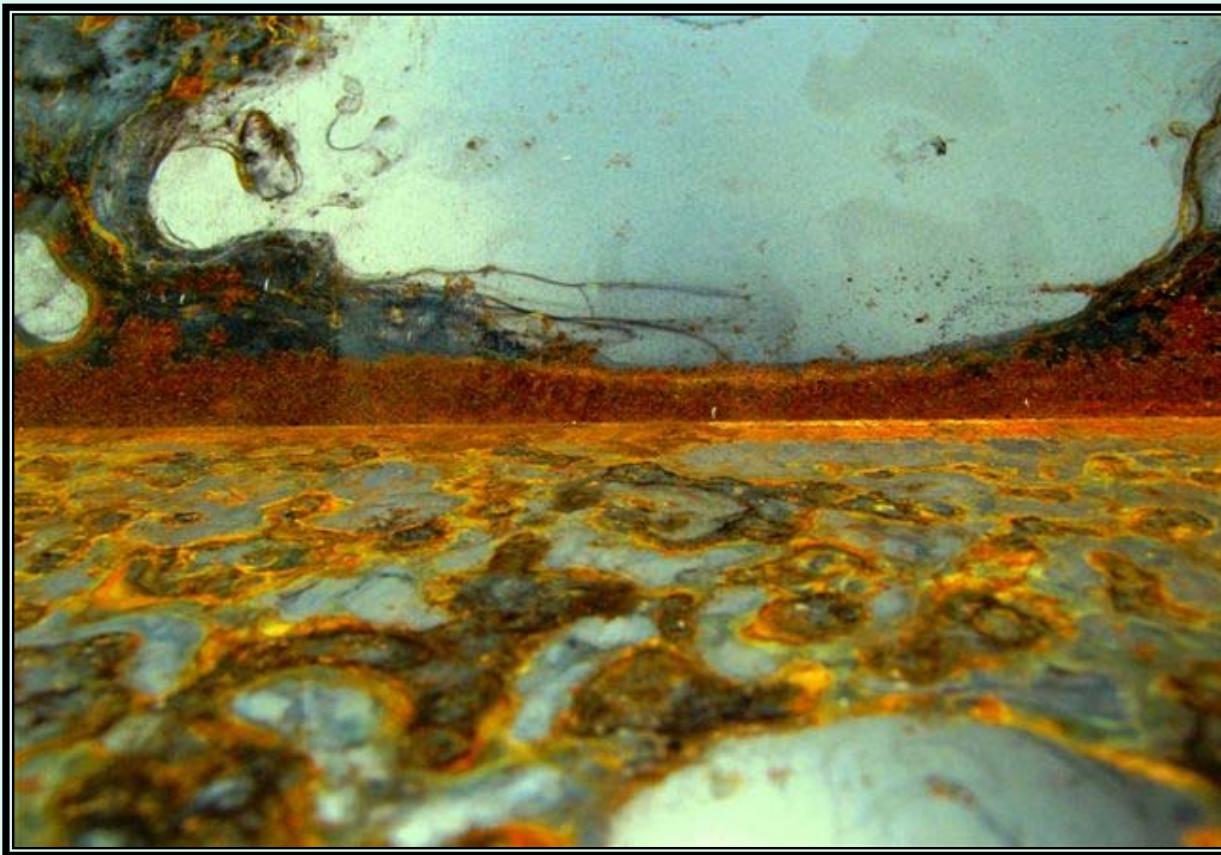
"The camera cannot lie. But it can be an accessory to untruth." -Harold Evans

TUNDRA



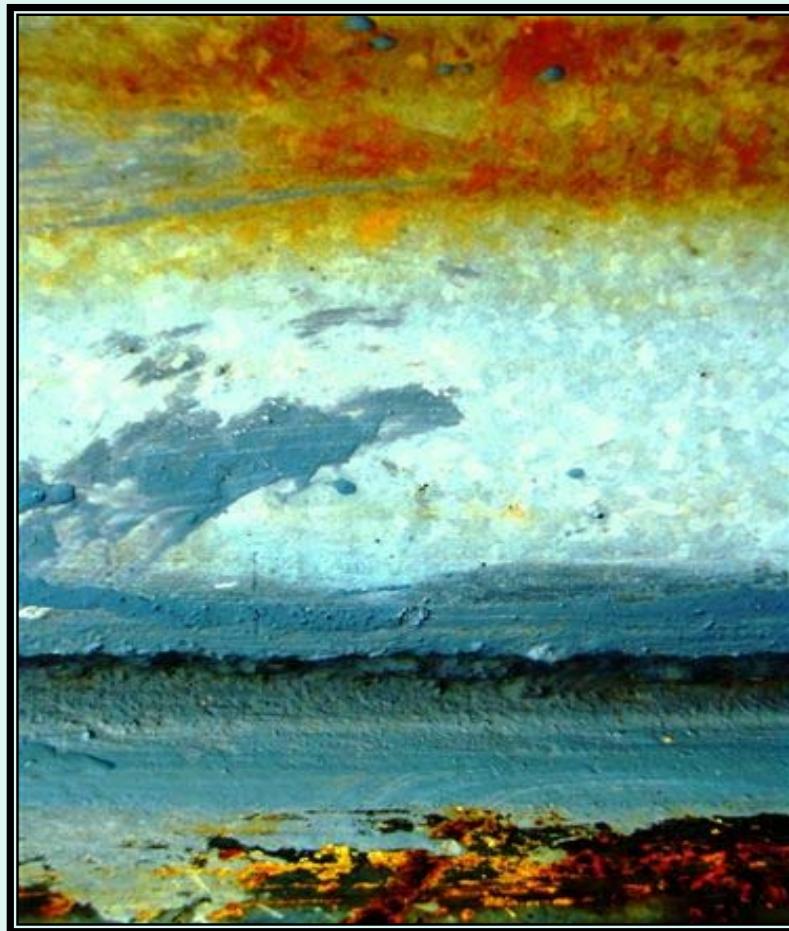
"On pavements and the bark of trees I have found whole worlds." -Mark Tobey

TAMING LEVIATHAN



"Some things have to be believed to be seen." -Ralph Hodgson

EVER-ROLLING SURF



"The hardest thing to see is what is in front of our eyes." -Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Side Space Gallery: After Dark



www.sidespacegallery.com

Artist Statement

John Gross is a practicing psychotherapist and visual artist. In both disciplines he explores a deep interest in how we understand and communicate experience--the metaphors we use and the way in which we consciously and unconsciously divide our world into things that are the same and things that are different. Working mostly with painted expressionistic effects in acrylic, John has lately turned to digital photography to capture abstract images that present themselves--'just-like-that'--in the real world. He calls them "accidental" or "found" paintings. "They show how nature disposes of our proposals and give further proof that the actions of nature are not so different from those of the artist."

John completed several courses at Toronto School of Art during the 1990's and his work has been included in group shows at Workscene, Aird and other community galleries and public events. "Seeing with New Eyes" is his first solo show.

A strong proponent of community access to art and to the artist in each of us, John organized and curated "The Art of Work" in the 1990's, with grant assistance from the City of York Arts Commission, to showcase and celebrate art created by people in the course of their work. He is pleased to show his work at our own community-friendly Side Space Gallery.

John can be contacted at: 416-653-8768 / mjgross@sympatico.ca