

Is this Not a a Renaissance Garden?

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In the village of Carrying Place, in Prince Edward County, on the Bay of Quinte, sits Oeno Gallery, named for its location in Canada's fastest growing wine region. Rich in history, the site offers wide scope for the outdoor exhibition titled *This is Not a Renaissance Garden*. The title recalls the elaborate gardens built all across Europe by Renaissance princes, constructed as a three dimensional journey into their century's thinking, and a synthesis of their era's aspirations.¹

The Oeno installations take an oppositional stance to the formalities of Renaissance gardens, while adhering to their conceptual aspects. Contemporary art is nothing if not conceptually conceived and therefore a manifestation of current thought and aspiration. As guest curator, participating artist, and professional gardener, Anne O'Callaghan brings significant experience to the project.

Originally consisting of seven outdoor works, the exhibition now has four remaining pieces, ones that can withstand the rigours of Prince Edward County winter. They include: *the architecture of trees 2007* by Orest Tataryn, *The Transported*

Forest by Robert Wiens, *Red Nova* by Shayne Dark and *Urn* by O'Callaghan.

Site-specific, they make rich connection to their location, drawing on local histories and timeless allusion. Quinte is a word anglicized from its earlier Iroquois form "Kente," meaning meadow. The village of Carrying Place is on a narrow isthmus connecting Prince Edward County to the mainland and therefore of historical interest as a point of portage between the bay and Lake Ontario.² O'Callaghan's *Urn* makes poetic associations between the history and geography of Prince Edward County and the enduring beauty inherent in the form of this vessel.

Closest to the shoreline, *Urn* is a stainless steel and tempered glass structure that stands over five feet tall, its individual plates reflecting both the changing light of day and the bay over which it presides. It is a visual book of hours, marking the sun's passage through the sky. By evening the reflective nature of the amphora-shaped construction creates an illusion that it is filling up and then slowly emptying of liquid.

The piece collects and disperses light, its shape recalling that most



ancient method for storing and transporting wine, as described below:

By the first century BC, the Romans were distributing wine throughout the Mediterranean in amphorae... They continued in use until the end of the first century AD, when there was a precipitous drop in wine exports. (The replacement of amphorae, which were airtight, by wooden barrels in the second century AD meant that vintage wines would not reappear until the

seventeenth century, with the development of the glass bottle and cork.)³

While Quinte waters cannot lay claim to Roman wine distribution or Renaissance princes, the waterway has a lively history as the main method of transport for barley and hops. From eighteenth-century Loyalist settlement, shipping and travel was by water in vessels with romantic-sounding names:

Kathryn of Hamilton, Nellie Hunter, Fabiola, Annie Minnes, Acacia, Katies Eccles, Wm. Jamieson, Bertie Calkins, Oliver Mowat, Persia, Olivia, Lyman M. Davis, Maggie L. The last named was a survival of the barley days... and later was used in the coal trade.⁴

The suggestion of past glory, sailing ports and steamers, the assertion that "when Toronto was barely a village, Carrying Place was in the running to be the capital of Ontario"⁵ advance metaphorical possibilities for this urn: the idea, its shape, its filling and emptying process, and even the punning thyme that O'Callaghan has planted at its base.

Within the sightline of *Urn* resides Dark's *Red Nova*, a seemingly storm-tossed and chaotic deposit halfway up the meadow between the water and the gallery building. Like pickup sticks for amazons, it is an assemblage of ten-foot ironwood poles, painted a vibrant red and apparently scrambled together with an electrical conduit. This ostensible disarray belies the meticulous planning and arranging required to affect an artlessness in the piece, the choice of material making it almost indestructible.

→ Robert WIENS, *The Transported Forest*, 2007. Site specific - irregular. 200 Black maple trees. Photo: Klaus Lang.

→ Anne O'CALLAGHAN, *Urn*, 2007. Tempered glass and stainless steel. 65 x 48 in. Photo: Klaus Lang.

→ Shayne DARK, *Red Nova*, 2007. Ironwood and electrical conduit. 20 x 8 x 9 ft. Photo: Klaus Lang.

