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Christos Dikeakos, Solo Red Delicious I November Right Side, 2011, ink-jet photograph, 22 x 17 in. (55.9 x 43.2 cm)
Executive Director’s Acknowledgements

The Kelowna Art Gallery is pleased to present the exhibition Christos Dikeakos: Nature Morte, along with this publication, showcasing the work of this senior Canadian artist, who has made such a significant contribution. This show examines his Okanagan-themed work, which is appropriate to this community and the ever-changing landscape around us.

On behalf of the Board of Directors and staff, I would like to thank Dikeakos for his notable generosity and collegiality. Thanks to our curator, Liz Wylie, for her enthusiasm and rigour realizing the exhibition, this publication, and for her thoughtful and informative essay, Entropy in the Orchard: the Okanagan Photographs of Christos Dikeakos. In addition, we are delighted and grateful to include texts by Claudia Beck, Harold Rhenisch, and Jeff Wall.

As always, thanks to all Kelowna Art Gallery staff, who work collaboratively to realize important projects such as this one, and to Kyle L. Poirier, our graphic designer, for his creative work on this catalogue.

Special thanks to the Audain Foundation for providing financial support towards the production of this publication.

As always, we are deeply indebted to all our supporters, members, volunteers, and sponsors for their continued support of our exhibitions, publications and public programs. The assistance of the City of Kelowna, the Canada Council for the Arts, the British Columbia Arts Council, the Province of British Columbia, School District # 23, the Regional District of Central Okanagan and the Central Okanagan Foundation allows us to bring important exhibitions and publications such as Christos Dikeakos: Nature Morte to fruition. Their ongoing support is very much appreciated.

Nataley Nagy
Executive Director
Curator’s Acknowledgments

Foremost I must thank the artist Christos Dikeakos for his involvement in this project. He has been most generous with his time and energy and creative ideas to make this exhibition and catalogue become realities. I have thoroughly enjoyed our times talking together and enthusiastic brainstorming around his ideas. It was his idea, for example, to make a Donald Judd-like tower from a group of old apple boxes. And it was his idea to create an On Kawara/Lawrence Weiner-esque text piece as a frieze in the gallery, made up of apple variety names. Dikeakos is a photographer, but is not restricted by this niche or medium, as evidenced in this show.

I would also like to extend my appreciation to the writers in this catalogue, Claudia Beck, Harold Rhenisch, and Jeff Wall, each of whom has written a text that is an essential element to the project as a whole. They have written with passion, eloquence and great skill and I am indebted to each of them.

Thank you to Dikeakos’ neighbour in Penticton, Jim Forsyth, who has kindly lent his antique apple boxes for us to use in the installation.

And, as always, my deep appreciation to my coworkers at the Kelowna Art Gallery, who help to make the job a pleasure.

Liz Wylie
Curator

Artist’s Acknowledgements

I am grateful to so many colleagues and friends and to the professional staff at the Kelowna Art Gallery for this exhibition. I first want to express my appreciation to Pauline Petit for printing many of the photographs and for her organizational support. I thank Claudia Beck for her perceptive and in-depth art historical reflections on the work in this show, and for her placing the work in the context of the apple in art history. My appreciation to Harold Rhenisch for his passionate/critical observations on the Okanagan, and to Liz Wylie for all her support and for working with me to develop the many aspects and possibilities for this show. Thanks to Jeff Wall, who provided a clear and thorough précis of my work in the foreword to this catalogue. And to my colleague Barry Jones for his photographic contributions.

To Harry Naegle and Benoit Martell, who have both worked on many apple orchards in the south Okanagan Valley, in addition to our own. Thanks you to Salvador de la Cruz for twenty years of baking apple pies at Sophie’s Cosmic Café. Finally to Sophie and my family, who decided twelve years ago to purchase a dilapidated and unruly apple orchard that is still producing and is a wonderful sight in the midst of a landscape of vineyards.

Christos Dikeakos
For more than forty years now, Christos Dikeakos has made works that occupy a threshold space among several of the main traditions of Vancouver art. His development has been a protean elaboration of variants on the possibilities he has recognized within those traditions.

He was among the first group of young artists and art students to get involved with the experimentation in and around photography in the later 1960s, and he organized the first exhibition of this work while still a student at the University of British Columbia. The exhibition, New Attitudes in Photography, included work by already well-known figures such as Douglas Heubler, Bruce Nauman, Dan Graham, and Ed Ruscha, as well as by the local student-artists who were hurrying into this movement – Iain Baxter, Ian Wallace, Christos, and myself. The work was generally what came to be called ‘photoconceptual.’

Yet, like most of his colleagues, Dikeakos was not really, or not seriously, a photographer in the late 60s. He was more interested in collage and most of the work he did at that time was collage, and this remained the case for many years, until he turned more decisively to photography in the mid-1980s.

This enthusiasm for collage was once again part of the local art and literary scene. The main stimulus, shared by poets and artists, came from the example of the Surrealist publications of the 1920s and 30s in which writers collaborated closely with artists and others, including intellectuals and political activists. This aspect of Surrealism was being rethought and reinvented in the context of the counterculture of the moment, and in the work of radical teachers at both of the city’s universities. Ronald Hunt, an itinerant and somewhat obscure British scholar, was among a substantial contingent of foreigners who taught in the city starting in the mid 60s. In 1969, he created the exhibition Transform the World! Poetry Must Be Made By All! at the then influential Moderna Museet in Stockholm. The show is considered one of the first and still one of the best expositions of the fusion of the radical avant gardes of the 1920s, and its catalogue became a source book for a new generation who were in the process of rediscovering the complexities and excitement of that era. Dikeakos took courses on Dada and Surrealism from Hunt, discovering the collage and publication work of the artists in that movement, particularly André Breton and Marcel Duchamp. Younger artists and writers in Vancouver were reviving and extending the fusion of poetry and found imagery in little magazines such as blewointment, radiofreerainforest, and Tish, as well as in poetry readings that fused into dance and music performances and, soon enough, rock concerts with light shows. In 1971, Dikeakos organized another exhibition, this time The Collage Show, which brought together the work of the Vancouver artists most intensely caught up in this development.

The late Robin Blaser, one of the most important of the American emigrés in Vancouver, was also a significant influence on Dikeakos, and became a life-long friend. Blaser encouraged the young artist to go more deeply into the esoteric iconography and the symbolism of Duchamp’s The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors Even (1915-23), and, as part of that dialogue, emphasized the connections between the personal symbolic structure of that work and mythic orders of thought in general. Blaser’s poetry elaborated on those notions over several decades of writing, publishing, and teaching in Vancouver.
In 1957, as a ten-year-old, Dikeakos himself had emigrated to Vancouver with his parents from Thessaloniki, Greece; he brought with him memories of traces and shards of the ancient world still underfoot in the contemporary cityscape. The city itself could be experienced as a form of collage, a ‘Merzbau,’ to use the term Dada artist Kurt Schwitters coined for his own room-sized constructions of found materials. These memories played their part in the development of Dikeakos’ insight that the place itself, the place where the artist finds himself or herself, was a vast, layered and concentrated assemblage of fragments of many pasts, different presents, and contending futures.

The late 1960s and early 1970s were also the moment when the revival of the indigenous arts of the West Coast began to surface as a central aspect of contemporary culture in Vancouver. Dikeakos was one of the first artists to notice and become curious about this, partly because of his encounters with Robert Davidson when the two were adolescents. By the early 1960s, at around the age of fourteen, Davidson was already active as a carver, working on the small-scale argillite totems that had become a staple of the tourist trade, but which also acted as entry-points for native artists who were intent on taking things much further. By the later 1960s, Davidson and a number of others, many of them guided and inspired by Bill Reid, had laid the foundation for the emergence of the forms and styles of tribal and clan art as a paradoxical yet inescapable element in the notion of contemporary art in British Columbia. Dikeakos was able, almost instinctively, to make the connection between the references to the distant past exemplified in the form-languages of Coastal Native styles and that of his own native styles, left behind in Greece. Part of the excitement in Vancouver over Surrealism was due to the Parisians’ fascination for and appreciation of the indigenous art and ritual of the Northwest Coast. The fact that the French scholarship of the 1930s was so closely associated with the Surrealist movement had the effect of placing the native arts of British Columbia in the framework of avant-garde art, rather than in that of history or anthropology.
These currents flowed together for Dikeakos – the esotericism of Duchampian symbolism, the fusion of the literary and the visual in collage and page design, the reminiscence of mythic language and its startling presence in both the prehistory of B.C. and its immediate present – all of this further complicated by the new omnipresence of photography and its challenge to the whole structure of western modernist pictorial art. By the middle of the 1970s, his work had shifted somewhat, from aggressive collages of highly-charged political imagery, to larger and more nuanced compositions that attempted an interpretation of Greek myths, such as that of Icarus, in a style that seems to have combined elements from Robert Rauschenberg and Ian Wallace, as well as aspects of Haida art. His original collages were photographed and then enlarged, often to impressive sizes, and then hand-coloured. This work occupied him for more than a decade and was the subject of an exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1986, the catalogue of which featured a long text by Robin Blaser.

The enlargement of the photographs in these works seems to have opened the way for Dikeakos to come into a new relationship with photography by the later 1980s. This moment was the high point of the evolution of photography as a gallery or museum art form and Vancouver artists played an important role in this development. Most of those of Dikeakos’ generation, such as Ian Wallace and myself, had made the small monochrome photographs that were characteristic of conceptual art in the 1960s and 70s, but had reconsidered the anti-art presuppositions of that work by around 1980, and had then moved in a different, even opposite, direction, one that engaged with potentials that permitted photography to be considered as a ‘tableau’, a free-standing, even singular image that was to be experienced the way paintings had been since the beginning of the modern tradition.

This direction was controversial because it seemed to many to be a revision of the canonical neo-avant-garde impulse to go beyond the established categories of ‘fine art’ or ‘bourgeois art’, using photography as a means to restructure the viewing experience, the content of the work, and its relation to other social media. The new large-scale photography appeared to be abandoning this project and as such seemed to be moving in a reactionary direction. This controversy continues into the present day.

Dikeakos’ work Sites and Place Names (1988-92), combined dozens of fairly large colour photographs of places in Vancouver and Athens with a folding wooden cabinet containing related material, including maps. The Vancouver work announced his new direction, which involved an extension of his engagement with Native culture and specifically with the history of local sites in relation to the land claims settlement discussions that were becoming increasingly prominent in B.C. politics and culture at the time. The Athens project was a location scouting of an ageing place, contrasting the modern city with the forgotten untidy-to-derelict mythic and sacred precincts.

These photographs were carefully composed and made, very much in the spirit of the new pictorialism. The images were overprinted with words or passages, prominently including native tribal identities. Although the prints were not large, they were assembled in a grid on a wall near the cabinet, and the ensemble of pictures constituted a large image panel. The cabinet made a direct reference to several of Duchamp’s pieces that involved containers that housed and displayed various elements; thus the work, basing itself on the Duchampian framework of inner complexity and linguistic fusion of image and text, managed to recombine the elements present in his earlier styles or forms, but with the emphasis now on local history instead of Greek and aboriginal myth; on urban, or street photography in colour rather than re-photography of collage done in black and white and hand-painted.

Dikeakos’ work moved further in this direction during the 1990s and into the 2000s. His photographs became much larger and began to do without the overlaid textual elements that were still present in the Sites and Place Names works. He concentrated on a specific area of Vancouver – False Creek, which had become the site of complex urban disputes and debates since it had first been restructured for Expo 86, then redeveloped through a series of classic Vancouver real-estate deals, then once again restructured in connection with the 2010 Winter Olympics. Dikeakos’ concentration on the area is centered on the fact that parts of False Creek can be considered to occupy significant aboriginal sites, all of which have been obliterated by the intensive developed nature of the zone. In these pictures Dikeakos returns to some of the political themes that were present in his earliest photographic works, revealing that his sympathies have not changed over the decades.

Over the past six or seven years, his interests have changed form once again. He has continued to make large cityscapes concentrating on the conflict between runaway real estate over-development and the increasingly isolated and weakened traces of the earth it all sits upon. But to this direction he has added elaborately constructed photomontages that resemble and possibly comment upon my own work as well as, and maybe more closely, the comic stagecraft of Rodney Graham’s lightboxes or Stan Douglas’ complicated strategies. Dikeakos’ consistent subject in these works is the status of aboriginal arts in the local art market. In works such as The Room (2009), which shows the shopkeeper Jerry Woolman in his backroom at the 3 Vets store, a gentle contemplation of the participants in the selling and appreciation of native arts is engaged in, but for all the good humor and affection, the critical intent is never disavowed. These works are a complex expression of Dikeakos’ long engagement with Native art and culture; they show us the care that non-Natives display for this work, for example, in The Collector (2013), but this care is never separated from the process of possession, trade, and the assessment of value in a system far different from the one in which much of the work was made. These pictures reveal to us the absence of the potlatch, and as such they are the lament of an artist whose instincts seem to be with the alternate, utopian economies with which the word ‘potlatch’ has been associated throughout the period of avant-garde art and its anthropologies.

Dikeakos and his family opened their first restaurant, Kozmas, in 1982. It was probably the first Greek restaurant in Vancouver to break away from the Canadianized Greek food of the post-war period and return to an authentic style. Kozmas was a financial success while at the same time being an important gathering place for artists and writers, and there Dikeakos, along with his wife Sophie and his sister Alexandra, established their great reputation for hospitality. That reputation has evolved through three restaurants, the current one being Sophie’s Cosmic Café, a local institution for more than two decades. Christos and Sophie Dikeakos are icons of hospitality in Vancouver, and this quality makes its presence felt in Dikeakos’ art as well – the work has been devoted to an imagining of a world other than the one we recognize so easily in his pictures of polluted creeksides blotted with trash and festooned with poorly-constructed condominium towers. This is a landscape of appropriation and possessing without any clear ethos or purpose. It is inhospitable and Dikeakos has worked and played against that lack of generosity in his work and his social life with commitment, learning, artistry and humour.
Surely the apple is the noblest of fruits.
– Henry David Thoreau

Entropy in the Orchard: the Okanagan Photographs of Christos Dikeakos

By Liz Wylie

Despite the tribute in the above epigraph to Malus Domestica – the species we know as apple – this text will not be a paean to the virtues and healthful properties of the fruit. Taking those aspects together as a given or backdrop, it will examine the recent Okanagan apple-themed photographs by Vancouver-based artist Christos Dikeakos. Who is this artist who (along with his wife Sophie) decided in the year 2000 to purchase an apple orchard in Naramata as a rural get away from Vancouver, and then began (as might easily have been predicted) shooting photographs about apple orcharding around and about the Okanagan Valley? And what is the context for this body of work within the artist’s production as a whole?

To consider these questions we first need to step back a bit, and a fitting starting point might be that heady, watershed year of 1969 (when man first walked on the moon, and it was the summer of Woodstock, plus the final year of the 60s – a decade that had been so defined by the counter culture movement). In the art world, things were in a state of ferment; conceptual art was burgeoning, along with other forms of radicality; rifts and departures from previously enshrined notions had been made; challenges were put forward by artists to institutions, and there was more, much more. And at age twenty-three, Christos Dikeakos was completing his final year in the art and art history program at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. He seems to have taken full advantage of the opportunities attendant to that institution, and forged professional relationships with such figures as the late Alvin Balkind, and the late Doris Shadbolt, for example, as well as with his peers. These collegial relationships extend to this day with fellow conceptual photographic artists such as Jeff Wall, Ian Wallace, or Rodney Graham.

Along with fellow student Ilya Pagonis, Dikeakos was curator at the freshly opened student art gallery in the newly built Student Union Building on campus. As a curatorial project he created The Photo Show (which was reprised in 2013 at the AHVA gallery at UBC, drawing on Dikeakos’ own extensive archive). This was a group exhibition focused on work by avant-garde artists using photography either in the service of or functioning as conceptual art. The show was meant to reveal to local audiences the variety of photographic work being produced using this approach, both in Vancouver, and by famous artists in the US. (Dikeakos wrote letters to artists such as Ed Ruscha, Dan Graham, and Bruce Nauman, who sent him material to exhibit by return mail.) At the time, this was a totally new way of thinking about and/or using photography, and would actually form the foundation of practice for the so-called Vancouver school.

In January, 1970, during his final term, Dikeakos had the chance to participate in a project conceived for Vancouver by the well-known American conceptual artist Robert Smithson. Titled Glue Pour, the piece was to be created outdoors and would involve emptying a large drum of industrial glue down a short incline so that it formed a kind of slowly flowing mass on top of the rough terrain. Dikeakos was one of the artists there who photo-documented the work. (He also helped by scouting for a site, and was...
embarrassed to have initially picked one Smithson pronounced as too scenic.) Eventually Smithson agreed to a grotty, semi industrial-looking spot, not far from the UBC campus.  

With his involvement in the Glue Pour, Dikeakos likely had some awareness that he was part of the making of (art) history, so, for example, he took care to retain all his negatives from the event. Smithson had come to do the work for inclusion in a group exhibition of conceptual art being organized for the Vancouver Art Gallery by American writer on art, Lucy Lippard. Titled 955,000, the show was a re-named and slightly altered version of her 557,087 exhibition, held at the Seattle Art Museum just earlier. The numbers in the shows’ titles referred to the populations of each city at that time. This rather deadpan approach to exhibition titling was entirely in keeping with the manner and mode of conceptual art of the period: nothing was exclamatory or attention-getting – the overall tone was flat and even-handed, and was all about the straightforward presentation of information. “Information” became a ubiquitous buzz word. (It was even the title of a famous survey show of conceptual art at New York’s Museum of Modern Art, in 1970.) To try to explain the excitement of conceptual art in retrospect, now forty-four years since the Glue Pour, for example, is challenging. It can now all look so thin and dry, and lacking in substance. But the idea of rejecting and moving beyond the object, for example, to making art that was an event, not a commodity, held such strong appeal and was so radical, linked as it was to period ideals of anti-capitalism, and the wish to free art from the marketplace. Information was hip and cool and for an artist to be going after information was a worthy goal. But it had to be presented in a flat, even-handed manner, anything more was just seen as artifice. The predilection for information and its straightforward presentation would enter and remain with the art practice of Christos Dikeakos, as will be elucidated shortly.  

A separate notion that was important to Robert Smithson (who loved reading about science and science fiction) was entropy, that is, the maximum randomness toward which all material naturally descends. To writer Robert Linsley, the Glue Pour was an exploration of entropy. As a concept, entropy (and its opposite – structured and ordered organization) also seems to have entered Dikeakos’ psyche, and has had a continuing role in his work. When he first saw piles of dumped apples in the Okanagan (that growers could not afford to take to the packing house as purchase prices were so low), surely he was returned to the moment of the Glue Pour, that rather random act of dumping something out into the landscape. But the apples were different – they had an emotional component with their bright, beautiful colour actually functioning as a resonating indicator of trouble in paradise.  

Another element that was widespread in conceptual art was the use of the rectangle as a neutral and uninflected field. Photographs were rectangles, as was the view finder through which we looked to take a photograph. Repeated rectangles could be formed into a grid, another popular organizing structure of the day. Smithson embraced it, even linking it to entropy, saying:  

I don’t think you can escape the primacy of the rectangle … There’s no exit, no road to utopia, no great beyond in terms of exhibition space. I see it as inevitability; of going toward the fringes, towards the broken, the entropic.  

So when Dikeakos came to the Okanagan and saw the stacks of big red wooden apple bins piled up here and there, surely a part of him saw minimalist art reenacted – he was certainly drawn to photograph them. He made these images with admiration, but also with that conceptualist’s remove and steadiness. As always: it is just information. These geometric works by Dikeakos may seem to be in
striking visual contrast to his orchard views, but they are like the flip side of the coin, with the repeated rectangular shape recalling the geometric and modular works of artists such as Carl Andre or Donald Judd, whose hallmark oeuvres were at their respective peaks in the 1970s. While they might elicited a smile from a viewer, Dikeakos’ photographs of these gigantic arrangements are not intended as jokes, more like subtle homages to these masters of material and of pure geometric form, and regular visual rhythm and interval (Dikeakos terms this as being poetic).

When Dikeakos began as an artist he seemed compelled to explore the urban fabric of Vancouver as his subject. He had come to Vancouver as a ten-year-old child with his family, from Thessaloniki, Greece, so the city (indeed, the whole country) was new to him. Writing enthusiastically and perceptively on his work from the 1990s, the late Judith Mastai characterized his camera as “investigative.”

Dikeakos became engaged with histories, especially lost ones. His series of work completed from 1991 to 1994, Sites and Place Names, were images of views in and around Vancouver with names of places and their meanings for First Nations peoples superimposed. The work was a way of reinventing the urban landscape, making it new again as it once had been, at least through remembering. It sent the flaneur (in the example of senior Vancouver photographer Fred Herzog, for instance) through the wormhole of conceptual art to a place where “straight” or “Street” photography did not really exist anymore as avant-garde approaches.

Sites and Place Names to some extent also allowed Dikeakos to “digest” Vancouver. A selection of these works by Dikeakos were included by curator Ihor Holubizky in his 2006 group exhibition curated for Museum London (Ontario), which toured to the Kelowna Art Gallery in 2009, called Radical Regionalism. For this exhibition, as well as having examples from the Sites and Place Names series included, Dikeakos created a three-dimensional piece that took the form of a wooden travelling case. When set up on legs and opened up for display it was bursting with small images, maps, books, facsimile documents, etc. It was both a metaphor for and a manifestation of memory – cultural and personal – instantly readable by gallery visitors, and redolent of nostalgia for the days of old-style, grand travel, with one’s clothing all packed into steamer trunks. It also could point to the more contemporary concept of personal baggage – all the stuff we lug around that influences – if not dictating – how we see the world. The valise is our self.

In the current show, Nature Morte, Dikeakos’ valise has been replaced by two binders placed on reading stands for the exhibition visitor to page through. These are rich with photographic image as well as documents, and facsimile documents that provide information on the topic at hand. It is that 1970s-style information again: rich and fully there for anyone willing to take a close look.

When Dikeakos photographs the Okanagan he begins with his own conceptual valise: his philosophical and aesthetic starting point or position, which is grounded in conceptual art. He is not after shooting nice pictures, nor seeking out picturesque views or scenery. By the time the Dikeakos couple purchased their orchard in 2000, due to a cluster of political and economic factors, apple orcharding in the Okanagan had been growing less and less tenable. This was unsettling and perturbing to the artist, and not what he had expected. He had initially thought of his orchard in idealizing terms: raising fruit that was healthy and beautiful, each apple an icon of well-being. The archetype of the sacred grove was perhaps active in his subconscious, but the bloom was shortly off the blossom, and Dikeakos’ work became about the activity of apple growing, at its most layered and complex: history, politics, water issues, etc. It therefore functions as a lens onto the notion of this place: what is the history of land use? Who has been disenfranchised? Whose idea was it to grow apples here, when and why?
As he explored about, Dikeakos would come across mounds of apples that had been picked but then just defiantly dumped somewhere in a pile and left to rot, as the buying price was too low for the orchardist to even pay for the gas to drive the fruit to the packing house or juice plant. Dikeakos bemoaned the waste of fruit and human labour, and his photographs of dumped apples signify despair, hopelessness, and waste. But there is nothing in Dikeakos’ approach that engenders emotion; the depictions are straightforward and a viewer has to work to penetrate and construct meanings. In two “corner” pieces in the exhibition, the artist has installed photographs of dumped apples directly on the floor in corners of the gallery space. The pieces read like direct quotations of Robert Smithson’s gallery works that he called Non-Sites, especially as the dumped apples are under our feet, not at eye level. (They also call to mind the corner piles of candies by later artist Felix Gonzales Torres.) In Dikeakos’ spill image, Apple Spill, Dumped Culls, from 2012, a figure stands at the top right of the work, such a direct echo of the observers’ positions in his Glue Pour images as to be uncanny.

Dikeakos presents additional dystopian views, for example, Orchard, Osoyoos, which focuses on a pile of crunched up cardboard cartons, reminiscent of Philip Guston’s paintings of piles of busted-up hob-nailed boots. But there are utopian images as well; a recurring motif is the single pendant apple, like the dream of an apple, or Plato’s ideal apple. And there are the winter images Dikeakos calls haiku, each with a red apple and some black twigs against white snow. They read like tone poems, or notes on a staff in musical notation.

There is a subtle wit that enters the work from time to time, which was not present in the atavistic tone of his Sites and Place Names work. In the Okanagan Dikeakos seems to feel free to just delight in some of the weird things he comes across: the texture of tree trunks, oddly deformed formations of roots, the snow on objects around the orchard, as he has explored the place in every season. But we are not talking about unbridled hilarity, the humour is held in check and the artist wants the images to speak for themselves.

As well as the photographs by Christos Dikeakos, there are additional elements in the Nature Morte exhibition. Around the gallery space at the top of the walls is a frieze made up of text: the names of apple cultivars grown in BC, both past and present. This work is a nod to conceptual artists who relied on text as their work, rather than imagery, for example, On Kawara, Lawrence Weiner, and the artists of the Art & Language group. There is a pattern of positive and negative shapes that climbs up one wall in the gallery in the form of a tower of old apple boxes, an homage to (again) artists such as Donald Judd and Carl Andre. (Apple boxes – now collectibles – were the precursor to the large bins, which require forklifts to move them around the orchards.) This sculptural work is in the same vein as Dikeakos’ Endless Column, created in 2010 for the Patisserie Duchamp / Puis-je fumer exhibition the artist curated for Ihor Holubizky at Museum London (London, Ontario) and McMaster Museum of Art (Hamilton, Ontario) of his own work plus collectibles and other objets. A nod to Brancusi in its title, form, and its shape, Dikeakos’ floor-to-ceiling structure was made of stacked cigar boxes (from his personal
collection) that were swivelled at opposing angles to ape Brancusi’s alternating modular forms making up his famous gigantic wooden piece of the same title. In a similar fashion the various constructed works in the Nature Morte show – the frieze, the corner apple dump photographic installations, the arrangement of apple boxes, and the information binders – act like hot links to previous key works or periods in modern art.

In his 2008 interview about his Okanagan photographs with Christos Dikeakos published in Lake magazine, Kelowna-based artist and writer Gary Pearson described Dikeakos’ approach to the landscape as interrogative. To me this is key and very important, and it is the perfect term, as Dikeakos is not out there making a statement, but is driving about and walking around with questions in his head: What are we doing with the land in the Okanagan, with agriculture and orcharding, wineries and grape-growing? Can a farmer still make a living? What is going to be sustainable? Dikeakos brings the richness of this questioning to his work. He is not just passing through, but has dug himself in.

The nostalgia currently running rampant through the contemporary art world for the seemingly more pure and simple art and times of the mid-twentieth century art movements is remarkable, and it might appear that Dikeakos has not been immune to the virus. But his approach is more idiosyncratic, less generic, and involves a mash-up, a post-modern hybrid, of straightforward-looking photographs that are actually anything but, and objects, text, and other items – his collection of vintage fruit box labels, for example – that are also placed in the exhibition in the guise or under the rubric of art objects. Simulacra? Signifiers? Tropes? With Dikeakos, no one interpretation is “correct,” he’s too complex a thinker for that, and also seems to be a bit of a trickster, taking real pleasure in presenting us with complex information.

Endnotes
1. Because there has been so much written in depth about these artists (Rodney Graham, Jeff Wall, Stan Douglas, Roy Arden, Ken Lum, Ian Wallace, for example) an elaboration here on this brief reference to the artistic context of Dikeakos in Vancouver is not deemed necessary.
2. For full details and images of the Glue Pour and Smithson’s other Vancouver projects, both only proposed and those fully realized, see Grant Arnold’s exhibition catalogue Robert Smithson in Vancouver: a fragment of greater fragmentation. Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 2003.
Christos Dikeakos, *Fuji Culls National Geographic Style 1*, 2011, ink-jet photograph, 22 x 18 in. (55.9 x 45.7 cm)

Christos Dikeakos, *Tent Caterpillars 1*, 2013, silver photograph, 21 5/8 x 17 5/8 in. (54.6 x 44.4 cm)
Christos Dikeakos, *Stacked Apple Crates (stairs)*, 2013, ink-jet photograph, 18 x 22 in. (45.7 x 55.9 cm)

Christos Dikeakos, *The Last of the Aurora Reds*, 2008, silver print, 19½ x 23½ in. (49.5 x 59.7 cm)
Christos Dikeakos, Apple Falls (Donkey), 2012, ink-jet photograph, 18 x 22 in. (45.7 x 55.9 cm)

Christos Dikeakos, Tree Creature 1 (Leaning Snow), 2012, ink-jet photograph, 17 x 22 in. (43.2 x 55.9 cm)
Christos Dikeakos, Leaning, 2011, ink-jet photograph, 17 x 22 in. (43.2 x 55.9 cm)

Christos Dikeakos, Snag, 2012, ink-jet photograph, 22 x 17 in. (55.9 x 43.2 cm)
Some stories in the Okanagan Valley are Okanagan stories. Others are Canadian stories. Yet others are American ones. Here’s one from Canada:

There is a land west of the mountains, where crickets chirp in the night and rattlesnakes lie under the sagebrush, where the lakes are blue and the sky even bluer. This is hot, desert country, which human ingenuity has turned into fruitful land under warm summer winds. The skillful addition of water has turned this desert into orchards, with boughs heavy with apples, peaches, pears, apricots and plums, and vineyards, that spill down to the blue lakes and up to dry, sun-baked hills. The best fruit in the world grows here, in a wine region setting new international standards. The lakes are pure and clean and you can come here across the mountains and play on them with your ski boats, or just lie on the sand and soak in the sun. This is Canada’s Riviera, where clean, modern cities merge with farmland cared for in the healthiest, most sustainable methods. Today, a new culture is being born in this country — the best of Canada’s past merged with the best of its future. The wisdom of a generation of Canadian business leaders has retired here and is turning its energy towards building this land for generations to come. Boutique hotels and bistros now share town and countryside with art galleries and family wineries. This is where Canada can retire in the sun. Come home to Canada. Come to the Okanagan!

I call that a Canadian story, because nothing in it extends south of the 49th parallel, or into Okanagan history. It just hangs in the air, as fully formed as a breath, as if it has spontaneously generated, like lightning out of an electrically charged sky. It does, however, miss a lot about this place, especially the grasslands, Syilx culture, and the earth itself. In their place, it presents a set of human social dreams and a beautiful story, and strongly embeds the region within a Canadian context. Even so, it leaves the land in jeopardy, and without the land there’s nothing here — just a resource to be consumed. When that resource — the life-giving potential of the earth — is depleted, there’ll be nothing of this place left. You might think that if you’re from somewhere you might not want to be eaten alive quite as quickly as all that, but I dunno. The people tasked with caring for this land, the fruit growers of the Okanagan, seem happy enough to play along. Here’s their version of history, from the website of BC Tree Fruits, the farming, packing and shipping cooperative that in 1936 brought a common vision to a fractious colonial fruit industry:

British Columbia’s Okanagan Valley boasts rich, fertile soil, endless days of summer sun and 135 kilometers of pristine lake fed by pure mountain streams. It almost doesn’t seem fair that one place should have so much. But thank goodness. Because this magical combination of conditions is positively perfect for growing tree fruits. Not just any tree fruits. But some of the most delicious in the world. From the newest varieties to old favourites, a BC Tree Fruits sticker means flavourful food grown close to home using natural and sustainable methods. Honestly, this is about as fresh as it gets. (http://www.bctree.ca/about/our-history)

Golly. I come from Okanagan fruit culture as much as anyone and more than most, and that is just not my history, at all. I’d say that if a history of Okanagan fruit culture does not match the history of people from that fruit culture, it’s not Okanagan fruit culture history. In terms of anything as tangible as a
glass of freshly-pressed Wealthy apple juice, with bubbles of froth popping on your lips, it just doesn’t exist. It sure is real, though. I know that one is not supposed to peek behind a magician’s secrets, but since more is at stake here than a double-faced queen of hearts, let’s have a closer look. For the Earth’s sake, shall we say.

British Columbia’s Okanagan Valley boasts rich, fertile soil ... Yes — in the old wetlands of the valley bottoms, it does. It’s largely covered now with houses and long strips of parking lots, access roads, and mini-malls, though. Only a tiny fraction of today’s productive land remains in this zone. To talk about it in the same breath as fruit growing is a bit of a stretch. Most land actively farmed today is on higher silt, clay and gravel bench lands, and most of the topsoil on them is only an inch or two deep. It’s not much, I know, but that’s what 10,000 years of organic activity in this climate can manage. Because of heat and drought, soil in this grassland is not formed out of rich layers of decaying organic matter, such as in the Carolinian forest on the shore of Lake Erie. Instead, it’s a mix of up to a thousand different fungi, microfauna and bacteria, which process water, air and nutrients in communities that lie on the earth’s surface or in the first few centimetres below it, like a membrane in a lung. Energy and oxygen pass through this film, the same way each human breath passes oxygen through arterial walls into the blood system and draws carbon dioxide back out. When such soil communities are scraped away to prepare land for farming, what is left is sandy loam, only slightly richer than it was in when the glaciers melted 10,000 years ago. In other words, traditional methods of farming in the Okanagan create northern, juvenile, tundra-like soils. That’s very Canadian, but it’s not really something to boast about. After a century of farming, for example, the old orchard land below my house, that now grows pumpkins and corn-on-the-cob in celebration of the culture of the Ohio Basin, is a heavy mineral mass that supports crops fed with petrochemical fertilizers, propped up by herbicides, and dependent on industrial technology. That’s not really a definition of wealth or fertility. It’s more a definition of debt, or poverty, or desertification. Things are scarcely different with today’s apple orchards, which are largely high-tech factories of trees planted more closely than grape vines. Every orchard today has a back-flush mechanism to prevent its petro-chemically-salted water from being drawn away from the trees and into the drinking water system. Still, if you wanted, you could call fertilized land fertile, and you’d be right ... sort of.

... endless days of summer sun ... Well, sure, yes, fifteen hours anyway, although depending upon which crook of the valley you find yourself in it could be much less. Mountains, after all, cast long shadows. Don’t let the bright light fool you, though; the heat you feel from the light doesn’t really come from a burning ball of hydrogen 149,600,000 kilometres away, but from the dryness of the air, right here, right now. You’re not exactly feeling the rays of the sun, in other words, but the air sucking the water right out of your pores before it has a chance to turn to sweat and cool you. You’re feeling your own body. Now, human bodies are beautiful, of course, and display well on the beaches of Penticton or the golf courses on the volcanics spines above Okanagan Lake north of Kelowna, but let’s not forget that fruit, just like those bodies with all their sun hats and sunscreens, strapless sundresses, rehydration sport drinks and SPF30 golf shirts with underarm ventilation, is largely water. In a place in which water must remain hidden or it will vanish into the sky, it shouldn’t be hanging in millions of litres off of branches in the open sun, yet that’s exactly what the fruit planted here does. At any rate, the fruitful summers of
the Okanagan are not endless, and, yes, even if “endless” is meant metaphorically, summer days that spread from the end of the cherry monsoons in early July to the first scents of Autumn in late August, when the saskatoons are burning to a yellow crisp in the arroyos of the hillsides and frost spills down at noon out of the high country, are not precisely endless. If the BC Tree Fruits’ copywriter is suggesting that the days feel endless because they are deliciously dry and take place under blue skies, it might be wise to remember that in the Okanagan precipitation is pretty much stable year round. The summers are dry, yes, but what makes them so is not so much the sun but the seasonal weight of the air. The rain that drizzles out of heavy air in November or March, or which pours in day-long floods in June, or dumps down in five minutes of lightning-induced hail in the nearly weightless air of August, cutting shreds out of the skins and flesh of the apples hanging exposed on dwarf trees, all adds up to about five centimetres a month. That’s not all the water there is, of course. Much more than that falls from the clouds, but it’s reabsorbed by the dry, pressurized air long before it strikes the ground. The effect makes for sensational sunsets, with red, orange, yellow and deep purple light undulating in watery sheets against pastel blue mountains. It’s easy to watch all this, mesmerized, for hours. The plants that thrive in these conditions of vanishing water are adapted to cold, heat and drought; they survive by water conservation, careful choice of location or season, speed of maturing, or special cell structures. The Turkish, Georgian, Armenian and Chinese fruits that were spread throughout Europe by the monastic cultures of the Middle Ages — grapes, apples, quinces, pears, cherries, peaches, apricots and plums — lack these adaptations. The vineyards of France, Switzerland and Germany, for example, aren’t planted in the heat; they grow in the fog. Apples thrive best in humid New York, England, Denmark and Germany, not here.

... and 135 kilometers of pristine lake ...

The copywriter is right: there’s a wondrous, 135-kilometre-long post-glacial lake here, storing ancient water in the midst of a grassland and brush steppe and serving to regulate the climate and recycle water (through summer thunderstorms) back up into the hills, but that lake is not pristine. Forty-five years ago it was as clean as bottled water from a glacier in Iceland or a volcanic spring in Fuji, but today it is polluted with sewage, invasive weeds, and shrimp. Yeah, shrimp. Ironically, they were introduced in the 1970s to feed the local land-locked salmon, called kokanee, but wound up nearly starving them instead. As predicted, shrimp are a good food source for adult kokanee, but they also devastate juvenile fish by competing with them for plankton food sources. The stress on fish populations is compounded because the adult kokanee have been displaced by the oxygen needs of rotting Eurasian water-milfoil — a frilly, choking, marshy, long-stemmed water plant that is mowed down annually to maintain swimmable beaches. If that weren’t enough, the wetlands that feed the lake with plankton have been filled in with gravel, for airports, highways (such as the freeway from Penticton to Summerland), industrial areas (such as the tire shops, RV storages, cement factories, and gas stations of Okanagan Landing), and residential developments. (For example, the 10,000 red-winged blackbirds that used to live at the south end of Okanagan Lake have vanished because their cattail swamp is buried under a Penticton Indian Band land development project that filled it in, sold it as a walled lakeshore retirement village, and used the capital profit from the project to support the band’s civic infrastructure on the dry hills above. Ironically, the development, which boasts a dozen or so blackbirds trying to nest in the cattails that have spontaneously sprouted in the ditches on either side of the four lane highway blasting through the security walls of the development, is called Redwing Resort.) Whether you like fish and their cultural presence or not, all this can hardly be called pristine.

... fed by pure mountain streams ...

The pure mountain streams exist. They sure do. There are no lies in this B.C. Tree Fruits advertising paragraph, but neither does it say that today the pure streams are few, or that many streams are rather dry, dammed in the high country and piped to the valleys to feed the irrigation systems for industrial vineyards, golf courses and home uses in the high-evaporation zones
in the valley bottoms; little is left for the fish or to feed the chains of life leading down from the tree zone. A functioning landscape that created a surplus of food crops as water followed gravity to the lake and was then recycled by thunderstorms back into the hills, has been replaced with an industrial one — with orchards. The only thing is, the orchards are largely gone.

From the newest varieties to old favourites, a BC Tree Fruits sticker means flavourful food grown close to home. Sure, all food is flavourful, to some degree, but one consequence of technologically growing fruit in an unsustainable climate is that the best-flavoured varieties aren't present. It's not that people haven't tried growing the best apples here; it's just that in dry heat many grow tough skins and don't breathe properly, water doesn't flow in and out as it should, they don't keep long enough, they have to be picked too early, the marketing system can't deal with a cornucopia of varieties (with short storage lives — a supermarket nightmare!) and the malolactic acids in the skins of apples at home in high-humidity, cloudy environments start acting like cabbages picked in the heat of the day, which is to say: they become bitter. In the end, whenever most of the world's best apples are grown in the Okanagan they taste like pig food. Because of that, there are no American Mothers, that look and feel like netted gem potatoes, no Reine de Pommes, like tiny yellow cherries, each handful able to bring an entire vat of cider to life, no Ashton Brown Jerseys, no Danziger Kantäpfel, no Golden Russets, like honey-flavoured wood (that's a good thing), no Boskoops, no Glockenäpfel, the Swiss yellow bell, no Bittenheimers, as large as pumpkins, and no Ribston Pippins. There aren't even their poor daughters the Cox Oranges. Instead, we have their poor great-granddaughters, the sweet, aromatic-for-a-week Royal Galas. They have low yields, small size, and ripen unevenly. As a result, they have to be picked three or four times, at a cost no farmer can afford. Farmers respond by physically removing apples that might ripen after the first picking. They throw those on the ground — the lower-priced apples that local people, as opposed to people purchasing apples in expensive foreign markets, might afford. The result is food banks.

And that's just the apples that don't grow here. Of the ones that have been grown in the valley, well there aren't any Delicious anymore (OK, OK, I know of one tree in Summerland, but the farmer is keeping all the apples to himself. I know. I begged. To no avail.) There are also precious few Golden Delicious, the green-striped Macintoshes, that tasted like wild fall rain, are gone, there's no Transparent-processing industry, even though Transparent-processing varieties make the best apple sauce in the world, and no-one grows Jonathans, Newtown Pippins, Wealthys or Winesaps, that old cider mainstay, anymore. The Delicious and Macs are gone because they were replaced by less flavourful, red mutations that cheated food grade designations by offering extreme colour without the need for ripeness and then were manipulated by hormones until they were really weird. I mean weird. I don't choose that word lightly. When we were using those hormones liberally, we had roots growing out of the sides of apples, or even new branches, with stems, leaves and even flowers. Nobody knew what to do with Winesaps — not because they weren't exquisite, but because they didn't need cold storage and so didn't go crunch, although they kept until June, when you could start eating strawberries. The other exquisite, soft spring apple, the Newtown Pippin, was replaced by the Granny Smith, largely because of supermarket wholesale buying practices and the lovely nitrogen-fertilizer-induced green sheen Grannies take on that makes them look like green gummy bears. A natural Granny in this climate is a pale, green-yellow, with a pink blush, kind of like a designer rose. It's a lovely thing, but it doesn't go pop as if it had spontaneously generated out of a Photoshop Hue and Brightness filter, so adjustments were made in growing practices and the deep green was born to catch attention on a supermarket shelf. The Wealthys have vanished because no one makes juice anymore; it's cheaper to reconstitute it from Brazilian concentrate, where it can be produced without pesticide regulations, and tastes, well, cooked. These are all failures of marketing, not failures of growing, but, you see, B.C. Tree Fruits is the marketing organization. One might think that with their professed passion for old favourites they might enthusiastically embrace these quality fruits, but, alas, no.

There are other varieties that might have been, too, but you will find few Empires, no Macouns, Spigolds, Crimes Goldens, Maigolds or Gravensteins, that make the best apple pies in the world. You won't find Sintas, that taste like cinnamon, or Belle de Boskoops that are the only apple for making Apfelstrudel (the German recipes note that if you can't get Boskoops, just don't bother.) You'll rarely find a Splendour Golden Gala, which keeps its flavour deep into January, but you will find their pretty sister, the Ambrosia (a chance seedling, most likely a colourful daughter of the Delicious). As for Kandil Sinaps, that Turkish apple that is brown when you pick it in November but glows like a Christmas light bulb in May and still crunches when you bite into it, although all the other apples you have stored with it in your basement have rotted away to brown pulp and neon-green spores of mould, well ... no.

The story of apple industrialization and standardization is amplified in the stories of the other fruits of the valley. The best pear land on earth, for instance, is behind the onion field at the top of Benvoulin Road in Kelowna, across from the Benvoulin Church heritage site and picnic park. Today, the onion field sports the largest shopping mall in the British Columbia Interior and the pear land is sprouting with apartments. If this were actually a fruit-growing culture, rather than a condo-growing culture, that would not be the case. Old, rich-flavoured peaches, like the friendly tiger-striped giants, Fairhaven, with apartments. If this were actually a fruit-growing culture, rather than a condo-growing culture, that would not be the case. Old, rich-flavoured peaches, like the friendly tiger-striped giants, Fairhaven, are almost impossible to find (if you still can.) The juicy, sweet queen of black cherries, the Lamberts,
have vanished. There’s a new cherry-growing technology in the valley, that merges meaty (rather than juicy) self-fertilizing cherries (for heavy crop sets) with a combination of aggressive pruning and petro-chemical fertilization, coupled with a spring-time application of hormones to produce cherries the size of plums that fetch astronomical prices on the Asian market but are, nonetheless, somewhat like chewing into fruit leather, or, once they’ve been sitting around in the produce aisle for a few days, sometimes just leather. The Royal Blenheims apricots, which have been maintained by grafting in China for 4,000 years and which are as sweet as eating the sun (but never last more than a day before going to jam), have been replaced by huge, brilliant orange, knobby apricots, that taste, on a good day, like lemon juice and on a bad day like more lemon juice. Few people plant them. Few people care. We used to grow tiny, sour little greengage plums, too, and sweet round damsons for jam-making, peach plums for fresh eating in the summer (it is impossible to eat them without the sugary juice literally running down your chin — I dare you to try it without laughing in joy) and Greta plums and Italian prune plums for drying and canning. In commercial quantities we now grow ... Italian prune plums, picked three weeks early and as sour as, well, as lemon juice really. It’s the only way they will survive being battered around on an industrial fruit grader and the only way they will have a shelf life long enough to survive in an industrial supermarket. All you can make properly out of immature fruit like this is slivovitz, that Hungarian plum brandy that you are supposed to drink the Hungarian way, by lighting it first with a match. When my friend Bob tried that in the Cariboo, he burned off his mustache. The whole thing went up like a thistle and that was that.

All these fruits are part of apple culture and apple history. When the old Barcelo Ranch in Cawston was turned into a Veteran’s Land Act orchard development in 1952, for example, the horticulturalist, Ted Swales, recommended mixing trees producing all of the above fruits together, allowing the smaller plum and peach trees to fill up space the larger apple trees would take decades to fill, and preventing the rapid spread of insects by eliminating genetically identical blocks of trees. Each orchard was designed to provide continuous work for one man for one year, and to support one family. Some owners of orchards like that used to joke that they didn’t have an orchard at all; they had a fruit salad. The whole thing went up like a thistle and that was that.

I think we should talk about that. Fruit growing has been a part of valley culture longer than there has been a country called Canada. It was in 1861 that Hiram Smith planted his ten-acre orchard above Osoyoos Lake and the Oblate priest Charles Pandosy walked by, with an apple seed in his pocket, on his way into Canadian mythology. That’s a long time ago, but it doesn’t mean that fruit-growing is natural to this place. Sagebrush is natural to this place. It covers its leaves with tiny hairs, which trap the water it expires as a natural byproduct of photosynthesis. It uses the surface tension of this water as a second skin, to prevent being dried out by the wind. Blue-bunched wheat grass is natural to this place. It catches the rain and the snow with its dried stalks and quickly funnels them down to a hibernating green core, which uses the

Honestly, this is about as fresh as it gets. Yeah, but only because everyone else is growing industrial fruit, too. Honestly. In comparison to the fruit we had even thirty years ago, the taste of the land today is the sour taste of lemons. Some of us remember when fruit tasted like the sun and made your head buzz like a bee. At apple picking time, the yellow “hangers,” overripe pears on the infilled trees throughout the apple blocks, would scent the air so richly it actually stung your eyes. There weren’t very many pickers who didn’t have an over-ripe Bartlett pear or a few half-fermented prune plums on the edge of their bin, to take a bite out of every time they came down out of a tree with a bushel of apples strapped to their chests. Anything less is poverty.
water to put out lush growth for a few weeks each spring — most of which produces the long stalks that gather in the rain for the rest of the year. That’s what grows well here — not European fruits. They’re here for economic reasons: the climate only poorly hosts apple scab, a black fungal growth like lichen that is a scourge across the continent and throughout Europe. Neither does it support the major peach, apricot and plum pest, the plum curculio. Those two horticultural factors enable production economies that make fruit-growing viable here, despite its climatic challenges. For the challenges, the major weapon against them has been a mutually-supporting triumvirate of advertising, horticultural change, and chemical technology. In this model, apple varieties, for example, are selected for taste, because people do care about that, but primarily on their ability to solve technical issues of distribution within an industrial food system. The most long-lived and effective advertising approach towards softening this blow has been to sell these industrial products as the natural outcome of one man and one woman working lovingly together with pure soil and pure sun. Unfortunately, the technical issues are very real, and over the last century the man and the woman in this tale have had to work increasingly less lovingly, as apples have had to continually change to fit inappropriate conditions and supportive technologies, under increasing world competition, rather than changing to fit an evolving story of human delight in taste, that you might expect from a love story. The very successful plant-breeding program in Summerland, for instance, which produced a never-released peach-flavoured apple and that gave the world the Spartan apple by breeding the Macintosh with the Newtown Pippin to extend its natural storage life, has been replaced, culturally, by a private agribusiness consortium built around a genetic engineering program. The owner of this agribusiness is currently petitioning for certification of an “Arctic” apple that won’t turn brown when sliced open. Because apple pollen drifts on the wind, the establishment of these apples in the valley could potentially destroy the only viable, healthy, profit-making arm of the fruit industry today, organic fruit growing, which actually manages to marry romantic images with honest human labour and strong inter-human relationships, but which is intolerant of GMO contamination. In this context, using natural and sustainable methods means methods economically sustainable in an industrial system. Sadly, because of the reliance of fruit on industrial water, there are no natural methods — except, of course, water is natural.

Naturally here, though, water is drawn up into the air and evaporates away.
The Apples of Dikeakos: Nature Morte
By Claudia Beck

What beauty is, I know not, though it adheres to many things.
– Albrecht Durer

We might think of the story of Adam and Eve and the apple. Christos Dikeakos is aware of this when he picks up his camera, but his apple pictures produce paradox: the present and history; alive and dead; still life as landscape and portrait; an exhibition of photographs as an installation, with sculpture and archive. I have appropriated The Apples of Dikeakos from the art historian Meyer Shapiro’s 1968 essay, “The Apples of Cezanne: An Essay on the Meaning of Still-Life.” Cezanne’s nineteenth-century still lifes with apples were the genre and the subject specific to his art. Dikeakos frames specific meanings of the apple as a symbol, and makes semantic play with the French for still life in his exhibition title. I think of his project as a problem of knowledge. Durer’s words put me with the beauty of apples and underscore this photographic series as part of a pictorial and conceptual art history.

We are looking at inkjet colour prints in an art gallery. Christos Dikeakos has depicted the beauty of apples in his photographs. The red and yellow globes pictured in sunlight, rain, and snow. “Yet, still-life, as much as landscape, calls out a response to an implied human presence.” (Shapiro) We imagine the fragrance and the tastes of the first bite. An apple picked off the tree: crisp-sweet-tart-succulent on the tongue, slurping the juice before it runs out the mouth. Ambrosial. The beauty of an apple is palpable – sensuous as well as visual.
Between 2010 and 2013 Dikeakos observed and framed his family’s apple orchard on the Naramata Bench through the seasons. He focussed his camera on individual apples and clusters on the branches. Perhaps these are his most beautiful single images, like portraits of the apple on the tree. At a medium distance he caught the spangled spray of red balls on branches and on the ground against green, the space flattened to a curtain where he casts the apple – his subject in the Okanagan.

His spring has the delicate tinge of pink in Blossoms, seductive bee catchers, before the wilting brown edges drop them to the ground. Then comes a look of Natural Fruit Set – nubile youth showing hints of maturity. There is a feel of a place cool and green in the fleeting rise of summer sun, soon to be overtaken by the lethargic heat that seeps through to ripen loaded branches quenched by irrigation pipes. With each season Dikeakos catches signs of labour. In fall, the careful picking for market, if lucky. Seen in this orchard, many culls, many apples unpicked, to become gifts for family and friends. But as pictures they are an integral part of the meanings in this series. Through winter hibernation the branches show themselves as bare lines for pruning. Somehow the artist makes visible the silence of snow’s blanket and the apples like haiku syllables pronounced as a poem observed in his orchard. Photographed.

Since 1969 Dikeakos has produced photographs, collages, videos, sculpture, drawings, and essays that have followed a pictorial and conceptual interest in the changing appearance of places. Over forty-five years he has collected a storehouse of experiences, memories, stories, pictures, books, and clippings as resources. He is an important go-to-man about the history of Vancouver artists. He has extended a conceptual still life, his archive of resources, to places he knows intimately: Vancouver’s False Creek, Greece, Haïda Gwaii, and most recently the Okanagan. His work has traced the physical upheaval and cultural changes that come with economic growth and development. These photographs are a form of criticality that presents what exists at an historical moment. We can look at them as images to help remember what existed. We understand them as history pictures.

This photographer works in a ‘documentary style’ as defined by Walker Evans. Jeff Wall has described his own photographs as ‘almost documentary,’ and occasionally as ‘prose poems.’ I find these notions relate to ‘beauty,’ as poetry of the everyday. This is how Dikeakos makes apple pictures in the Okanagan. But he wants the physical, three-dimensional, dynamic movement of a living orchard. An echo back to Muybridge’s locomotion studies in the 1870s and ’80s, are the artist’s video-like shots of Peter Naegle picking apples, which add a sense of movement. Into the exhibition he has inserted a stack of wooden boxes in which apples used to go to market. “This is my Donald Judd sculpture, a ready-made” – appropriating both Judd and Duchamp into his work.
During the Common Era, paradigms of origin shift from many gods to man and one god. The story of the Garden of Eden in Genesis is where the bite of the forbidden fruit becomes the fall of man. The tree bears the fruit of forbidden knowledge, of good and evil in the Bible. The earlier Hebraic tradition saw the fruit as symbolic of all knowledge – wisdom that is between good and evil. Though the Bible does not name the tree, the apple is pictured. Much Christian iconography has been adapted from Classical sources, so the apple could hark to the golden apples of immortality. A serpent lures Eve, rather than guarding the fruit as did Ladon. Perhaps one of the best-known paintings from this text is Durer’s 1507 double panels of the naked Adam and Eve looking innocent. While the serpent proffers the fruit to Eve, each holds an apple on the branch. Michelangelo’s Fall of Man and the Expulsion from the Garden of Eden on the Sistine ceiling (1508-12) makes the story monumental. In all these depictions the apple tree has been there and unconsciously as the apple and tree continue to appear in art, literature, and advertising. Apples are symbolic. In each instance the apple is a symbol of desire: to reach for, to pluck, to bite into, to know, to give in love and friendship. It amazes me to think the power and magic of food was believed to sustain the dead. As food for the dead, apples have been found in graves in Ur dating to 4,500 years ago. In Egyptian tombs from about 1650 BCE are frescoes of food, including apples, to nourish the ‘soul’ for its journey. About such evidence Guy Davenport wrote: “That, it seems to me, is the real root of still life – an utterly primitive and archaic feeling that a picture of food has some sustenance.” A multifaceted writer, Davenport’s mind reads like a collage of his vast readings and translations and looking at art which appear in his book Objects on a Table: Harmonious Disarray in Art and Literature. He continues, “Between the gathering of food and its consumption there is an interval when it is on display.” One of the earliest pictures is the Roman fresco of a glass bowl of fruit from c. 50-30 BCE, from a bedroom in a Roman villa in Boscoreale. In Roman frescoes the ideology of wealth and indulgence was shown theatrically within the actual nature and gardens of the countryside villa; often a landscape pictured within a landscape.

But firstly the apple is food. Dikeakos loves food, its history, its preparation and its presentation. As cook and host he continues the tradition of gathering round a table for eating, camaraderie, and conversation. No wonder he would relish this fruit and focus on it. Today we rarely think about the locale and labour of production of what we eat. For most of us an apple (malus domestica) is common. Usually found year round in supermarkets, seasonally in farmers’ markets, much less picked fresh from a garden. Its medicinal/health value is repeated in popular refrains: ‘an apple a day keeps the doctor away’ or ‘rosy cheeks like an apple.’ Americans since Johnny Appleseed and Henry David Thoreau nationalized the fruit – ‘American as apple pie.’

Botanists have traced the migration of the apple (malus sylvestris) from Southeast Kazakhstan in central Asia and its cultivation in the ancient world. Since the Vikings explored our Maritime coasts I must mention that the Norsemen had their own myths and lore about the apple, a crab apple known as malus sylvestris. In Upper Canada it was the pioneering Brit, Susanna Moody, who wrote about planting and cultivation of apple trees by settlers in her 1852 book, Roughing it in the Bush – a good cultivator and desired food. Dikeakos comments that the orchardist who planted his orchard in the early 1970s used both old and new varieties like the Winter Banana Apple. The doyenne of Canadian cooking and its history, Elizabeth Baird, relates the apple’s cultivation and varieties from 1632 in the Annapolis Valley to the Niagara Peninsula and out to BC’s Okanagan. In her Apples, Peaches and Pears, written in 1977, she notes the diminishing varieties as apple production became more and more commercial.
Dikeakos photographs only the realism of an outdoor setting and yet he uses a word for still life. The term ‘still life’ first came from Dutch artists’ jargon as leven for alive, a live model. Stillเลven were collections of inanimate objects on a table, seen in a domestic, interior space. Seventeenth-century Dutch paintings of sumptuous displays of fruit and other foods, luxurious goblets and platters, flowers, even insects and snakes, were displayed as a feast on a table as signs of wealth. These attributes were shown off by virtue of the artist’s skill with volume, colour, the optics of shine and transparency: signs of current scientific knowledge as well as economics. Perhaps a mention of the Spanish bodegón (still life) paintings of Juan Sanchez de Cotán and Luis Meléndez and the French master Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin will temper the still life back to simpler domestic ways of life.

Sometimes in this genre there was a current of mortality, of vanitas: rotting fruit or a skull were metaphors for impermanence and death. In Caravaggio’s basket of fruit of c. 1599 we see how light glows on it, placed against a beautifully rich but blank ivory ground. I see painting imagined in the brilliance of that ground with a realism of ripe, over ripe, insect-holed and bitten fruit and leaves. Fecundity and death, a metaphor also at work in Dikeakos’ series. “Stare. It is the way to educate your eye, Stare. Pry. Listen. Eavesdrop. Die knowing something. You are not here long.” (Walker Evans) The photographs picture signs of predators in the orchard. We look at a frame of Tent Caterpillars in dessicating black and white; a sign of a coddling moth smears rich green and red, almost hiding its hole in Late Fall Rains; rot is evident on Fuji Culls 2; while Haiku 1 shows the bites of hungry birds or squirrels. In contrast, Irving Penn’s colour photograph Wormy Apples (1985) is more a still life with the apples laid out in careful array on a light box contradictorily jewel-like.

Very few artists ever devoted themselves solely to still life, which was considered a minor genre in relation to history painting, portraiture, and landscape, though not without significance. For some it was a meditative way to work on aesthetic problems. Paul Cezanne, the great innovative modern painter, was the only artist who was consumed with making still-life paintings with apples. It should be noted that Cezanne had a classical education and was an intellect. As in Shapiro’s title, he analysed the aesthetic and social significance of still life for his art, and the primary significance of the artist’s selection of subject matter.
The scale of Dikeakos photographs might be referred to as easel size since most are 17 x 22 inches. His choice of scale takes in the viewer and makes the apples somewhat larger than life size – on the wall they almost appear as if a viewer could reach in and touch them. They are not super-sized but they are considerably larger than any photographic still life I will mention. Yet this essay about Dikeakos’ apples has not yet made reference to photographic still life, for which there is also a strong tradition since the medium’s beginning. It starts with Nicéphore Niépce in *The Set Table* from c. 1827, followed by Daguerre, Fox Talbot and others. Like most artists, photographers did not limit their practice to still life, though stillness aided the making of photographs in the medium’s first twenty years. In 1852 Henri Le Secq made a beautiful still life of apples, one of which still has its leaves and stem. It makes lovely serendipity with Dikeakos’ colour image *Late Fall Rains*, a clump of apples on the tree – apples and leaves in voluptuous colour. This image looks uncannily similar to the conceptualist Christopher Williams’ 2009 photograph in a German orchard. As part of Williams’ ongoing series, *For Example: Dix-Huit Leçons Sur La Société Industrielle*, his apple image (only one) takes on some of the meaning of production that Dikeakos pictures, but in a highly abstruse way.

Gable and Apples, dated 1922, photographed by Alfred Stieglitz, seems almost a fragment, a snapshot unusual for the time, with four apples dangling on branches against the triangle of the gable of his house. In 1939 he sent a print to his lover, Georgia O’Keeffe, since she had been there when he took the picture. Love, desire, gift and, for the moment, the beloved, like the apples, is out of reach. Dikeakos’ photographs of the spangle of Swiss Arlets or *Triage* might be seen to have similar tones of meaning. The arlets ripe and fallen. Or the artist’s play with three apples dangling against the snow so the *trois/trio* might receive triage: a beautiful image whose title makes a metaphor for the priority to save the apple economy. In this case, we see a major theme appearing in these photographs: to cherish what may be lost in this place.

The modernist photographer Paul Strand did make a few still lifes with apples, which carry the gravitas of Cezanne’s paintings. He also photographed the tree *Full Bloom*, in 1946, dazzling in black and white as if the blossoms were explosions of light. Another looks up from the tree to a New England clapboard house, at a time when there were family orchards. These days Dikeakos leases out his orchard to the care of others. Two Jeff Wall images show another artist’s work with still life. *A Sunflower*, from 1995, a kitchen still life scene; and *Fias and Sauce*, from 1999, a take-away container thrown on the street. Both seem to be found *in situ* already there. The beauty Dikeakos sees is everyday and not spectacular. *The Last Auroras*, dumped, shown in a panoramic view with his house on one side and the fertile valley on the other – a scene commercial and gritty where he lives.

Most photographs of apples one finds on the net are colour advertising shots. Paul Outerbridge, an important early colour photographer, made carbro colour prints and produced many for advertisements. The most relevant photograph for this essay is his *Waiting for Eve* from c. 1938: a bushel of apples with a black snake snaking over it. So obvious, its kitsch is a guffaw. His *Display of Food without the Brand Names*, dated 1937, is an array of fresh, tinned, and packaged foods. Consumption is what we buy rather than what we grow – a picture of the commercialization of food production. Dikeakos alludes to the commerce of apples with roadside signs: local apple cider in *Roadside Fruit Stand Kaleden No 1 Fruit Stand*; Local Ambrosia Apples; Keremeos 20 lb *Apples Sign*. These photographs keep snapping us back to the business of apple production in the Okanagan.
The apples of Dikeakos in *Nature Morte* do not look like they belong to the genre of still life. There is no collection of inanimate objects on a table – the most common place for still life. A still life is arranged by the artist and for specific allegorical and ideological meanings beyond a description, ‘this is an apple.’ Yet the photographer’s arrangement is his frame of what is already there. Dikeakos’ photographs are of apple trees, apples on the branch, apples on the ground. More like landscapes as in ‘views of what can be observed’ in the Okanagan, with a clear attitude to what has changed in apple production in the place to which he has been coming since a teenager. He uses the histories of art and of this specific place to layer meanings on his photographs.

So what are we to make of the title of Dikeakos’ exhibition, *Nature Morte*? The French for still life literally translates as *dead nature*. Yet the artist pictures lots of apples on the tree – trees and apples that are very much alive. The only still life is tongue in cheek – a tablecloth with prints of apples and other fruit. Dikeakos has put a two-dimensional still life on the table. But remember, he also photographed culls on the ground, a dumped spill, road signs for apple stands. The desired luscious and beautiful apple in its current context in the Okanagan signifies the artist’s lament – both nature alive and dying away. In the symbolism of the apple this contradiction runs through literature and art. Specifically here, in the Okanagan, the commercial economy of apples, often insufficiently profitable to pick, we see as culls, as unpicked fruit on the tree, or as food for neighboring donkeys. Signs of the declining economy of apples being literally uprooted in *Orchard Removal #64*, converting the land to more profitable crops. Advertising for wine rather than the apple has taken over Okanagan tourism. And this story forms an important subtext to these photographs.

“as the sweetapple reddens on a high branch
high on the highest branch and the applepickers forgot –
no, not forgot: were unable to reach” (translation by Anne Carson)

The poet and classicist uses this Sappho fragment as symbolic of the bittersweet Eros – as the reach, a lover’s desire for the loved whom she doesn’t have. So how delicious to metaphorically see a hint of the erotic where Dikeakos frames the picker reaching for golden apples. Carson teases out the philosophical problem of how similar “… the way Eros acts in the mind of the lover and the way knowing acts in the mind of the thinker.” A reach from what exists as lack of the loved one and for what is unknown for the thinker, both reach for what is possible. Dikeakos pursues the apple for knowledge, and towards poetry of picture making. In this sense his *Nature Morte* is the metaphor that holds two unlike ideas at once: living nature and approaching death, which run through this series of photographs.

Christos Dikeakos, *Three Arlet Apples and Table Cloth*, 2012, ink-jet photographs, overall dimensions 30 x 22 in. (76.2 x 55.9 cm)
**List of Works**

All works are ink-jet photographs unless otherwise noted. All works are in the collection of the artist.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adore with Apple Pie</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>17 x 22 in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apple Falls Corner Piece 1</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>23½ x 25½ in.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apple Falls Corner Piece 2</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>23½ x 25½ in.</td>
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<td>Apple Syll Damped Culls</td>
<td>2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arlet, Apple Falls (Homely)</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>18 x 22 in.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Art of Apple Picking Demonstration by Harry Naegle</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>video projection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fallen Apple Tree</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>10 x 19 in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Snowfall</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>18 x 22 in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frozen Single Red Delicious (Fruit Confit)</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>22 x 18 in.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harry Naegle Reaching Winter Banana Apple</td>
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<tr>
<td>Irrigation Sprinkler (In Snow)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Last of the Apple Bins, Penticton (panorama)</td>
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<td>The Last of the Aurora Reds</td>
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<td>19½ x 23½ in.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Late Blossoms</td>
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<td>19½ x 23½ in.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leaning</td>
<td>2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>Macintosh Tree Trunk</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nameless Apple Tree</td>
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<td>Orchard Snow Storm</td>
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<td>Roadside Fruit Stand, Kaleden (No 1 fruit stand)</td>
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<td>Snow</td>
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<td>Solo Fuji</td>
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<td>Solo Red Delicious 1 November Right Side</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solo Red Delicious 2 November Left Side</td>
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<td>Spartans and Mac Falls</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stacked Apple Crates (stairs)</td>
<td>2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stacked Apple Crates (wall)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tent Caterpillars</td>
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<td>Triage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Winter Banana Tree</td>
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<td>Non-photographic works</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frieze around top of gallery walls in text of names of apple varieties (taken from from the US patent registry for apple names), 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Selection of vintage apple box labels from the collection of the artist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arrangement of old apple boxes (on kind loan from Jim Forsythe, Penticton) in a Donald Judd-like wall work</td>
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**Selected Biography**

**Christos Dikeakos**

- **Born**: 1946, Thessaloniki, Greece
- **Lives and works in**: Vancouver

**Education**

- **1970**: BFA, University of British Columbia, Vancouver

**Selected Solo Exhibitions**

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1973    Canada Traiteurs 73, Musée d’art moderne de la ville de Paris, France.
1978    West Coast Visions, Vancouver Art Gallery.

1972    Art Prévu, Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver.

1971    College Slow, Fine Arts University, British Columbia, Vancouver.

1970    Image Book Postcard Show, Fine Arts University, University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

1969    Tokiwa Gallery, Tokyo.

1969    Image 7: B.C. Almanac, National Film Board, Ottawa.


1990    "Don’t ask what these collages mean," in Artscanada, 2009.


Theriault, Norman. “45.30’ N73.36’ Inventory,” La Presse (Montreal), February 6, 1971.


Published Writings by the Artist


Public Art Commissions

2000 The Lookout, produced in collaboration with Noel Best, False Creek, Vancouver

Selected Public Collections

Morriss and Helen Belkin Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver

Canada Council Art Bank, Ottawa

Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Ottawa

Kelowna Art Gallery, Kelowna, BC

Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

Museum of Canadian Contemporary Art, Toronto

National Gallery of Canada

Oakville Galleries, Oakville, Ontario

Surrey Art Gallery, Surrey, BC

Utah Museum of Fine Arts, Salt Lake City, Utah

Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver

The Venner Museum of Contemporary Greek Art, Patania, Greece

Selected Corporate Collections

Microsoft collection, Seattle, Washington

Christos Dikeakos’ work is represented by the Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver.

Christos Dikeakos, Roadside Fruit Stand, Kaleden (No 1 fruit stand), 2011, ink-jet photograph, 17 x 22 in. (43.2 x 55.9 cm)
Claudia Beck

Claudia Beck lives and works in Vancouver. She and Andrew Gruft founded NOVA Gallery in 1976 to exhibit and foster the collecting of photographs. It became a pioneering practice and began their longstanding support of artists, curators and writers. They closed NOVA in 1982. Among the too-many-to-be-named photographers they showed were Fox Talbot, Hill and Adamson, Baldus, Fenton, Dally, and JM Cameron, all from the nineteenth century; and Stieglitz, Tina Modotti, Weston, and Walker Evans, who all worked in the earlier twentieth century; and contemporary artists including Robert Frank, Eleanor Antin, NE Thing Co, MP Bancroft, Ian Wallace, Jeff Wall, and Rodney Graham.

Beck refers to herself as an art maven and advocate for artists. Occasionally she has taken on curatorial projects. Her ideas and bodily relation to contemporary art are now figured in forms of essay writing. These include essays on: Shelagh Keeley, the films of Danny Lyon, projects by Marian Penner Bancroft, Sorel Cohen, the sculptural arrangements of Christina Mackie, and film work of Fiona Tan; and a variety of works of fiction. She currently serves on the Board of the Vancouver Art Gallery, is past chair of their acquisition committee, and is a member of the Getty Museum Photograph Council.

Harold Rhenisch

Harold Rhenisch was raised on a prominent orchard in the Similkameen and has worked on orchards, vineyards and nurseries throughout the Okanagan. He grafted some of the first Ambrosia apples and did much of the early grafting of Fuji, Royal Gala, Jonagold and Braeburn apples in the South Okanagan and the Similkameen, before leaving for the Cariboo in 1992. He was the inaugural Okanagan Regional Library Writer in Residence (2014) in Vernon. His essay on cider pears, A Recipe for Perry, was published by the Okanagan Institute in 2011. His stories of pilgrimage on the Northern Camino through East Germany appear regularly in Kelowna’s Saging Magazine. Rhenisch is the author of twenty-five books including eleven books of poetry and six books of literary and environmental nonfiction, including the Okanagan classic Out of the Interior, a pioneering work of B.C. Creative Nonfiction Writing. He has won many prizes for his work, including the George Ryga Prize for Social Responsibility in B.C. Literature. In early 2013 he was writer in residence at Skriduklaustur, Iceland. He is working on a book about cool-climate winemaking and writes the daily environmental blog www.okanaganokanagan.com, in celebration of his homecoming to the Okanagan after a twenty-year walkabout.

Jeff Wall

Jeff Wall is a senior Vancouver-based artist who has achieved international acclaim for his large-format photographic works, usually colour, back-lit transparencies. Wall received an MA in art history at UBC in 1970 and proceeded to study in London, England, at the Courtauld Institute. For the last thirty years he has exhibited internationally in both solo and group exhibitions. He was given a survey exhibition at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels in 2011. The recipient of numerous awards, Wall was named as an Officer of the Order of Canada in 2007, and received the Audain Prize for lifetime achievement in the visual arts in British Columbia in 2008. His work is represented by the Marian Goodman Gallery in New York.

Liz Wylie

Liz Wylie has been curator of the Kelowna Art Gallery since 2007. Previously she held the position of University of Toronto Art Curator for eleven years. As well as her work as a curator, she has been writing reviews and articles on contemporary and historical Canadian art since 1977. In 2009 Wylie launched the programming of a new forty-foot-long satellite gallery space at the Kelowna International Airport with six-month-long solo installations of work by Okanagan artists. Her recent publications include monographs on Canadian artists Keith Langergraber, Keith Harder, John Hartman, and Bill Rodgers. Wylie holds an MFA in art history from Concordia University in Montreal. She is a past president of the Ontario Association of Art Galleries.