

Slow motion gives gestures new meaning

Arts Scene

by Heather Solomon

Sylvia Safdie turns her curled-up body into a submerged stone in her solo show *Body – Transforming – Gesture* on until Dec. 19 at Galerie Joyce Yahouda, 372 St. Catherine W., Suite 516.

To do this, she videoed herself in a fetal yoga position that she uses as a relaxation exercise, and superimposed it with another video of a running stream filmed in Memphremagog, one of her favourite getaway destinations.

In *Body/Stone/Water* she cyclically fades from view and then returns, the flesh adopting the granite texture of the real boulder that sits in the stream under constant erosion.

"I always thought that particular stone resembled a body so I took the form of that stone," Safdie says.

A second similarly superimposed film shown in a loop with the first, has her very slowly unfolding her arms and legs as the sun writes like calligraphy on surface ripples.

"There's something very soothing about it. You think you're being purified," says the artist. Viewers may sit on a bench in front of the projected images to drain away their own tensions.

But it cannot be mistaken for a simple relaxation tool. The installation expresses the metamorphosis and transformation of humanity as part of the larger macrocosm of nature.

What especially interests Safdie are the small nuances of movement, and in bringing these forward, she helps the viewer to "really feel everything that's going on."

One can also extrapolate one's own meaning from such images, as she proves with her *Morning in Varanasi* video.

In it, two shadowy figures moving in infinitesimal slow motion increments interact in the distance on what may be a beach or an expanse of desert. One is on the ground and the other is upright.

Is the prone man resting and is his companion waiting for him to continue their stroll? Is something more sinister happening with the standing figure looming over a fallen opponent?

A third figure farther away edges across the horizon line, marking time. Sky, earth and people become the ingredients for a

mysterious narrative.

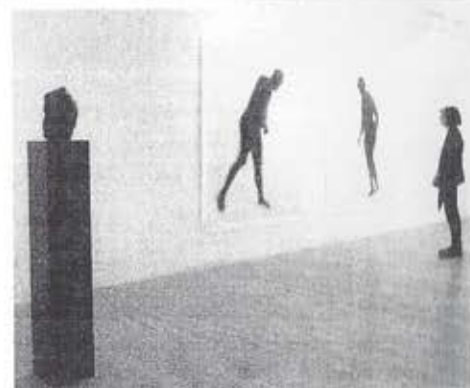
"I always have the sense that I am a vessel in which something comes into being. Once you exhibit a work, you let it go and it's open to all kinds of interpretations. That's what's exciting," Safdie says.

She instigated this series early one morning in Varanasi, India, when she "went out on the rooftop of the hotel where I was staying, and by chance, I saw across the river a scene of two little figures, so tiny in my viewfinder that I could hardly make out what they were doing," Safdie said.

"They reminded me of the little earth figures I've been drawing and painting for years that captured gestures with the slightest amount of information. We leave millions of gestures behind us. We're constantly in motion and transforming."

Safdie captures transformation by keeping the video camera still and waiting to see what moves into the frame rather than following with the camera.

The artist enhances the notion of gestures in time by including large-format inkjet prints, stills from the Varanasi video. The *Body Series* works have been blown up and manipulated so that they resemble huge charcoal shadows, some



Sylvia Safdie stands in Galerie Joyce Yahouda with her *Body Series* and some of her *Bronze Heads* sculptures. PATRICK ANDREW BOIVIN PHOTO

cropped to just a head turned toward the viewer.

The *Long View Series* has smaller panoramic stills tracking the walking figure across the top of the paper while the two others morph in the foreground.

Rounding out the show are some of Safdie's sculptures from the *Bronze Heads Series*, bronzed real rocks that resemble human heads as suggestive as the Varanasi figures.

She's been collecting such rocks since her childhood in Israel, later building an inventory for inspiration in her Montreal studio.

"Now I'm collecting images, moments in time and space rather than objects," she says. For gallery hours go to www.joyceyahoudagallery.com. ■