



Ann & Marshall Webb

Toronto collectors Ann and Marshall Webb have an enviable track record of zeroing in on important artists before they attain international acclaim. “We collect our contemporaries—local, national or international, it’s really about being in touch with living artists who open up the world to us,” says Ann. She’s executive director of the Canadian Art Foundation; Marshall is a teacher at Upper Canada College and a private art advisor. They met in the ‘80s in the Toronto gallery where Ann was working, and possessed a shared sensibility and taste from the start. “We can walk into a gallery separately and both choose the same work,” Ann says, laughing.

The couple’s compact home has been renovated to showcase cutting-edge art throughout. A gallery on the top floor houses their remarkable sculpture and multimedia collection, a core sample of art of the past 20 years. Every couple of years, the Webbs completely overhaul this carefully curated installation. Swapped-out works go into storage until it makes sense to reintegrate them. “We definitely don’t collect for the walls. We collect for our lives,” says Marshall.

The couple’s prescient collection of early photo-based works by Bernd and Hilla Becher and their students at the Düsseldorf Art Academy, including future superstars Andreas Gursky and Thomas Ruff, was exhibited by the Art Gallery of York University in 1989. “If the photos were not German, in those days, we wouldn’t look at them,” says Marshall. “Now, we’re much more interested in sculpture, installations and paintings.” Currently, the collection focuses on mixed-media art incorporating everyday found objects.

One example is Vancouver artist Geoffrey Farmer’s *Streak of Light* (2001–2007), an installation featuring a stack of partially blank sheets of newsprint on

the floor beside an overturned newspaper box. Lift the rock that holds down the papers and you will find “Streak of Light” printed in small letters on each sheet. Honouring individuals who engage in public discourse, it alludes to an anonymous guest opinion column of the same title that appeared in an underground German newspaper. The covered area remains true to the printed text, while the area not covered by the rock is now yellowed from exposure to light.

While the Webbs favour works with conceptual or literary underpinnings, “we’re also drawn to the ephemeral,” says Ann. “Sometimes, we’re more interested in what isn’t there.” Oona Stern’s *The Sound of Grass Growing* (2009) is an irregular-shaped white wool area rug with raised, green grass-like patches. Custom-configured for their space, it comes with an ambient soundtrack featuring crickets and other nature sounds.

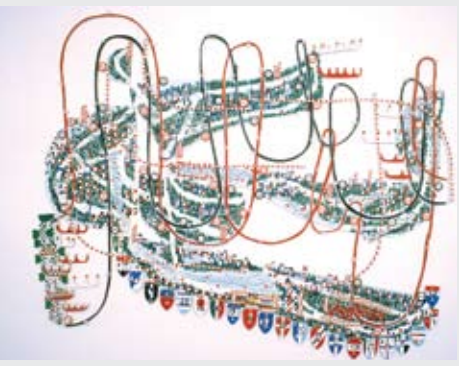
Also featured prominently is the work of Nathan Carter, a 39-year-old New York-based artist. “We were so attracted to his tactility after living with photo-based works,” says Marshall. Based on Carter’s travels from Venice to Basel, his sprawling wall relief titled *Radio Free Sarajevo is Reporting Anticyclonic Gloom 6 Becoming Gale 9 Visibility Moderate* (2003) features relief recre-



ations of subway routes, maps, logos and national flags. The Webbs also have two large collages by Carter.

While emerging artists are integral, they’ve also acquired pieces by influential senior artists including James Lee Byars, Marcel Broodthaers, Lawrence Weiner, Ian Wallace and Matt Mullican. The Webbs are most definite about the centrality of Canadian talent to their holdings. Marshall adds, “We do not collect according to nationality or gender. Our context is international, and Canadians are part of this context.” »

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT: MIT GEPÄCK FLÜCHTEN, 2007, BY MIRIAM CAHN; RADIO FREE SARAJEVO IS REPORTING ANTICYCLONIC GLOOM 6 BECOMING GALE 9 VISIBILITY MODERATE, 2003, BY NATHAN CARTER; STREAK OF LIGHT, 2001–2007, BY GEOFFREY FARMER



ANN WEBB PROJECTS AFTER FIVE YEARS OF LIVING, 2005, BY KOENRAAD DEDOBDELEER, AS MARSHALL WEBB SITS ON THE SOUND OF GRASS GROWING, 2009, BY OONA STERN. ON THE WALL IS ABLAGE (STUDIO), 2008, BY MATTHIAS ZINN, WHILE NEST #1, 1997, BY SIOBHAN LIDDELL, HANGS ABOVE. INSET: UNTITLED, 2002, BY SHARY BOYLE

PHOTOGRAPHY: ANN AND MARSHALL WEBB AND UNTITLED BY LEE TOWNDRON; MIT GEPÄCK FLÜCHTEN COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND MEYER RIEGGER GALLERY; STREAK OF LIGHT COURTESY OF CATALIONA JEFFRIES GALLERY; RADIO FREE SARAJEVO... COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND CASEY KAPLAN