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May 10, 2005

The blogger's blogger: an interview with Marja-Leena Rathje



"Nexus VI", Etching 75 x 56.5 cm.
Marja-Leena Rathje

Finnish-Canadian artist **Marja-Leena Rathje** is a **blogger's blogger** who uses her blog as an online showcase for her **exquisite prints**, a past/present blend of the organic and archeological, with personal reflections about culture and artistic process. Rathje also shares a variety of research subjects that inform her work including anthropology, archaeology and Finnish history. In her own words:



"I was born in Finland, and emigrated to Canada as a child. I've been an artist all my life, with a passion for printmaking for over 20 years. I started using the computer in 1998 as one tool in my artmaking. My Finnish roots became of greater interest in recent years with so much new material appearing on the internet - history, ethnology, archaeology, ancient rock art, far north cultures around the globe."

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MM: Why do you blog?

ML: When my friends and I were preparing for our exhibition in Finland in 2002, a friend made a website, [Traces](#), to accompany it. Afterwards I asked if he could develop a full artist's site for me. Busy with his growing career, he eventually suggested I do a blog, which would bring a great deal more traffic to my site than a regular website. My reaction was "what's a blog?" and "what am I going to write about?" Another friend set me up with one, teaching me the basics and left me to practice it for a while. I searched for and studied other blogs that interested me - chandrasutra was one of them. After three months I felt ready, and February 2002 it was launched, a bit timidly at first but quickly becoming a passion. The blog is a place to put up my work, to write about printmaking, other artists and exhibitions, and about the many things that interest and influence me and make me the person, and therefore, the artist that I am. It is a place to keep all the fascinating information that I have gathered over the years and still keep finding. Writing has helped me focus my thoughts, though finding the right words, being more articulate, continues to be challenge. It is another creative project, a form of self-publishing, with a unique world-wide audience, often silent, but with a few voices responding and making it all so very worthwhile and satisfying.

MM: Where do you find your inspiration?

ML: From life past and present, my work, from other bloggers, from my research. Sometimes I seem to go off on a tangent, off the topic of art, when inspired by some light-hearted stuff, like Christmas or May Day, but I realize that it's really another part of this life that interests me, that I want to know more about and makes me the person and artist that I am. Recording it and sharing it all on a blog is an exciting process for me, far more in-depth than a few scribbles in my sketchbook.

MM: What blogs do you read and why do you like those blogs?

ML: I read a variety of blogs and the most read ones are on my blogroll. Some have become dear friends that one likes to visit every day, and I'll mention just a few here. Among artist's blogs, [Anna Conti's Working Artist's Journal](#) is my favourite. I also really enjoy the linguistic challenge (my Finnish is a little rusty) of reading the well-known Finnish printmaker Kirsi Neuvonen's excellent blog [Kuparipelto](#) (Copperfield) that just started in February this year. (She has a separate [website](#) for her work that is also in English.) I continue to be surprised there are not more artist's blogs though more are slowly appearing. Naturally there are numerous wonderful writer's blogs, two favourites are Beth's [The Cassandra Pages](#) for her articulate and wise writing about many human issues, multiculturalism, daily life and because she is a lover of art and Anna Scott's

work

Writing

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- Tricycle Magazine blog
- ZeD

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- Blogosphereradio
- Air America Radio
- NPR
- BBC World Service
- CBC Radio ONE

ACTIVATE

- Adbusters
- Amnesty
- Anti Racism (and more)
- Boreal Forest Network
- Bush Greenwatch
- Buzzflash

Self-Winding for her wit and humour about English country life and her love of art and literature. Both have been very appreciative of my art work and have become friends. Of course there are many more, like yours, and Ronni Bennett's **Time Goes By**, and the photography & politics blog of **Gordon Coale**.

MM: Many Big Media journalists have attempted to discredit blogger by saying we're "diarists" and questioning our "credibility" etc. what do you say to that?

ML: I think some of the Big Media journalists, constrained by their owners' right wing agendas, may feel threatened by the free speech of bloggers, especially in the area of politics and world affairs. These bloggers are very important in keeping news open and available, whether it's the girl in Iraq or independent journalists who write blogs (many are quoted in Gordon Coale's blog). There's a growing loss of readership from hard copy to online. A sign of change are The Guardian and **Tyee** here on the Canadian westcoast that have embraced blogging with news.

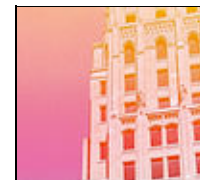
When treated, some lash out at competition unfairly. Yet there are diarists of the frivolous kind out there, and so let them be. But there are a huge variety of blogs of all descriptions and worthiness, and that is the strength of this medium. It's growing and even changing but it's not going away. Blogging has allowed free speech that is read by many thousands around the world. It blew me away when I first learned my blog has readers around the world and I even get emails from around the world!

MM: Beyond blogging vs. journalism. Bloggers need to get rid of Big Media frames and frame blogs in our own terms. To that end, what are the frames we can use to define blogging/participatory media according to our own terms?

ML: As a non-techie, I don't understand this question, even after a lot of thought. Basically, I think bloggers can do and are doing as they wish, the heck with what Big Media says. Blogs are only one of many new media emerging and changing our world.

MM: What are your "desert island" 3 favourite/most important posts of all time?

ML: Blogs are daily changing, transitory, and of such variety - how can I just pick a page here or there to take with me? However I can see a personal use in taking my portfolio of printworks. It has become a great resource for me when I want to look up some of my work for information or to refresh my memory or show someone quickly. I sometimes reuse older images in new works, in new ways, so I'm always looking out for some new connections. Going online is sure a lot faster than getting out the slide projector or pulling prints out of storage, and you can't take them with you to a desert island. But does that desert island have wireless internet? Oh,



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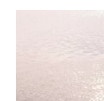
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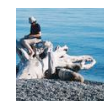
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LAUGH

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and I don't have a portable!

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Comments

Mel, this is such a wonderful series of interviews and I am so very honoured and thrilled to be included amongst such distinguished bloggers! I hope Big Media takes note.

Posted by: Marja-Leena | May 11, 2005 02:57 AM

How wonderful to both read about and SEE my friend Marja-Leena here! I'm glad you asked for photos, Mel. What Marja-Leena says here underscores the diversity and value of blogs in categories other than the usual (as discussed in the Chandrasutra post for today). It's clear from reading Marja-Leena's blog how much her art journey has been enhanced by blogging, but it's also proof that much of art is about sharing one's passions and inspirations with others, as she does so consistently.

Posted by: beth | May 12, 2005 09:18 AM

Re: "Many Big Media journalists have attempted to discredit blogger by saying we're "diarists" and questioning our "credibility"

Q: What do you call a person who writes a journal?

A: A Journalist!!!!

Posted by: Kelley Bell | May 12, 2005 06:01 PM

Yes, I've pointed this one out many times. For people who get paid to work with words many journalists fail to see the very naked projection they're revealing when they dis bloggers.

My own theory about those journalists who attack bloggers (and I stress "those" - because not all journalists, especially the really talented ones, are threatened or bothered by blogging - many are actually quite taken with it as yet another form for their expression) is that they probably, at some point in their career, experienced the sting of academic criticism for glossy research and superficial analysis. It's classic projection. Interestingly enough, there are a great many academics blogging and many of their blogs are better

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researched and more insightful than most commercial journalism. I think blogging has posed a very useful challenge to old media and commercial journalism. I hope that the journalists will take up the challenge. Some of them already have - they, the talented ones, know that they have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

Posted by: Mel | May 12, 2005 06:38 PM

Interesting to delve into Marja-Leena's motivation (and to see her face for the first time). No disappointment on either score.

She has prompted me to many new thoughts and ideas through her writing; her growing audience quite evidently values the same qualities. Thank-you for this chance to know her a little better.

Posted by: Anna | May 12, 2005 11:09 PM

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