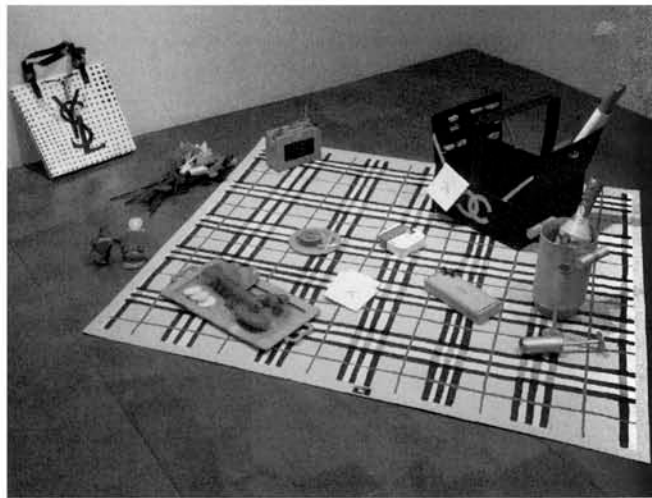




Edward Burtynsky, *Rock of Ages #15, Active Granite Section, E. L. Smith Quarry, Barre, Vermont, 1992*, color photograph, 40 x 50".



Libby Black, *Picnic Set, 2005*, paper, glue, and acrylic, dimensions variable.

sources, including Earthworks, early landscape photography, luminist painting, and even the intensely colored photographs of unpeopled forests that grace the publications of the environmentalist Sierra Club. Burtynsky captures a kind of wonder at the discovery of places that most people never see, but though the images pack an aesthetic punch, they also have powerful political implications.

One of the surprises of "Manufactured Landscapes: The Photographs of Edward Burtynsky" was its chronological breadth—the artist has been working on this project for decades. Organized by the National Gallery of Canada and shown at Stanford University's Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts in condensed form, the show contained images made between 1984 and 2002. These consistently striking works are characterized by a tone of shock and awe that's tempered by hard-edged beauty. They show that capitalism's impact on the planet over the past two decades has been consistently detrimental—a theme with which the artist has persisted in more recent images of China, not shown here. As the effects of global warming and our accelerating consumption of natural resources grow daily more apparent, Burtynsky's pictures serve as bracing reminders that "progress" is invariably shadowed by ecological degradation.

Included in the exhibition were a few examples from each of the artist's other well-known series—shots of mines and quarries in Vermont, Ontario, and Carrara, Italy; oil fields and refineries in Ontario and California; automotive-waste dumps (or "urban mines," as Burtynsky calls them) in the U.S. and Canada; and Bangladeshi workers breaking down decommissioned

ships. These were displayed in a compact gallery with low lighting and muted gray walls, which suggested the presentation of a formalized history. The knowledge that Leland Stanford Sr., the university's cofounder, was a railroad baron who made part of his fortune by dealing with Gold Rush miners, and had flip-flopping policies on immigrant labor, added to the complexity of the show.

But as all this visual and verbal information, some of which was communicated in a videotaped interview with the artist, compounded itself, it became increasingly difficult to know how to respond to the work. How, for example, should one approach *Nickel Tailings #34, Sudbury, Ontario*, and *Nickel Tailings #35, Sudbury, Ontario* (both 1996), a memorably dramatic diptych that shows rivers polluted to a glowing, lavalike orange, a visually stunning but nonetheless poisonous result of nickel mining? The scenes are at once seductive and repellent, a condition common in Burtynsky's oeuvre. Such images are formally assured, but their underlying subjects and intentions remain, productively, problematic.

—Glen Helfand

## PALO ALTO, CA

### EDWARD BURTYNSKY

IRIS AND B. GERALD CANTOR  
CENTER FOR VISUAL ARTS,  
STANFORD UNIVERSITY

Uncomfortable ironies abound in Canadian artist Edward Burtynsky's large color photographs of ravaged natural terrain. Burtynsky's subjects have consistently been landscapes in which the process of industrialization has resulted in spectacles that dwarf the likes of Michael Heizer's sprawling *City, 1970–99*. Burtynsky's work is undeniably gorgeous yet maintains connections to the documentary. It is also invested with a sense of adventure and achievement: The photography of dangerous places tends to necessitate the negotiation of corporate bureaucracy as well as some tricky outdoor navigation. And although his images can read as the creations of a political environmentalist akin to Robert Adams, Burtynsky nonetheless maintains an interest in art-historical