

CRISIS OF NARRATIVE

Adrian Gorea • Aditi Ohri • Stephanie Raudsepp • Solafa Rawas • Alisi Telengut

To raise the question of the nature of narrative is to invite reflection on the very nature of culture and, possibly, even on the nature of humanity itself. So natural is the impulse to narrate, so inevitable is the form of narrative for any report on the way things really happened, that narrativity could appear problematical only in a culture in which it was absent...

- Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987) 1.

This exhibition seeks to investigate the role of narrative in the representation and definition of reality. More specifically, it explores the function of narrative in the transmission of knowledge and its negotiation of issues of place, identity, gender, history, hegemony, and representation within the visual arts. Narrative represents systematic ways for articulating knowledge. "Even when we look at something as static and as completely spatial as a picture," author H. Porter Abbott writes, "narrative consciousness comes into play."ⁱ As taxonomical, static definitions, grand narratives perpetuate the dichotomies that inform power hierarchies, thus producing an oppressive relationship between dogmatic narratives and the realities of cultural pluralism. The works in this exhibition respond to this crisis of narrative wrought by exclusory institutional discourses upon which many of our contemporary social and cultural systems are founded.

Narrative seen in this way moves towards encompassing the heterogeneity of knowledge. The varied works and strategies deployed by the five Concordia students presented here, feature diverse voices that critique narrative as a "discursive reproduction of power, abuse and social inequality."ⁱⁱ Rather, they express negotiations of the struggle to articulate cultural identities.

ⁱ H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 6.

ⁱⁱ Teun A. van Dijk, *Discourse and Power* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 1.

EAHR Curators: Carolina Garcia Amatos • Cécile Charvet • Samantha Wexler • Rajee Jejishergill • Adrienne Johnson • Katerina Korola • Sara Catherine de Montigny Racher • Genevieve Wallen • Brittany Watson

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Adrian Gorea

Byzantine symphony

2011

Gold, Silver, Copper leaf, Pen and Ink on Paper

1.12m x 55cm

Using Byzantine iconography Adrian Gorea's *Byzantine symphony* creates a narrative that is both sacred as well as unexpectedly profane. The world depicted is neither entirely realistic nor completely imaginary. The insertion of popular media icons like Looney Toons characters in the space traditionally reserved for religious figures provokes a crisis in the dichotomy of the sacred and secular. The viewer, whose expectations are shocked by the appearance of these pop icons, must reconsider the boundary between these antimonies. The narrative of the film demands that the viewer question the role of both pop and religious icons in contemporary society. Do the pop icons represent religious figures? Have religious figures been transformed into popular icons through repetitive representation?

Drawing on the aesthetic of the mosaic medium so emblematic of Byzantine artistic production, the faces of these figures are rendered as though constructed from assembled fragments. Their bodies, which appear contorted, further emphasize the off kilter feeling of the work, revealing the clash between the narratives of pop culture and religious iconography.

— SAMANTHA WEXLER

Stephanie Raudsepp

The [Blank] Exhibition Catalogue

2013

Various handmade papers, thread, ink-jet printing, photocorners, duct tape

Book 1: 9" x 12" x 1/2"

Book 2: 8" x 10"

Catalogues are often regarded as mere secondary resources next to the artworks featured in an exhibition. A self-taught book-binder and multi-media artist, Concordia MFA artist Stephanie Raudsepp is frustrated by this marginalization of the book. "For me, books are artworks," she states, articulating the driving concern of this project. *The [Blank] Exhibition Catalogue* elevates the book to the status of art object. The exhibition catalogue, which functions as a link between the art world and the public, is an interactive artifact that bridges these two worlds that are often regarded as separate spheres. In an effort to combat the distance between the art world and general public, Raudsepp offers her viewer the opportunity to walk

in the curator's shoes, choosing what will be included in the exhibition catalogue and expressing their own opinions and understandings of art. The piece comprises three elements: a hand-made book/catalogue that relates the history, propriety, and essence of exhibition catalogues; a blank version of the catalogue; and an instruction sheet. The viewer (you!) is invited to participate by filling in the blank pages of the catalogue. What do you have to say about art?

— CÉCILE CHARVET

Alisi Telengut
Tengri
2012
Digital Film 16:9
5:47 min.

Tengri by Alisi Telengut comprises a sequence of hand painted frames animated at the speed of 24 frames per second. These hand-crafted scenes, complimented by the addition and removal of colours within each frame, generate a visual vocabulary for the narration of the Mongolian nomadic experience. In Mongolia, harsh climate conditions have led nomadic communities to develop a unique culture and lifestyle that is centuries old. Today, however, this culture is threatened by climate change, the introduction of new technology, and the development of modern cities. This culture in crisis is the subject of *Tengri*, which testifies to the persistence of Mongolian nomadic lifestyle and traditional Shamanic beliefs.

The Turkic word "Tengri" refers to the heavens, as well as to the primary deity of nature that has been worshipped by Mongolian and Turkic peoples. Within traditional Mongolian spirituality, when a person dies, it is believed that the wind spirit guides that person's soul to ascend to the cradle of father heaven. While *Tengri* can be read as an homage to Mongolian rituals and a nomadic lifestyle on the verge of disappearing, it also speaks to intergenerational transmission. Telengut grew up hearing stories about her grandparents' lives as Mongolian nomads, and this film testifies to the power of such stories on the diasporic subject.

— SARAH CATHERINE DE MONTIGNY RACHER &
RAJEE PANA JEJI SHERGILL

Solafa Rawas
Sand face (from the sand box series)
2013
Sand, plastic, paint, wood
28 ½" x 19 ½" x 36"

Through the context of a sand box, an object and site of childhood play, Rawas's *Sand face*, a sculpture from her "Sand box series," presents layered explorations into temporality and memory through the medium of sand. Rawas's work draws attention to the delicacy and fragility of this natural material. In the words of the artist: "Sand need be touched only lightly and already traces are left behind even if one draws only a few random lines with one's fingers. The precision with which the grains of sand react to the slightest movement or rearrangement create atmosphere of attentiveness. Sand behaves like a very sensitive receiving device that records the slightest influence with total accuracy, as if a million grains of sand were ready and 'listening'."

The capacity for narrative, therefore, is not exclusive to human beings but intrinsic to a vast variety beings, objects, and substances. For Rawas, an artist whose formal training is in medicine, sand has potential as both a therapeutic medium and a means of artistic expression.

Through this sculpture, Rawas uses sand and its physical transformations to explore the subconscious, its relationship to identity, and the fragility of time and memory.

— ADRIENNE JOHNSON

Aditi Ohri
Modern Style Sari
2012
Video
4 mins.

Modern Style Sari articulates the questions and uncertainties involved in the inhabiting of a "dual-identity." Aditi Ohri's efforts to wrap a sari perfectly position her body as a site of social investigation. It is on this site that Ohri attempts to destabilize the dichotomy of tradition vs. modernity, a structural opposition which reveals itself as inadequate when considering the complex negotiations of identity that lie beneath the essentialist notion of the cultural "other." Through this video performance, the artist explores how her "Indianness" interacts with and disturbs her sense of "Canadianness" and vice versa. Through the self-reflexive process of video documentation, Ohri highlights the cultural signifiers which mark her as an exotic "other" within the Canadian discourse. At the same time, however, this piece also allows for the creation of a new

space wherein which Ohri allows herself to be reconciled to her own ambiguous cultural duality. By performing her Indian cultural heritage, the artist leads the viewers to consider the constant renegotiation of identity engaged in by diasporic subjects, for whom identity is often constructed from the fragments of diverse cultural signifiers.

— GENEVIÈVE WALLEN