

*MAPPING CULTURAL BELONGING*  
15-MARCH-15APRIL, 2012

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

***Mapping Cultural Belonging*** – An exhibition that examines the construction of the self through in a globalized digital age, where culture is no longer defined by territorial boundaries.

Featuring works by Shahrzad Amin, Hans Bobanovits, Kandis Friesen, Keivan Khademi Shamami, Ronak Kordestani, and Cardy Lai.

Please join us for the vernissage and artist talk for ***Mapping Cultural Belonging***, on **Tuesday March 20<sup>th</sup> 2012**, from **4:00 – 5:30 pm** in room **EV-3.760**. The exhibition is presented in the Vitrine of the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the EV building from March 15 – April 15, 2012.

This exhibition examines the construction of the self through language, place and policy. In a globalized digital age, culture is no longer defined by territorial boundaries but through the intersection of multiple histories. The works in this exhibition are the products of six Concordia undergraduate students, and they express how each artist negotiates belonging to their family, ancestry, and city of residence. The works engage in the struggle to articulate linguistic and cultural identities. They transcend physical and geographical boundaries by means of adaptation, transnationalism and hybridity.

***Mapping Cultural Belonging*** is curated by EAHR (Ethnocultural Art Histories Research work group), a 100% student-driven work group that engages with issues of cultural representation in the visual arts. The curatorial team is comprised of eleven EAHR members currently studying Art History and/or Fine Arts. The exhibition meets the pedagogical requirements of Dr. Alice Ming Wai Jim's art history course, ARTH 389 (Issues in Ethnocultural Art Histories: Race, Citizenship and Art in Canada). It also provides an opportunity for undergraduate students to gain professional experience showing their artwork.

For more information on *Mapping Cultural Belonging* please contact EAHR coordinators Adrienne Johnson and Sally Lee and at [ethnoculturalarts@gmail.com](mailto:ethnoculturalarts@gmail.com)

EAHR's activities are made possible by the financial support of The Gail and Stephen A. Jarislowsky Institute for Studies in Canadian Art and the Department of Art History at Concordia University.

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Ethnocultural Art Histories Research  
A 100% student-driven workgroup

# Mapping Cultural Belonging

Shahrzad Amin • Hans Bobanovits • Kandis Friesen  
Keivan Khademi Shaman • Ronak Kordestani • Cardy Lai

This exhibition examines the construction of the self through language, place and policy. In a globalized digital age, culture is no longer defined by the boundaries of territory but by the integration of multiple perceptions and constructions of the self. The varied works and strategies deployed by six Concordia undergraduate students express how they negotiate the relationship of belonging to their family, ancestry, and city of residence. The works engage in the struggle to articulate linguistic and cultural identities. They transcend physical and geographical boundaries by means of adaptation, transnationalism and hybridity.

In his renowned book *Imagined Communities* (1983), Benedict Anderson argues that language creates a community through the possibility of shared communication. Some questions proposed in this exhibition include: *How does multilingualism alter communication? In what ways is language racialized? Does language produce multiple identities? Does one's milieu change one's ability to communicate?* Linguistic tension generates a cultural preoccupation wherein the representation of the self is restricted to perform in a private sphere. Quebec has been described as a place of cultural convergence because of political histories dictating an obligation for immigrants to adopt the French language. The province thus breeds culturally-hybridized identities due to the use of multiple languages that may allow access into a new community. However, this adaptation may also occasion a loss, particularly for second-generation members of diasporic communities. This sense of loss is palpable throughout the vitrine exhibition.

Canadian multiculturalism has been a central discourse in the understanding and managing of ethnocultural diversity. How do the ideals of policy manifest in the lived experiences of individuals negotiating immigration, language debates, and the red tape of Canadian citizenship? While the nation's official languages are French and English, Canada as a country is comprised of a plethora of ethnic and indigenous groups. Since the legislation of Bill 101 passed in 1977, linguistic power structures in Quebec have been constantly renegotiated. In Montreal, where both English and French have dynamic currencies, ambiguity around a dominant monolingual culture foments awareness of language-use. While the Government's policy of multiculturalism does not reflect this multiplicity of identities, the works in "Mapping Cultural Belongings" attempt to bring this discussion forward.

Carolina Garcia Amatos • Katerina Korola • Adrienne Johnson • Sally Lee • Hearyung Kim • Rajee Jejjishergill •  
Marlee Parsons • Emma Siemens-Adolphe • Genevieve Wallen • Brittany Watson

*Sponsored by the Gail and Stephen A. Jarislowsky Institute for the Study of Canadian Art*

Shahrzad Amin

**Why are we Alone?**

2012

Clay and wood, 72 x 28 x 18cm.

This sculpture features three clay figurines that sit anonymous and isolated around a wooden slab. Without any markers of gender or ethnicity, the figures are in the act of writing their identities upon their own bodies. Exploring the means by which human beings define themselves and one another, the artist posits language as the key marker of identity. Words written in Farsi, the artist's native language, connects the group across the gulfs of space that separate them. Language here writes meaning onto the figures but it also isolates them. The secret of their text is visible on their skin but ultimately incommunicable, reflecting the challenges met by immigrants upon arrival in Canada. Cast adrift in undefined space, the figurines embody the tension between identity and participation, a dilemma which must be negotiated by all those whose histories have been marked by migration.

— KATERINA KOROLA



Hans Bobanovits

**Bagage C.**

2012

Video, 5 min 58 sec.

This video articulates the anxiety and uncertainties found within the discourse of cultural identity. Specifically, it delineates the concerns of individuals who physically embody the results of migration and cross-cultural encounters. The artist explores the impact of cultural hybridity on one's character through a highly-charged and self-reflexive conversation. The artist immigrated to Canada at age thirteen, a particularly critical time of youth. French-born, to an Armenian mother and a half-French, half-Hungarian father, and very fond of Japanese culture, the French-born and Canadian permanent resident artist articulates via multiple personas, the complex structure of identity and the constant negotiation between the different facets of himself. The valence of language and translation, therefore, creates a linguistic encounter that allows the viewer to pause and reflect on the notion of belonging which has a strong relationship to the concept of home and homeland, to the acquisition of identity and cultural background.

— GENEVIÈVE WALLEN

Kandis Friesen

**A Ess Fe Arbüse'zieropp: Dee Dijcht'konst Fonn Enn'waundra Weadbüak'moaken  
[A is for Watermelon Syrup: The Poetic Art of Immigrant Dictionary-Making]**

2011

Looped video: stop -motion animation and archival footage .5:24min.  
Colour, Plaut'deitch (Mennonite Low German) with English subtitles.

This video comprises of a series of animated drawings akin a living alphabet. Friesen illustrates the Plaut'dietsch (Mennonite Low-German) language and cultural histories through the use of warm, muted colours and the playful jumpiness of stop-motion animation. As the letters lead to ideas, however, the terminology chosen to narrate each letter relates to an adult understanding of loss, growing up in Manitoba, and the mass of displaced cultural history of the Mennonites.

The importance of Plaut'dietsch to Mennonites is resonant in their adage: "The only homeland for Mennonites is our Mother tongue." The heritage of this language reflects a diasporic, migratory history that has over time, in its adaptability, absorbed elements of other cultures. In this respect, the video also addresses a vital facet of

Montreal life. Now residing in Montreal, the artist is negotiating her work within the local linguistic environment which privileges a language's connection to nationhood.

This video is a component of Friesen's larger project, the Mennonite Video Archive Project, an assemblage of created and found documents which will serve to elaborate on and commemorate the existing collection efforts undertaken by Mennonite communities. It would seem then that by working in Plaut'dietsch, the artist is narrating a journey of rediscovery of aspects of her own culture as she navigates a convergence of her artistic and cultural identity.

– MARLEE PARSONS & BRITTANY WATSON

Ronak Kordestani

## **Uprooting**

2010

Mixed media on canvas, 19 x 19 inches

Geographic displacement, forced or voluntary, induces psychological and physical distress, which are limitedly healed with time. During such displacement, the question ‘what awaits?’ is ever present, and the answer elusive. Whether or not one can ‘go home’ again, memory attains greater significance in closing those distances through the recollection of sensations, life and the lives one has left behind. In today’s increasingly transnational world, ‘home’ becomes more fluid.

Pseudo-autobiographical, *Uprooting* captures these growing grey areas of identity, time and place, through an intricate play of contradictions. In a sweeping symphony of grey-scale, driven by a pyramidal composition, there is melancholia and optimism about the work. In the lower left, a group of shadowy figures – strangers, friends, or kin – appear to migrate beyond the limits of the canvas and yet seem contained by its square box-like

frame. In reference to the ‘Tree of Life,’ it is as if the roots extended from the seemingly solitary figures are from a singular source. Overhead, a fictitious map looms as a dark cloud of uncertainty or a map to a future of promise.

From the humanitarian perspective of isolation and the unknown, dynamic and still, direct yet mysterious, *Uprooting* brings forward a reflection on our increasingly borderless society and the socio-cultural limitations presented by the bureaucratic challenges of immigration policies towards integration.

– ADRIENNE JOHNSON



Keivan Khademi Shamami

**Room**

2012

Acrylic, pencil, masking tape and ink on wood panel.

This work discloses the isolation experienced by the artist due to language and cultural differences following his immigration to Canada. According to the artist: "In this painting, I explore the feeling of disconnectedness between different physical and psychic spaces." *Room* navigates alienation in relation to cultural space, conceived both in physical and psychological terms. The painting alludes to the redefinition of identity following immigration and the consequences of situating oneself within new cultural parameters. It also points at social and psychological barriers presented by language. Exploring the liminal space of cultural conjunctions, it attempts to initiate a dialogue on transformation and redefinition, describing a territory and identity in continuous mutation.

In this image, the self re-emerges from the structural grounds of a given space, casting a

shadow within those confines. This shadow embodies the projection of an identity resulting from the articulation of old and new cultural content.

The space depicted represents an allegory of physical place and psychological dimension. Discontinuous lines indicate the permeability of cultural structures. Cultural identity flows in a space of redefinition and transformed desires. Ultimately, this work explores the hinges and structures that define cultural integration and transformation towards the redefinition of cultural identity as composed of existing traces, borders and lived experiences. Decoding the experience of immigration into a space of visitation, the artist has inscribed within fluctuating cultural boundaries, cultural identity transcending the physicality of place.