

# fuse

art culture politics

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## ...IT'S STILL PRIVILEGED ART.



### BETTER MODELS FOR INVESTMENT

Amber Landgraff **DISCOVERS** MICROFUNDING, CAROLE CONDÉ AND KARL BEVERIDGE'S WORKING-CLASS ART, Ger Zielinski and Stephen Kent Jusick **TALK ABOUT** MIX FESTIVAL OF QUEER EXPERIMENTAL FILM AND VIDEO, Christopher Régimbal **REMEMBERS** LONDON ONTARIO'S EMBASSY HOTEL

\$7 Volume 33, Number 3



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printed in Canada

**11 JUNE - 17 JULY / Opening June 11 / 8 PM**

*The National Portrait Gallery*  
The NPG hopes to revitalize, decentralize and liberate the idea of a national portrait gallery. This exhibit of 30 contemporary works features traditional portraiture, film, music and other experimental forms, all with a focus of Canadian subjects. [www.npgallery.ca](http://www.npgallery.ca)

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Canada's annual performance art festival

See website for more details

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Exhibition programming / Deadline 30 June 2010  
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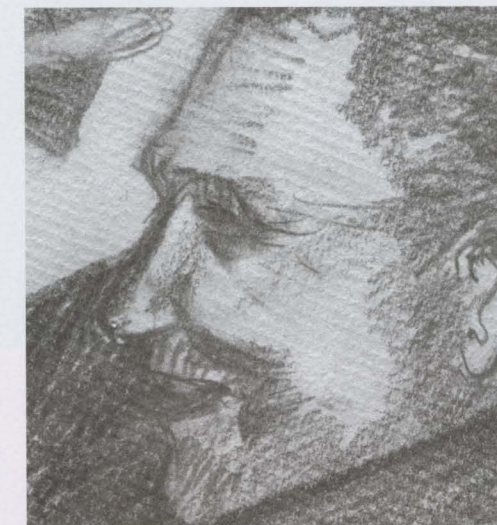
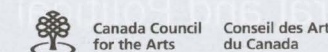
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**Jack Butler, Canadian Artist**  
**Self Portrait**

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## CULTURAL FLOE:

### Modern and Inuit Traditions

Among the artists featured are:

Shuvina Ashoona, Tim Pitsiulak,  
William Noah, and Idris Moss-Davies  
Curated by Anna Hudson



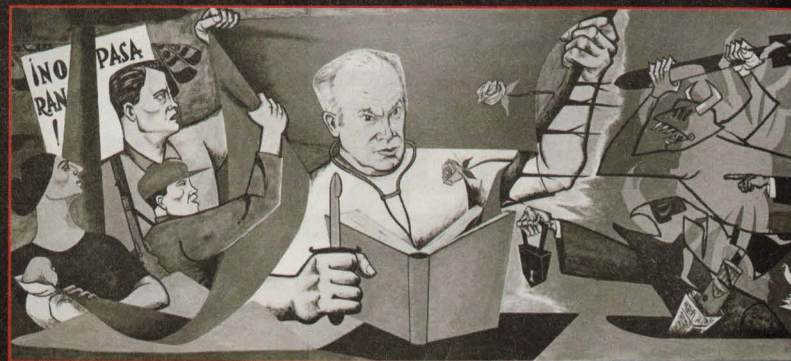
Shuvina Ashoona, *School Bus*, 2006-2007, ink, pencil crayon on paper.

## A TRIBUTE TO NORMAN BETHUNE:

### The Mural and Political Cartoons of Avrom Yanovsky

Avrom Yanovsky

Curated by Anna Hudson



Avrom Yanovsky, *Bethune Mural*, 1964, acrylic on masonite, Collection of the Yanovsky Family.

## VARLEY IN UNIONVILLE

Selections from the Permanent Collection

# JUNE 3 – SEPTEMBER 6, 2010

Opening Reception – Thursday, June 3, 2010, 7:00-9:00p.m.

## KAI CHAN: A SPIDER'S LOGIC

SEPTEMBER 25 – JANUARY 30, 2011

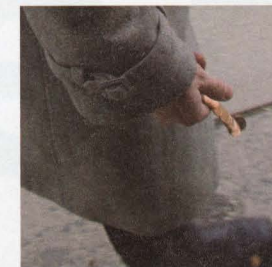
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# artist-run Calgary

## UPCOMING ARTISTS

Amy Lockhart  
Elisabeth Belliveau  
Jessica MacCormack  
Karina Bergmans

Sarah Adams-Bacon, Ben Jaques  
Chris Joynt and Nicole Sanches  
Beth Pederson  
Miruna Dragan and Noxious Sector:  
Ted Hiebert & Doug Jarvis  
Lewis & Taggart  
Peter Redecopp  
José Luis Torres  
Cécile Belmont  
Randy Niessen

Chih-Chien Wang  
Tammy Salzl  
Rolande Souliere  
Nancy Nisbet

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27 AUGUST TO 3 OCTOBER 2010

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## LOCAL ALTERNATIVES

In this issue of Fuse, we consider the different ways in which community-based interventions and collaborations can create alternatives at the local level. In Micro-funding: A little goes a long way, Amber Landgraaf reflects on the importance of community dinners, especially when they lead to alternative systems for funding art. Looking outside of established systems and toward community funding initiatives, Landgraaf considers artist projects that facilitate the redistribution of community money in order to effect positive change within that community.

In a related piece, Christopher Régimbal looks back on the legacy of London, Ontario's Embassy Hotel and the group of artists known for their work as the Embassy Cultural House. Régimbal considers the impact of the Embassy Cultural House on the city of London, and calls for a reinvigoration of London's arts community in the face of gentrification to the city's east end.

Relating culture to the communities that it happens in, Marc Léger and Kevin Rodgers both consider the socio-economic conditions in which culture is contextualized and produced — Rodgers through his article on the work of Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge and Marc Léger in his discussion of the Marc Mayer affair at the National Gallery of Canada.

In light of the current social and political climate — we here in Toronto also prepare for the blockades, closures and confrontations that will inevitably result from Toronto's hosting of the G20 — it is perhaps even more important to consider the different ways in which community-based interventions and collaborations build local level alternatives.

Summer is a time for reflection — this issue of Fuse invites you to reflect on the myriad ways that communities impact change on the local level.

— Izida Zorde, Editor



William Grant Munro  
Feb 11, 1975 – May 21, 2010

On May 21, 2010, queer activist and artist Will Munro lost his battle with cancer.

I first met Will in 1994, while I was on crutches in the Sculpture/Installation program at OCA. Being the only one who offered to help me hobble around class, I instantly fell for him. From that day on, Will and I joined forces. We co-facilitated OCA's queer student group, carried placards for student rights, and conjured up many exhibitions. As a precursor to Vazaleen, he was deeply connected to the straight-edge, hardcore music scene, bringing in bands from all over North America to Toronto.

Will was an entrepreneurial vegetarian who made his own gluten and art from his own and found underwear. And due to these underwear creations, he once landed press from a neo-conservative radio talk show where the host asked the public to deliver dirty diapers to an exhibit he had in protest of combining the words "queer" and "boys' underwear" in his artist statement. Will was ecstatic, but no public obliged.

Will carved out a monumental forum that transcended queerness, and handed it back to people with no expectations. And people gravitated toward him because he was truly spectacular.

— Chandra Bulucon



# MICRO-FUNDING

a little goes a long way

BY AMBER LANDGRAFF

I first came across FEAST (Funding Emerging Art with Sustainable Practices) when I found one of their dinner menus in the Temporary Services art collective's free newspaper *ART WORK*. *ART WORK* provides a forum for discussing responses to the current economic climate, both theoretical and practical. FEAST makes use of the action of eating a shared meal in order to raise funds for projects that directly affect and are made by members of their community.

While FEAST is based in Brooklyn, there are many other examples of micro-funding community dinner events that use a similar structure across the US, including versions in Chicago, Portland, and Minneapolis. FEAST's menu proposes community driven micro-funding as an alternative source of support: immediate financial support as well as an ongoing structure within the community. Part of a growing culture of coming together over a community meal as a way of drawing communities closer together, FEAST uses the modern day pay-what-you-can dinner event as a site for a positive intervention into the economic crisis. Community and art initiatives are funded directly through community interaction and everyone involved decides together how the money they collect will be awarded. The process is completely open and transparent, happening through immediate face-to-face presentations.

Before each event, FEAST collects proposals by artists and community members for projects that are intended as positive community interventions. In order to apply for funding, artists need to be present at the event to pitch their ideas over dinner. After dinner, everyone votes to select the project that they would like to fund. The chosen artist is provided the funds made from the dinner, minus enough money for FEAST to pay itself back and fund their next event. At a recent dinner Melanie Jelacic proposed *Shower Room*, a decorative and functional work of art intended for the showers at the Metropolitan Pool. Jelacic described the project's intended impact on the community: "The Metropolitan Pool is a social center of Williamsburg's diverse community. It is a remarkably affordable facility available to anyone in the neighbourhood, a rare place where people from all walks of life converge for leisure and exercise. This project will have a widely felt impact on the pool's 11,000 members, not to mention its employees. Tiles will create a clean, colourful and welcoming environment."<sup>1</sup> For the following dinner, on April 24, Jelacic



At the October 3 FEAST event. Photo: Kramer O'Neill, 2009.



MEET FOLKS. HAVE FUN. EAT FOOD. FUND ART.

**aperitif**

CLEANSE YOUR PALATE OF BUSINESS AS USUAL

**STEAL GOOD IDEAS**

It's what we did. With models like InCUBATE, FOOD restaurant, grocery co-ops, and CSAs, much of the figuring out had already been done.

**FIND COLLABORATORS**

It's a community-based project. So tell your community and get friends and neighbors to help out.

**hors d'oeuvre**

SET A TONE FOR THE ENTIRE EVENT

**WHO ARE YOU?**

Everyone loves a snappy acronym. Once you settle on that, build a web site and send out e-mails to local artists and press.

**WHERE DO YOU LIVE?**

A good space is critical. We love our church basement because it has tables, chairs, and a stage. And our drunk friends are careful not to fuck up God's house.

**antipasto**

BEFORE THE MAIN EVENT

**MENU**

A well-curated menu is crucial to the success of FEAST. Working with local farms, bakeries, and breweries—we serve a seasonal, vegetarian, organic meal.

**ARTISTS**

Target a handful of your favorite artists so you have a strong pool of proposals.

**GET CRAFTY**

Prepare decorations, ballot box, ballots, proposal posters, table decor, and lighting.

**entree**

THE WAIT IS OVER

**SET UP**

Arrange tables, chairs, artist proposals, entry desk, food distribution, and voting booth.

**IN THE KITCHEN**

Get as much ready ahead of time as possible.

**ON STAGE**

FEAST is full of bands, surprise performance, poets, toasts, and artist presentations.

**dessert**

EVERYONE'S FAVORITE PART

**COLLECT**

It's the best. Count the ballots. Count the money. Pay yourself back and save some for the next event.

**DISTRIBUTE**

Hand those big bucks over. We have a big bag with a dollar sign on it. The kids go crazy for it.

**DISPERSE**

Kick 'em out. Clean it up.

**digestif**

FINISH WELL TO START WELL

**HELP THEM OUT**

Work with grantees to help present a good product at the next event.

How to FEAST menu, 2009. Courtesy: FEAST.

provided documentation of the finished project, the process of tiling, and a brochure of local tiling resources. Grants typically end up being between \$400 – \$1000, amounts that are contingent upon the presence and generosity of the community members attending the event. A supportive community (both the presence of the community at the dinner and donations of food from local businesses) becomes integral to the success of FEAST's granting process: the more people that come out to dinner, the larger the grant amount ultimately ends up being. Since 2009, FEAST has funded 14 projects, and granted over \$8500.

Of course FEAST's model of microfunding is only one possibility. I found a number of other projects by artists, curators, and communities that demonstrate other models. While the structure of the granting process may differ from group to group (some fund discrete, ephemeral, and public projects, others are set up to fund projects that will have a positive impact on their community, and others make use of a larger internet community to find funding) one thing remains consistent across the board: when everyone shares a small amount of the little that they have, it can add up to a lot. These grassroots funding initiatives are interesting because they are predicated on a process of sharing. Rather than providing large sums of money to one artist, these projects offer smaller grants to many. They often involve a community-based collection and decision-making process that draws a direct relationship between those providing the funding and those receiving it.

Another funding model can be seen in both Josh Greene's *Service Works* and Marissa Neave's *Tiny Grants*, which offer small grant amounts to fund more discrete projects. Both projects work on the basis of sharing what little money is available to support both artists and non-artists, often funding projects that would not have been eligible for support from larger granting bodies. Greene shares his own earnings in order to fund his grants and Neave makes use of PayPal donations from supporters.

With the creation of *Service Works* in 2006, Greene began offering small grants to people in order to connect his non-artistic labour to his art practice. While working as a waiter at an upscale restaurant in San Francisco, Greene set aside one night of tips per month, typically about \$200, in order to fund a small project. *Service Works* functioned as both an artwork and a funding opportunity, and as such Greene had specific requirements for the chosen projects: they must be accomplished with the amount that he earned that month; they must be completed within the month that the grant was earned; and each completed project is documented on his website along with a short description of his experience at work the day he earned the grant money. In Greene's case, he was the one who was making the decision as to what projects would be funded, and he specifically chose projects based on things that he liked, or projects that claimed to explore themes similar to those found in his own art: relational and political practice. I particularly enjoyed Helena Keefe's *\$256 Project*, which put out a call for people to imagine a speech given by George Bush that would make him the president of their dreams, and Kara Hearn's *\$231 Project*, a series of home made reenactments of Hearn's favorite movie scenes, which she inserted into a local video shop as bonus disks.

For Greene it is important for the projects to be accomplished with the amount that he can provide from his tips, in order to draw a distinct and direct connection between his labour at the restaurant and the making of the work (the grants that turn out to be larger than the amounts of his tips are often due to unsolicited donations from people supportive of the project). As Greene points out in an interview, "Part of the structure is that these grants are small. So if you apply for a \$200 grant, most likely you could probably do your project anyways"<sup>2</sup>. Greene continued *Service Works* only as long as he could directly connect his labour with the grant that was provided. His dissatisfaction with the grants that were made through donations, as well as the projects where the connection between his labour and the funds

provided was less distinct, eventually led to him putting the project on an indefinite hold. While Greene may not currently be funding projects, the idea of an artist supporting artists by sharing their earnings can function as a model for anyone interested in exploring microfunding.

Marissa Neave's more recent *Tiny Grants*, created as her undergraduate thesis project at the Ontario College of Art and Design, awards small grants to short-term, creative interventions. Her intention with the project was to fund small, ephemeral projects in Toronto's public spaces — interventions that would encourage public participation and provoke imaginative interactions in the city. In order to be eligible for *Tiny Grants*, proposed projects needed to be completed for under \$300, with the stipulation that the funds could not be applied to funding an aspect of a larger project. Four projects were chosen: Josh Cleminson's *\$36.00/hour*, Leigh Nunan's *Tiny Snowmans*, The Pocketology Collective's *On Site*, and Cynthia French's *Monster Pole*. Josh Cleminson's intervention is particularly prescient in a discussion about the cost of art practice, and the value of labour in general. For *\$36/hour* Cleminson worked out how many pennies could be picked up over the course of an hour, and scattered 3600 pennies in downtown Toronto. An industrious person undeterred by the repetitiveness of the task could make \$36 for an hour's work, highlighting that the compensation for participation ended up being much higher than minimum wage and higher than most workers can actually hope to achieve as an hourly wage. While *Tiny Grants* is Neave's first foray into microfunding, the infrastructure exists for the continuation of the project. Neave was able to make use of a wider internet community in order to solicit donations to fund the project, a move that allows for a larger community to draw upon for support.

Kickstarter, an all-or-nothing web-based microfunding project offers another alternative model that also makes use of a larger internet community in order to fund projects. Kickstarter works on the basis that "a good

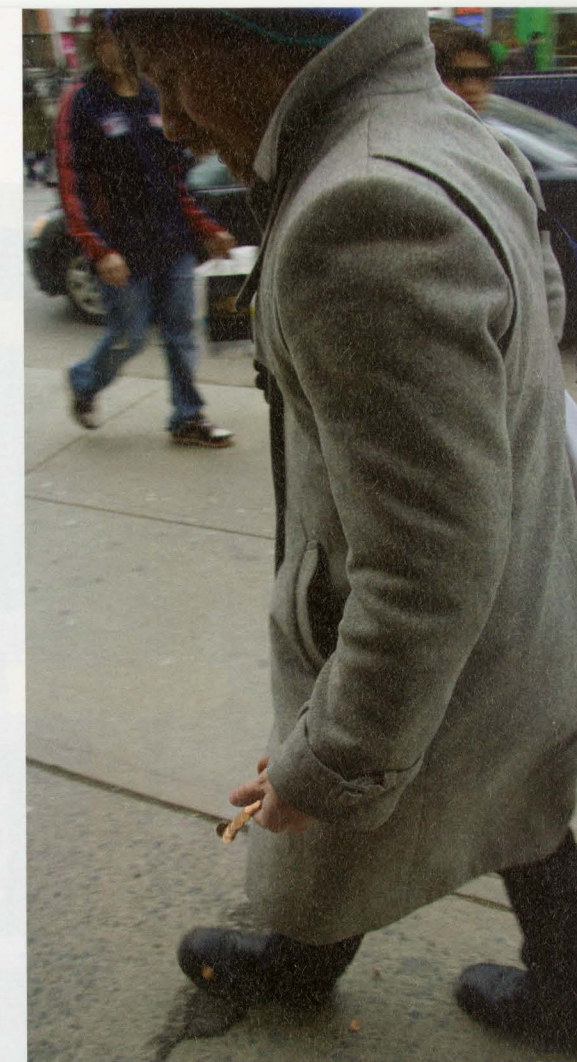
idea, communicated well, can spread fast and wide," and that "a large group of people can be a tremendous source of money and encouragement."<sup>3</sup> Project pages, posted for between one and 90 days, describe the project and what funds will be used for, as well as offering fun incentives in exchange for support (often these incentives include a public "thank you" to all backers). People are able to pledge backing for projects that they would like to support. If at the end of the posting period the project has received 100% (or more) of their proposed grant, the grant is awarded. The benefit of Kickstarter is that a much larger community is accessible to the artist, so larger funding amounts can be achieved. It works on the assumption that interested backers will pass project pages along to their friends, creating a buzz about the project, and making it possible for more people to offer their support.

The projects described here are only a few examples of a larger movement — there are endless possibilities for models of community-driven support systems. While these initiatives cannot and should not be expected to replace larger granting systems, they do provide positive alternatives for funding projects, as well as much-needed systems of community support. When nobody has enough money, it can feel disheartening to try to fund an ongoing artistic practice, yet what these microfunding projects demonstrate is that it isn't necessary to give a lot in order to support fellow artists. Instead, they prove that when people come together, a little goes a long way. □

**NOTES**

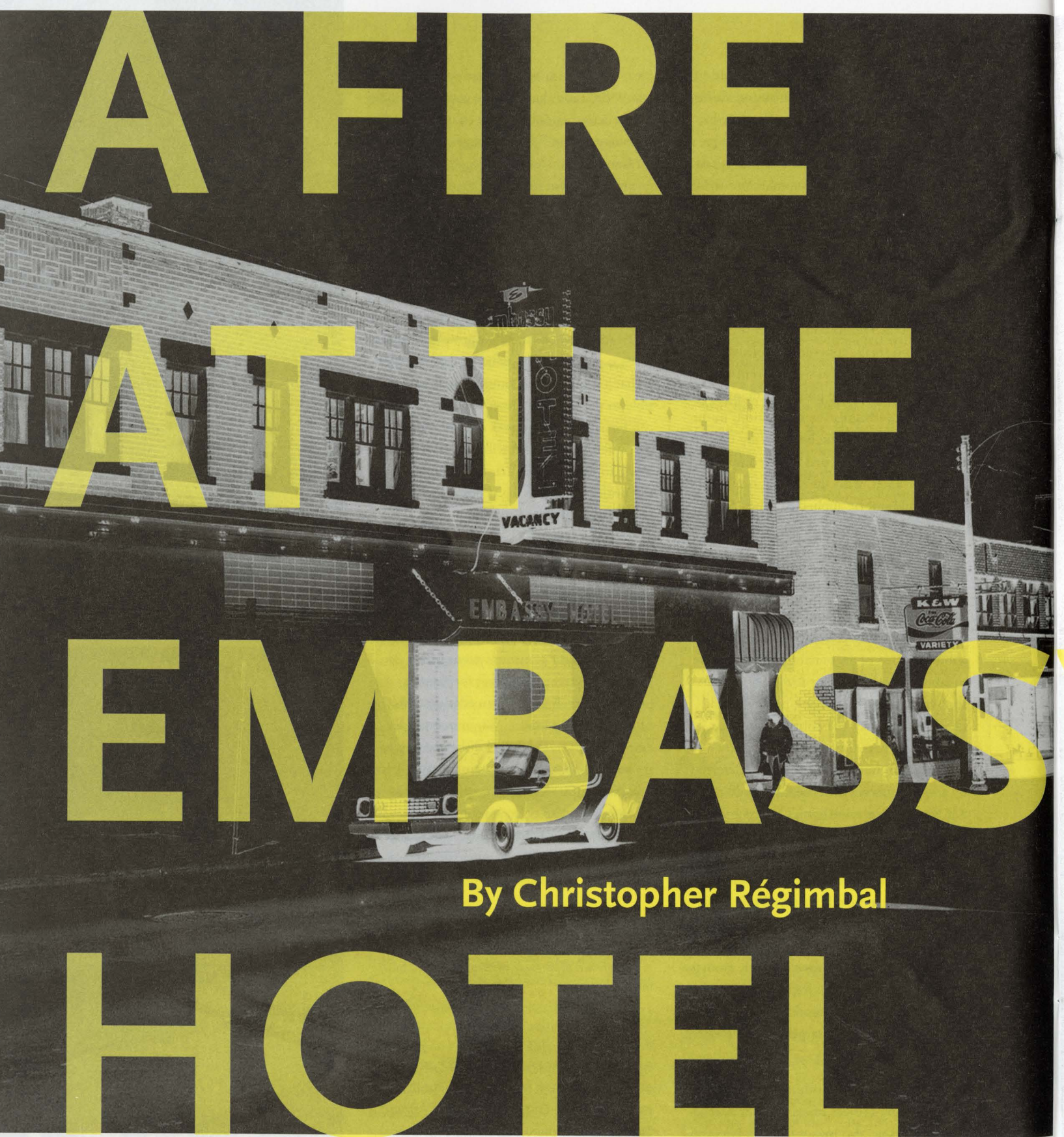
1. <http://feastinbklyn.org/index.php?proposals/work-for-pay/>
2. <http://www.sfweekly.com/2007-07-04/culture/the-tipping-point/>
3. <http://www.kickstarter.com/help/faq#WhatIsKick>

AMBER LANDGRAFF has recently come to the end of her MFA in criticism and curatorial practices at the Ontario College of Art and Design. She is planning on starting a local version of FEAST in Toronto.



<above> Joshua Cleminson. *\$36.00/hr*, 2010. Photo: Miles Stemp. Courtesy: the artist. <below> At the October 3 FEAST event. Photo: Kramer O'Neill, 2009.





By Christopher Régimbal

For nearly 75 years, the Embassy Hotel stood in the heart of east London — a large, working-class neighbourhood 20 minute’s walk east of downtown in London, Ontario. In May 2009, the legendary hotel burned to the ground, the latest victim in a string of arsons targeting abandoned buildings in the southwestern Ontario city. The hotel was a popular alternative music venue and watering hole, and throughout most of the 1980s, it played host to one of Canada’s most innovative and resolutely alternative artist-run spaces, the Embassy Cultural House (ECH). When the Embassy Hotel burned to the ground, the building still contained a very real connection to the ECH collective’s activities: permanent installations by artists Spring Hurlbut, Susan Day, and José Bedia. These three projects were all that was left of a series of 12 *in situ* commissions by the ECH group, and all three were destroyed in the fire and subsequent demolition of the building.

The story of the Embassy Cultural House collective and the destruction of these three significant artworks plays out alongside a parallel history of economic depression and renewal in this east end neighbourhood. Significantly, the site is now being redeveloped as a 150-unit condominium as part of a plan to revitalize the neighbourhood as a “creative” community. In light of the neighbourhood’s transition, the history of the Embassy Cultural House speaks to both the past and to a potential future for community-based and inclusive city planning.

ECH was founded in 1983 by Ron Benner, Jamelie Hassan and Eric Stach and quickly became a meeting place for London’s politically engaged post-*Heart of London* generation of artists, spurring the relocation of London’s art community from downtown to the East End. It was run by a group of artists that included Hassan and Benner, as well as Wyn Geleynse, Debranne Eastabrook, Sharon Forrest, Janice Gurney, Jean Hay, Doug Mitchell, Kim Moodie, Gerard Päs, Peter Rist, Jean Spence and Jennie White. The work of many artists of this generation was rooted in the regionalist language established

by artists such as Greg Curnoe, Jack Chambers and John Boyle, who participated in the generation-defining 1968 National Gallery of Canada exhibition *The Heart of London*. ECH artists, however, reimagined the city’s parochial regionalism by opening it up to international influence through extensive travel and international exchanges, situating London within the broader social and political world.

Unlike artist-designed hotels that have become popular in recent years, the Embassy was not home to an international jet-set seeking “one-of-a-kind experiences,” but to a group of down-and-out men and women, pensioners and transients. About 60 percent of the residents were on welfare, fixed incomes or in other marginal circumstances and were living in the hotel on a full-time basis. The 40-room, 65-dollar-a-week hotel was a constantly changing space where bar regulars, off-duty taxi drivers and hotel residents mixed with artists and concertgoers, creating a living and evolving community within its walls. The name Embassy Cultural House was chosen in reference to culture houses that Hassan and Benner had encountered in Europe and reflected a desire to create a forum to foster art, culture, communication, and community.

Between 1983 and 1990, the ECH’s prolific exhibition schedule engaged with a distinct local culture in east London that was connected with the global political concerns of the 1980s, including indigenous rights, disarmament, and the Israel/Palestine conflict. Two significant exhibitions — *The Body and Society* in 1988 and *Siting Resistance* in 1990 — addressed issues of HIV/AIDS and racism respectively, each within the context of the east London neighbourhood. *The Body and Society* was organized by Hassan, Spense, and Geleynse, and included three exhibitions, a conference, and a major publication, all exploring the politics of the emerging HIV/AIDS crisis.<sup>1</sup> Twelve Canadian and American artists, including Stephen Andrews, Sheila Butler, Greg Curnoe, Leon Golub and Nancy Spero, contributed artwork that explored the body as a political site, placing

UNLIKE ART-IST-DESIGNED HOTELS THAT HAVE BECOME POPULAR IN RECENT YEARS, THE EMBASSY WAS NOT HOME TO AN INTERNATIONAL JET-SET SEEKING ONE-OF-A-KIND EXPERIENCES, BUT TO A GROUP OF DOWN-AND-OUT MEN AND WOMEN PENSIONERS AND TRANSIENTS.

the HIV/AIDS epidemic within a context of gender, race, sexual orientation, age and income. The exhibition and conference pushed the HIV/AIDS discourse outside of the medical and scientific spheres and into the social and economic realms of everyday life in east London.

The exhibition *Siting Resistance* was organized in response to the racist teachings of University of Western Ontario psychology professor J. Philippe Rushton. At the time, Rushton's neo-eugenic writings were attracting unwanted international attention in the press, placing the community at the centre of a divisive debate that it did not ask for. Benner organized the exhibition program to increase public exposure to the work of artists of colour and to discredit Rushton's discriminatory rhetoric. The four exhibitions of the program included work by the self-styled Black Artists from Britain (Sonia Boyce, Allan deSouza, Shaheen Merali, Pitika Ntuli, and Keith Piper), Canadian artist Grace Channer, and Cubans Mariá Magdalena Campos-Pons and José Bedia. Both *The Body and Society* and *Siting*

*Resistance*, like many of the exhibitions that the group organized, reacted to issues that were urgent to the community and created a social space in the East End where these topics could be discussed.

Beginning with Shelagh Keeley's *Room 31* in 1986, the ECH commissioned 12 site-specific projects, which included the pieces that were destroyed in the recent fire. Like the ECH exhibitions, the commissions were frequently intended to be relevant to the men and women who lived in the hotel. Discussing the installations in 1988, Hassan wrote: "In [their] work, [the artists] responded to the reality of the hotel, inspiring both visitors and regulars who have come to feel that by sharing in the process and production of artists that the work of art itself is a part of them."<sup>2</sup> Spring Hurlbut's sculpture was commissioned in 1987 in the Beaver Lounge, one of the Embassy Hotel's bars, as part of a series of projects that also included work by David Merritt, Robert McNealy and Michael Fernandes. Hurlbut replaced the shaft of a Doric column with a tree trunk and installed it in the Canadiana

wood-panelled bar. Her project blended into the space seamlessly, changing it a great deal but altering the atmosphere very little.

Susan Day's tiled mural *Handicap Access Bathroom* was installed in the women's bathroom on the first floor as part of the exhibition *The Body and Society*. The mural depicted a wheelchair-bound elderly woman struggling to pull herself into a bathtub, highlighting the underlying politics of age, poverty, and sickness that play out on the body. The most visible of the permanent projects, a 15-foot mural by Cuban artist José Bedia, came about as part of the exhibition *Siting Resistance*. In the 1990s London became the home for a large number of new immigrants from Latin America, many of whom settled in East London. Bedia's painting of a horse jumping over a rising sun spoke to the changing cultural landscape of the neighbourhood and became a very visible landmark in the community.

The fire was only the spectacular end in a process of neglect that began after the artists broke ties with the Embassy Hotel in 1990,

at which time nothing was left of the collective as an entity to offer stewardship over the site-specific artworks remaining in the hotel. Over the years, the rest of the 12 permanent installations went missing or were destroyed, including projects by Lani Maestro, Elizabeth MacKenzie, Robert McKaskell and Liz Magor. After the hotel was sold, but before the sudden fire, Museum London Director, Brian Meehan, was working with the real estate developer to assess the possibility of salvaging some of the remaining artwork into a public collection. After the fire, but before the building was demolished, the artistic community implored the city to save the José Bedia mural, which was not damaged in the fire, but extensive structural damage to the remainder of the hotel led to the demolition of the building within a matter of days.

Ironically, since London was an important centre for contemporary art, poetry, literature, and experimental music for many years, the City of London has begun a top-down effort to rebrand itself as a Richard Florida-inspired "creative city."<sup>3</sup> The East End, which had largely been ignored by developers until recently, has become a very attractive site for gentrification. What sets the Embassy Hotel apart from other, more recent art hotel projects, is that instead of facilitating gentrification, the ECH helped the neighbourhood resist it. In the 1980s, rapid development in London's downtown drove up property prices in the core while neglect and absentee landlords helped to keep prices in east London low. Speaking at the Dia Foundation in 1989, Hassan prophetically raised the spectre of development in the east end, saying, "I don't know if in 15 years ... [we] will also fall prey to developers. That may very well be the case. But we are strongly encouraging anyone who has any resources to work together with us cooperatively and collectively."<sup>4</sup> ECH artists often worked as advocates for the disenfranchised communities in the area, participating in a coalition of residents to protect heritage sites and prevent crippling development.

Between the time the Embassy Cultural House closed and the present day there has been very little investment in East London, and many of the buildings are now in disrepair, boarded up, or, like the Embassy Hotel, burned out. The condominium development on the site of the former Embassy Hotel is the first major residential development in the neighbourhood, signalling a new and irreversible shift in the community dynamic. Twenty years after Hassan made her prediction of development, this new condo project will undoubtedly change the makeup of the East End, and, after years without investment in the community, change is sorely needed. The artists of the Embassy Cultural House showed us that by working with the community, even with modest means, you could create inclusive and productive change. My hope is that those who call for the revitalization of London's East End keep this lesson in mind. □

*Prepared with files from the archives of Ron Benner and Jamelie Hassan, the Embassy Cultural House archives at the London Public Library, and with the help of Joe Belanger at the London Free Press.*

#### Notes:

1. James Miller ed. *Fluid Exchanges: Artists and Critics in the AIDS Crisis*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).
2. Jamelie Hassan, "Statement from the E.C.H. Board," in *Embassy Cultural House Tabloid*, (London, Ontario: The Embassy Hotel, 1988): 2.
3. City of London, *The Creative Cities Task Force Report*, (London, ON: The City of London, 2004).
4. Jamelie Hassan, "Planning: Power, Politics, People," moderated by Robert Neuwirth, May 16, 1989. *If you Lived Here: The City in Art, Theory, and Social Activism*. Dia Art Foundation Discussion in Contemporary Culture, no. 6. A project by Martha Rosler. Ed. Brian Wallis (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991).

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Embassy Hotel circa 1983-1990.  
Photo: John Tamblin. Courtesy: The Collection of the London Public Library.

WHAT SETS THE EMBASSY HOTEL APART FROM OTHER, MORE RECENT ARTISTIC HOTEL PROJECTS IS THAT INSTEAD OF FACILITATING GENTRIFICATION, THE ECH HELPED THE NEIGHBOURHOOD RESIST IT.



# Ger Zielinski

IN CONVERSATION WITH

# Stephen Kent Jusick,

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF

# MIX Festival

OF Queer

# Experimental Film and Video



John Greyson and Stephen Kent Jusick at the screening of *FIG TREE*. Photo: Szu Burgess, 2009. Courtesy: MIX Festival of Queer and Experimental Film and Video.

**Ger Zielinski:** MIX festival is coming up to its 23<sup>rd</sup> anniversary this autumn. You have been officially or unofficially around the festival for many years. Do you remember attending for the first time? What drew you to it?

**Stephen Kent Jusick:** My relationship with MIX is kind of funny. Vito Russo wrote a review of the 2nd festival in *The Advocate*, and he ended it with a notice saying if you were interested in hosting the festival at your college to contact cofounder Jim Hubbard. So I wrote him a letter (this was fall 1988!), and then he called me and told me all the things I would have to do to bring the festival to my college. I had no idea what experimental film was, or what this material would look like. I knew that I wanted to see the films and that the best way for that to happen was to do a public screening so more people could participate. We agreed upon a single screening that would be free to the public. Part of my concern was that no one would show up. I also felt that the student body was very homophobic. Not charging admission was a financial inducement, but also allowed people to slip in if they didn't want to linger by the door and be identified. I also knew that I would do outreach to the gay community in Baltimore. I didn't feel I could count on enough students to show up, so I went to the local gay newspapers, who ran free ads for the show, and I even got someone to do an advance article. There wasn't a film critic versed in the avant garde, so they had their music critic write the article. After my initial contact with him, Jim thought he'd never hear from me again. But a few months later I called him and said I'd done everything and was ready for

the show. Jim took the train from New York. He'd sent me a few preview tapes. I met him at his friend's house for dinner, and they discussed what seemed like high culture, such as opera. We watched Jim's super8 feature *Homosexual Desire in Minnesota* on video. Afterwards I told him I didn't know what experimental film was. He asked "Even after seeing this?" We had the screening the next night. It was a full house, but the audience was perhaps a little confused, even hostile. They seemed angry and wanted to know why we were showing this work to them. I was embarrassed that they would be so rude to our guest. And this was a free screening, a gift to the community! Jim was not upset though, and it ended fine. I continued to do these screenings each year, adding more shows, mostly of work selected by Jim, based on the work that showed in New York. So for many years I had a relationship with MIX, but I didn't attend the festival in New York until 1993. That year it was at the Kitchen, and there were screenings downstairs and installations and special events upstairs. It was great. I remember most of the screenings, especially one curated by Karl Knapper, *Who's Saying What About Whom?*, which showed me how in a well-curated program each short film talks to or relates to the ones around it.

**GZ:** The word "experimental" has been in the festival's title since the beginning, distinguishing MIX from other LGBT film festivals. Its meaning seems to have become rather malleable, in a sense allowing the festival to adapt to new social and political issues and aesthetic concerns. What does the coupling of "queer" and "experimental" mean for the festival today?

**SKJ:** At this point I take it as a given. It's just who we are. At the same time, with the way art and culture have changed, I don't think "experimental" has the specificity that it did when MIX was founded in 1987. I also don't think the general public has a definite understanding of what it means, nor do they necessarily have an aversion to it. With so many people describing *Pulp Fiction* as having experimental elements, the word has lost its scariness. But for me it does mean that we're not interested in calling card films or traditional narratives. If you can show it on Logo TV it's not for MIX.

**GZ:** Some critics periodically wonder whether queer film festivals still have a purpose. What's your opinion? Has the struggle been won?

**SKJ:** Before I became Executive Director in late 2005, Jim and I were discussing whether MIX had a purpose. Obviously I think so. I looked at all the films that show only at MIX, or begin their life here. I looked at the makers for whom MIX is an impetus to create work, because they know there is a venue that is hospitable to what they are trying to do. MIX still feels unique and has a different political mission than most gay film festivals, which at some level are presenting positive images of queers. That's not really part of our agenda. You're not going to see pro-marriage fluff at MIX.

**GZ:** MIX has strongly advocated for frank representations of sex and polymorphous sexualities, against timid self-censorship. Has this rather radical stand ever caused problems for the festival, e.g. regarding its venue or funding?

**SKJ:** I don't think there have ever been venue issues. We did decide not to pursue negotiations with a church once because it might have been a problem. Certainly we suffer a little squeamishness from potential corporate sponsors. And in 2009 the Bank of New York Mellon refused to let us participate in their corporate giving program after they looked at our website. They objected to a description of an installation that made a parodic reference to "Hillary Ridem Clitoris," and other material. So we were denied about \$2000 in a payroll pledge than an employee wanted to donate throughout the year.

IN 2009 THE BANK OF NEW YORK MELLON REFUSED TO LET US PARTICIPATE IN THEIR CORPORATE GIVING PROGRAM AFTER THEY LOOKED AT OUR WEBSITE. THEY OBJECTED TO A DESCRIPTION OF AN INSTALLATION THAT MADE A PARODIC REFERENCE TO "HILLARY RIDEM CLITORIS."

**GZ:** In 2008, MIX was held in a defunct Liz Claiborne flagship store, in the now highly gentrified South Street Seaport, with changing rooms as sites for installations, and this past year it took place in a high-gloss condo building in Chelsea, with installations in the restrooms. Perhaps nomadic, perhaps fugitive, what sort of process is involved to secure a venue for the festival? While the economic downturn may have decreased funding, has it opened up opportunities for possible venues?

**SKJ:** Finding the right venue is a struggle. Once we decided that we wanted to pursue alternative spaces and not be in a traditional movie theatre, things got harder. It's often last minute, which is very stressful for the organizers. I thought that 2009 would be easier because of the bad economy, but many brokers are in denial, thinking that a long-term tenant is just about to sign a lease, even in spaces that have been empty for over a year or two. These brokers wouldn't even call me back many times!

**GZ:** The screening of John Greyson's *Fig Trees* (2009) was accompanied by a strong element of performance, with the special costumes for the presenters, and 'HIV Positive' t-shirts surreptitiously placed under the seat of each audience member. John seemed delightfully surprised and genuinely honoured. What inspired you to create such an event?

**SKJ:** *Fig Trees* just really spoke to me as a film, and was important to me when I saw it as part of the Teddy Jury for Best Gay Film at the 2009 Berlinale. As I continued to think about the film, all these ideas descended upon me, about how to really embrace the various strategies it employed. It started with the 'HIV+' t-shirts. In the film there's a scene where South African AIDS activists give Nelson Mandela an 'HIV+' t-shirt, which he puts on. I thought it showed such a demonstration of leadership, but also something very simple that could be done anywhere to raise the issue of AIDS. Giving out the t-shirts just seemed like it made sense. We had fig treats served to the audience, and for the Q&A I wore a squirrel costume, based on one of the characters in the film wore. I wanted people to understand that we weren't just throwing the film on the screen and saying watch it, but that we had thought about it a lot and were deeply engaged. I guess it really has to do with individual passion. When I curated a Super8 sidebar at MIX in 1998, Will Munro made me a skirt and tunic out of 8mm film. This was a response to what I saw as the staid and musty style of presenting experimental film at museums. While MIX is serious about the work we show, we also want to embrace the fun and anarchy that are part of the history of experimental film.

**GZ:** Cary Cronenwett and Ilona Berger's *Maggots and Men* (2009), an epic transgendered retelling of the 1921 Kronstadt uprising in the Soviet Union, and parody of Eisenstein's *Potemkin* and the Russian Revolution, was a very successful screening. How did you find out about this project? How does MIX serve as a unique venue for the screenings of such work?

**SKJ:** *Maggots and Men* seemed like the perfect film for MIX. Cary had shown an earlier film at MIX in 2002 called *Phineas Slipped*, an adaptation of Melville. He then started work on *Maggots*, and we knew it would be visual tour de force. As a local production it had a great premiere in San Francisco, but I think many venues are fairly timid when it comes to unusual work. MIX closed with *Maggots* because for us it was not a stretch — there was so much excitement

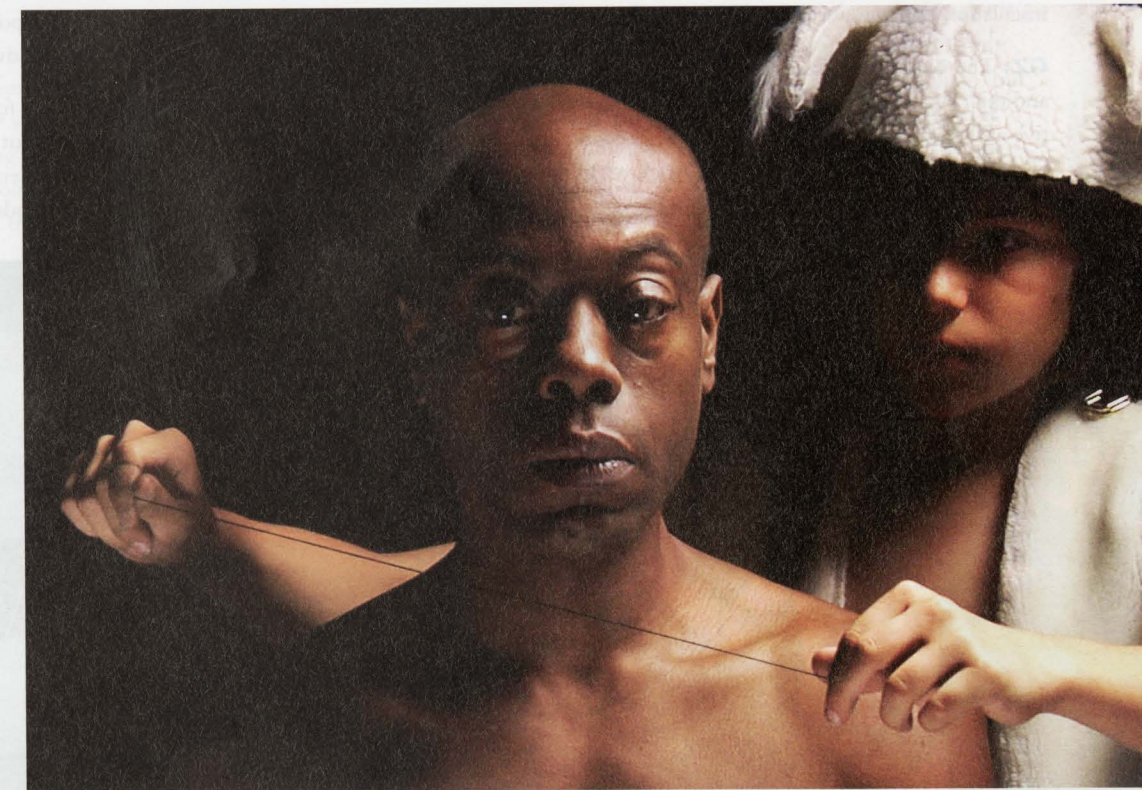
**GZ:** Peter Cronin has been part of every MIX Festival for the past 10 years. He's a family friend to me, but his presence at MIX since 1994 at least. This year I think he was a bit of a surprise. I saw where it was going, a piece constructed in a way that he constructed it was not before working on the last version, which much to my surprise included water, something that I saw when it was in the piece, and other things that I saw. The surprise in the screening was that when he saw the film, he was really into it. I think the screening was the whole point.

in our community of artists and audiences. Maybe we operate from a space of privilege, in that MIX exists to support artists and show their work. We're not here to promote the kind of bland positive images that infect the identity politics of many gay film festivals. What may now be regarded as canonical, say Barbara Hammer's early work, which focuses so much on women's bodies, or Michael Wallin's *The Place Between Our Bodies*, which celebrates gay male lovemaking, would not be the movement's first choice for idealized images, even though their work is deeply personal, loving, even sweet, although defiantly explicit. With *Maggots*, it's interesting how Cary's conception of the piece changed over time, as the more explicit sections got cut, with more emphasis on the other parts of the narrative. He did what he thought was best for the film, not for marketing, since his fan base was probably expecting more sex.

**GZ:** A film that remained with me for days afterward was Vanessa Renwick's *Portrait #3: House of Sound* (2009), a meditation on urban absence and, specifically, the razing of an important African-American record shop that served as a social hub in Portland. The film was included in "Bulldozed!," a fascinating program on the ambivalent politics — even queering — of urban space and change, particularly gentrification and how it intersects with class and race. How did it come into being? Did you receive any feedback from the audience on it?

**SKJ:** Gentrification is a topic that the MIX staff discusses a lot in our personal lives. New York has been so transformed by the over-policing that began under Mayor Giuliani, and by the development-at-any-cost mindset of billionaire Mayor Bloomberg. It makes it harder to find places to live, work and play. So that idea has been

bubbling in the background for a few years as we talked about programming. This year it came together, and we pulled in *Berlin/New York*, an older film by Jack Waters, that I thought made the connections to the 1980s, when the East Village where MIX was born was abandoned due to gentrification. Gentrification does not seem like a typical LGBT issue on the face of it, certainly not for most festivals, or for most gay rights organizations. But it affects so many of the MIX constituency in profound ways. When MIX began in the East Village, makers dropped off their prints in person at a pre-party, and it was all very local because many people actually lived in the same neighborhood. Now that's not possible. Most young artists live in Brooklyn, but not in any one location. There's not the same sense of closeness.



John Greyson. *FIG TREES* (Video Still), 2009. Courtesy: the artist.

**GZ:** Installations and performances by NYC-based and international artists played a prominent role in the festival this year. The space felt part gallery, part Warholian factory. Noam Gonick and Luis Jacob's *Wildflowers of Manitoba* (2007) commanded attention in the first room and appeared to help organize the other pieces around it. In the second room, Hector Canonge's endurance installation-performance *Schema CorpoReal* (2009) and Adriana Varella's sexually charged installation with projection *Meeting God* (2009) constituted a living thread throughout the duration of the festival. What attracted you, and the other curators, to these works?

**SKJ:** We'd been pursuing *Wildflowers* for a few years, just trying to find the right space to present it in. That was the structuring installation for us in 2009. We liked that it was ambitious, and had a performative as well as film & video element. But its looking forward/looking back using hand-cranked 35mm film, geodesic dome, retro-modern turntable, incense, with the character thinking and fantasizing about another possible, future life, spoke to many of our concerns as an organization. *Meeting God* uses a deconstructed bed as a canvas or projection screen, and that also seemed an apt metaphor for the art and politics of what MIX does and is interested in. But both of these installations invited audiences to engage them in more than a subject/object way. There's nothing I hate more than an installation that is just a monitor on a pedestal.

**GZ:** The New York-based artists Jack Waters and Peter Cramer, and their ongoing *Petit Versailles* project, have had a long, productive affiliation with MIX. When did they become involved with the festival? How did Peter's installation work within the gallery section of the festival?

**SKJ:** Peter Cramer has been part of every MIX Festival (except maybe one in 2003). There is a family aspect to this, but he's been doing installations at MIX since 1994 at least. This piece, *I Want to Be Left a Loon*, was a big question mark at first. I saw where it was going, as Peter constructed it, but then he reconstructed it several times before settling on the final version, which much to my surprise included water, sometimes just a slow drip-drip-drip on the roof of the piece, and other times more of a gush. The audience in the screening room could often hear this while the films were going on, and I liked how the overlapping sounds made the whole experience more intimate. There was less separation between what was going on in each place. The *Loon* became one of the oddest but also most beloved pieces because it was a cozy (and crazy) environment with cushions and an almost *sub rosa* video projection, where people could hang out, make out, whatever. It was there that lesbians were, um, getting it on while gay men were cruising each other.

**GZ:** As someone who has worked in or around MIX for many years, what sort of people support it, find it appealing, or participate in it? Who does it attract — how homogeneous or diverse?

**SKJ:** I like to joke that we're for queerdos. We don't do audience surveys about demographics but we do know that in general it's a young crowd, artists or art-oriented. Politically engaged people who appreciate art. Of course it tends to be people who are outside the

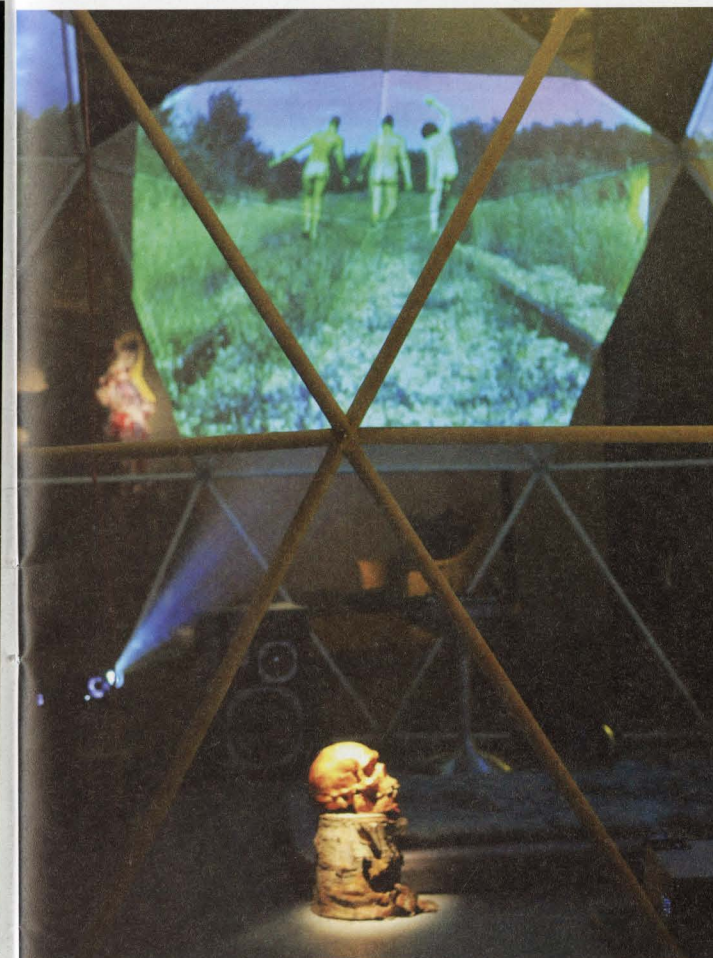
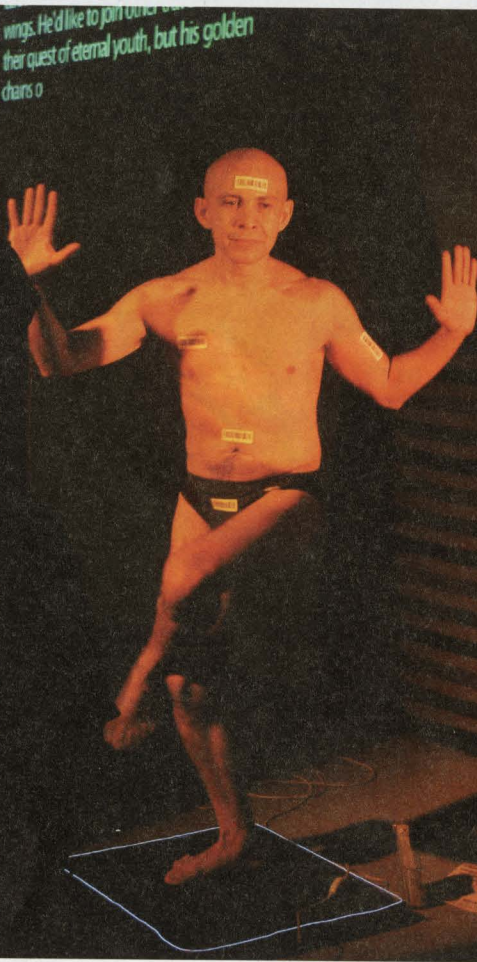
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mainstream. One of the rare places where dykes and fags can get together creatively. I take it for granted but it's still uncommon to have poly-gender programs at gay festivals. It doesn't make sense to us to segregate by gender, although sometimes certain themes present best that way. But it's not our standard formula.

**GZ:** Over its many years MIX has put a strong emphasis on various outreach initiatives to broaden its audiences, the cultivation of new media-makers, and, more generally, the queer community. Which initiatives have worked well? Have they been able to break down any ethnic, racial or class boundaries?

**SKJ:** For whatever successes we have had, there's always more work to do. But a good example of something that has been great is *A Different Take*, MIX's free summer youth production workshop, teaching them to make video, targeting mostly at-risk young people, who don't have other access to the tools of production. In New York, where we have the film factory that is New York Univer-

sity dominating downtown, but also the New School for Social Research, and Columbia University, and Brooklyn College, all with film programs, we wanted to reach local residents who are not enfranchised by these citadels of higher learning. We've had students as young as 13 and as old as 25, Latino, East Asian, South Asian, African-American, Caucasian... Some of the students have been homeless, and they had bigger problems than getting to each class. In 2008 we tried having the younger students work more closely with adult learners, and that was rewarding too. One student's film was just accepted into the Tribeca Film Festival, so that's a great bridging of worlds, since the Tribeca FF was a top-down idea that the power elites (Robert DeNiro and American Express) dropped fully formed on the city as a vehicle to revitalize the post-9/11 economy. Our partnership with the Bronx Academy of Arts and Dance (BAAD), an organization run by a poly-gendered group of people of color, has been such a loving relationship. Doing programs in the Bronx was a big step, and it's still challenging to bring audiences there, but each time we do it's so lovely. The discussions have been great and the atmosphere is unique — not like a movie theater and not really like the festival proper either. The first shows MIX presented at BAAD were very consciously all works that addressed race, all but



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<from left to right> Hector Canonge. *Schema CorpoReal*, 2009. Photo: Szu Burgess; Cary Cronenwett and Ilona Berger. *Maggots and Men*, 2009. Photo: Daniel Nicolletta; Installation view of *Wildflowers of Manitoba*, 2007 by Noam Gonick and Luis Jacob. Photo: Jonathon Ziegler, 2009. Courtesy: MIX Festival of Queer and Experimental Film and Video.

one by makers of color, and it was the first time BAAD had shown film and video as a stand-alone event. MIX wanted to get local Bronx audiences. BAAD might have wanted to draw from outside of their base, and both happened. We had very long Q&As, which was great. More conversational in that there could be in-depth back-and-forth, rather than quickly moving on.

**GZ:** Some have grumbled that MIX errs on the side of youth or art school students. The audiences seem younger on average than those at LGBT film festivals. Is this the result of privileging emerging filmmakers, a matter of the appeal of experimental work, or something else?

**FOR ME, THE BEST FESTIVALS ARE NOT THE LARGEST ONES. I HAVE A TOUGH TIME AT CANNES AND BERLIN, BECAUSE THERE'S SO MUCH EMPHASIS ON BUSINESS AND GLAMOUR. IMAGES IN TORONTO IS GREAT FOR ITS COMMITMENT TO EXPERIMENTAL FILM.**

**SKJ:** Grumblers should step up to the plate — we can learn more from critique than praise! But I worry about the health of many of our organizations. When I go to other gay festivals, I don't see a lot of young people. I wonder what's going to happen. Similarly, I wonder what the plans for the Filmmakers Coop or Canyon Cinema are? How will they survive another generation? MIX has always been run by younger people. Jim and Sarah were in their 30s when it was founded, but Shari Frilot and Karim Ainouz and Rajendra Roy and Anie Stanley, for example, really kept it young. I wonder sometime why we don't show more films by Nathaniel Dorsky or George Kuchar, for example. Mainly because their work is now shown by the Film Society of Lincoln Center or Anthology, so that work has found another platform. But also, those makers,

of a different generation, and not based in NY, don't show interest in us, so it kind of works out that they get shown, just not at MIX. Still, I'd like to bridge that gap. And while we do like to see work by young people, or new filmmakers, we don't discount work by someone who's been around. In 2009, we included work by John Greyson and Matthias Müller, both of whom are veteran makers who do get shown outside of MIX.

**GZ:** You, among many other queer festival programmers, attended the Berlinale this year. It's rare to hear of such programmers going to Cannes or TIFF. What makes Berlin's festival such a special hub for your work? What other festivals do you regularly attend?

**SKJ:** I've been to both Cannes and TIFF as well, but Berlin has a queer history. The Panorama section of new international art-house cinema was founded by Manfred Salzgeber, who was gay. His legacy is carried on by Wieland Speck, and the Panorama is very gay-friendly. Also, the Teddy Awards for best gay films are given out at the Berlinale, and that makes it an important event. Cannes and TIFF don't actually do anything on an institutional level to cultivate recognition of gay film or the development of queer curatorial practice. (The Gay Flambé does not count!). For me, the best festivals are not the largest ones. I have a tough time at Cannes and Berlin, because there's so much emphasis on business and glamour. Images Festival in Toronto is great for its commitment to experimental film. Rotterdam, while very large, also has a distinct experimental bent that makes it a delight to attend. Frameline in San Francisco is also great. True/False in Columbia, Missouri is a documentary film festival that shows what you can do in a smaller community.

**GZ:** A few years ago, MIX cofounder Jim Hubbard complained to me, only partly in jest, that the festival receives a particular abundance of entries from Canadians and that the Canada Council for the Arts should fund MIX to sift through them all. Are the entries to MIX global these days, or do they mainly come from the U.S., U.K., Australia, and Canada? How do the programmers at MIX seek out exciting new work around the world?

**SKJ:** We don't systematically track that information, but we do get entries from around the world, outside of the Anglophone countries. There is a very healthy experimental scene in France, for example. But the challenge with the type of work we're interested in is finding people who are doing it more DIY and without institutional affiliation or support. So I'm sure there's lots of work being made that we don't see, that's thriving in its own communities. That's work we'd hope to find. At Berlin this year there was a Super8 film shot in Morocco that seemed like it would fit into MIX. It wasn't on my radar as a gay film, but I was at this program of Super8 work, and there it was. □

GER ZIELINSKI, PH.D., is currently a visiting scholar in the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University where he is researching post-1969 queer experimental film scenes in New York City and (West) Berlin.

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The National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Photo: Jennifer Dales, 2010.

# Whose Excellence? Our Excellence!

Marc James Léger

*It's a modern folly to alter the corrupt ethical system, its constitution and legislation, without changing the religion, to have a revolution without a reformation.*

– G.W.F. Hegel

Last March, a considerable number of artists, curators and cultural workers from Canada and abroad added their names to an open letter addressed to Marc Mayer, Director of the National Gallery of Canada, for a series of comments he made during a CBC report on diaspora art and the cultural politics of public institutions (CBC, “Diaspora Art,” *The National*, February 2, 2010). Mayer’s comments to reporter Jelena Adzic can be summarized with the following quote: “Our real mandate is excellence. We do think about diversity, however ... We put on what we find in the Canadian art scene that is excellent and we’re blind to colour or ethnic background, or even whether you were born in Canada, we don’t care. (...) We’re looking for excellent art. We don’t care who makes it.” These statements, because they presuppose the existence of universal standards which are then used to manage collecting practices at the NGC, solicited the organized response of people who gathered first through e-mail, then through the social networking site facebook, and then through postings to an online blog called [excellenceatthenationalgallery](http://excellenceatthenationalgallery.blogspot.com). The open letter, penned by curators Milena Placentile and Emily Falvey, and with the subsequent support of curator Ryan Rice, quickly became a catalyst for scrutiny of the NGC’s mandate and policies.

The letter takes exception to Mayer’s comments, which seem to ignore recent efforts on the part of the NGC to address its colonial and sexist legacy. The letter states: “This begs the question: Whose excellence? This is what women and ethnic minorities have been asking for centuries. (...) Today you tell us that [the] NGC doesn’t show ethnic minorities because they are not achieving ‘excellence.’ The simplistic notion that connoisseurs know ‘good art’ was thoroughly discredited by 20th century feminist and post-colonial writers, artists and activists. (...) Well, we know ‘excellence’ when we see it, and today we prefer to call it hegemony.” The letter goes on to recommend to Mayer some essential reading from feminist art historian Linda Nochlin, postcolonial

Excellence is not only concerned with markers of identity, it regulates and manages cultural differences in favour of market-based notions of human capital. A perfect example of this is the policy shift towards “creative industries” in the UK and the European Union, which was also the common platform of all the major political parties during the last Canadian federal election.

literary theorist Edward Said, and African-American cultural theorist bell hooks, and asks him to at least familiarize himself with *Fuse Magazine*.

Although the letter has generated some responses in newspapers and websites, in particular in the *Ottawa Citizen* (see <http://excellenceatthenationalgallery.blogspot.com>), I would like to consider some of the limitations of the petition as it relates to a leftist critique of the neoliberalization of cultural institutions. What I would like to address in particular is the difference between a politicization of culture that takes into consideration class as the concrete universal and a culturalized politics (or post-politics) that considers class struggle to be one category of struggle among others, in particular those based on race, gender and sexuality.

In his 1996 publication, *The University in Ruins*, Bill Readings argues that the kind of cultural nationalism that characterized the National Gallery as recently as the 1960s, has been replaced by the technocratic management of a transnational class of people who refuse identification with a specific class status or cultural identity. The idea of universal cultural standards that are the object of feminist and postcolonial cultural critics may not be the same kind of excellence that actually forms the basis of cultural administration in places like the NGC even if at times some of its members may rely on atavistic intellectual frameworks. Excellence, as Readings describes it, has less to do with formal criteria of analysis, or even political relevance, however you define it (avant-garde, cultural politics of difference, anti-global), than with performance indicators that directly link the market in intellectual and cultural produc-

tion with a global cultural marketplace in which national institutions operate as what Maria Carmen Ramirez has termed “cultural brokers.” Excellence in this regard is not only concerned with markers of identity, it regulates and manages cultural differences in favour of market-based notions of human capital. A perfect example of this is noticed in the policy shift towards “creative industries” in the UK and the European Union, which was also the common platform of all the major political parties during the last Canadian federal election. Another word for excellence in the old canonical sense, and one that actually provides a point of critique within this new neoliberal framework, is the concept of virtuosity, as it is explained by the workerist philosopher Paolo Virno. The kind of “culture wars” that the current debate is oriented around may in fact repress a class analysis.

Almost anyone who was taught critical cultural theory in undergraduate and graduate university courses understands that as soon as you provide such a class analysis of culture and you begin to relate culture to its socioeconomic conditions of production you run the risk of “economism,” or “vulgar Marxism.” For some, this is enough knowledge to leave sociology behind and move on to more exciting cultural analysis. In fact, much of the project of cultural studies as well as much contemporary art is premised on this sort of post-Marxist postmodernism and discourse theory. Janet Wolff argues that sociologists, in wanting to expose the social bases of aesthetic judgment and matters of taste as culturally constructed, tend to discredit aesthetics altogether. She argues against this kind of “sociological imperial-

ism” as well as its flipside, “postmodern relativism,” and holds that one cannot remain indefinitely “agnostic” and forever postpone aesthetic choice and deliberation. In other words, we all eventually make judgments concerning cultural excellence, even though we may not expect these judgments to be universally valid.

There is a supplement to Wolff’s argument against agnosticism, however, in Slavoj Žižek’s theory of belief. Parents do not believe in Santa Clause, he explains, but in their ritualistic actions, and through their children, they effectively believe anyway. The children relieve the parents of the burden to believe. In some ways, this is the work that Mayer and the institution he represents is performing for patriotic citizens as well as the art public. The National Gallery’s constituents are relieved of the burden to believe in universal aesthetic criteria, or to define them for themselves, as long as there are gatekeepers within institutions who are willing to perform this task for them. This at least goes some way in explaining the profoundly social nature of all cultural meaning. Another word for belief in Slavoj Žižek’s writing is ideology. The NGC can do more in terms of equity and yet continue to operate as an institution that serves the neoliberal “end of ideology” status quo. It can easily perform the first task and ignore the other, and this is true of cultural production at all levels, from art school to artist-run centres.

In the work of some of the most sophisticated thinkers of our day — Slavoj Žižek, Alain Badiou, Giorgio Agamben, Jacques Rancière — there is a critique of post-politics, the view that the major political struggles and “meta discourses” of the 19th and 20th centuries are a thing of the past and that we must turn now to the endless plurality of *petites histoires*, micropractices and the multitude of singularities. Cultural difference, as Žižek argues, is part of the logic of late capitalism. In Marx’s *Capital*, the worker’s sensual particularity and individual qualities are exchanged for their abstract value in the form of wages. In a similar way, Žižek argues that in today’s global capitalism,



The National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Photo: Jennifer Dales, 2010.

particular interests are not only universalized by hegemonic forces, but, more to the point, we become universal for ourselves. With liberal multiculturalism, he argues, identity coincides with the ruthless measurement of value in terms of the universal market forces of global capitalism.

For these reasons, we should not only consider our collective cultural wealth as such, but we should attempt to draw the links between this cultural commons and the social commons by asserting the struggle against capitalism. This brings me to the *faux pas* made by Adzic in her news report, wherein she conflated diaspora art and work by artists of colour with “outsider art” — a category usually reserved for art made by children, the insane, folk artists or sometimes by artists

who are unaware of Western cultural frameworks. Perhaps the real outsider art is art that is capable of prefiguring an outside to capitalism. This art would have to be, given the state of things, the art of the masses who resist the reduction of life and all of human culture to the workings of free market ideology. □

MARC JAMES LÉGER in an artist, writer and educator living in Montreal. He is editor of the collected writings of Bruce Barber, *Performance, [Performance] and Performers* (YYZ BOOKS, 2007), and of the forthcoming *Art and Contestation in the New Century*.

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Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge. *It's Still Privileged Art* (Book Cover), 1975. Courtesy: the artists.

## ...IT'S STILL PRIVILEGED ART.



# THE CHANGING PICTURE

By Kevin Rodgers

## 1. ISN'T IT TIME TO BEGIN?

"...The Red Guards Come and Go, Talking of Michelangelo" is Allan Sekula's personal reflection on the possibilities for a radical synthesis of social and art history, one "reformulated from below." A key contribution to the recently published book *Condé and Beveridge: Class Works*, the essay is divided in two parts. The first part covers a series of personal anecdotes from New York in the 1970s interwoven with an exposition on Robert Koehler's painting *The Strike* (1886) — a influential piece of "working-class art" that

Sekula saw one November afternoon and that appears in Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge's project *Class Work* (1987-1988). The painting is a depiction of agitated factory workers converging on a company office; a solitary top-hatted capitalist and a young clerk stand ready to meet them. Rescued from obscurity by Marxist literary historian Lee Baxandall, the painting captures a moment of potential violence.

The second part of Sekula's essay takes *The Strike* as a starting point to delve fiercely into issues of "topicality," hyperbole and eternal damnation in the work of Condé and Beveridge. Reflecting on the artists' first key collaboration, *It's Still Privileged Art* (1976), Sekula asks, "Given the stakes, is it surprising that the entire project is haunted by the spectre of banishment?" Before long, Sekula is leading the reader to a vivid interpretation of the majestic montage *The Fall Of Water* (2006-07), whereby the artists' "picture-pages sweep us a few scenes downriver in *Genesis*, to the Flood, and the scuttling of ragged claws."

With this evocative essay, Sekula opens up the work of Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge to an extent unlike any other I have read. By declaring the artists' work a deliberate fusing and/or confusing of "the space of the page and the space of the stage," Sekula arrives at an explication of their practice that is crisp, insightful and demands further reflection. In order to do so necessitates a return to the artworks themselves.

This is made all the more possible by recent initiatives by Jan Allen, Curator of Contemporary Art at the Agnes Etherington Art Center in Kingston. The publication *Class Works*, produced in conjunction with Susan McEachern and The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, accompanies the broad and nationally traveling survey exhibition *Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge: Working Culture*. The final stop of the exhibition opened this spring at The Robert McLaughlin Gallery in Oshawa, and it is where I traveled to see the artwork.

## 2. SO NOW YOU'RE DOING 'POLITICAL ART'

Between the years 1982 and 1983, Condé and Beveridge produced the 56-part photo narrative *Oshawa — A History of CAW Local 222*. Created in collaboration with members of the Canadian Auto Workers Local 222 (then still part of the US-based United Auto Workers), the project emphasized the changing role of women in the workplace and the union. Divided into five sections, this oral and photo history covers the founding of the union in 1937

and tracks changes from the Second World War to post-war growth and stability. Chronicling gender tensions that resulted from the introduction of women into non-traditional jobs during the 1970s, the series culminates with the looming threats of new technology in 1984. The project anticipated many of the strategies the artists would go on to use repeatedly throughout their practice, including

an immersive and collaborative approach with organized labor and the facilitation of the workers' own experiences of the relationships between family and the workplace. Through the use of actors, non-naturalistic sets and stylistic devices such as montage and captions, the artists visualized and manifested the complicated relationship between art and labor. "Ambiguity is a strategy that management uses to obscure an issue," Beveridge recently said to me when asked about visual and, by extension, political clarity. "Ambiguity is like pulling wool over the eyes."

Over the past 30 years, Condé and Beveridge have been committed to a sustained and unapologetic political analysis. Whether interviewing immigration workers on detention and deportation, debating art and artists as a moral conscience or persistently pushing for a fuller democratization of the arts, they have rarely ceased analyzing how art could be politically involved and publicly performed. In an era where class politics have been supplanted by cultural antagonism — where culture outweighs economics as a matter of public concern — and the appeal to "the political" advanced by mainstream art discourse often relies on an over-emphasis on the theoretical affinities between aesthetics and the polis, the work of Condé and Beveridge is a uniquely pragmatic practice of engagement.

As *Working Culture*, a survey covering the years 1976 to the present, opens at The Robert McLaughlin Gallery in Oshawa almost 30 years after *A History of Local 222*, it is fitting to undertake a thorough and renewed evaluation of the artists' practice as a model for artistic and political engagement.

Having already moved from Kingston to Halifax and Windsor, the latest incarnation in Oshawa is a homecoming of sorts in that the entire sequence of *Oshawa — A History of Local 222* will simultaneously be installed in the Local 222 Union hall.<sup>1</sup> In keeping with Condé and Beveridge's practice, gallery viewers are encouraged to make the trek to a union local at the south end of Oshawa. Arguably, it is testament to the mutual respect long developed between organized labor and the artists that this type of installation can successfully take place, as the artists have worked tirelessly to build trust and integrate themselves into the lives of workers, both in the private and the public sector.

The model of integrated engagement that Condé and Beveridge have practiced for 30 years did not, however, appear fully formed. This is confirmed by the work that confronts the viewer immediately upon entering the spacious installation of *Working Culture* at The Robert McLaughlin Gallery. The nine-part photographic series *Art is Political* (1976) is given ample room. The centerpiece of Condé and Beveridge's 1976 exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario *It's Still Privileged Art*, the photographs were tucked away in storage until this survey.

Created when the artists were undergoing a sea change in their methodology (“Where to begin, what kind of work to do, can we be effective?”), these large-scale black and white photos depict the artists gesturing towards each other, friends, and in the final frame, the viewer, while large lettering spells out “ART IS POLITICAL” across the backdrop of the sequence. Referencing the choreography of Yvonne Rainer, it is Condé and Beveridge’s first photographic work and brings the politics of spectator and performer relations directly to bear on their own politicized endeavor. The artists are the primary actors here, and while they would often act in their future work, there is a marked level of urgency at play.

Directly in front of this piece are two vitrines displaying a sequence of small drawings on cards that went on to form another key component of the 1976 AGO exhibition. Black and white and in

a graphic style, they depict the life of the artists. Some images are of them at home with their children, or in the studio, courting curators and collectors or debating with each other the compatibility of artistic practice with social commitment. Each drawing seems to have undergone revision, with layers of white correction fluid masking wayward lines and text, words crossed out and rewritten. The drawings are by turns delicate, humorous and scathing, and are witness to the artists turning their back on their previous minimalist sculpture and painting practices. Eventually they came to be published in a small book that arose from conversations between the artists about their political awakening. “Let’s face it,” a caption from card 33 says, “there’s bound to be some confusions and outright dumb mistakes.” To some *Its Still Privileged Art* was exactly that; to others it represented a necessary step toward engagement with the ‘real’ world.

Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge. *Oshawa: A History of CAW Local 222, 1938-1945*, (#6 in a series of 6), 1982-83. Courtesy: the artists.



After the war the aircraft department was just closed down. The single girls were transferred to Cutting and Sewing. The wives, well, they said our place was in the home. We should have fought it, right then and there.

A chronological arrangement of some of Condé and Beveridge’s key works is hung throughout three rooms at the MacLaughlin Gallery. These include the exceptional sequence *Linda* from *Standing Up* (1980-81), *No Immediate Threat* (1985-86) and *No Power Greater* (1990-91); in another room hang more recent works including *Ill Wind* (2001), a series based on visual workshops with health care workers, and the four-part *Cultural Relations* (2005). Whether manually collaged or digitally constructed, staged or acted out in workshops, all of these images evince a highly intentional construction of narrative and meaning. They are theatricality *par excellence*.

If the practice of Yvonne Rainer was in the background of *Art is Political* and the influence of Bertolt Brecht can be found on *Class Work* (1987-1988) and others, I wish to take up Sekula’s reference to Erwin Piscator (1893-1966). Piscator was a German theatre direc-

tor renowned for representing socio-political content with an extensive use of mechanical aids and stage effects. By emphasizing recorded speech and documented fact, Piscator interrogated the whole notion of a single imaginative creator and instead put the author in position of an organizer of given material. Condé and Beveridge have seamlessly synthesized aspects of this approach (“We don’t have the corner on creativity”) and bridged it with more recent techniques such as those of the Forum Theatre.<sup>2</sup> Often their work feels like community theatre, low budget and full of the language of mass communication. A single image is a part of an ensemble, written text and speech important vehicles for contestation.

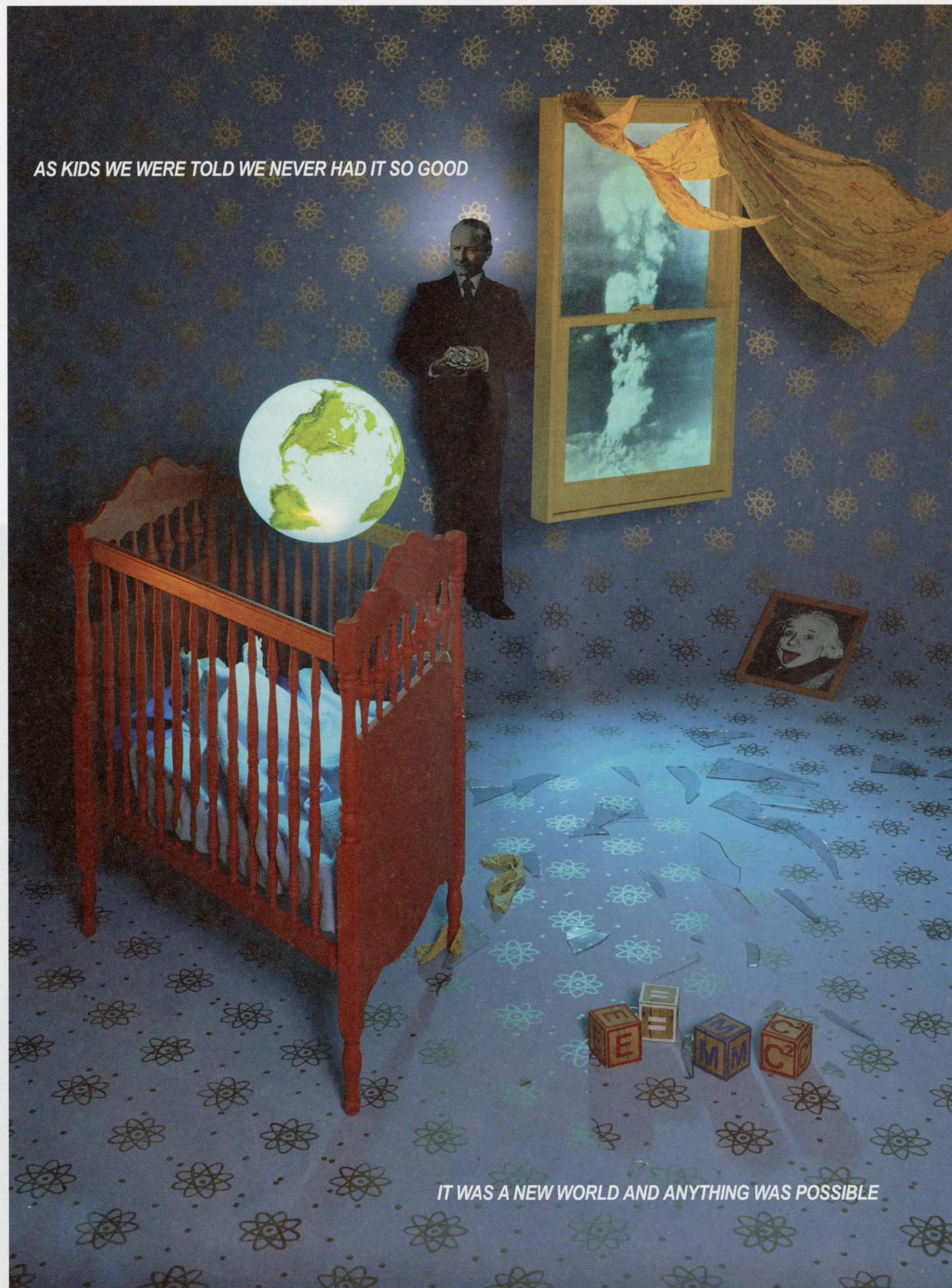
“In a bound volume,” Sekula writes in *Class Works*, “every *recto* has its *verso*.” Mirrors reflect possibility and depicted windows become holes through other sides, “a preview of what is coming two pages

Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge. *Linda*, 1980-81. Courtesy: the artists.





AS KIDS WE WERE TOLD WE NEVER HAD IT SO GOOD



IT WAS A NEW WORLD AND ANYTHING WAS POSSIBLE

Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge. *No Immediate Threat: Crib* (#2 from a series of 8), 1985-86. Courtesy: the artists.

hence." By primarily producing the work in multi-image sequences, the artists bring attention to how images could act within larger scenarios that are no longer, or not yet visible. In *Linda*, from *Standing Up* (1980-1981), a work bathroom mirror reflects doubt and possibility. Graffiti is scrawled above the sinks: TAKE THIS JOB AND SHOVE IT. Doubled in the reflection of the bathroom are black-and-white-images of domestic life ("You're mouthy. You've changed.") Other images are of street scenes and picket lines; through car windows and rear-view mirrors are glimpsed scenes of fright and action. Over the six-image sequence of *Linda*, the graffiti text on the wall is slowly altered to become TAKE THIS JØB COMPANY AND SHØVE UNIONIZE IT, with a second hand affirmatively writing "right on!" beneath the text. *Linda* is not a depiction of one individual but of family, workplace and friends, and the wounds that strike situations can create. If a somber sheen adheres to *Linda*, a dizzying display of victorious eviction is found 25 years on in a single image that hangs by itself on a wall in the next room.

This is the aforementioned *The Fall of Water* (2006-07), an allegory about emerging water politics. It is based on Pieter Bruegel's 1562 painting *Fall of the Rebel Angels*, a chaotic and vicious scene where fallen angels succumb to mutation and loss, away from the divine light. Condé and Beveridge were inspired by the liquid and marine surface of the Breugel composition where an infestation of floating fish with arms and menacing creatures crowd, toss and turn throughout the image. In their dense digital *mise-en-scène*, however, the artists have transposed the depiction of the struggle between the Archangels and Lucifer to a contemporary setting, with an altogether different result. Heads appear to flip over asses and the angels become activists of various nationalities and cultures. A Bolivian indigenous woman leads the charge against a dystopia of disease and dead fish, oil companies, privateers and corporate greed. The entire composition is an incisive and humorous delight.

It is this triumphant image of liberation that graces the cover of *Class Works*. None of Condé and Beveridge's works is more emblematic, nor suffused with such tumbling and rich detail. If, as Jan Allen says in her introduction to the book, a conviction that the moment was right for assessing their work led to *Working Culture*, then the accompanying publication would have to recognize the wide scope of their practice.

Edited by Bruce Barber, *Class Works* contains a wealth of information and extensive analysis on the practice of Condé and Beveridge, including seven essays and an interview. Also included is a chronology of their practice as described by the artists themselves. Due to the availability of space and curatorial design, many of the artists' projects are absent from the exhibition itself. And while there are absences that are questionable, including many of the banners that were commissioned and some publications and posters, *Class Works* does a commendable job of filling in the gaps. The selection of authors shows a wide range of influence, understanding and commit-

ment. Those who have previously and most prominently written on the artists include Clive Robertson and Dot Tuer, but also included here are essays by Allan Sekula, union educator D'Arcy Martin and Irish art curator Declan McGonagle.

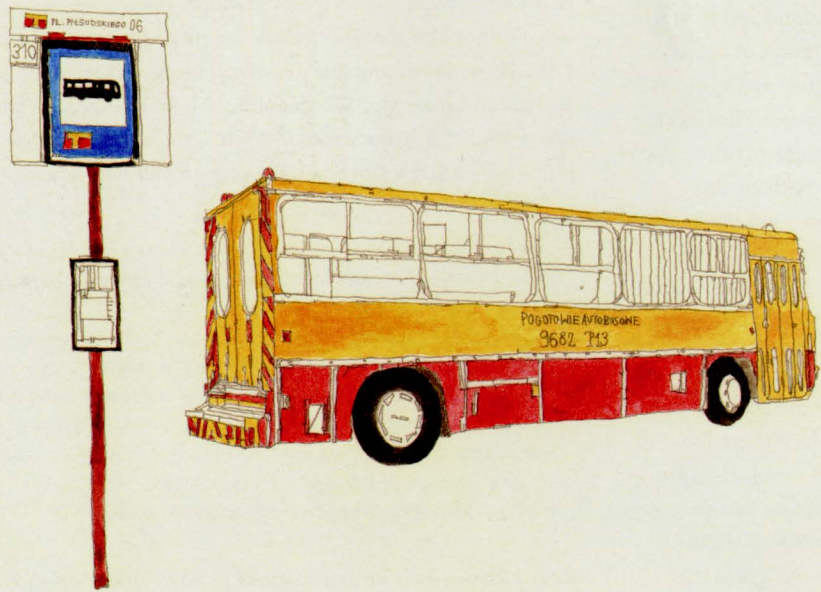
What may appear as a formality within the bibliographical notes ends up being an inviting departure point for future research. Included are listings of books, anthologies, articles and reviews on the artists; equally important are publications, articles, reviews and editorial work by Condé and Beveridge themselves. It does not seem unreasonable that a future publication could be produced containing their written contributions to various publications over the past 35 years, enhancing an even fuller understanding of their remarkable strategies.

To read through *Class Works*, however, is no substitute for experiencing the artists' photographs. As only one example, *Art is Political* (1976) is nowhere to be found in its pages, and many of the significant projects are simply excerpted. Even with the sheer number of photo illustrations, the elegance and detail of the images are lost. Yet what replaces the image is needed and welcome information. In competing with corporate and public service announcements, Condé and Beveridge have worked with their many collaborators in pursuing a practice inflected by not only the lineage of Social Realism, but populist rhetoric and the language of mass communication. *Class Works* does a notable job of gathering and presenting this analysis and context. "We might be able to change the intentions of our work," the artists wrote in 1976, "but how much does it change if it is still available, for example, only to cultural institutions?" □

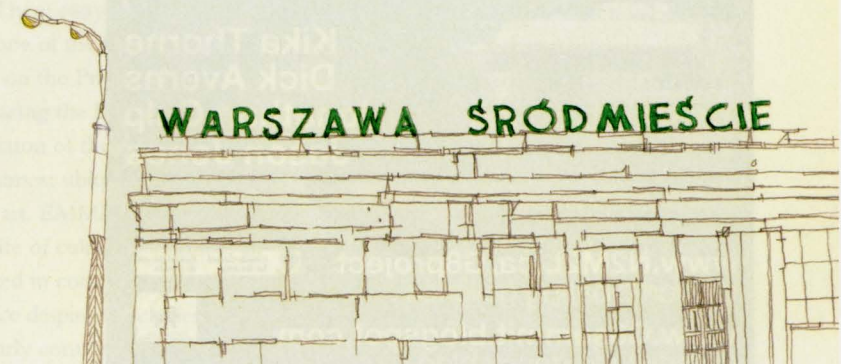
#### Notes

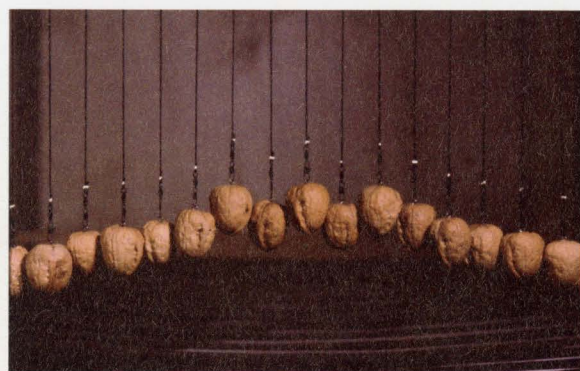
1. The Canadian Auto Workers Local 222 is Canada's largest private sector local Union and has been at the forefront of integrating progressive politics into policy and community.
2. "Forum Theatre works from rehearsal improvisation to create a scene of specific oppression. Using the Greek terms "protagonist" and "antagonist," Forum Theatre seeks to show a person (the protagonist) who is trying to deal with an oppression and failing because of the resistance of one or more obstacles (the antagonists). Forum scenes can be virtual one-act plays or more often short scenes (1 - 5 minutes)." <http://www.theatreoftheoppressed.com/#BACKGROUND>

KEVIN RODGERS is an artist whose practice draws upon provisional formalism and the rhetoric of radical individualism. A 2008 graduate of University of Guelph (MFA), Rodgers is currently a doctoral candidate in art and visual culture at the University of Western Ontario.



**ANKA DABROWSKA** makes fine pencil drawings on paper that she customizes with geographical details of her native Warsaw, Poland. Her hybridization of imagery, recalled from memory and data gathered from fact-finding missions to Warsaw, describes the disparity between one's personal relationship to, and the collective memory of, a given place.





Mary-Anne Wensley, *Coping Mechanism #3 The Troller 2000* (photo: courtesy of the artist)

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**25 YEARS INTO THE FUTURE: EMMEDIA's Expanded Standard Timeline: Artists and Electronic Media in Calgary | EMMEDIA 1980 through 2005...**

EDITED BY Grant Poier  
EMMEDIA, 2009  
REVIEW BY Diana Sherlock

For anyone who has worked in a community or institution for a long time, there comes a point when one recognizes that the cycle of forgetting shapes our histories as much as our memories. Perhaps in an attempt to make something new, to further progress, each generation of practitioners enacts a sort of willful blindness to history. Yet this cycle slows our movement forward, as new leaders often work in a historical vacuum, reinventing the wheel *ad nauseam*, without critically challenging earlier attempts at the same thing. Calgary's contemporary media and visual art history has been shaped almost exclusively by artist-run culture and the Alberta College of Art & Design. Save for a few exceptions — sporadic individual artists' catalogues, The New Gallery's *First Ten* and *Silver* histories and TRUCK's recent 25<sup>th</sup>-anniversary anthology, *Resonant Dialogues* — this history has gone mainly unwritten, and therefore remains inaccessible to younger generations.

*Expanded Standard Timeline* is the latest in a still small but growing number of artist-run centre publications that attempt to counter this cultural amnesia. Edited by Centre Art Video/EMMEDIA co-founder and video artist Grant Poier, and designed by Poier and Joel Danielson/Ihiver, this 210-page anthology references a digital video-editing window in its design and layout. It borrows from the concept of A/B roll editing: a multi-track video compositing process whereby images and texts can be variously



Grant Poier. *Expanded Standard Time Line: Artists and Electronic Media in Calgary*. EM Media, 2009.

combined, altering meaning through both context and time. The 15 A/B roll essays in the "Texts & Transitions" section — seven essays commissioned for EM's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2005 and a handful of reprinted essays spanning the years 1991-2006 — sit side-by-side and unfold simultaneously to form the main body of the book.

"A-Roll Conversation and Dialogue" includes seven substantial interview-based essays that mine EMMEDIA's archive and members' memories to tell a very focused story of a place. These essays record EMMEDIA's history as one of the first electronic media art centers on the Prairies, while simultaneously tracing the history of video from the introduction of the Portapak in 1967 to its now almost ubiquitous presence in contemporary art. EMMEDIA is pictured throughout as a site of cultural resistance, an organization rooted in community-building and artistic practice despite the challenges of Alberta's particularly conservative climate. The cornerstones of early artist-run centre

philosophy — independent (read self-determined), experimental and non-commercial production — are not only presented and reinforced throughout the book, but also complicated through debate.

Significantly, the first essay is written by Sandra Vida, a Calgary video artist and arts administrator, who nurtured the beginnings of Centre Art Video (later EMMEDIA) in 1979 under the umbrella of Off Centre Centre (The New Gallery). Vida's essay, like many in the book, traces EMMEDIA's history by sharing the recollections of some of its key figures and also by recognizing how their diverse artistic practices informed and shaped the centre. Similarly, texts by Karen Knights and Kay Burns delve deeply into artists' practices and individual works to demonstrate a now 30-year history of socio-political engagement on the Prairies through the production and distribution of media art. EMMEDIA's seeming desire to locate a regional identity and aesthetic is also evident in Rob Milthorp's interview with Nelson

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Henricks. Later in the book, Henricks re-prints “a love letter to EM” in the guise of a curatorial statement from his 25<sup>th</sup>-anniversary screening, which also develops the idea of an “EMMEDIA house style.” Importantly, the publication makes visible some of EMMEDIA’s productions by including a limited edition DVD compilation of five video programs selected by some of the writers to further the ideas in their texts.

“B-Roll Activity and Detail” comprises eight essays, which are somewhat awkwardly inset into the “A-Roll” texts. Despite the unfortunate implied hierarchy between the A/B Roll texts, the “Activity and Detail” section expands the context for the “A-Roll” interviews by including close-ups of past curatorial initiatives, or cutaways to arts policy or collaborations with media art centres nationally. Similarly, the continuous chronology at the bottom of each page traces key moments in EMMEDIA’s history, but also sketches the sociopolitical context out of which EMMEDIA grew. Finally, “Ephemera” closes the book with a mish-mash of short texts that introduce past and current staff/directors, book contributors, and the tale of EM told through an etymology of its ever-evolving name and location.

Every artist-run centre has a core group of individuals that shepherds the centre through its daily life, and EMMEDIA is no different. One might criticize *this* history of EMMEDIA for being too focused on one group of individuals, who are from one time, from one discipline and from one politic, which does not fully reflect the diverse identity of the centre, and particularly EM’s recent history. Certainly, some attempt has been made to connect different generations of producers from EMMEDIA’s history, but a younger generation of artists lacks visibility. On the other hand, such a focused history allows for a more complicated, layered telling of a story, and a well-told story this is. Poier and many of the other writers recognize the limits of history — that any history is partial, subjective and exclusionary. Poier’s voice resonates throughout, but the interrelatedness of his artistic identity and EMMEDIA’s

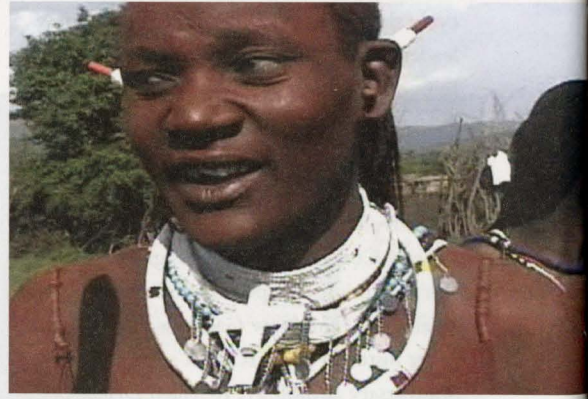
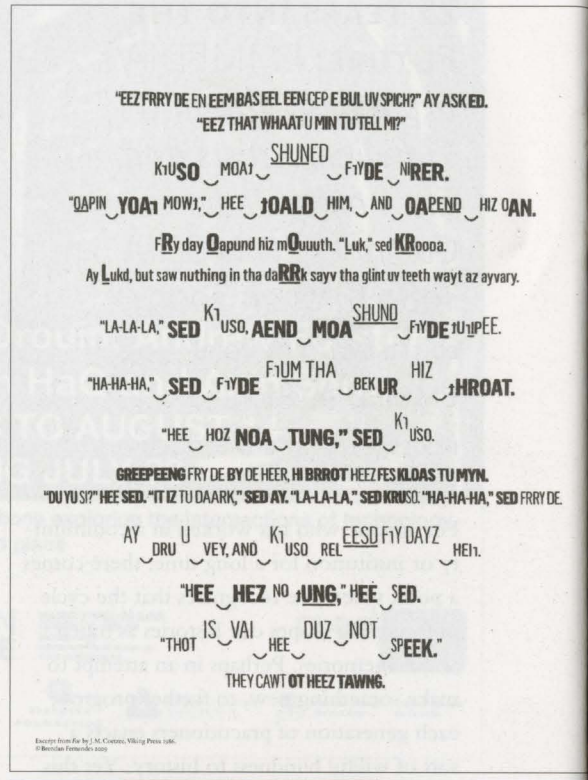
history is particularly evident in his “Monolog: Local-personal Lens” text, in which he tells the story of EMMEDIA through his own practice. Here he overtly embraces the personal, subjective nature of an official history, and by example, encourages us all to write our own.

*Expanded Standard Timeline* acknowledges that to know one’s history is inevitably to shape one’s future. Within the context of this history, Rae Staseson, Valerie LeBlanc and Vern Hume, in particular, raise interesting questions about the future of media art production and distribution centers given the now more-or-less technologically self-sufficient DIY generation of socially-networked media artists who see little or no difference between critical media and entertainment. How can media centres refocus on community to create social and educational opportunities that are not offered within formalized academic or commercial structures? Or could the future of EMMEDIA, as Hume suggests, develop a hybrid profit/non-profit model that serves the needs of internet-based artistic production and distribution? Whatever the issues, this history of EMMEDIA will greatly help to inform future discussions about the roles of media art centres.

DIANA SHERLOCK is a freelance writer and curator from Calgary.

**UNDOING IDENTITIES:  
BRENDAN FERNANDES’  
Haraka Haraka**  
Montréal arts interculturelles •  
4 February – 6 March, 2010  
REVIEW BY Jen Kennedy

The centerpiece of Brendan Fernandes’ exhibition *Haraka Haraka* is *Nyumba ata Choma*, a makeshift hunting village composed of six camouflage sniper tents, each housing a small television screen that plays a looped video of a Yule log superimposed on an archival news



still from the torching of three million dollars worth of illegal ivory seized by the Kenyan government in 1989. The impermanent architecture of the dwellings, with televisions haunted by hearths at their center, immediately evokes a sense of the *unheimlich*, at once familiar and strange, that is here linked to the often-repressive force of official history represented by the burning ivory — a spectacle that then-president Daniel arap Moi hired a Hollywood pyrotechnician to stage in front of the global media. By referencing a skillfully designed, now largely forgotten, effort to remake Kenya’s international image, Fernandes questions the contingent and



<clockwise from top left> Brendan Fernandes. *Foe*, 2009. Image: Lauren Wickware; Installation view of *Nyumba Ata Choma*, 2008; *Aya Mama* (Video Still), 2008; *Foe* (Video Still), 2009. All courtesy: the artists.

manipulated foundations on which cultural and national identities are staked. Translated as “The House will Burn,” *Nyumba ata Choma* draws a connection between the function of the concepts of “home” and “homeland” in fixing identity and identification to a defined place. While the former is material and the latter discursive, both are equally embroiled in a violent cycle of destruction and reconstruction in the service of globalization. The initially calming, crackling sounds of the semi-hidden fires turn menacing in combination with the image of ivory and the politics of violence

— the brutal poaching, the failed government, the spectacle of waste — that underlie them. Indeed, the viewer’s experience of *Nyumba ata Choma* is all the more unsettled when, walking between the tents, she is confronted by the fact that this is not a village but a war zone. The tents are not homes but shelters for killers who could emerge at any moment and wipe us out of Fernandes’ fictive scenario built on contradictions. The bookends of the exhibition, video works *Foe* and *Aya Mama*, look at immigration and tourism respectively. In *Foe*, an experimental rendering of what a subversive or

composite model of communication might look like, Fernandes is aided by an off-screen language instructor as he reads from J.M. Coetzee’s postcolonial reimagining of *Robinson Crusoe* in the accents of his heterodox cultural backgrounds. The passage selected by Fernandes is a conversation between three castaways in which Crusoe (the master) explains to Susan Bartman (the visitor) that his slave Friday has been mutilated and cannot speak. The relationships that underwrite this text, the struggle between self and other, master and slave, and activity and passivity, are all inflected by the uneven distribution of language itself. Friday’s apparent loss — his

inability to speak, his severed tongue — is echoed by Fernandes's own autobiography and his attempt to relearn the accents that haunt his past. By focusing on the teaching process, however, Fernandes reveals that he is not interested in whether he can authentically reproduce or "regain" each accent. Rather it is the suspended act of learning, fluctuating between speech that we hear as discourse and speech that is understood as noise that is of interest here. Oscillating between diverse cultural accents, Fernandes evokes the innovative and urgent means of communication, such as Creole languages or pidgin, that emerge in moments of cultural contact when "official" languages fail.

Presentation, representation and self-representation commingle in *Foe*, foregrounding the slippage between history and fiction and between biography and pseudo-biography in the conquest of communication and language. Rather than imagining a material space, like Crusoe's island, where the socio-cultural frames that structure these relationships can be revised and reinvested, Fernandes engages at the level of the discursive, asking us to consider the innumerable ways in which our received modes of communication and representation delineate the conflicts and crises we are confronted with in the global world. He asks how, in other words, we might invent an imaginative, transcultural and hybrid space of communication outside the oppressive dominance of institutionally or nationally sanctioned models based on consensus and exclusion, by investing in the potentiality of contradictions and *disidentification* instead.

In *Aya Mama*, the third and final work in *Haraka Haraka*, tourist footage of Masai men performing a ritual is juxtaposed with video from a New York fashion show. If the contrast between these images appears crude, it is this crudeness that lets *Aya Mama* escape the by now well-worn dichotomy of "traditional" or "primitive" cultures, on the one hand, and "progressive" or "civilized" cultures, on the other. Instead, Fernandes looks at this footage from the perspective of tourism, the exchange of consumers or

the inverse of immigration, the exchange of producers, invoked in *Foe*. Both of the rituals we see performed in *Aya Mama* have been designed to sell. The fashion show and the Masai warrior's recital are products of an intricate system of global trade — a system in which art and representation are increasingly recruited to reproduce hegemonic power relations. The glimpses we catch of "western" watches and street clothes under the Masai's traditional garb affirm this fact.

*Aya Mama* explores the extent to which cultural identities have become commercial goods in the service of the spectacle-commodity economy. Through the uneasy relationship between the video and the voice-over, which recounts a passage from his personal history, Fernandes investigates the slippage between identity as it is related to subjectivity, and identity as it is circumscribed by the highly constructed system of representations that underwrite global power relations.

Like its title, taken from the Swahili proverb "hurry hurry has no blessing," all of the works in *Haraka Haraka* question the roles played by contradiction, paradox, and dissonance in re-imagining ways of doing, saying, and being-in-common in the global world. Despite often appearing innocuous, these modes of communication and representation — language, media, art, markers of national identity, etc. — are embroiled in the complex system of power relations that underwrite almost all political conflicts today. At stake in Fernandes' work is how we use art to imagine alternatives.

JEN KENNEDY is a SSHRC doctoral fellow at Binghamton University and part of an ongoing artistic collaboration with New York-based artist Liz Linden that explores the heterogeneous field of contemporary feminism. She recently completed the Whitney Independent Study Program.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND THE FAMILY FRAME:

### Jaret Belliveau's "Dominion Street"

Gallery TPW • 4 February – 6 March, 2010

REVIEW BY Matthew Ryan Smith

Documenting a period of five years, Jaret Belliveau's *Dominion Street* presents a visual narrative of his mother's cancer alongside other incidents within the family frame. Speaking to questions of sickness, love and loss, Belliveau offers the viewer strikingly informal glimpses of his family as he himself would have seen them — in a hospital room, in an alleyway, in his father's bedroom and so forth. When these photographs are hung in an exhibition space, we are seemingly invited by Belliveau's autobiographic lens to experience his family's suffering and to grieve alongside them. We can be assured that there is contentment in between the moments shown in the photographs, but Belliveau consciously fixes his camera on his family's plight, creating photographs riddled with emotion and affect.

One of the central aims with this recent work, as Belliveau himself explains, was "...to be compassionate to my father losing a wife. Or to my grandmother watching her daughter die."<sup>1</sup> There is little catharsis for Belliveau in these images, only responsible (and faithful) documentation, and the support that comes from the distance of the camera. The images he captures are affecting simply because most people can relate to them. As cancer sweeps through our families, friends, colleagues, we identify with these images — they generate flash-lit glimpses of our own memories living close to the illness.

Three major threads reveal themselves in this series: the resistance to cancer by the artist's mother, the maturity of the artist's brother and the coping of the artist's father. Viewers are witness to the worsening of Mrs.



Jaret Belliveau. *Telling Jokes*, 2004. Courtesy: the artist.



Jaret Belliveau. *Saturday Afternoon*, 2003. Courtesy: the artist.

Belliveau's health over several photographs, but the artist also captures his mother's emotional highs. The family orbits Mrs. Belliveau throughout the series, attesting to their strength and resilience.

It is obvious that cancer causes suffering in both those with the disease and those who are close to them. For Mr. Belliveau, his wife's cancer has rendered him emotionally and physically weary. In only the few short years of the series, decades of age show in his face. In *Saturday Afternoon* (2003), Mr. Belliveau's bed has become a centre of intrigue. He sleeps with arms crossed on a Super Mario Bros. pillowcase sheltered by a bubbly pink blanket. Several years later, after his wife's death in January of 2005, there is an image of an empty bed with an unsheeted mattress, rumpled blanket and a deeply rust-stained pillow (*Master Bedroom*, 2006). Mr. Belliveau's bed has become a site of abject loss. It appears that without the physical presence of his wife, and following the trauma of her death, Mr. Belliveau's bed has become a metaphor for his emotional and physical desolation.

Considering his father's bed of sleep alongside his mother's bed of confinement, Belliveau offers what is arguably the most poignant photograph in the series with *Telling Jokes* (2004). In it, Mrs. Belliveau is caught in a moment of laughter. She sits up in bed, her oversized green shirt blending into the pale green background of the wall behind. Her hands are held together and a tub of ice cream rests in her lap. In earlier pictures, the representational presence of God is readily available in such works as *After Service* (2003) where Mrs. Belliveau cleans up after a service she has conducted in her role as a minister. Later, as the cancer worsens, the visual prominence of God, as characterized by the crucifix and other symbols, is diminished. The visual focus has shifted from the incarnation of God to simpler pleasures like ice cream. Arguably, the question of the visibility and invisibility of God is what is most fascinating about the series as a whole. Is this a conscious choice by Belliveau, or

mere coincidence? Do the images confront a larger moral and spiritual dilemma?

Combining old family photographs, sculpture, and Belliveau's recent photographic practice, the exhibition teems with all things autobiographical, so much so that it tends to look "busy." Particular displays like the collection of old found family photographs, arranged in no particular chronological order, are perhaps intended to add familial context, but they are seemingly out of place and add ambivalence to the current series. Yet, one cannot help but be torn between the idea that the exhibition calls for a narrower, more selective focus on current work on the one hand, and the idea that the complexity of family life, containing heterogeneous circumstances in which past present and future affect each other, demands this kind of complicated representation. What is essentially at question in this exhibition is that area *in between* comprehension of the artist's time and space (autobiography) and its representation (exhibition).

1. The Torontoist. "Jaret Belliveau's Family Portraits." [http://torontoist.com/2010/02/family\\_portraits.php](http://torontoist.com/2010/02/family_portraits.php) (accessed March 26, 2010).

MATTHEW RYAN SMITH is a Toronto-based writer, curator and Ph.D. candidate in Art and Visual Culture at The University of Western Ontario. His current research explores the politics of disclosure in contemporary autobiographical and confessional art.

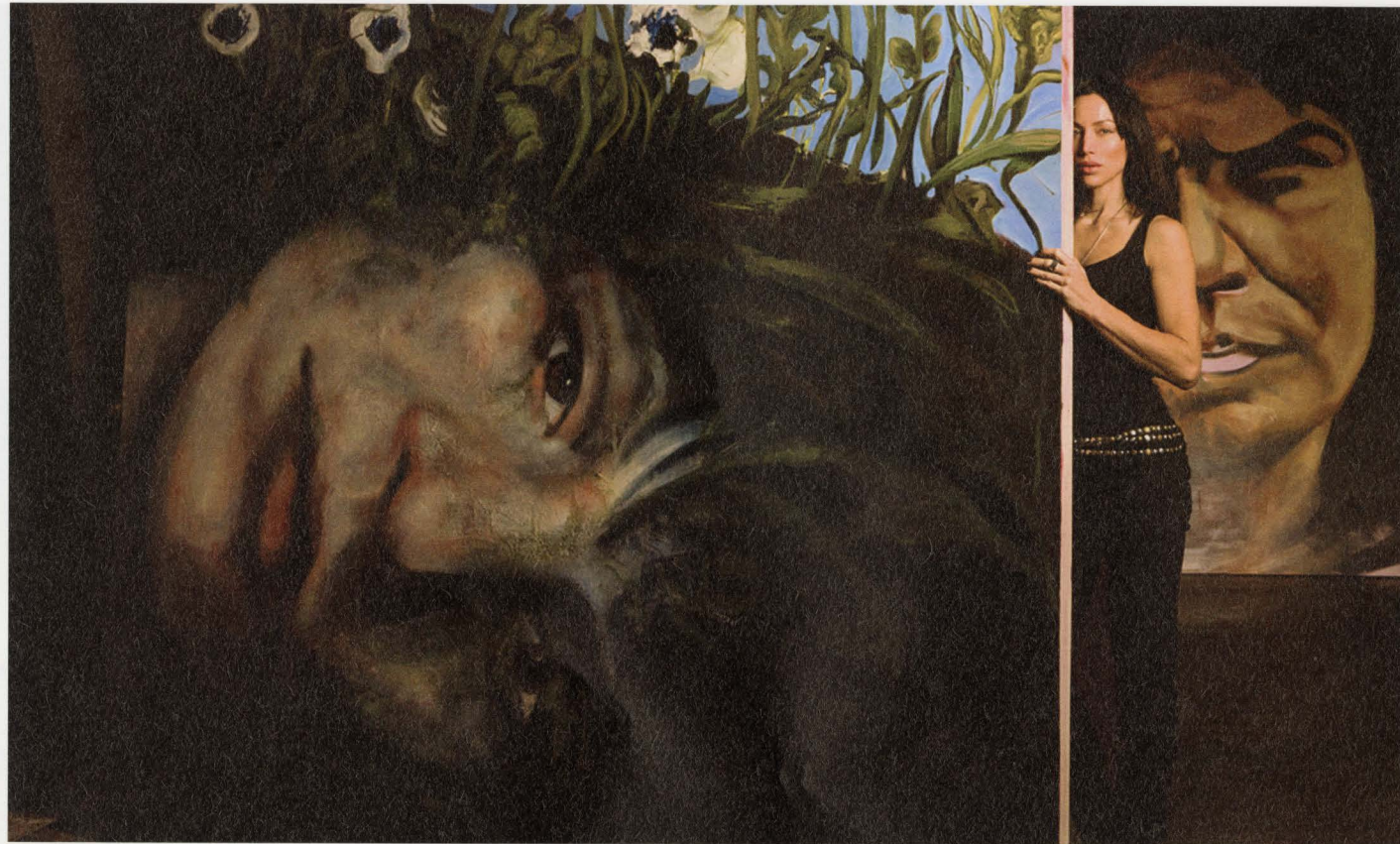
**BRUTALIZING VENEERS:  
PAMELA MASIK'S  
*The Forgotten* (Preview)**  
Vancouver Public Library Square  
• 16 – 26, January 2010  
REVIEW BY FRANCISCO-FERNANDO  
GRANADOS

During the month of January, artist Pamela Masik installed a selection from her project *The Forgotten* in the exhibition space at the Central Branch of the Vancouver Public Library. *The Forgotten* consists of a series of large-scale paintings depicting the 69 women who have disappeared from Vancouver's Downtown East Side. Upon entering Library Square, I first found the work as I looked down through the glass railing towards the basement. I walked downstairs to get a closer look.

A suite of five 8'x10' portraits hang against a glass wall. The paintings appear to be based on snapshots of the women that were sourced from their "missing" posters. For each canvas, Masik has taken a different approach, as though to give each work a sense of individuality. The women's names and other words have been scribbled in the oil paint. One of the portraits presents a woman's face partially erased with white paint; another renders the brutalized features in an earth-tone *grisaille*; yet another has been painted over a newspaper collage. Perhaps most disturbing is the canvas that depicts an image of a woman's face slashed vertically all the way through. They are exposed like this, marred and humiliated, in an overwhelmingly spectacular size. The relationship between artist and model that Masik enacts does not merely seem to represent, but indeed reproduce the violence that has been inflicted on her subjects.

This public showing of the work served to publicize "an exclusive preview" for the project that took place in the artist's "new 14,000 sq ft studio" on January 29th. Vancouver's Mayor, Gregor Robertson, who announced at the event that the complete set of portraits is going to be exhibited through the Museum of Anthropology in early 2011, attended the private preview.

The invitation for the January 29th event features a quote from Antony Shelton, Director of the Museum of Anthropology. In it, he proclaims that the artist "returns the humanity to her subjects" through her paintings. Masik's own statement in her website goes on to say that "[t]he intent of



Pamela Masik posing with her *Forgotten* series. Photo: Melissa Gidney, 2010.

the work [...] is to raise awareness of the social problem inherent within our society.” The choices of the Library, the Museum of Anthropology, the reference to the private artist’s studio and the website (<http://www.theforgotten.ca/>), as contexts for the exhibition of these images, bring up important questions about the ways in which Masik’s attempt to exalt and rehumanize her models signify in the expanded social field in which the artist herself wants the work to operate.

What kind of knowledge is created when the brutalization of the disappeared women is so graphically displayed? How can the project restore the dignity of the subjects when the audience is asked to look down on them? How does placing the images of the victims in an anthropological museum serve to humanize them? What are the historical implications of this choice of venue, particularly in light of the fact that many of the disappeared women from the Downtown East Side belong to First Nations communi-

ties? What happens when these images of violence are privatized and turned into an art-world event?

The majority of the pictures on the website for the project feature the artist in front of her creations. In the image found next to her Artist’s Statement, Masik’s fashionable attire and flawless make-up stands in stark contrast to the blood-red paint that drips from her subject’s nose. In another shot from the Press Gallery, the artist’s sophisticated pose denotes a socio-economic privilege that disconnects her from the classed and racialized likeness found in the painting behind her. It is perhaps this disconnect that makes the paintings feel so insulting (jarring is too mild a word). There seems to be a lack of connection not only between the artist and the models, but between the artist and the social conditions that frame the painful circumstances she has set out to represent.

FRANCISCO-FERNANDO GRANADOS is a Guatemalan-born artist and writer cur-

rently working in performance and cultural criticism. Through his practice, he aims to create ephemeral spaces where larger socio-political contexts can collapse and co-exist with personal narratives.

### ONLY HOPE WAS LEFT: INSIDE *Pandora’s Box* Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery •

29 January – 21 March, 2010

CURATED BY Amanda Cachia

REVIEW BY Erin Silver

The myth of Pandora presents a portrait of woman as a beautiful evil who, consumed by her own curiosity, opens a box and unleashes all of the ills of society onto the world, only to close the lid before Hope can escape. *Pandora’s Box*, a touring exhibition curated by Dunlop Art Gallery’s Director/

Curator Amanda Cachia, proposes that there is not one, but several modes through which this enduring parable can be reclaimed as a powerful feminist allegory. Cachia seeks to address the pluralities that contribute to present-day conceptions and enactments of feminism, featuring artists who “add diverse, poignant, independent and intersubjective voices to an evolving polylogue of what it means to be female.” The resulting effort presents an opportunity to reflect on the myth of Pandora’s Box as though from within, with “Hope” for a new feminist generation as a point of departure.

For decades now, the “mature audiences only” warning label has been a menace to contemporary art exhibitions. However, its proximity to one of Amy Cutler’s sparse and whimsically rendered figurative drawings creates a juxtaposition that works not to sensationalize, but to entice the visitor inside, more an Alice than Pandora, embarking on ten distinctly perilous journeys down to the feminine core. Chitra Ganesh’s *Inside Pandora #2* is the gallery’s Cheshire Cat, introduced here as a grotesquely naked female figure, whose hookah mingles among other appendages and orifices that circle back into one another, positing an image of woman as eternally spilling out of her culturally imposed frame. Something similarly messy is perceptible in the works that follow, the myth of Pandora working something like a net to catch a series of feminist falls from feminine grace. Those with knowledge of the contemporary art world are likely already familiar with the representational signatures that have catapulted each artist included here to recognition, but this does not compromise their continued ability to incite intense emotional response: Kara Walker’s *Testimony: Narratives of a Negress Burdened by Good Intentions* documents a shadow puppet interpretation (though, unfortunately, the animation was omitted from the KW|AG installation) of the sexually charged and socially complicated relationship between a slave and her master. Walker’s work exposes and reflects on this history with simple formal cues in a manner that is simultaneously stomach-turning and captivating. Annie Pootoogook



<left> Laylah Ali. *Untitled*, 2006-07. Courtesy: the artist and 303 Gallery, New York. <below> Installation view of *Pandora’s Box*. Courtesy: Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery.



<left> Dawit L. Petros. *Proposition 1: Mountain*, 2007. <right> Calvin Dondo. *Untitled from the series Harare Charge Office*, 2000. Courtesy: Kenneth Montague.



is also concerned with revealing the perfunctory lens through which contemporary Inuit life is often perceived by outsiders, detailing, with acute honesty, both the mundane and the critical concerns of a community often misrepresented and misunderstood. The magnification of intimacy carries corporeal connotations for Wangechi Mutu, whose collages simultaneously conflate and shatter conceptions of woman as biologically determined. In *Histology of the Different Classes of Uterine Tumors*, Mutu overlays cutouts of facial features onto medical illustrations of the female reproductive system — here a site of malignant invasion. Dissecting what is often held to be the symbolic core of womanhood, Mutu's figures forcefully occupy the womb and establish the subjective, irreducible traces of identity embedded in the corporeal self. These works luridly depict but a handful of ways by which the female subject is confined, while other works form the bridges that permit female agency to escape. Fleshly deconstructions figure centrally in the work of Ghada Amer, whose immense *French Kiss* depicts the act suggested by the work's title, presented elusively and erotically behind a chaotic weaving of variegated embroidery and blue, red, and yellow paint, exposing the backside of a private moment on the front for all to see. It is as though longing, as interpreted by Amer, is a force so strong as to burst the seams of its cultural containment. For Leesa Streifer, it is not only agency, but also anxiety, that betrays confinement as she excavates her parallel and colliding identities, scratching beyond the photographic veneer with a series of school pictures obscured by handwritten interventions. A painful portrait of adolescence conveyed through hushed whispers, it is Streifer's private ruminations turned public that reverberate through the gallery, tingeing bordering works with a persistent sense of anxiety about things left unsaid and sites left unseen.

*Pandora's Box* points to a reinvigorated interest in feminism as a site of curatorial interrogation and imagination. However, the concept of Pandora's Box is one that risks perpetuating notions of female subjectivity that are too generalized and, in some cases,

too essentialist to respond to the countless nuanced and evolving identifications activated under the rubric of feminism — a reminder that rejecting the patriarchal canon of art history is no safeguard against erecting new ones in its place. Indeed, Cachia has assigned herself the daunting task of sampling the heterogeneous concerns of present-day feminisms, and Pandora's Box succeeds at presenting a valuable opportunity to engage with important, insightful work by some feminist heavy hitters. Additionally, it reminds us that the art world is, in itself, a series of boxes, and that those seeking to explode out of one may find themselves nestled comfortably within another.

*Pandora's Box* will be traveling to the Kamloops Art Gallery in fall 2010.

ERIN SILVER is pursuing a PhD in Art History at McGill University, focusing on where queer visual culture meets critical pedagogy, radical curatorial practices, social histories, and activism.

**NEW DISCOURSES:  
ALWAYS MOVING FORWARD:  
CONTEMPORARY  
AFRICAN PHOTOGRAPHY  
FROM THE WEDGE  
COLLECTION**

Gallery 44 Centre for Contemporary Photography • 1 May – 29 May, 2010

CURATED BY Kenneth Montague

REVIEW BY Sally Frater

Photography is often considered an accurate record and representation of reality, with the truths that the camera produces seemingly forever affixed to the subjects that exist beyond its lens. Curator Okwui Enwezor has often written about the conflicted relationship that the continent of Africa and members of the African diaspora have had with photography, noting that Africa has



been presented as a “wasteland of the bizarre and the insane,” a site outside of time or a site of unending struggle and upheaval. As a result, the historical index of images of Africa and the black African body have been rendered abject. The work of contemporary African photographers has not only shifted the ways in which we view African subjects and the myriad countries that they inhabit, but also the ways in which the discourses about their artistic production are discussed. Part of the Contact Photography Festival, *Always Moving Forward* features the works of 13 emerging contemporary photographers from various African countries.

Collectively, the works in the exhibition address diverse issues such as class, identity, fashion, race, migration and architecture. A piece from Antoni Kamimani's series *Black Diamonds* (2009) documents members of South Africa's new black elite, who reside in the suburbs of Johannesburg and possess the trappings of wealth, while Nontsikelelo “Lolo” Veloko's image *Vuyelwa* (2004)

features a young subject in stylish attire gazing confidently into the camera. The latter image could have been taken on the streets of London or New York City, conveying a cosmopolitan vibe that is decidedly global. Zwelethu Mthethwa's *Untitled* (200) photograph depicts a self-constructed shelter made by a recent rural migrant to a South African industrial centre. The photograph addresses the dire economic circumstances of many black South Africans in a manner that refrains from being paternalistic or demeaning. When paired with the works by Kamimani and Veloko it simply becomes one of many captured versions of a constantly shifting landscape.

Other works in the exhibition disrupt photography's troubling history as a tool for defining and fixing signs of “otherness” and “difference.” Mohammed Camara's self-portraits feature him as a tourist at European ski resorts, flipping the paradigm of the vacationing Westerner who travels to “exotic” locales and documents him/herself

amongst the “colourful natives.” Dawit Petros' *Proposition 1: Mountain* (2007) features a (black) hand holding a pile of salt, and in the words of essayist Pamela Edmonds, provides “insight into the socially constructed nature of race by making the invisible norm or ‘whiteness’ visible through de-territorialization.” These works also serve to expand the discourses of Africa beyond the continent's borders, a thread that continues in the work of Mohamed Bourouissa. Originally from Algeria and now based in France, Bourouissa takes as his subject matter the unresolved tensions related to immigrant communities in France. The artist's images, which depict scenes of racial tension and appear very similar to mass media imagery, are clearly staged, perhaps suggesting the underlying fabrication in media photography and video. *Le téléphone* (2006) depicts two young men in a face-off in the foreground, while another youth in the distance raises his arm to capture images on his cell phone, using his phone not to call for help but merely to record images of a contentious situation.



In the work of these 13 photographers, we witness photography shifting away from enacting or recording violence and oppression to interrogating and transgressing them. Their collective representations reconfigure African bodies and landscapes so that they are no longer simply sites to be inscribed with traumatic histories but spaces in which the spirit of subversion and transformation can occur.

SALLY FRATER is an independent curator and writer. In her curatorial practice she is interested in exploring issues of identity, history, memory and environment and issues of representation and equity in gallery and museum practices.

## MY RECTUM IS NOT A GRAVE: WILL MUNRO'S *Inside the Solar Temple of the Cosmic Leather Daddy*

Paul Petro Contemporary Art •  
26 February – 27 March, 2010  
REVIEW BY JON DAVIES

At 35 years old, Will Munro was a fixture of the Toronto scene for over a decade, and his visual art practice was inseparable from his long-standing involvement in queer community activism and in creating alternative spaces for queer subcultural expression: punk, artfag, youth, sex-radical, anti-capitalist. In addition to working for a number of years with the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Youth Line, Munro founded and programmed the famed Vazaleen live rock parties before he and Lynn McNeill bought the Beaver Café on Queen West, which has become a hub for the local queer art scene.

Munro believed deeply in the emancipatory power of music, specifically funk, punk and new wave. Musical fan culture encourages new forms of identity, both private (fantastical self-creation and self-mythologization) and public (the provisional communities

that form from a group of people sharing a rhythm together). Engaged with and inspired by the legacies of queer cultural production that have come before him, particularly those originating from Toronto, Munro bedecked the walls of the Beaver with art by different generations of Toronto queers — from General Idea to FASTWÜRMS.

For the past few years, Munro battled terminal brain cancer, and it is impossible not to look at his last solo show as a meditation on passing on. Munro's grappling with the prospect of death is nuanced by his longstanding fascination with queer histories and subcultures, which are transmitted from generation to generation through hearsay, gossip, furtive research and other forms of hidden knowledge. This queer cultural transmission offers an alternative both to the high-art canon and to the heterosexual reproductive cycle that passes a family name and genes down a biological lineage. Munro joins a number of queer artists at work today — fidgeting restlessly in our seemingly apolitical moment — in mining the lessons that the “dead queers” of the past may have to teach us. In fact, in 2005 Munro even created a work entitled *Dead Guys*, a series of silkscreen portraits of his deceased aesthetic inspirations, mentors, icons and crushes: Leigh Bowery, John Sex, Darby Crash, Quentin Crisp, Andy Warhol and Klaus Nomi. (Bowery's and Nomi's eccentric stylized silhouettes frequently appear in Munro's iconography). Invoking Munro's own personal queer pantheon, the exhibition at PPCA seemed to pave the path towards his achievement of a state of transcendence.

The walls of *Inside the Solar Temple of the Cosmic Leather Daddy* bore a variety of works on mirror, neon and textiles that juxtaposed the symbols of the queer/leather community — particularly from the 1970s, a heyday of sexual experimentation that came to an abrupt end with the dawn of the AIDS pandemic in the early 1980s — with the spiritual iconography of Ancient Egypt. Through Munro's queer lens, the stylistic bricolage that characterizes musical genres like funk, punk and new wave represents a kind of communion across time; referencing past

cultures, movements and aesthetics becomes a way of making sense of oneself in a historical context and not mere pastiche. (The 2009 Luis Jacob-curated 'Funkaesthetics' exhibition at the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery that included some of Munro's work, made this argument as well, prominently featuring the Afro-futurism of Sun Ra, who drew links between Ancient Egypt, present-day Black struggles and visionary images of a utopian future. (Jacob shares Munro's keen interest in queer and radical aesthetic legacies, both musical and visual).)

In American artist Gregg Bordowitz's influential 1993 video *Fast Trip, Long Drop*, he described his experience of living with AIDS as a powerful connective tissue that placed him in a historical continuity with ancestors who had died of typhus epidemics in Eastern Europe: the history of sickness. Similarly, in the gallery's statement about Munro's exhibition, the show is said to be in thrall to those who had fallen to AIDS: “Through worship and remembrance, Munro revisits the lives lost during the 1980s AIDS epidemic, endows them with a sense of eternal life, and allows them to still be present among us.” Quite simply, the legions of queer artists (and many others) who died of AIDS at the height of the pandemic in North America provide countless models for how to live and die as gracefully as possible with a potentially incurable disease.

The centrepiece of the installation, taking up most of the gallery's floor space, acted as a kind of sanctuary, somewhere that Munro could feasibly retire to in comfort: *Spider Sex Sling* (2010) consisted of a wooden frame containing a leather sling, its frame festooned with colourful macramé plant holders at each of the four corners (with each plant illuminated by a small light bulb), and the sling itself topped with a crocheted blanket, a kind of “sling cozy.” Here the dark, hard-edged aesthetics of gay leather culture were tempered by a vibrant, comfortingly domestic craft aesthetic reminiscent of the work of co-conspirator Allyson Mitchell (though Munro has frequently worked with multi-coloured textiles himself). While the sling stands as a

kind of regal throne, the decorative elements contribute to an atmosphere of vulnerability that haunts the scene. Anal sex has historically been constructed as a kind of death wish to the degree that men who have sex with men are essentially not seen as “innocent” victims of AIDS, for example, but instead as deviants who willfully courted death through their unchecked libidos. Munro's dressing of an SM dungeon in homespun granny-drag transforms this site of supposed humiliation or self-abasement into a peaceful and sacred space, where the risk inherent in desire and the security associated with home coexist in harmony.

*Spider Sex Sling* reminded me of Munro's dazzling *The Pavilion of Virginia Puff-Paint* performance/installation collaboration with fashion designer Jeremy Laing at the Art Gallery of York University for curator Philip Monk's 2004 *Sinbad in the Rented World* group exhibition. Inside the pavilion, Laing and Munro were dressed in dainty, skin-tight, flesh-coloured humanoid costumes that were covered with dozens of swollen foam orifices and phalluses. The two performers engaged in a stoically comprehensive choreography that involved inserting objects into holes in every conceivable polymorphously perverse permutation. While surrounded by lights and mirrors, leather and denim, it seemed significant that *Spider Sex Sling* was not activated by any performing bodies. Instead it stood there quietly, waiting as if with open arms to one day be occupied, even as scores of people pressed against it on opening night as they crammed into the tiny room to pay their respects.

As the magazine was going to press, Will Munro passed away early in the morning on Friday May 21, 2010 at the age of 35. He will be sorely missed, but never forgotten.

JON DAVIES is a widely published writer on film, media and visual arts based in Toronto. He is the Assistant Curator of Public Programs at The Power Plant, where he recently co-curated the exhibition *Ryan Trecartin: Any Ever*.

<top> Will Munro, *Infinity*, 2010; <below> *Spider Sex Sling*, 2010. Photo: Luis Jacob. Courtesy: Paul Petro Contemporary Art.

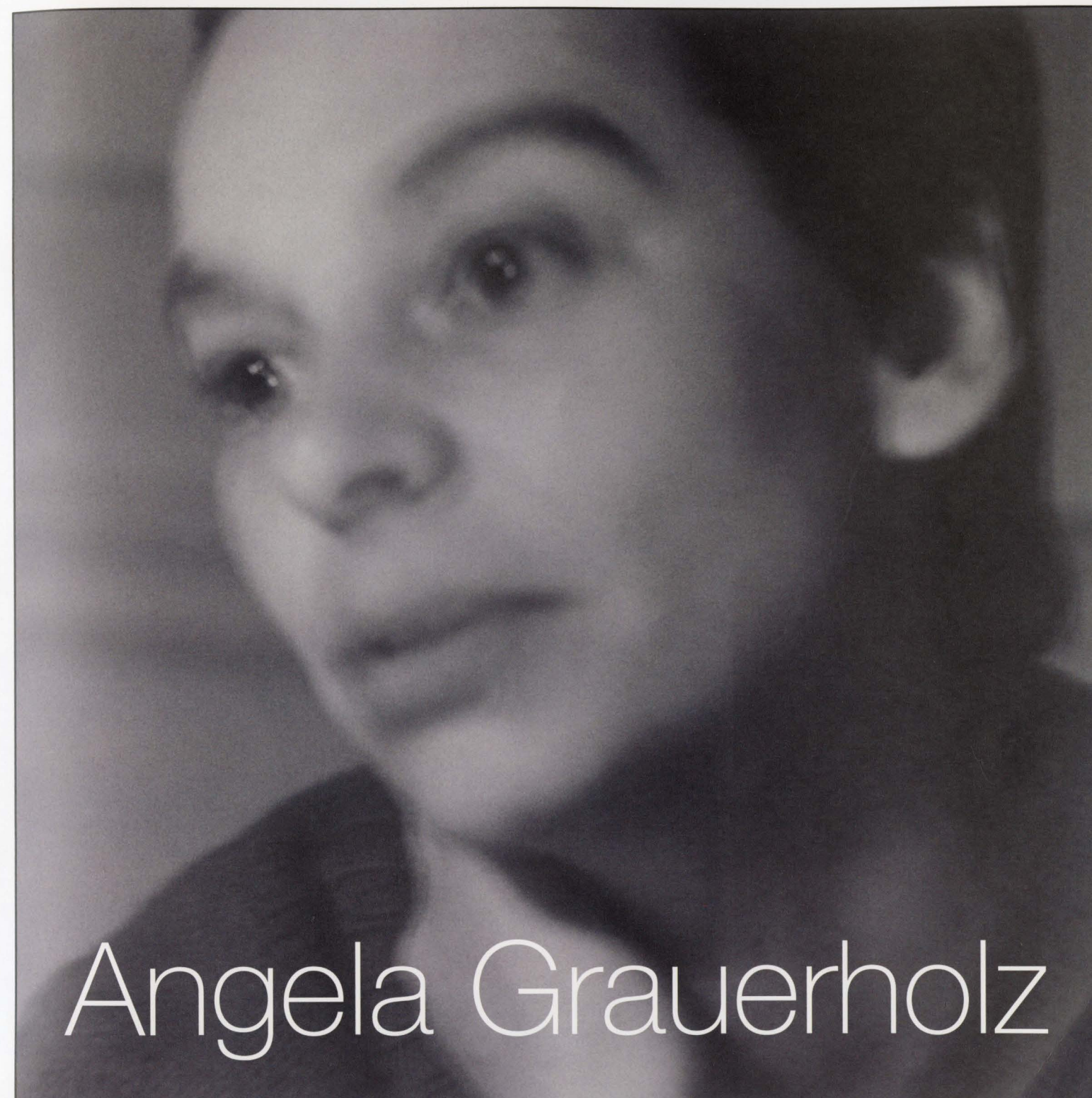


# THE PINKY SHOW

by Pinky & Bunny



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# Angela Grauerholz

THE INEXHAUSTIBLE IMAGE ... ÉPUISER L'IMAGE

PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION

May 28 – September 26, 2010

Michèle Waquant, 1984, NGC. © Angela Grauerholz

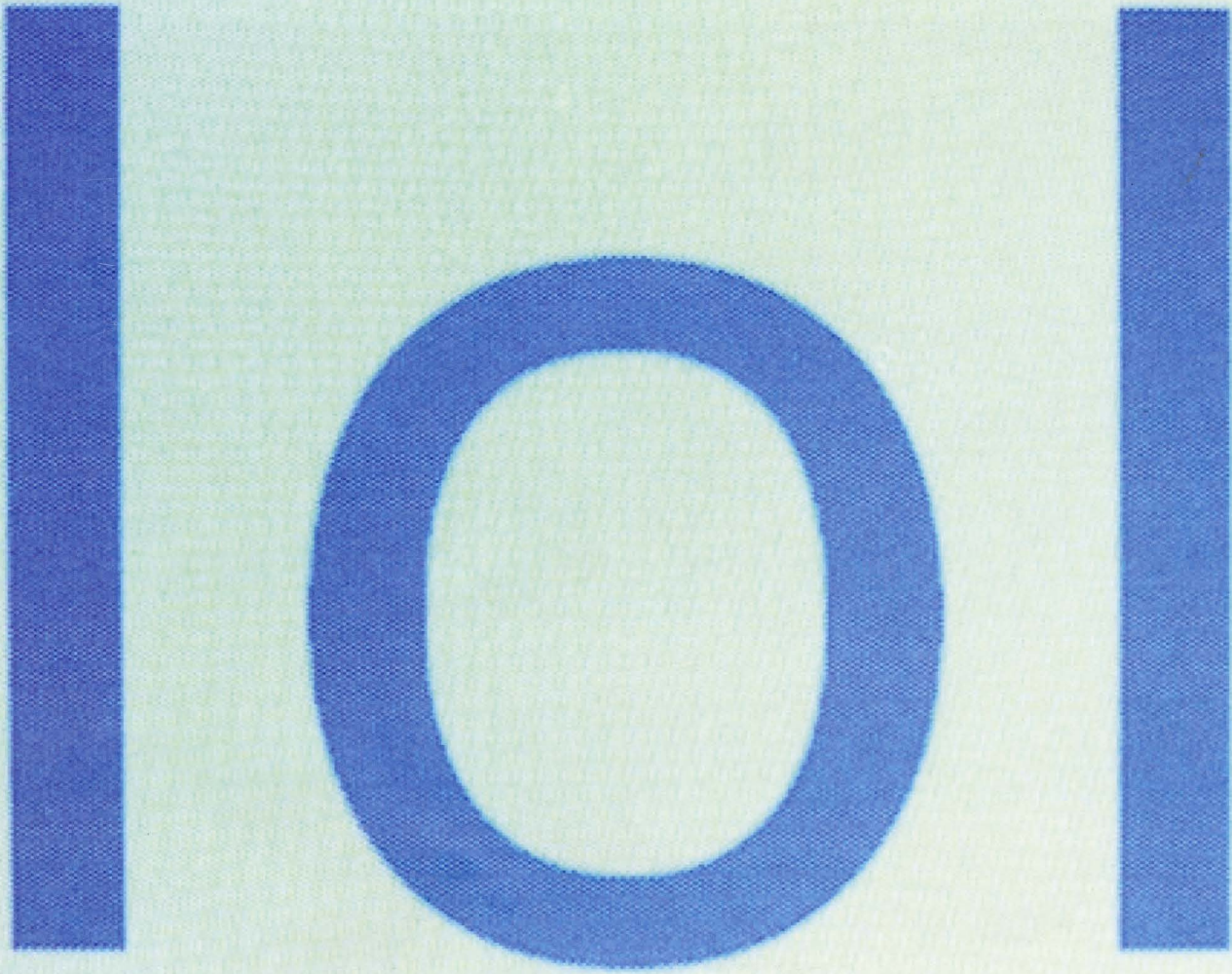
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