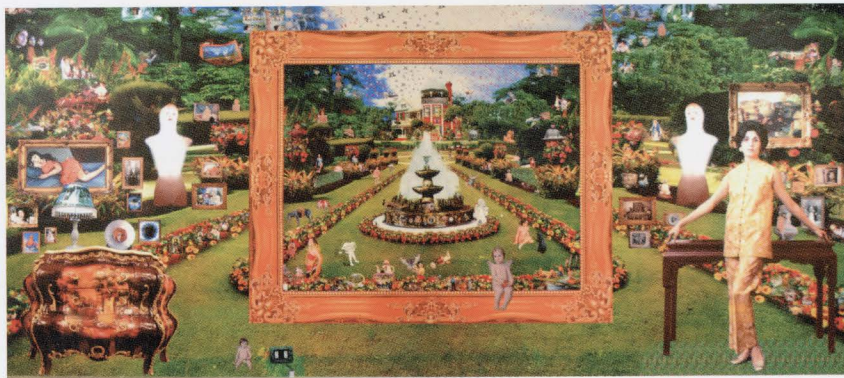


FUSE



Detouring the Grand Tour
p.26



Trans-border Talks
p.16



A Curtain Closes p.35

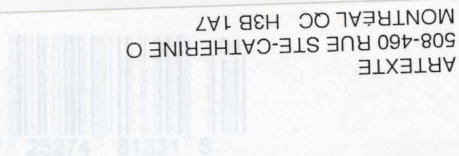


Breaking Through Boundaries
p.41

>FUSE MAGAZINE
>>Art
>>>Media
>>>>Politics

\$7.00
Volume 31, Number 1
Printed in Canada
www.fusemagazine.org

Smoke and Mirrors > Kelly Phillips takes on animal rights and hierarchies of value > Debra Antoncic reveals how the same exhibition is used for different ideological purposes > Glen Lowery and Henry Tsang report on this past summer's art fairs > Artist projects by Camille Turner, Gray Fraser and Forays Collective >>



ARTEXTE
508-460 RUE STE-CATHERINE O
MONTREAL QC H3B 1A7

PM40022164 R8623

January 11 – February 9

Sonic Cubes

Catherine Béchard and Sabin Hudon

February 16

53 Ways To Leave Your Lover

Annual (anti-Valentine's Day) fundraiser

February 22 – March 22

Stories From The Inner City

C.W. Carson

LATITUDE&53
CONTEMPORARY VISUAL CULTURE

Latitude 53 Contemporary Visual Culture www.latitude53.org info@latitude53.org (780) 423.5353 10248 106 St. Edmonton AB T5J 1H5

January 10 - February 23

Opening reception: Friday, January 11, 7pm-9pm

Our Particles Are In Motion

Patrick Bulas

February 28 - April 12

Opening reception: Thursday, February 28, 7pm-9pm

Untitled

Karen Trask

SNAP's opening hours:
Tuesdays to Saturdays
12noon - 5pm
Wheelchair accessible
Free admission

SNAP GALLERY

society of northern alberta print-artists

SNAP Gallery www.snapartists.com snap@snapartists.com (780) 423-1492 fax (780) 426-1177 10309-97 Street Edmonton AB T5J 0M1

January 10 - February 16

Between the Lines:

Digitized Dialects and
Encoded Traditions

Jude Norris

Opening reception
January 10, 7 - 10pm

Spacefarers of the Expanse

Tony Baker

harcourthouse

February 28 – April 5

Business As Usual

Lynn Richardson

Opening reception
February 28, 7-10 pm

Unpacked

Jennifer Pickering

Harcourt House Arts Centre www.harcourthouse.ab.ca harcourt@telusplanet.net T. [780] 426 - 4180 10215 112 St. Edmonton AB T5K 1M7

SNAP GALLERY

society of northern alberta print-artists

LATITUDE&53

CONTEMPORARY VISUAL CULTURE

hh

harcourthouse

EDMONTON

ARTS COUNCIL

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

EDMONTON

ARTS

EDITORIAL

3

COLUMNS

8-15

A Curtain Closes on Theatre of the World

by Kelly Phillips

16-22

Trans-border Talks — Carlos Garaicoa on Tour

by Debra Antoncic

FEATURE

26-36

Detouring the Grand Tour — Venice 52, Kassel 12, Sharjah 8

by Glen Lowry and Henry Tsang



REVIEWS

41-43

Breaking Through Boundaries in Curatorial Methodology

review by Charo Neville



44-46

Whose life are we talking about anyway? Michael Fernandes' One potato, two potato...it's your life...

review by Christopher Régimbal

46-49

Asserting the Right to Sovereignty, Audio-Visually — RED EYE First Nations Short Film and Video

review by James Missen





FUSE

FUSE MAGAZINE
Art, Media, Politics
Volume 31 Number 1 January 2008

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Adrian Blackwell, Roberta Buiani
(on leave), Firoza Elavia, Tomas
Jonsson (on leave), Denise
Macharacek, Srimoyee Mitra, Jessica
Shepherd, Tim Whalley

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE
Adrian Blackwell, Gita Hashemi,
Sally McKay, Rachel Gorman, Maureen
Thompson

STAFF
Izida Zorde / Editor
Heather Haynes / Publisher
Sameer Farooq / Concept &
Redesign, www.newink.ca
Suzanne Noga / Design
Liz Clayton / Copy Editor
Milada Kovacova / Ad Sales
Rachel McRae / Intern

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Joane Cardinal-Schubert (Calgary),
Andrea Fatona (Peterborough),
Richard Fung (Toronto),
Ashok Mathur (Vancouver/
Kamloops),
Clive Robertson (Kingston),
Kirsten Forkert (New York),
tobias c. van veen (Montréal),
Trish Salah (Montréal)
R William Hill (London UK),
Dot Tuer (Toronto and Argentina),
Randy Lee Cutler (Vancouver),
Janna Graham (London UK),
Michelle Jacques (Toronto)
Jessica Wyman (Toronto)

FUSE is published four times a year by
Artons Cultural Affairs Society
and Publishing Inc., a non-profit artists'
organization. All inquiries and return of
undeliverables to the following address:

Artons Cultural Affairs
454-401 Richmond St W
Toronto ON M5V 3A8 (Canada)

EMAIL:
subscriptions@fusemagazine.org

TEL:
416 340 8026

**PUBLICATIONS MAIL
AGREEMENT NO.**
1396609

REGISTRATION NO.
8623

ISSN 0838-603X

Copyright © 2008 Artons Publishing Inc.
All rights reserved under International
Copyright Union. Any reproduction with-
out permission is prohibited. Send per-
mission requests to Access Copyright
(800 893 5777). Artons Publishing pur-
chases First North American Serial
Rights and copyright reverts to the
writer after publication. Artons
Publishing assumes no responsibility for
unsolicited manuscripts. Manuscripts
will not be returned. A copy of our
Writers' Guidelines is available on our
website. Publication of an advertisement
in FUSE does not include endorsement of
the advertiser by the magazine. Opinions
expressed outside of specifically marked
editorials are not necessarily held by
members of the Editorial Board.

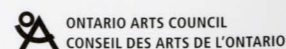
SUBSCRIPTION RATES:
\$24 per year; Institutions \$36 per
year (in Canada only). Outside Canada
\$28 U.S. per year, \$36 International;
Institutions \$48 U.S. Decisions regarding
who qualifies as an individual subscriber
remain the right of the publisher.

Printed in Canada by Sonic Print
Management.

FUSE is indexed in the Alternative Press
Index and ARTbibliographies Modern,
and is distributed by, and a member of,
Magazines Canada (416 504 0274).
FUSE acknowledges the financial sup-
port of the Government of Canada
through the Publications Assistance
Program and the Canada Magazine Fund
toward our mailing, editorial, production,
and project costs. We also acknowledge
financial assistance from the Canada
Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts
Council. Finally, we are grateful for the
many hours of volunteer and partially
paid labour that are provided by every-
one listed on our masthead, and some
not so listed.

ERRATA:
The photo on the cover of issue 30:4
titled Migrant Justice should have been
credited to Tatiana Gonzalez.

In issue 30:3, the review titled Ongoing
Project: Tropicalia A Revolution in
Brazilian Culture (1967-1972) had two
errors. The caption for the image on
page 48 should have read: Installation
View, Tropicalia: A Revolution in
Brazilian Culture. Courtesy: The Bronx
Museum of Arts. Photo: Bill Orcutt. On
page 50, the caption for the final image
should have read: Hélio Oiticica Seja
marginal, seja herói (Be an Outlaw, Be a
Hero), 1967. © Projeto Hélio Oiticica
(Rio de Janeiro, Brazil).



EDITORIAL

SMOKE AND MIRRORS

This issue of Fuse returns to the
question of framing, examining the
ways in which a conceptual approach,
applied to a debate or used as a curator-
ial strategy, directs our readings of art-
works, events and future possibilities.
Frames are inevitably ideological ways
of conceiving of our circumstances and
while it is impossible to invoke an event
without framing it, the conceptual
approach that gets deployed shapes our
imaginings and ways of understanding.
Debra Antoncic takes up this question
in *Trans-border Talks: Carlos Garaicoa on
Tour*, drawing connections between the
ROM's expansion project and the fram-
ing of *Carlos Garaicoa* in the new
Institute of Contemporary Culture.
Curated and first exhibited at LA
MOCA, Antoncic argues that the con-
textualization of the show in the differ-
ent venues reveals the ideological agen-
da's of the institutions involved. The
ROM, she argues, has staked a great
deal on Daniel Libeskind's design for
the Michael Lee Chin crystal, where the
ICC occupies the top floor. The
superficial way in which the exhibit is
situated, she argues, suggests that the
ROM is eager to capitalize on the
glamour associated with contemporary
art while avoiding the complexities of
analysis and critique. Ultimately, she
writes "the exhibition reveals a complex
encounter between an American cura-

tor, a Canadian venue and a Cuban
Artist in a three way conversation
where each maintains a separate vision
and a different agenda."

Glen Lowery and Henry Tsang's
article *Detouring the Grand Tour* presents
another three way conversation.
Reporting back on their explorations
of the big art fairs this past summer,
they take Documenta XII, Sharjah
Biennale 8 and the Venice Biennale in
relation to one another. Arguing the
recalcitrant failure of Documenta for
re-articulating and attempting to reinsti-
tute European cultural history, the
authors assert that the relative success of
Sharjah and Venice seem to do with the
function of nation-based discourses and
political aspirations and an impatience
with the hegemonic structures of
European art. Criticizing Documenta
they write, "under the erasure of their
universalizing formalism, the social dif-
ferences separating the (over)developed
nations from the rest of the world are
held in strange isolation, fixed if not
entirely dismissed in a collection of
guling anthropological gestures."

The "overdeveloped nations" were
the intended subjects of Huang Yong
Ping's artwork *Theatre of the World*
before he pulled it in response to SPCA
intervention at the Vancouver Art
Gallery. In *A Curtain Closes on Theatre of
the World*, Kelly Phillips examines the

CENTRE DE DOCUMENTATION
ARTEXTE
DOCUMENTATION CENTRE

debates of animal rights versus artistic
freedom that erupted in response to the
controversial work, which contained a
selection of animals and insects posi-
tioned around a central arena that
appeared to invite confrontation among
the creatures. Phillips argues that using
animals in art production undermines
whatever metaphorical purposes it
might have by reinforcing relations of
power and domination. She also cites
Carol Gigliotti's comparison of the
Critical Art Ensemble and Eduardo
Kac. CAE's challenge to biotechnology
and biocolonialism has landed them in
court while Kac's genetic manipulation
of a bunny, which validates the biotech
industries, has been widely lauded.
CAE's surreal post-USA PATRIOT Act
legal case is the subject of this issue's
shortFuse.

Speaking of the surreal, in our
Spring issue readers can look forward to
Kirsty Robertson's examination of the
relationship between Canada's oil and
culture industries where she recounts
Alberta Premier Ralph Klein's presenta-
tion of an oil truck to the Smithsonian
Institute as Canada's contribution to the
museum's annual Folklore Festival. And
Clive Robertson follows up on the
recent Visual Arts Summit in Ottawa,
which he describes as little more than a
smoke and mirrors show.

— Izida Zorde

49–50
**Curatorial Prognostications —
Curating Subjects**
review by Tim Whalley

SHORT FUSE

26–36
**The Wrong Arm of the Law —
The Persecution of Steven Kurtz
and Robert Ferrell**
by Cynthia Foo

ARTIST PROJECTS

24–25
**The Final Frontier — Adventures of
the Dogon Space Travellers**
by Camille Turner

23
**When is an artist book not an
artist book**
by Gray Fraser

37–40
Forays into Cocoons
by Forays Collective

WALTER PHILLIPS GALLERY

ANTHEM: Perspectives on Home and Native Land

February 16 - May 11, 2008

Curator: Ryan Rice

Organized by Carleton University Art Gallery

Lily of the Valley:
Attila Richard Lukacs:

Still Life Paintings/
Helen Lukacs: Garden

February 16 - May 11, 2008

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

Curator: Katherine Ylitalo

20.01.08 to 16.03.08

**Art and Society in Canada
1913-1950**

Organized by the National Gallery of Canada



National Gallery of Canada / Musée des beaux-arts du Canada



Paraskevi Clark, Petrouphka, 1937, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Photo © NGC, © Clive and Benedict Clark

kamloops ART GALLERY



www.kag.bc.ca
465 Victoria Street
Kamloops, BC
(250) 377.2400

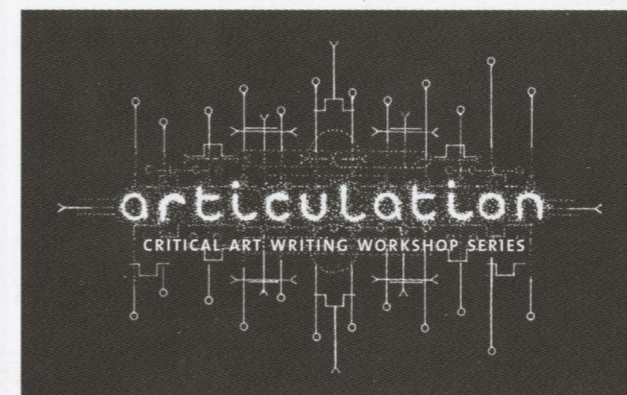


BRITISH COLUMBIA
ARTS COUNCIL

Canada Council
for the Arts / Conseil des Arts
du Canada



Quality of Life
The Culture
of Small Cities



SATURDAY 12 JANUARY **RAY CRONIN** \$20 PER WORKSHOP
 SATURDAY 16 FEBRUARY **MEEKA WALSH** \$15 FOR OAG MEMBERS
 SATURDAY 15 MARCH **RICHARD FUNG** REGISTRATION AMBER YARED
 SATURDAY 19 APRIL **OLIVIER ASSELIN** 613-233-8699, EXT. 228
 SATURDAY 10 MAY **KIRSTEN FORKERT** PUBLIC@OTTAWAARTGALLERY.CA

The Ottawa Art Gallery | La Galerie d'art d'Ottawa
 Arts Court, 2 Daly Avenue, Ottawa, ON K1N 6E2 613-233-8699
 www.ottawaartgallery.ca info@ottawaartgallery.ca



A SPACE GALLERY

January 11 - February 15, 2008

War Zones

Guillermina Buzio & Jorge Lozano, Derek Hardinge,
 Peter Kingstone, Afshin Matlabi
 Curated by Sally Frater

Opening Reception Friday January 11th, 7 - 9 pm

February 23 - March 21, 2008

Grotesques

Nao Bustamante, Cheto Castellano,
 David Khang, Natalie Loveless, Irene Loughlin,
 Nafus Ramirez-Figueroa, Coco Rico
 Curated by Lisette Olivares

Opening Reception Saturday February 23, 6 - 9 pm
 Co-presented with FADO performance

401 RICHMOND STREET WEST . SUITE 110
 TORONTO . ONTARIO . M5V 3A8 . 416-979-9633
 INFO@ASPACEGALLERY.ORG WWW.ASPACEGALLERY.ORG



Dunlop Art Gallery
CENTRAL GALLERY

21
Cheryl l'Hirondelle, Divya Mehra, Jayce Salloum,
 Camille Turner & Gabriel Yahyahkeekoot
 Guest Curator Elwood Jimmy
 Organized by Dunlop Art Gallery
 NOVEMBER 16, 2007 TO JAN. 13, 2008

Althea Thauberger: Northern
 Adjunct Curator Annette Hurtig
 Organized by Dunlop Art Gallery
 JANUARY 18 TO MARCH 9, 2008

SHERWOOD VILLAGE GALLERY

Abnormal Growth
 Griffith Baker, Twyla Exner & Tricia Middleton
 Curator Amanda Cachia
 Organized by Dunlop Art Gallery
 NOVEMBER 23, 2007 TO JAN. 6, 2008

**Vaughan Grayson: Adventures of
 an Artist in the Canadian Rockies**
 Curator Heather Smith
 Organized by Moose Jaw Museum & Art Gallery
 JANUARY 11 TO MARCH 2, 2008

Ethics of Luxury
 materialism and imagination
 by Jeanne Randolph
 Afterword by Ihor Holubizky
 Essay by Anthony Kiendl
 Reflections on the ethics of creative
 practise in a culture of affluence
 Co-published with
 Plug In ICA/Plug In Editions
 19.95

**Performance
 [Performance] and
 Performers**
 By Bruce Barber
 Edited by Marc C Léger
 Vol 1 - Interviews and conversations 29.95
 Vol 2 - Essays 29.95
 Set 49.95
 Bundle with **Reading Rooms** (1992)
 published by Eye Level Gallery
 All three books 65.00

YYZBOOKS
 140 - 401 Richmond St W
 Toronto ON M5V 3A8 Canada
 T: 416.598.4546
 F: 416.598.2282
 E: publish@yyzartistsoutlet.org
 W: www.yyzartistsoutlet.org/books.asp

Wildflowers of Manitoba
 NOAM GONICK AND LUIS JACOB
 December 14, 2007 to February 9, 2008

Dream House Annual Fundraising Exhibition
 Contemporary artists explore domestic space
 February 29 to April 12, 2008

**PLUG IN
 ica**
 286 McDermot Ave.
 Winnipeg MB R3B 0T2
 www.plugin.org

April 2008
SIMULCAST 1.0: Saskatoon
 Four sound artists are each invited
 to create an unchanging radio broadcast.

Magali Babin
 Martine H. Crispo
 GX Jupiter-Larsen
 Harold Schellinx

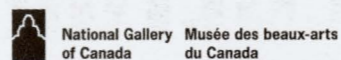
Curated by Emmanuel Madan
 Overnight broadcast on
 CFCR 90.5 FM Saskatoon, April 1 - 29.

PAVED Arts
 424 20th Street West
 Saskatoon SK S7M 0X4
 (306) 652-5502
 www.pavedarts.ca

JANET CARDIFF: *Forty-Part Motet*

Organized by the National Gallery of Canada

JANUARY 12 - MARCH 23



Janet Cardiff: *Forty-Part Motet*, 2001. 40-track audio installation, 14 minutes in duration. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Image courtesy of the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. Photo: Richard-Max Tremblay



13750-88 Avenue
Surrey, BC V3W 3L1
604-501-5566
www.arts.surrey.ca
www.surreytechlab.ca

PREVIOUSLY SHOWN AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART IN NEW YORK,
AND AT THE TATE GALLERY IN ENGLAND, THE SURREY ART GALLERY WILL
HOST THE FIRST EXHIBITION OF *Forty-Part Motet* IN BRITISH COLUMBIA.

This exhibition is presented in partnership with the Vancouver 2010 Cultural Olympiad



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts
du Canada



BRITISH
COLUMBIA
ARTS COUNCIL

SURREY
CITY OF PARKS

CULTURAL POLICY IN CANADA IS PRODUCED IN A VACUUM.

How can the needs of contemporary visual art
be met by public policy if there isn't adequate
research being undertaken on the current state of
cultural producers?

<http://www.yorku.ca/agy/survey/index.html>

out there
...centering the dialogue.

This is a paid advertisement from the Art Gallery of York University



Agnes Etherington ART CENTRE

Conversation Pieces

12 January to
10 February

Curated by
Sarah E. K. Smith

Linda Duvall
Germaine Koh
Deirdre Logue
Matt Rogalsky
Laurel Woodcock

Presented with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts,
the Ontario Arts Council, an agency of the Government of
Ontario, the City of Kingston and the Kingston Arts Council.

Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario
Canada K7L 3N6
613.533.2190
www.aeac.ca

Writing Home

Letters From Home, Letters to M, Writing Home

Bonnie Devine
Curated by Faye Heavyshield
February 8 to March 21, 2008

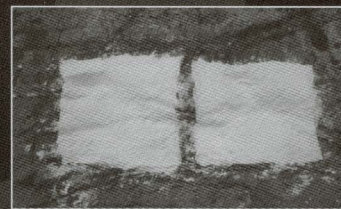


Image: Bonnie Devine, work in progress

GALLERY GALERIE
CONNEXION

453 Queen Street - Justice Building Annex
P.O. Box 696 Fredericton, NB E3B 5B4
T. 506.454.1433 | E. connex@nbnet.nb.ca

www.galleryconnexion.ca



THE MAKERS, C. 1983. PHOTO BY FRANCIS SANAGAN.

Makers Return: A History of
Makers Gallery, Owen Sound
1981-85

Craft Convergence: A Juried
Exhibition of Contemporary
Canadian Craft

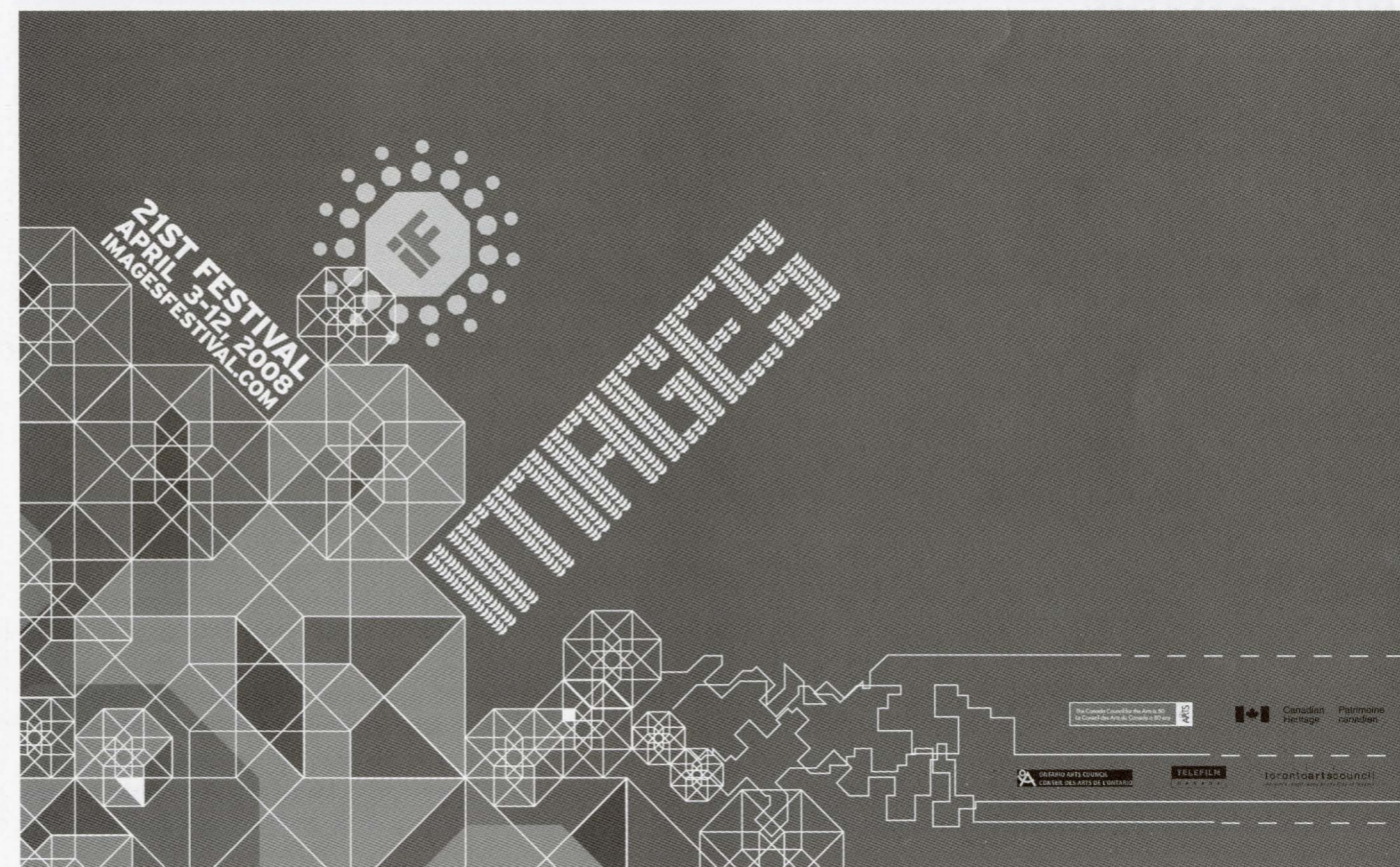
craft 2007

December 7, 2007
to January 27, 2008

**TOM
THOMSON
AG**

Tom Thomson Art Gallery
840 First Avenue West, Owen Sound
ON Canada n4k 4k4 Call 519-376-1932

tomthomson.org



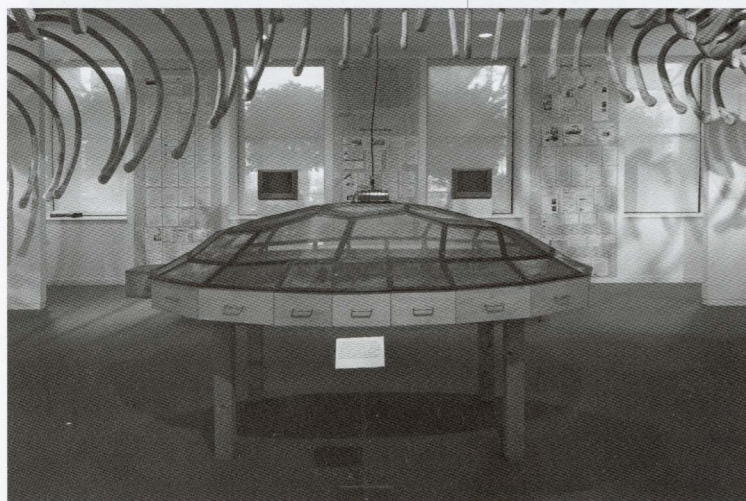
A CURTAIN CLOSES ON THEATRE OF THE WORLD

— *A Controversial Exhibit at the Vancouver Art Gallery Pits Animal Rights Against Artistic Freedom*

BY KELLY PHILLIPS

Beneath a massive coiling serpent skeleton, a screened enclosure in the shape of a turtle shell sits silently on display at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Now empty of its animal contents, the work caused a storm of debate not heard in Vancouver since 1990 when performance artist Rick Gibson threatened to crush a rat. The debate revealed deeply polarized opinions on the value and limits of artistic freedom and the relation of humans to the natural world.

The work in question, *Theatre of the World*, forms part of Huang Yong Ping's spectacular touring retrospective: *House of Oracles*: a selection of works assembled by the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. Ranging from installations drawing parallels between the incarceration of big game animals in zoos and the subjugation of migrants, to an extraordinary, room-sized model of a Chinese colonial-era bank as a decaying castle of sand, the exhibit includes Ping's controversial work: *Bat Project*

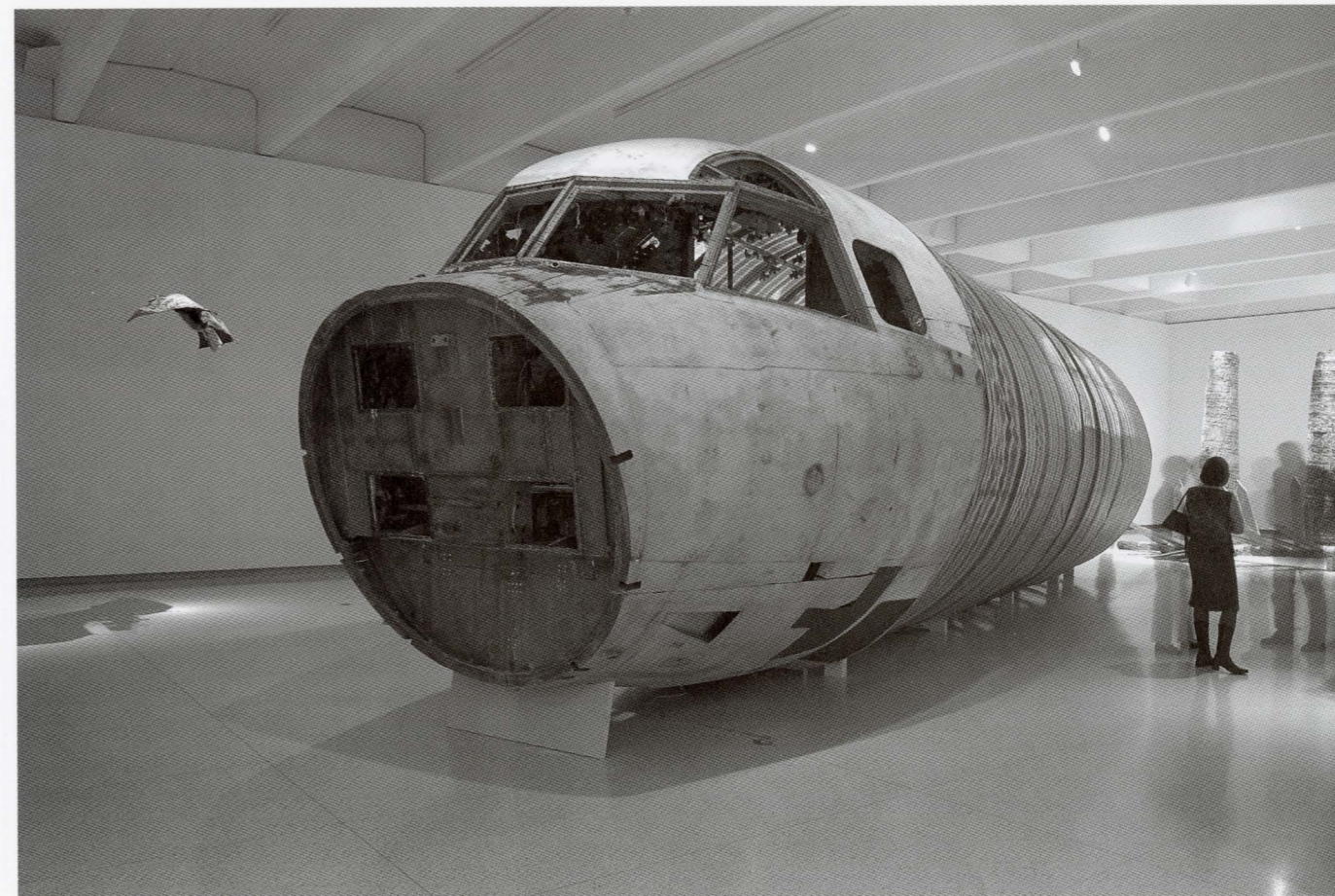


Huang Yong Ping. *Theater of the World*, 1993 - 1995. Photo: Tomas Svab. Courtesy: Vancouver Art Gallery.

IV, an actual cockpit of an American EP-3 plane whose fuselage has been reconstructed in bamboo. Visitors are invited to tour the desiccated bat-encrusted interior of the fuselage where tables are filled with letters of protest documenting the work's suppression in two Chinese exhibitions.

Speaking on a panel, Chief Curator Daina Augaitus maintained that Ping's provocative work presents a deeply moving critique of the operations of power, destabilizing "standardized ideas about knowledge, subjectivity and history." Mourning the closure of *Theatre of the World*, Augaitus was clearly perplexed as to why the work should cause so much controversy in Vancouver when it had been exhibited without objection elsewhere. The controversy over this work may reveal as much about the cultural climate of Vancouver, birthplace of three environmental movements, as it does about the contents of Ping's art.

Inspired by ancient Chinese tradition and Dadaist games of chance, *Theatre of the World* also draws from the Confucian wisdom contained within the pages of the book of divination: the I Ching, specifically Gu, the 18th hexagram. Gu prescribes the making of a magical potion consisting of five venomous animals. With a view to drawing parallels between human and animal behaviour using animals as metaphors for human societies, the artist followed Gu's prescription, placing a selection of cockroaches, millipedes, tarantulas, scorpions, snakes, lizards and toads into the enclosure following consultation with a reptile specialist hired by the gallery. While each of the animals was



Huang Yong Ping. *Bat Project IV*, 2004 - 2005. Courtesy: Walker Art Center.



Bat Project IV, detail.



Huang Yong Ping. *Passage*, 1993 – 2005. Photo: Tomas Svab. Courtesy: Vancouver Art Gallery.

No sooner had the work gone on display then a complaint was received by the SPCA.

afforded a small retreat on the enclosure's perimeter, the exhibit's open, central arena appeared designed to invite confrontation between creatures renowned for their aggression and toxicity.

No sooner had the work gone on display then a complaint was received by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. The SPCA's investigation, conducted in cooperation with the gallery, ordered changes made to the exhibit to afford the animals more heat and individual shelter. A subsequent inspection and meeting with the gallery staff resulted in a second, legally binding order requiring the removal of the tarantulas and scorpions, which the Society had determined were in distress. At this point the artist intervened and bitterly citing the violation of his freedom of expression, removed all the animals. In their place, he asked that all official documents related to the closure of his work be posted beside the empty exhibit.

Perhaps misunderstanding its role in Canadian society, Ping argued that the SPCA had "completely ignored the ideas and unique concepts" in his work, that it had dwelled instead "on the many doctrines and details [of provincial legislation] in the name of "animal protection," and that the order had violently interfered with the rights of an artwork to be freely exhibited in an art museum. "Their objective," he wrote, "is to mold the artwork into... something which might resemble a zoo

or a pet shop..." He noted that "this is a reflection of today's political, economic and social pressures that transform people into coveted pets and pampered, self-loving objects... One key aspect in *Theatre of the World* is to challenge this current, pet-oriented and pampered view of the world and to object to such indulgences."

In his statement the artist acknowledges that the anticipated antagonism among caged animals was intended as a philosophical counterweight to what he sees as the excessive self-indulgence of modern life. But as an allegory of power among nations, the work oversimplifies the human condition. Scores of cultures function cooperatively in close proximity and the array of laws, treaties, conventions and customs that facilitate this in no way resembles the instinctual behaviour of animals. Such allegories, the substance of fairy tales and fables where animals take on human roles, shed no more light on the human condition than regret for the persistence of violence among some human societies.

Accommodating Ping's request, the gallery's interim Head of Public Programs, Marie Lopez, related that in addition to the flood of commentary from the local, national and international media, it had been a challenge "to keep up with the demand for paper and pencils" on the comment wall beside the empty exhibit. Transcending the simplistic binary of "animals in art



Huang Yong Ping. *Passage (Detail)*, 1993 – 2005. Photo: Tomas Svab. Courtesy: Vancouver Art Gallery.

— good" versus "animals in art — bad," opinion ranged from the view that the work exhibited "misplaced social commentary" and "demonstrated personal and cultural hypocrisy," to the belief that it provided strong analysis of "power and how it is shared, shifted and abused." The work raised additional questions of "voice, agency, humanity and art."

Following the uproar, the gallery convened a discussion panel to explore the issues in-depth. Opinion ranged from the instrumentalist view that the human use of animals and the privileging of human values (including freedom of artistic expression) is the natural order, to the opposing view that animals possess inherent rights, regardless of their relative appeal or utility to humans.

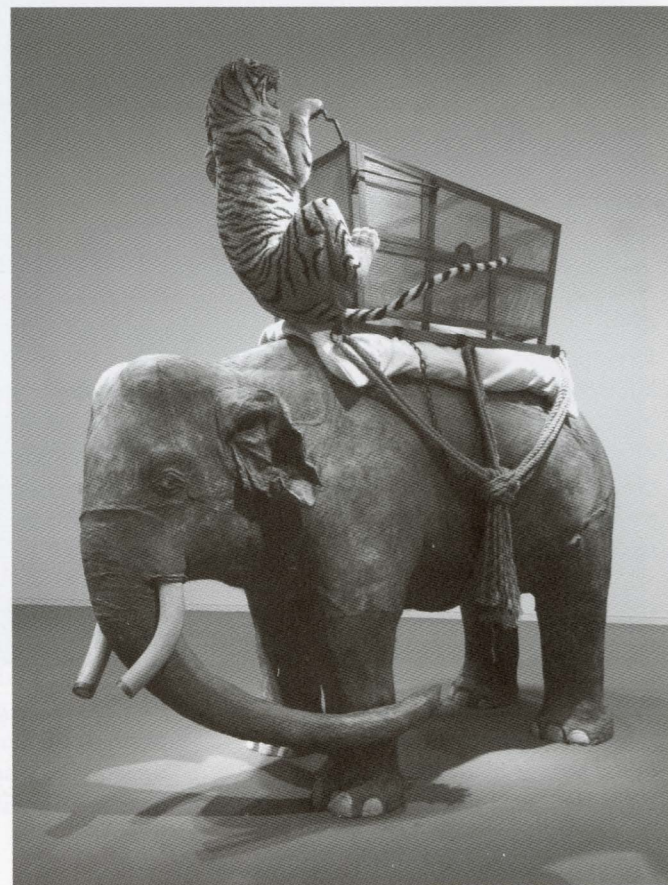
Into this latter category fell Emily Carr Associate Professor Carol Gigliotti who argued that animals deserve to be considered sentient beings and subjects in their own right, not displayed as "resources, objects, metaphors or ideas" in the service of art production. Gigliotti argued that using animals as

art supplies undermines whatever metaphorical value such use might have. Ultimately, she insisted, such display communicates that animal life exists for human purposes, thereby reinforcing the relations of power and domination, which, she noted, Ping so ironically critiques among humans in much of his work.

Citing the persecution of artists whose work criticizes the use of animals in science and biotechnology such as Steve Kurtz of the Critical Art Ensemble, Gigliotti described the dichotomy between artistic freedom and animal rights as a false one; freedom of expression is often denied those artists who dare to challenge the status quo represented by the biotech industry, while it is extended to artists such as Eduardo Kac, whose use of animals appears to validate these procedures within the rubric of creativity. Kurtz's work, which critiques "biocolonialism" through the genetic modification of organisms (a huge moneymaker for agribusiness giants like Monsanto), was considered sufficiently suspicious for



Top: Huang Yong Ping. *Travel Guide for 2000 - 2042, 2000.*
Photo: Tomas Svab. Courtesy: Vancouver Art Gallery.



Bottom: Huang Yong Ping. *11 June 2002 - The Nightmare George V, 2002.* Photo: Tomas Svab. Courtesy: Vancouver Art Gallery.

The closure of Theatre of The World may indicate a movement of public sentiment away from the exhibition of animals and this hierarchy of value.

him to be prosecuted by the FBI under the Patriot Act. Conversely, Eduardo Kac is celebrated for having manipulated the genes of a rabbit with the DNA of fluorescent marine life to create "Alba" the *GFP Bunny* that glows in the dark.

By contrast, the instrumentalists regard the use of animals as a given. For them such use is deeply ingrained in human culture, as we have consumed animals for food, relied on them for labour and companionship and anthropomorphized them to reveal human values embedded in art and mythology.

Both Jason Gratl, President of the BC Civil Liberties Association and Daina Augaitus felt that the closure of the piece deprived the public of a valuable opportunity for critical social self-examination. They maintained that artists are frequently harbingers of a future as yet unknown and that their voices consequently deserve full expression in spite of the sometimes troubling stories they may tell.

The privileging of humanity over other species is not unique to Western thought, but it does stand in contrast to the worldviews of many indigenous

peoples who see humans, dependent on all other species for survival and occupying a more humble place in creation.¹ Although this view does not preclude the killing of animals, such consumption has historically taken place within carefully circumscribed conditions.

The privileging of humanity also shares an historical parallel with outdated notions of cultural evolution and the pre-modern "Chain of Being" in which European men occupied the apex. Like the Chain of Being, the evolutionary value ladder between humans and animals ranks animals in



Huang Yong Ping. *The Pole of the East, 2004.*
Photo: Tomas Svab. Courtesy: Vancouver Art Gallery.

relationship to their appeal (pets) or utility (farm animals) to humans. It should be noted that the SPCA makes no such value distinctions among species; the standards of treatment for all animals are equal according to law. In spite of *Vancouver Sun* reporter Ian Mulgrew's view that closing an art exhibit over concern for such insignificant creatures as lizards and millipedes makes a mockery of the city's world-class aspirations² the closure of the orca and land mammal exhibits in Stanley Park, as well as *Theatre of The World*,

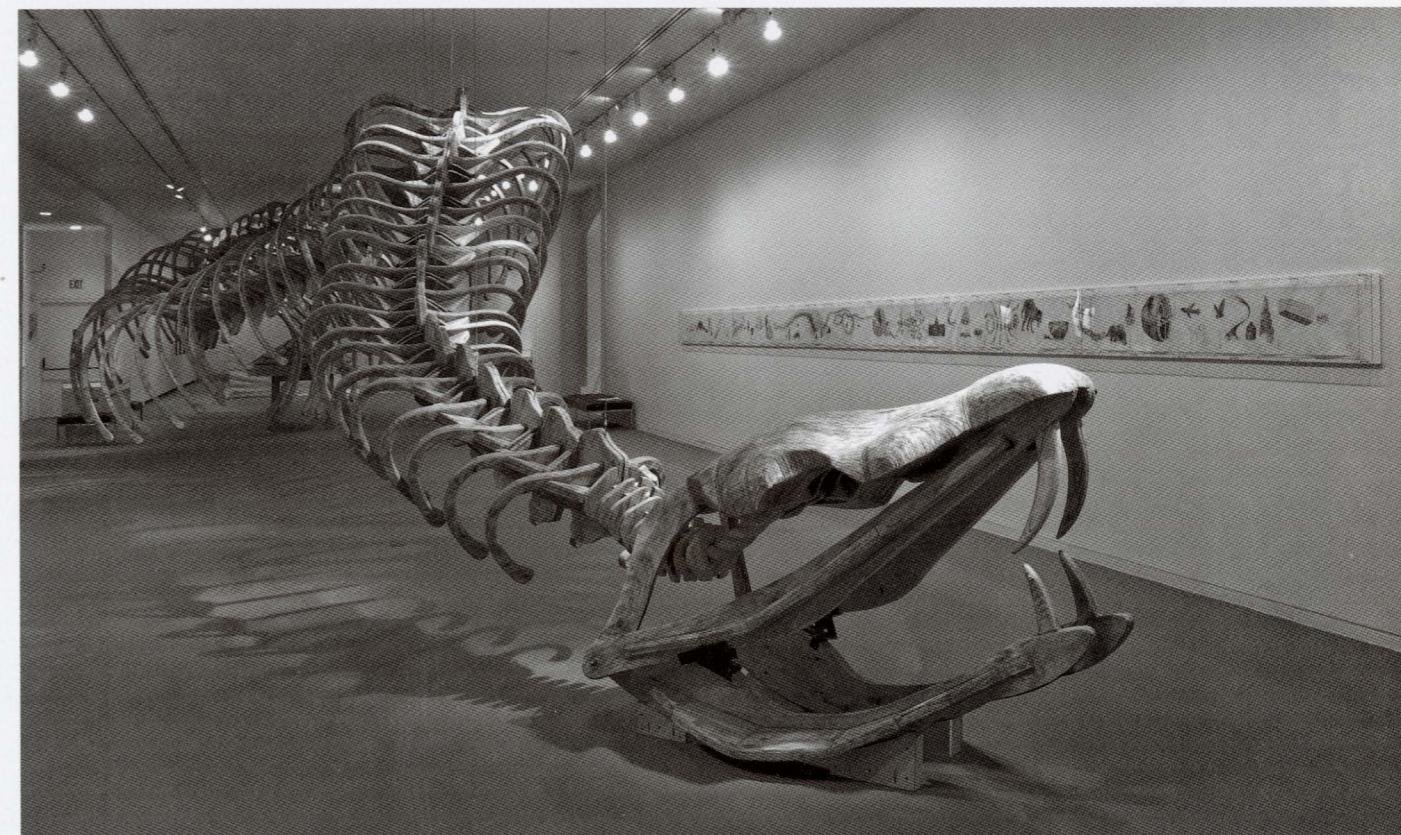
may indicate a movement of public sentiment away from the exhibition of animals and this hierarchy of value.

Nevertheless, UBC Assistant Professor of Anthropology Anand Pandian, editor of *Race, Nature, and the Politics of Difference*, saw *Theatre of the World* as a deeply moving critique against the violence that pervades colonialism and its offspring: modernity. For him the work symbolized the global suffering of millions of animals; it was a "theatre of our world" in which the overlooked history of animal rights

activism was also embedded in relations of domination and class struggle against subject peoples whose relationships with animals have often been used to define them as barbaric and uncivilized.

And here, like the mythical, perhaps venomous snake that devours its own tail, the circle of debate completes itself because this same history of colonial subjugation once found expression in the public display of living humans. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries such displays were commonly used to justify colonial expansion as a moral, social and philosophical good in fairs and expositions from Leipzig to Chicago.³ Writing about the Hamatsa performances of his Kwakiutl parishioners at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, the Rev. Alfred J. Hall praised the way the US government was "proudly exhibiting civilized bands from their industrial schools," while from Canada "came only this display of paganism, chosen by Dr. Boaz because these were the most degraded he could find in the Dominion."⁴ So enormous was the Chicago exhibition that North American natives including Kwakiutls, Apaches, Penebscots, Iroquois and Navahos barely made an impression alongside the "280 Egyptians and Sudanese in a Cairo street, 147 Indonesians in a Javanese village, 58 Eskimos from Labrador, a party of bare-breasted Dahomans in a West African setting, Malays, Samoans, Fijians, Japanese, Chinese as well as an Irish village with both Donegal and Blarney castles"⁵

That the exhibition of living humans is no longer acceptable indi-



Huang Yong Ping. Python, 2000. Photo: Tomas Svab. Courtesy: Vancouver Art Gallery.

cates a shift in thinking to a belief that notions of cultural evolution and superiority are a myth. Contemporary audiences would no more accept the display of a "Hottentot Venus"⁶ for educational purposes than they would circus acts featuring people with physical deformities for entertainment. In the wake of decolonization, the display of humans as "types" is inconceivable, but the condition of voiceless animals remains one of domination by humans and their use as artist's supplies raises the question in light of this history of exhibition: do animals remain the colonial Other for the Empire of Man?

While committed to exhibiting art in the vanguard of ideas, the Vancouver Art Gallery should draw the line at displaying work that engages animal cruelty. The abiding question is whether the Art Gallery can justify an exhibit that approximates the deadly combat of pit-bulls. Comparing the work to the Roman Coliseum, one visitor characterized the work as "gladiatorial."

Accommodating the minimal conditions for survival of animals not normally found together in the wild, animals whose nature would lead inevitably to confrontation, does not relieve the institution of responsibility for the consequences of these hostile encounters. Whatever insights might have been imparted by this display, the message that many would have carried away is that, in the view of the Gallery, the lives of these animals were expendable in the service of art. Ultimately, such notions serve neither art nor society at large. This controversy underlines the need for a radical creativity that embraces dignity and respect for all species as a progressive value for our times.

Notes:

1. Hugh Brody. *Beyond Eden Hunters, Farmers, and the Shaping of the World*. (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre: 2000), Wade Davis. *Light at the Edge of the World a Journey Through the Realms of Vanishing Cultures*. (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre: 2001), Splashing Eagle.

2. Ian Mulgrew. *The Vancouver Sun*, (9 April, 2007).
3. Curtis Hinsley. "The World as Marketplace: Commodification of the Exotic at the World's Colombian Exposition, Chicago, 1893." *Exhibiting Cultures*. ed. Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine. (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press: 1991).
4. Douglas Cole. *Captured Heritage The Scramble for Northwest Coast Artifacts*. (Vancouver: UBC Press: 1985), pp.130.
5. Ibid. pp.128.
6. Sander L. Gilman. "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature." *Race, Writing and Difference*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (Chicago: 1986).

Kelly Phillips is an artist and teacher living in Vancouver, BC.



Huang Yong Ping. Amerigo Vespucci, 2003. Photo: Tomas Svab. Courtesy: Vancouver Art Gallery.

TRANS-BORDER TALKS

— Carlos Garaicoa on Tour

BY DEBRA ANTONCIC

There is an obvious connection between the recent expansion project at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto and the framing of an exhibition of work by Cuban artist Carlos Garaicoa. Installed in the Weston Family Room at the ROM from 9 September to 31 December of last year, the central focus of the exhibition was the artist's ongoing exploration of the built environment of Havana. Organized by The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, the exhibition travelled to the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia following its Toronto engagement. While the focus of the exhibition appears to shift in each venue, the significance of architecture to the health of a city was emphasized throughout its Toronto engagement.

The exhibition begins with a complex array of rice paper lanterns, strung together with electrical cords in a haphazard arrangement. With light glowing from within, the lanterns appear to hover above the floor; the makeshift display suggesting the organic growth of a city over time. According to the exhibition wall text, this installation, *De la serie "Nuevas arquitecturas"* (From the Series *New Architectures*, 2003), is a representation of buildings in a "fictional utopian city."

The subject of utopia reappears throughout the show, as does an investi-

gation of the use of architecture to achieve utopian as well as dystopian ideals. In *Campus o la Babel del conocimiento* (*Campus of the Babel of Knowledge*) (2002 – 2004), the artist constructed a miniature university campus using the model of the panopticon. While this type of structure is often associated with prisons, it was also conceived as a model for control and standardization within institutions such as factories and schools. The accompanying text describes the restrictions envisioned for the fictional students of Babel, who are not allowed to communicate with each other and are forced to live and study in complete isolation. Here the power of fascist architecture is effectively rendered in the precise visual language of the architectural model.

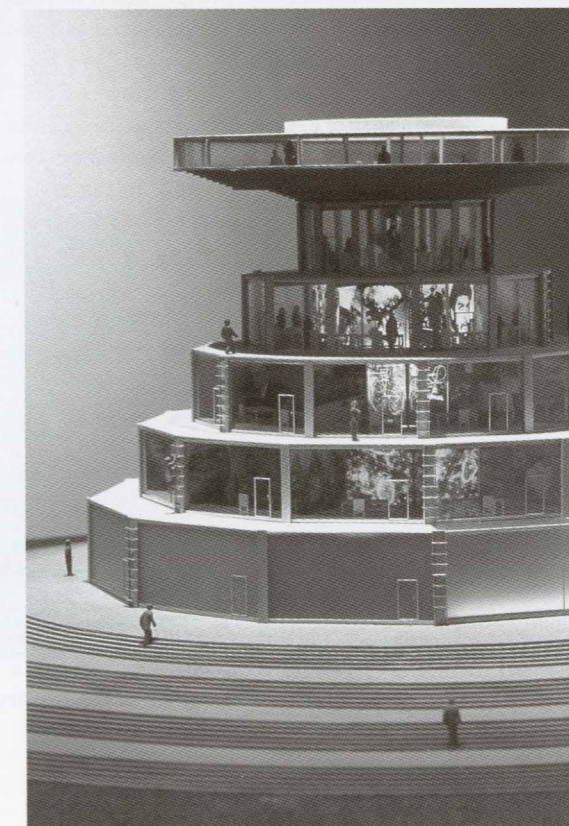
While the focus of the exhibition appears to shift in each venue, the significance of architecture to the health of a city was emphasized throughout its Toronto engagement.

The power of language as a force of repression is given visual form in the video installation, *La Habitación de mi negatividad (II)* (*The Room of My Negativity*) (2002 – 2004). For this work, the artist has carefully arranged small wooden letters on the floor to spell out words in both Spanish and English. Words such as "dictadura" "nacionalismo" and "capitalismo" translate easily for a unilingual audience and seem to indict political, social and economic repression in all forms. An animated video on the wall above portrays the words moving like toy trains, crashing into a wall, plunging off a cliff, falling into pieces and self-destructing before our eyes. While this activity adds a chilling counterpoint to the display, the accompanying wall text refers rather weakly to the artist's exploration of



Top: Carlos Garaicoa. From the Series *New Architectures*, 2003. Courtesy: Royal Ontario Museum.

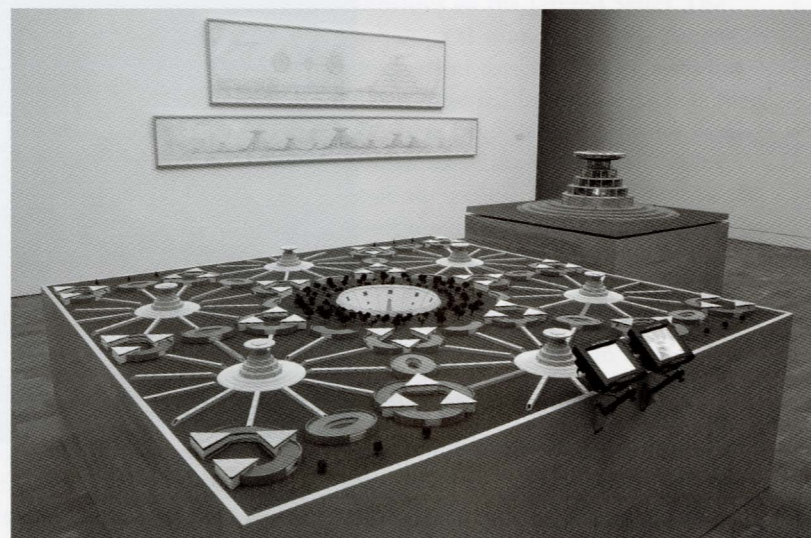
Bottom: Carlos Garaicoa. *Campus or the Babel of Knowledge*, 2002-2004. Courtesy: the artist and Lombard-Freid Projects.





Top: *The Room of My Negativity (II)*, 2002 - 2004. Courtesy: Royal Ontario Museum.

Bottom: Carlos Garaicoa. *Campus or the Babel of Knowledge*, 2002-2004. Courtesy: Royal Ontario Museum.



The superficial nature of this justification suggests that the museum is eager to capitalize on the glamour associated with contemporary art while avoiding the complexities of analysis and critique.

restrictions on travel, investment, cultural exchange or other forms of economic activity with Cuba. It is not difficult to imagine an increased use of such tactics in the future, under the pretext of the war on terror.

Another difference that appeared in the migration of the exhibit from Los Angeles to Toronto was the emphasis on the artist's critical investigation of the city as a locus of imagination. For the curator in LA, the deterioration of the city of Havana demonstrated the failures of communism while in Toronto, the implications of long-term neglect seemed to be of greater interest. This focus is evident in the way the institution framed the exhibition in public statements by museum officials and in the description of the exhibition on the museum website. The role of architecture in creating and sustaining a dynamic environment within a city and the implication of the neglect of the built environment are clearly significant subjects for an institution engaged in an ambitious renovation and expansion project.⁶

The ROM has staked a great deal on the vision of architect Daniel Libeskind and the design for the Michael Lee-Chin Crystal, originally scheduled to open in 2006. The Garaicoa installation was the inaugural exhibition of the Institute of Contemporary Culture, a new venture at the ROM dedicated to the exploration of culture and cultural issues. Within the expanded museum, which opened in June 2007, the ICC occupies the top floor of the Crystal. Situating the Garaicoa exhibition within the

mandate of the new space, managing director Kelvin Browne explained that it was part of a "three-month focus on Cuba, a country with which many Canadians have had first hand experience. Cuba presents an interesting parallel to Canada in that it is a smaller culture struggling to maintain its identity in the midst of its shared and culturally dominant neighbour, the United States."⁷

The first hand experience Browne alludes to is perhaps a reference to the popularity of Cuba as a vacation destination for Canadians, suggesting an association with tourism rather than cultural analysis. The "interesting parallel" to Canada's experience with the US is also tenuous since Cuba is typically situated within the collective sphere of Latin America while geographically part of North America. Browne's observations are effectively a denial of divisions between north and south, rich and poor nations, not to mention the fact that Cuba's struggles with the US involve a great deal more than identity.

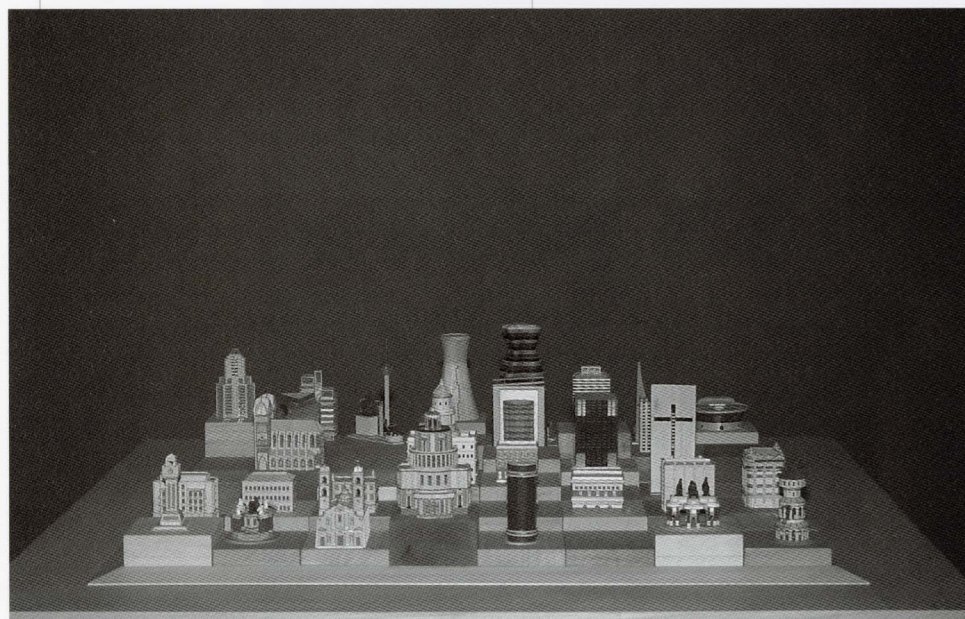
The superficial nature of this justification suggests that the museum is eager to capitalize on some of the glamour associated with contemporary art while avoiding the complexities of analysis and critique. The renovation and expansion of the historic building by a "starchitect," along with the ambitious construction project itself, also attest to a desire to position the ROM within a global context of cultural destinations. Around the world, cities have rushed to replicate the success of the Bilbao Guggenheim by building their

own version of the "Gehry" and institutions in Toronto have clearly joined the crowd.

In the minds of city and cultural planners, the Bilbao achievement closely links economic renewal with innovative architecture, cultural tourism and the attractions of a major art collection. In a profound demonstration of what George Yudice has identified as the use of culture as expedient, or means to an end, investment in arts and culture is invoked for economic development.⁸ A similar logic underlies the vision, enthusiastically embraced in Toronto and across North America, in which artists and other "creative types" are sought after within a conceptual framework that imagines citizens as perpetual tourists within their own cities.

The description of Garaicoa's practice in ROM exhibition notes echoes the kind of language found in Richard Florida books and articles, suggesting that it is the artist's creative investigation of the urban landscape, performed within the city of Havana that caught the attention of ROM administration. In the words of CEO and Director William Thorsell: "Through his thought-provoking artistic interventions, Garaicoa has transformed and re-imagined his city's architecture and explored the relationships between the city and its inhabitants."⁹ The recent attention given to this aspect of his practice has come as a surprise to the artist, whose long standing interest in the city as a subject had previously been neglected.¹⁰

Another aspect of Garaicoa's practice that has escaped notice is his obvi-



Carlos Garaicoa. *Capablanca's Real Passion*, 2004. Courtesy: Royal Ontario Museum.

ous and deep affection for Havana, in the face of sustained deterioration, increasing hardship and uncertainty about what lies ahead. Attributable to national pride, identity, love of homeland, the artist conveys a strong attachment to the city of his birth and his homeland in his work. This emotional bond is a force that should not be underestimated and, on a national level, may not allow for an easy American re-entry into the Cuban economy upon the much anticipated death of Fidel Castro.

Garaicoa's personal connection to

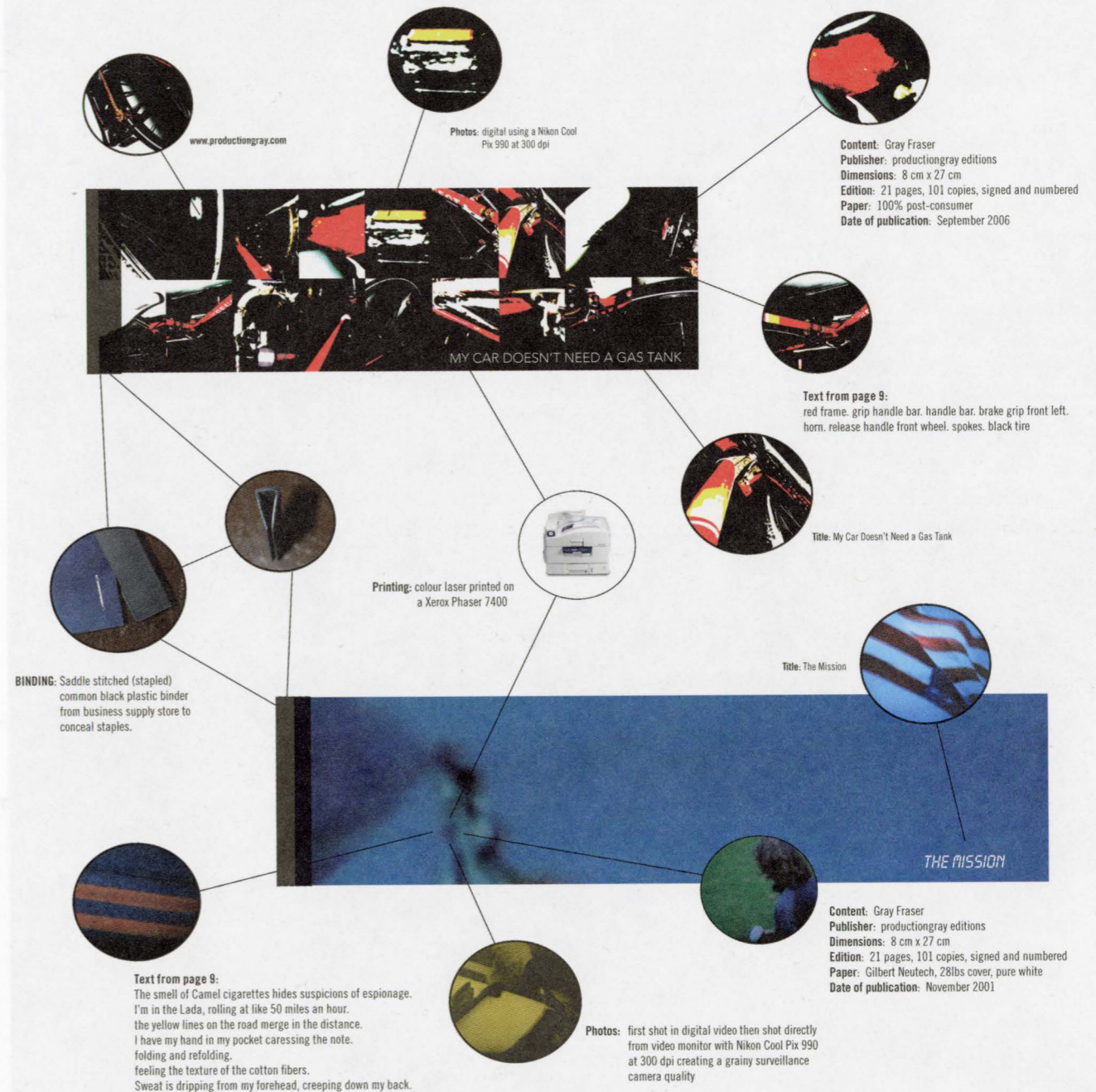
city and homeland presents a subtle resistance to the curatorial interpretation imposed by the institutions in both Canada and the US. While the museums have presented his work as an exploration of the failure of communism (LA MOCA) or as a celebration of the urban architectural landscape (ROM), these interpretations are clearly self-serving. What the exhibition reveals is a complex encounter between an American curator, a Canadian venue and a Cuban artist. In this three-way conversation, however, each maintains a separate vision, and a different agenda.

Notes:

1. Quotes from exhibition panels, ROM, consulted Dec. 31 2006.
2. Alma Ruiz. *Carlos Garaicoa; Capablanca's Real passion*, exhibition catalogue, LA MOCA. (Prato, Italy: Gli Ori: 2005), p.3.
3. Louis A. Perez Jr., "Fear and Loathing of Fidel Castro: Sources of US Policy Toward Cuba," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 34 (2002), p.247.
4. Mark Spiegler, "City Lights" *ArtNews* (March 2005), p.99.
5. Perez 2002, p.249.
6. www.rom.on.ca, consulted 3 January 2007.
7. www.rom.on.ca/about/icc/consulted 2 January 2007.
8. George Yudice, *The Expediency of Culture*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press: 2005), p.9.
9. www.rom.on.ca/about/icc/consulted 2 January 2007.
10. Ruiz, 2005, p.101.

Debra Antoncic is a PhD candidate and Teaching Fellow in the Department of Art, Queen's University, Kingston.

When is an artist's book not an artist's book?



When is an artist's book not an artist's book? The library and Archives Canada (LAC) has been struggling with the definition for some time. As of this writing LAC has stated that the issue will be resolved early this fall with the launch of their artists' book website. All publications in Canada are legally required to be deposited into LAC. Artists' books are subject to deposit laws as well, but LAC will compensate the artist when acquiring artist's books for the collection. *My Car Doesn't Need a Gas Tank* and *The Mission* (pictured above) were submitted to LAC as artist's books on April 17, 2007. Artists' publications have to meet the criteria of LAC's definition of an artist's book and pass examination by an evaluation committee. If the book passes and is defined as an artist's book LAC will acquire it and if not, the book is catalogued differently and entered into the general collection without payment to the artist. My two books were rejected by LAC as not meeting its criteria of artist's books (see website for definitions www.collectionscanada.ca) due to laser printing and binding processes. These types of book works are being acquired as artwork in most international collections. I have requested a reevaluation of LAC's definition of an artist's book by resubmitting these books (for more information see my articles concerning LAC's exclusive policies in two publications on artist's books *Artist's Books Creative Production and Marketing 2007*, University of the West of England, and *Umbrella*, California). The reevaluation is in September but I have been reassured by the director of acquisitions M. Jean-Eudes Bérault that the definition will be more inclusive to reflect contemporary Canadian artists work. www.productiongray.com.

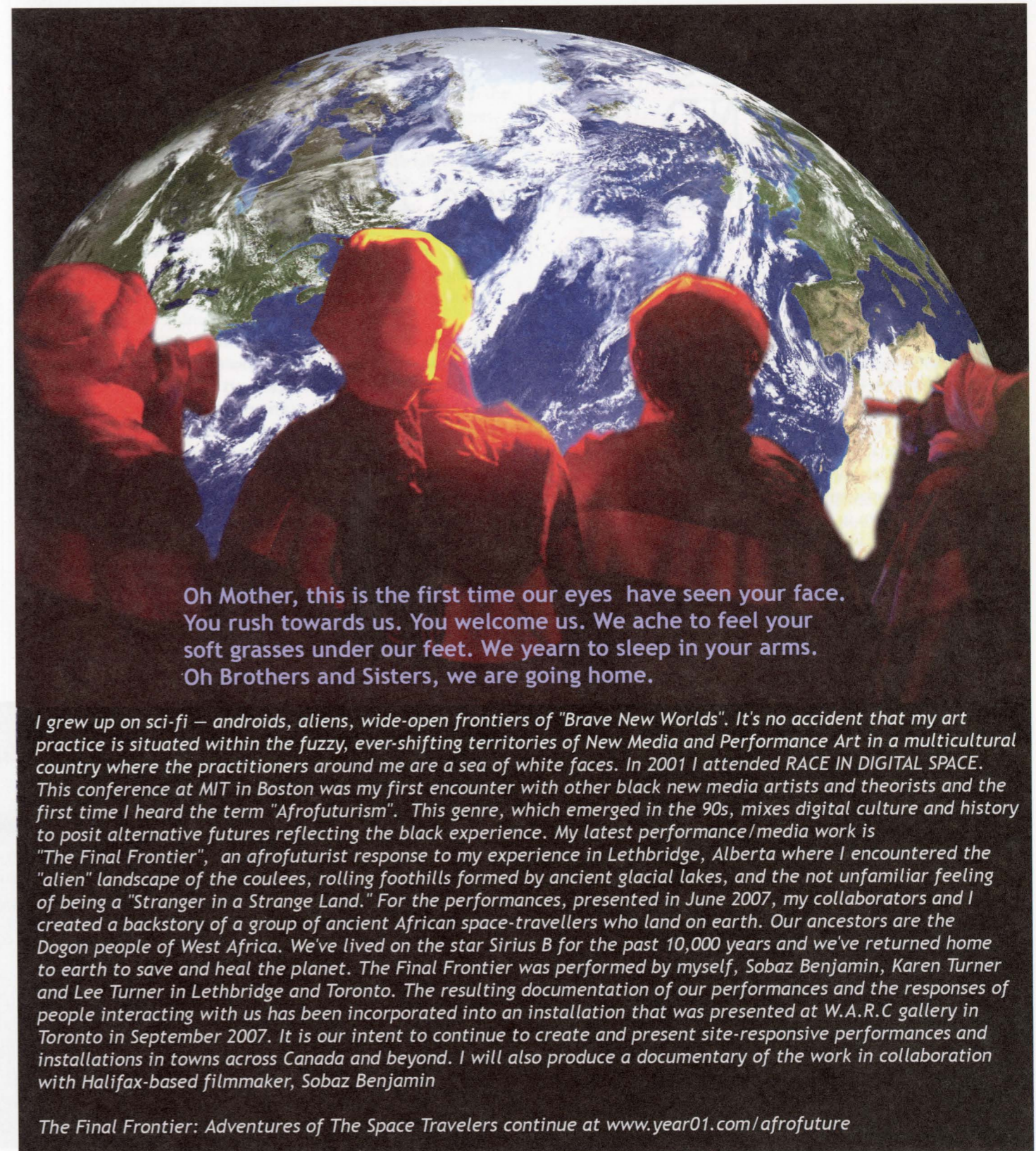
The Final Frontier: Adventures of the Dogon Space Travelers
by Camille Turner

Our stories tell of a time when our ancestors lived on the earth. We lived in a beautiful land with trees and rivers and oceans. Ten thousand years ago the water dried up and the land became a desert. We traveled to different parts of the earth, guided by the stars. Some of us left the earth to live on Sirius B amongst the wise Nommos. But no matter how many generations have passed, each of us is born dreaming of the earth, yearning for the stories, memories and the land of our ancestors.

Now our beloved earth is in danger and the time has come for us to return home. We have been sent by our elders to help and to heal. All our lives, we have been preparing for this moment.



image of earth: NASA's Goddard Space Flight Centre, Scientific Visualization Studio
photos: Brahm Rosensweig and Chris Thomas
space travelers: Lee Turner, Karen Turner, Sobaz Benjamin and Camille Turner



Oh Mother, this is the first time our eyes have seen your face.
You rush towards us. You welcome us. We ache to feel your
soft grasses under our feet. We yearn to sleep in your arms.
Oh Brothers and Sisters, we are going home.

I grew up on sci-fi – androids, aliens, wide-open frontiers of "Brave New Worlds". It's no accident that my art practice is situated within the fuzzy, ever-shifting territories of New Media and Performance Art in a multicultural country where the practitioners around me are a sea of white faces. In 2001 I attended RACE IN DIGITAL SPACE. This conference at MIT in Boston was my first encounter with other black new media artists and theorists and the first time I heard the term "Afrofuturism". This genre, which emerged in the 90s, mixes digital culture and history to posit alternative futures reflecting the black experience. My latest performance/media work is "The Final Frontier", an afrofuturist response to my experience in Lethbridge, Alberta where I encountered the "alien" landscape of the coulees, rolling foothills formed by ancient glacial lakes, and the not unfamiliar feeling of being a "Stranger in a Strange Land." For the performances, presented in June 2007, my collaborators and I created a backstory of a group of ancient African space-travellers who land on earth. Our ancestors are the Dogon people of West Africa. We've lived on the star Sirius B for the past 10,000 years and we've returned home to earth to save and heal the planet. The Final Frontier was performed by myself, Sobaz Benjamin, Karen Turner and Lee Turner in Lethbridge and Toronto. The resulting documentation of our performances and the responses of people interacting with us has been incorporated into an installation that was presented at W.A.R.C gallery in Toronto in September 2007. It is our intent to continue to create and present site-responsive performances and installations in towns across Canada and beyond. I will also produce a documentary of the work in collaboration with Halifax-based filmmaker, Sobaz Benjamin

The Final Frontier: Adventures of The Space Travelers continue at www.year01.com/afrofutur

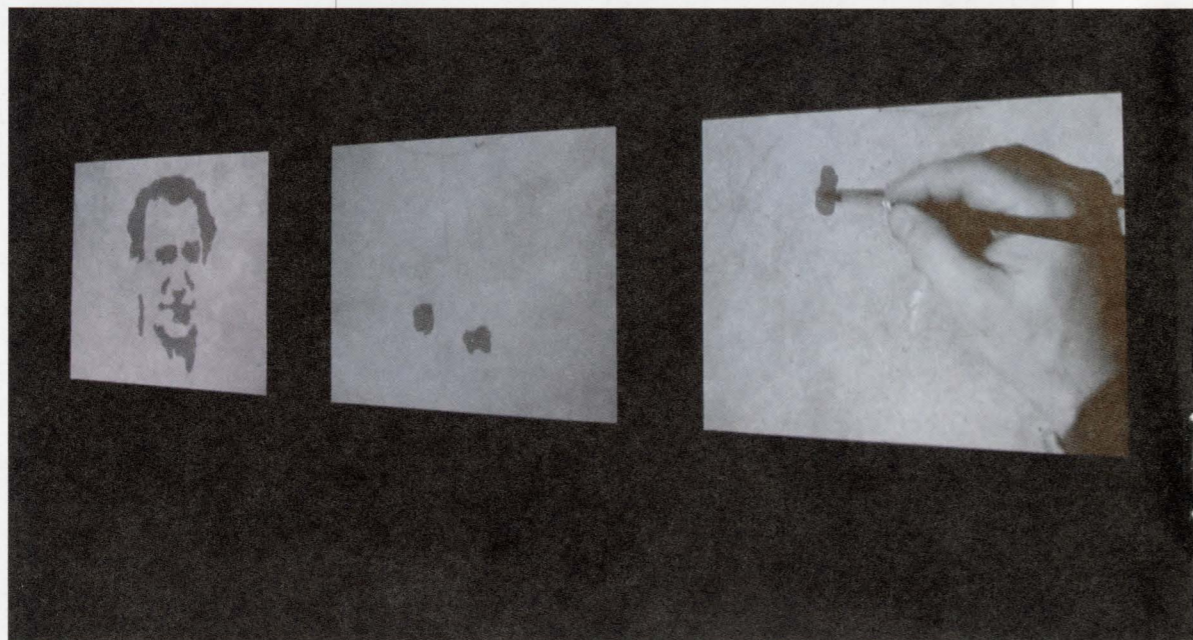
DETOURING THE GRAND TOUR — Venice 52, Kassel 12, Sharjah 8

BY GLEN LOWRY AND HENRY TSANG

This summer witnessed the 2007 iteration of the Grand Tour: a celestial alignment of the four major European art events — la Biennale de Venezia, Documenta (in Kassel), Skulptur Projekt Münster, and Art Basel — that is viewable only once every 10 years. Foregoing the annual Art Basel and deciding instead to start with the Sharjah Biennial 8 (SB8) in the third largest of the United Arab Emirates (behind Abu Dhabi and Dubai), we embarked on our own modified Grand Tour. Contrary to expectations, our own in particular, this detour proved to be illuminating, helping it to define and focus our thinking about the larger European art fairs, particularly in relation to an emergent global-local nexus of contemporary artistic production. A significant foray into the international art world from a relatively unrecognized zone of cultural production, SB8 provided a way

of locating and mapping distinct curatorial vectors in relation to fraught, ambivalent and at times mesmerizing engagements with the alterity of the Euro-American art project.

The Sharjah Biennial — pronounced *biennale*, as in *de Venezia*, so we were told — involved over 80 artists, two large exhibition halls, outdoor works, a film program and symposium. Next to the 52nd Venice Biennale, Documenta XII and Münster 07, the Sharjah Biennial 8 is a fledgling exhibition and might be seen as a marginal event in the global contemporary art scene. It does, however, stage an important dialogue between the imaginative drive of a rapidly developing nation state and the rarefied pretensions of museum-defined contemporary cultural production still beholden to a western avant-garde canon. In relation to the massive investments and investitures of the Grand Tour, the stakes



Oscar Muñoz. *Proyecto para un Memorial*, 2003 – 2005. Courtesy: the authors.

and negotiations of SB8 are every bit as palpable and vital as what we experienced in the centres of Venice, Kassel and Münster (which, given its specialized focus on public art requires more space than we have here to discuss properly).

Sharjah's ambitious desire for international art world validation is clear, as is the need to assert itself as a cultural presence regionally, in contradistinction to or perhaps in parallel with the economic prominence that the UAE has recently been aggressively cultivating. Grand is an understatement in the UAE. Dubai, Sharjah's neighbour, is home to the world's tallest building, the Burj Dubai, taller than the CN Tower with dozens more floors yet to be built; the world's largest theme park, Dubailand, which promises to be twice the size of all the Disneyland and Disney World resorts put together; the first, self-appointed seven-star hotel, the Burj Al Arab; the largest artificial islands, The Palms and The World; and the first underwater hotel, the Hydropolis.

While the SB8 is nowhere close to the scale of these other gigantic projects, it does provide an important cultural intervention in the UAE. The first serious foray from the Persian Gulf into the international art world, it might be seen as a precursor to the massive Saadiyat Island cultural development proposed in Abu Dhabi (the oldest, most wealthy of the United Arab Emirates two hours down the highway). The Saadiyat Island plans budget \$27 billion for a Cultural District featuring a Frank Gehry Guggenheim, Jean Nouvel Louvre, Zaha Hadid Performing Arts Centre and Tadao Ando Maritime Museum. Amidst hyper-expansion and phenomenal growth, against the backdrop of an emergent global-urban phenomenon, the Sharjah Biennial functions as a litmus test with which to gauge the relationship between contemporary art and a truly global capitalism.

The Sharjah Biennial started off as a traditional showcase for regional artists. That is until a young art student studying in London, Sheikha Hoor Al Qasimi, complained about the exhibition's lack of vision to her father, Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi. The Sheikh in turn appointed her director for the Sharjah Biennial 6 in 2003, a position she has retained. The impact of Al Qasimi's leadership was both immediate and impressive. As Antonia Carver suggests, Al Qasimi's determination "to reposition Sharjah alongside new contemporary art capitals such as Havana and Gwangju [was] remarkable."¹ Claiming that her "inspiration was actually Documenta,"² Qasimi brought Peter Lewis from Goldsmiths College on board. Under the theme of "Art in a Changing Horizon: Globalization and New Aesthetic Practice," Qasimi, Lewis and their team were able to attract 117 artists from 25 countries, despite their relative lack of international stature, Bush War II and political instabilities across the region.

SB7 featured the works of 74 artists. The fact that these artists represented a larger number of countries (36 rather 25) might be seen as indicative of a growing interest in questions of political identity and affiliation. As an official press release put it, "The biennial addresses the rapid developments taking place in the Emirates and engages artists and guests in a shared reflection about the increasingly vaporous landscapes of our homes, habitats, societies and nations." Placing itself squarely within a

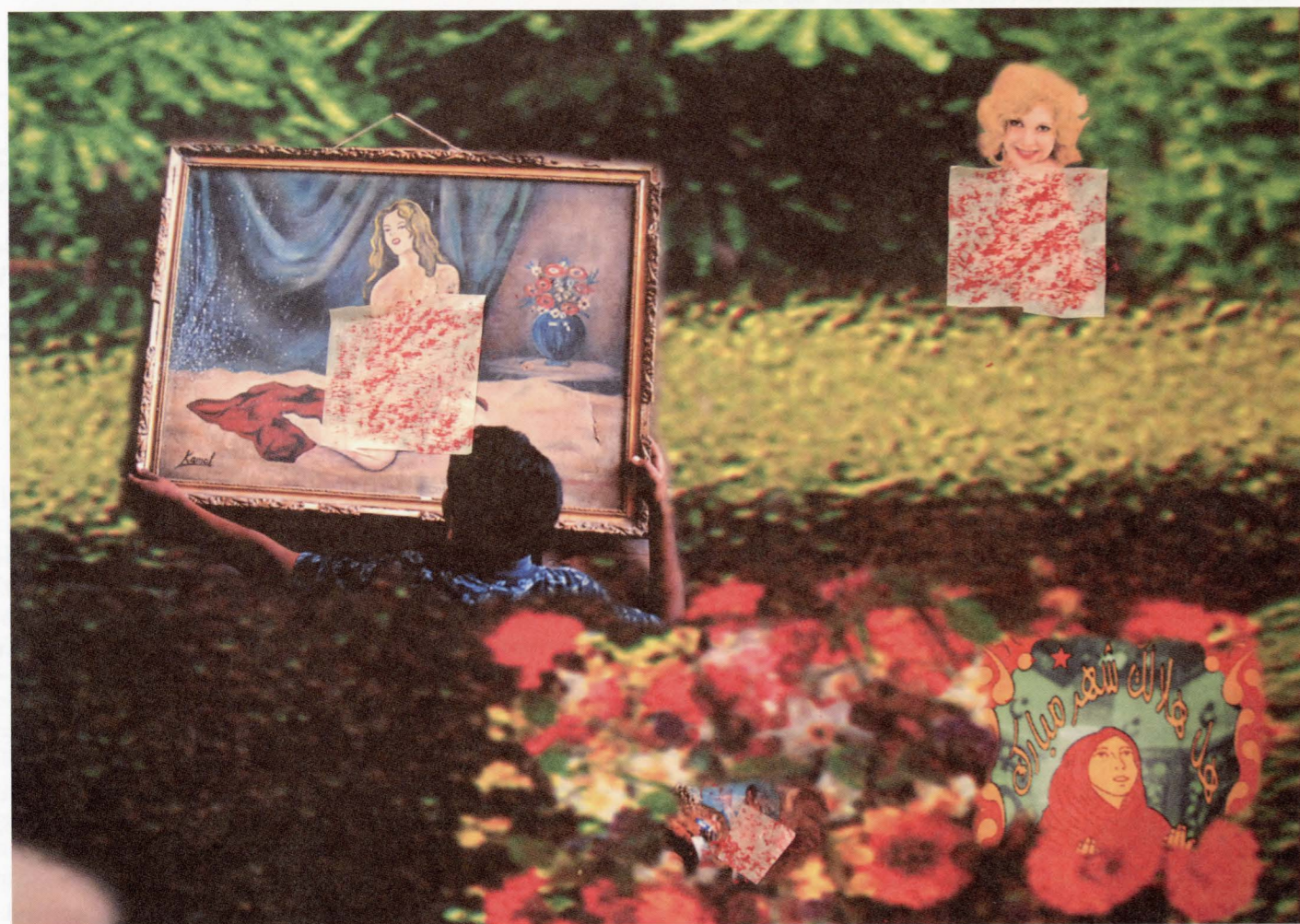
The Sharjah Biennale functions as a litmus test with which to gauge the relationship between contemporary art and truly global capitalism.

new politics of global-local redefinition, the biennial saw itself offering "a space where contemporary art can be discussed in the light of shifting strategies of allegiance that may be national or territorial, strategic or sentimental, formal or conspiratorial."

For SB8, the organizers/promoters upped the ante again, no doubt encouraged by the mind-boggling success of local, national and regional economies,³ claiming to be the largest international art exhibition in the Middle East. Indicative of a larger (national) desire to not only change history, but also rewrite the geography of the region and the world, the biennial was in no way humble about its previous success, its intentions, nor particularly careful in its geography.⁴ Under the direction of Al Qasimi, Persekian and the curatorial team of Mohammed Kazem, Eva Scharrer and Jonathan Watkins, SB8 enacted the topical, ambitious if somewhat cryptic theme of "Still Life: Art, Ecology, and the Politics of Change." They commissioned 53 new works, including the first-ever realization of Gustav Metzger's 1972 installation proposal, in which 120 idling automobiles are arranged along the four sides of a massive glass cube, their exhaust fumes blowing into the transparent space. In addition to the Metzger commission, the exhibition represented work (new and old) by brand name international artists such as Alfredo Jarr, Mona Hatoum, Simon Starling, Marjetica Potrc, Lida Abdul and Roy Arden, along with, of course, local cultural producers.



Gustav Metzger. 1972 – 2006. Courtesy: the authors.



Top: Lara Baladi. *Perfumes & Bazaar, The Garden of Allah* (detail), 2005. Courtesy: the authors.

Bottom: Michael Rakowitz. *The Invisible Enemy Should Not Exist*, 2007. Courtesy: the authors.



Two projects stood out from the rest, for very different reasons. One was Mikael Rakowitz's *The Invisible Enemy Should Not Exist*, consisting of a long table with reconstructions, made from Middle Eastern food packaging and newspapers, of artifacts that had been looted from the National Museum of Iraq in the aftermath of the American invasion in April 2003. Surrounding this tableau is a series of episodic drawings depicting Dr. Donny George, former President of the Iraq State Board of Antiquities and Heritage and Director General of the National Museum in Baghdad. The narrative reveals that Dr. George, who has been working to recover the over 7000 objects that are still missing, had during Saddam Hussein's reign avoided Ba'ath Party meetings by working at archaeological sites. In his spare time, George was a drummer for a Deep Purple cover band. In George's honour, the installation features a version of "Smoke on the Water" recorded by a New York Arabic band, Ayyoub, which provides the audio component of this complex and evocative work.

The other artwork that left a mark on the exhibition was noticeable for the marks made on it. Like Chen Lingyan who was asked to remove work showing her nude body (menstruating) from SB6,⁵ Lara Baladi was also censored. Her Boschian photomontage murals, *Justice for the Mother* and *Perfumes and Bazaar*, are ruminations on the notion of paradise that employ metaphors of the garden in contrast with the jungle. Closer inspection of the myriad of pop cultural images and those of the artist's personal and family history within these landscapes reveals the careful hand of the censor. Wherever there were depictions of sexuality or body parts that were deemed inappropriate such as cleavage, exposed buttocks or worse, masking tape had been affixed. On top of the masking tape was scribbled red crayon. When the crayon strayed beyond the tape, a feathering effect was created and the cloaking became a camouflaging that blends photograph with its censorship in an almost charming but alarming way.

Wherever there were depictions of sexuality or body parts, masking tape had been affixed.

Also of note was architect Mona El Mousfy's exhibition layout for the Sharjah Expo Centre. El Mousfy employed scaffolding with stairs that climbed up high above the entire exhibition, providing an overview from a walkway that transported gallery-goers above and across the entire space with a bird's eye view. As an architectural gesture, it had an exhilarating and somewhat vertiginous effect, unifying the cavernous trade fair hall while highlighting the temporary nature of exhibits in this



Mona El Mousfy. *Exhibition Layout*. Courtesy: the authors.



Paolo Canevari. *Bouncing Skull*, 2007, video still. Courtesy: Paolo Canevari and Christian Stein.

space and perhaps by extension, all biennials. On the ground, El Mousfy positioned the art that required light on the periphery, with the expanded centre a labyrinthine mass of dark spaces through which one meandered, encountering along the way in an exploratory manner projections such as Leopold Kessler's *Red Sea Star*, wherein a scuba diver while methodically exploring the ocean floor bumps into a couple enjoying a gourmet meal inside the aforementioned Hydropolis undersea restaurant. The design was a brave move, given that the transitory, in-process effect created by what looked like a scaffolded construction site with its internal maze cast a reflection or even commentary about the unfinished business that is the ongoing rapid development project of the UAE.

In stark contrast to the Expo Centre was the older Sharjah Art Museum, which provided the other key exhibition space in the biennial. Once a resplendent colonial structure, the Sharjah Museum's main floor consists of an extremely long corridor flanked by double garage-sized open rooms that house artwork.

A sense of rhythm, repetition and predictability is created as one moves through the show; this effect, however, did not contribute to the reception of the art. Most artists were given their own space, although not all of those spaces were fully utilized. Some of the spaces were blocked for the projections contained within, helping in a small way to break up the monotony of the long march.

One project that did use its space fully was Tue Greenfort's *Exceeding 2° C*, that raised the temperature of a room by 2 degrees Celsius, with the resultant savings in energy costs from the air conditioning to be used to purchase a plot of rainforest. Another project that also played off the overall thematic of the politics of change was the CD compilation by e-Xplo (Rene Gabri, Heimo Lattner and Erin McGonigle in collaboration with Ayreen Anastas), *I love to you. Workers Voices from the UAE*. This installation was available at the entrance of the gallery on a Discman; it was also re-broadcast in several locations around the city. e-Xplo attempted to address the issue of over a half-

Discussed and dismissed by many reviewers, the Arsenale still contains many pleasant surprises in witness to the unfolding of diverse desires in the international art arena.

million migrant workers, primarily from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, many of whom are given (by our standards in the first world) harsh working and living conditions, by interviewing guest workers and recording their voice and song in their native languages. While e-Xplo's work seemed to function more as oral history than as a pointed critique of the dynamics of labour and race in the region (which, as the Baladi piece illustrated, might have been subjected to a stricter censorship gesture), it did provide a bridge to the world outside the biennial's exhibition spaces and was a reminder of the show's thematic intentions to examine "Art, Ecology and the Politics of Change." In the opening weeks, the biennial also developed a program of "Installations/ Interventions/ Performances/ Works Around Town" that we were unable to attend because we came too late. These works and the cultural political questions they seem to want to raise are promising and bode well for future iterations of the biennial, particularly in light of the environmental and social devastation that is part of the region's meteoric development. While the UAE has the world's largest ecological footprint (Canada has the fourth) and the region's explosive development and absolute dependence of imported raw materials (everything from water to steel to sand) provides little hope of an environmental turn, there is some indication that the discourses of change are beginning to hold. The fuzzy notion of "sustainability" has already begun to enter marketing copy and political discourse. There is also talk of "greening" the region by 2012; for example, recent policy discussions by the Ministry of Environment and Water in Abu Dhabi suggest that there is governmental will to cut water consumption by half within the next five years (although it is yet unclear exactly how this will happen). In light of recent changes in official rhetoric, in conjunction with strong regional optimism, one can only hope that increased exposure to the types of dialogues engendered by the biennial will continue to have a positive impact. Whether or not art can effect political changes for the 500,000 migrant labourers (re-branded as "guest workers") in the region is up for debate.

A week after SB8 finished, Venice opened. Red and green banners covered the islands, proclaiming US curator Robert Storr's pithy, somewhat dated theme: "Think with the Senses, Feel with the Mind: Art in the Present Tense." A record 76 nations or organizations were represented, with the Arsenale as the main attraction once again, showcasing the work of more than 100 artists.

Discussed and dismissed by many reviewers, the Arsenale still contains many pleasant surprises, in witness to the unfolding of diverse desires in the international art arena. The size of the exhibition in the former armory seemed to provide a sometimes-overwhelming glimpse into the tensions of contemporary life and death. The Present Tense, or what might be rephrased as the tense present came through in numerous works dealing with themes of war and exile and grappling with the exigencies of cultural memory and site-specific trauma. Notable among this large body of work was Paolo Canevari's *Bouncing Skull*, a video of a young boy kicking a skull-shaped soccer ball that was shot in front of the bombed-out site of the former Serbian army headquarters; Gabriele Basilico's *Beirut 1991*, photographic prints of empty streetscapes in bombed-out areas of the Lebanese city; Neil Hamon's photographs reenacting key moments in the history of US warfare and Rosemary Laing's large panoramic photographs of immigration facilities (camps) in Australia, cryptically or ironically titled *And You Can Even Pay Later, Welcome to Australia and 5:10 am, 15th December 2004*.

While these works tend toward less-than-subtle engagements with the current state of war, they point to an important thematic element in Storr's project and are indicative of an attempt to foreground the political. More nuanced examples of this type of memory work could be found in installations by Oscar Munoz and Emily Prince. Munoz's five-channel video installation, *Proyecto para un Memorial*, depicts the "disappeared" in Columbia's violent landscape through the painting of anonymous portraits in water on a stone slab, images that begin to evaporate almost as soon as the painting begins. Similarly, Prince's *American Servicemen and Women who have Died in Iraq and Afghanistan (But not Including the Wounded, Nor the Iraqis nor the Afghans)* works with hand-drawn portraits that make up an archive of more than 3,300 index cards detailing the face (and race) of a fallen soldier, each affixed to a map of the US.

The ability to play the Arsenale against the competing pavilions, both within the Giardini and outside throughout the city and on various islands, creates a useful tension, for it was on the peripheries that some of the most compelling works were to be found. Of particular interest was Hong Kong, which brought together three artists/groups; Amy Cheung, Map Office and Hiram To; offering different takes on the cultural history of the former British colony, with the title of *Star Fairy*, a queering of the legendary *Star Ferry* that shuttles between Hong Kong Island and Kowloon. Mexico was represented by



Top Left: Rafael Lozano-Hemmer. *Pulse Room*, 2006. Courtesy: Puebla 2031, and the artist.

Top Right: Vincent Leow. *Andy's Addiction*, 1996. Courtesy: the artist.

Bottom: Gerard Byrne. 1984 and *Beyond*, 2005. Courtesy: Arts Council of Ireland.



Rather than showcasing contemporary cultural production or using contemporary art as a vehicle with which to explore or worry a political question or theme, Buergel and Noack retain a formalist aesthetic that is both curious and troubling.

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer from Mexico City and Montreal. The exhibit functioned as a mid-career retrospective and was refreshing as one of the few (and particularly strong) presentations that would qualify as new media. His meticulous installations activated the expansive space of a gothic palazzo, inviting viewers to interact and participate with a number of complex and ambitious projects that employed robotics, surveillance technologies and old-fashioned light and shadow. And Ireland's Gerard Byrne impeccable show of film and photographs was found adjacent to Northern Ireland's Willie Doherty's elegantly installed set of projections.

One aspect of Venice 52 was the prevalence of presentation overproduction. In simpler times, Eric Duyckaerts' glass-and-mirror labyrinth in the Belgian Pavilion housing many monitors playing the same single-channel video would have played without the glass and mirrors and extraneous other monitors. Never mind the fact that his work is based on a series of performances where he mimics an intellectual imposter, the physical conceit of the installation seemed particularly wasteful. In a similar approach, Sophie Calle's immensely popular installation in the French Pavilion was an excellent example of exploration ad infinitum. She and her curator Daniel Buren (who applied for the position that she posted publicly) employed all of their extrapolative abilities to fashion a visually dazzling multidisciplinary exhibition based on a minor but personally significant event: the email breakup letter. Singapore had a different challenge to overcome — the architecture of the Palazzo Cavalli Franchetti. Within this magnificent setting, the work by Tang Da Wu, Vincent Leow and Zulkifl Mahmod was overpowered by the architecture and gorgeous chandeliers. However, Justin Lim's writhing mass of porcelain vines and light bulbs, *Just Dharma*, that was ceremoniously dropped from the ceiling, left a pile of wreckage that exhibited a sensitivity and confluence with its precious surroundings.

A week after the hoopla of la Biennale originale previews, Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack's Documenta XII was unveiled. In his editorial statement, "Dar Ursprung" (The Origins), Buergel aligns his curatorial approach with that of Arnold Bode, director of the first Documenta. Buergel writes, "After a period of state-sponsored crime, Bode felt the need to put the postwar German public back in touch with international modernism. And this meant, first and foremost, to recon-

stitute civic society as such." Investing Documenta with what is primarily an art historical function, one that is grounded in the unbridled humanism of a reconstructed European subject, Buergel, quoting Bode, suggests that the role of Documenta is to "make visible the roots of contemporary artistic production in all major fields."

Rather than showcasing contemporary cultural production or using contemporary art as a vehicle with which to explore or otherwise worry a given political question or theme, Buergel and Noack retain a formalist aesthetic that is both curious and troubling. To help reinforce the curators' rhetorical stance (or political position), Documenta XII showcases significant historical works spanning 600 years. The oldest works in the exhibition are from the Berlin Saray Album, a mishmash of drawings and paintings brought to Germany by the Prussian Ambassador to Constantinople (1786 – 1790) that dates back to sometime between the 14th and 16th century (according to the catalogue). There is a 16th century Persian calligraphy by Haddsch Maqsd At-Tabrizi, a facsimile of a 16th century Chinese collector's album describing pottery from three successive dynasties, a 17th century Chinese lacquerwork panel, various pieces from 18th and 19th century Mogul albums and paintings, a 19th century Iranian carpet, a 19th century veil from Tajikistan, 19th century painting from India, a Katsushika Hokusai design sample (dated 1835), Edouard Manet's 1867 *L'Exposition Unvierselle* and Nibaran Chandra Ghosh painting *The Suppliant Lover* (c. 1900).

This amalgam of orientalist artifacts (one might wonder how Manet fits here) is bracketed by Paul Klee's 1920 *Angelus Novus*, a non-too-subtle allusion to Walter Benjamin's well-known essay "On the Concept of History," in which Klee's angel serves figure of the tragic historian for whom history is "one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet." As Benjamin describes it, "The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress." Buergel and Noack seem to be inviting us to sort through the wreckage of 20th Century Art, calling forth Tanaka



Ai Weiwei. *Fairytale, 1001 Chairs, 2007*. Courtesy: Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing-Lucerne and the artist.

Atsuko, Juan Davilla, Mary Kelly, Bela Kolarova, Kerry James Marshall and John McCracken to name a few who pile up alongside others.

Documenta XII's strategic re-situating of 20th century vanguards within a long history of cultural exchange between the West and East poses interesting questions about the geo-historical limits of Western culture, particularly in relation to China and Middle East. However, the exhibition's reliance on formalism and tendency toward the de-historicization or deracination of alterity is deeply disconcerting.⁵ In reference to the current exhibition, we are left to wonder about the unspoken or unnamed political context toward which Buerger and Noack are working. What parallels are to be drawn between 1955 and now? Is this exhibition a response to post-911 political instabilities in the US and EU? Does it call forth the spectre of a newly racialized and divided Europe? We are tempted to read the curators' political position vis-à-vis the social function of art — their conservatism — as a stance against the very conditions that are making the smaller, marginal biennials like Sharjah all the more interesting and more vital.

Beneath the polished and darkened surfaces of Documenta XII that come across as being self-consciously conservative, glimpses of this alternative, much less abstract reality are avail-

able. In fact, the more powerful work at the exhibition seems to fly in the face of Buerger and Noack's reactionary departure from Nigerian director Okwui Enzewor's radical attempt to reconfigure Documenta XI across geographic and cultural locations, to break it away from its Eurocentric, colonial origins. Works by artists such as Ai Weiwei, whose presence in conjunction with those whose travels he orchestrated literally infiltrated and seemingly dominated Kassel, and Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle's *Phantom Truck*, a replica of a mobile biological weapons lab, do in fact draw attention to the fluidity or at least volatility of European borders and ongoing negotiations with emerging geo-political contexts. In relation to these works, Buerger and Noack's Documenta XII might be read as an attempt to erase Enzewor's radical despatializing project, a backlash or last gasp of an outmoded Modernist project.

Ai Weiwei's performance, *Fairytale*, plays on the fact that Kassel was often the setting for fairytales by the Brothers Grimm, who used to live and work in the town. In the tradition of Joseph Beuys' *7000 Oaks* for Documenta VII, Ai's fantasy consisted of 1001 Chinese participants and 1001 Chinese chairs. The people, who were brought to Kassel in five stages from different regions in China, functioned as "live exhibits," interacting with local residents, visiting the exhibits, living

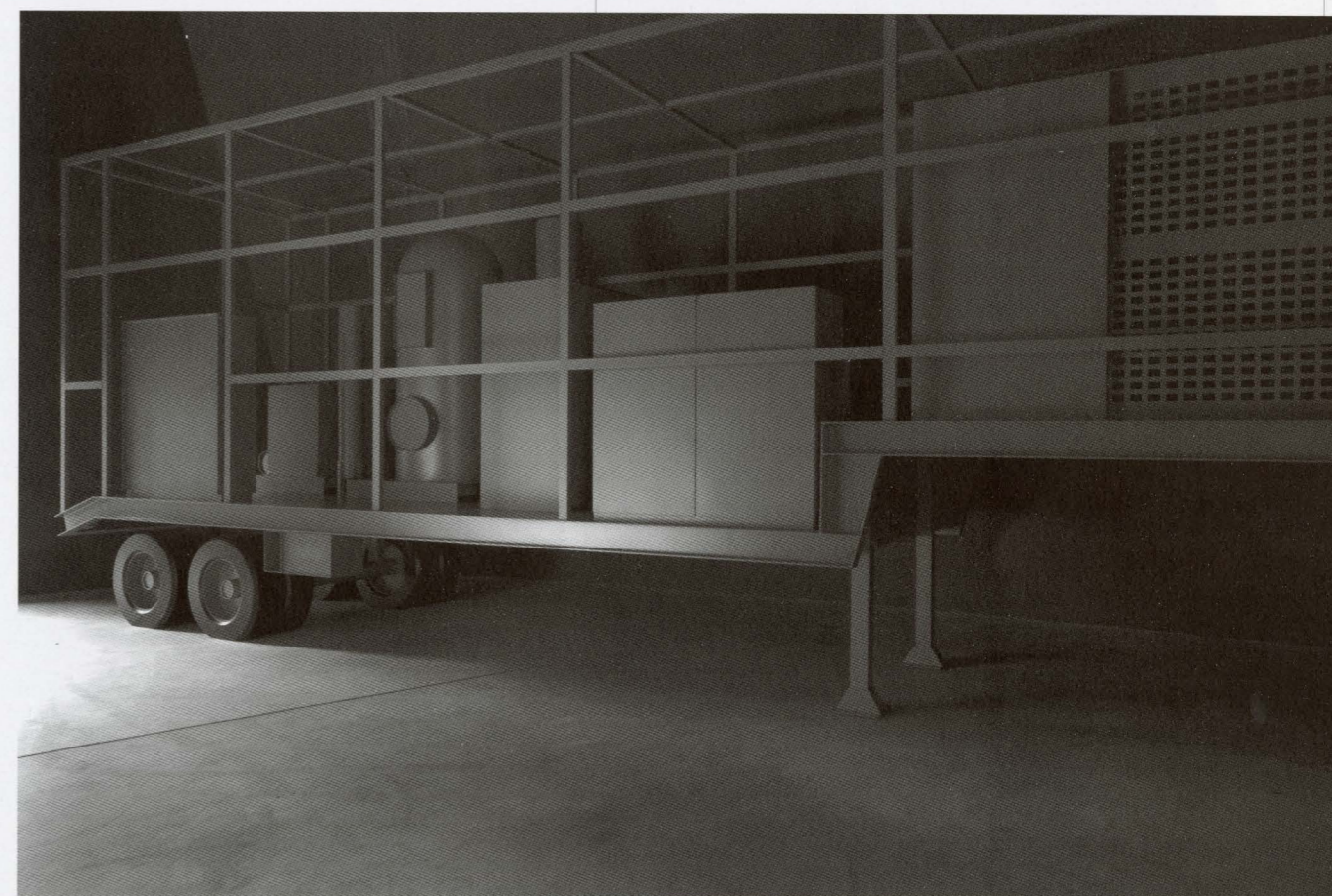
together in dorms and documenting their impressions of their experience for the artist who asked them not to leave Kassel for the duration of the show. The chairs, like the people, were seemingly omnipresent (to the German press, anyway), scattered throughout the various exhibition spaces. The monumental and spectacular nature of this project was embraced by the media and public, which was a good thing since it was also by far the most expensive, reportedly costing 3.1 million to produce.⁷ An accompanying large-scale sculpture, *Template*, was an assemblage of doors and windows from Ming and Qing dynasty houses from the Shanxi area, Northern China, where entire towns have been destroyed to make way for new construction. Shortly after Documenta XII opened, the sculpture collapsed due to strong winds. In a typically Duchampian move, Ai Weiwei decided to leave the sculpture in its new condition, stating heroically, "Art is not the end, art is just the beginning."

Against the recalcitrant failure of Documenta XII, the relative success of both the biennials in Venice and Sharjah seems, ironically perhaps, to do with the function of nation-based discourses and political aspirations. More than 100 nations were represented at the Venice Biennale with 30 purpose-built pavilions for France, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Russia, Spain, South Korea, Japan, the United States, Canada and other 20th century nation-states in the Giardini. Scattered throughout

The representational systems in Venice and Sharjah are symptomatic of state-sponsored identity formations.

Venice on various islands in palazzos and warehouse spaces were (official and unofficial) "collateral" venues for Argentina, Hong Kong, Mexico, Singapore, Taiwan, Ireland, Azerbaijan, Lebanon, Wales and others. These national and post-national sites posit a counterpoint to the Sharjah Biennial and the desires of the emirate to accrue cultural and political capital through contemporary art.

In contrast, Documenta functions as a vehicle for articulating or reinstituting European cultural history; centering a canonical modernism, Buerger and Noack suggest that the concerns of contemporary art remain tied to a mid-20th century



Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle. *Phantom Truck, 2007*. Courtesy: the artist and Katrin Schilling.

reconstruction of a beleaguered European subject. Under the erasure of their universalizing formalism, the social differences separating the (over)developed nations from the rest of the world are held in strange isolation, fixed if not entirely dismissed in a collection of guiling anthropological gestures. The representational systems in Venice and Sharjah are symptomatic of state-sponsored identity formations, similar to major international festivals such as the Olympics and World Expos. Nonetheless, in opposition to the more solipsistic vision of Buergel and Noack's reactionary respatialization of Documenta, the biennials are both spaces of influence and power for artists, curators and viewers, especially from postcolonial sites. The Sharjah Biennial, in particular, demonstrates both a yearning for and impatience with the hegemonic structures of the European art world, and suggests that it need no longer sit on the peripheries of the larger modernist projects.

Notes:

1. Antonia Carver. *Sharjah enters the eye of the art storm*. universes-in-universe.de/car/sharjah/2003/e-carver.htm.
2. *ibid.*
3. Mike Davis and Deborah Campbell, among others, have argued that the phenomenal and unprecedented economic growth of Dubai can be linked directly to the aftermath of 9-11 and the influx of massive amounts of wealth from Arab investors looking to repatriate their billions of dollars worth of cash and investments closer to home.
4. The claim to be the largest in the Middle East raises

5. See Grady T. Turner's review on SB6 in *Art in America*, Nov. 2003.
6. Reviews have made the faults of Buergel and Noack's curatorial approach abundantly clear. So there is little need to retread old tires.
7. Ai's gallery owner Urs Meile raised the money through two Swiss foundations.

Glen Lowry is writer, educator and editor who specializes in contemporary Canadian literature and culture and creative-critical collaboration. He teaches in Critical and Cultural Studies at Emily Carr Institute for Art + Design + Media in Vancouver, BC. Lowry edits West Coast Line and is a founding editor of LINEbooks, a micropress specializing in experimental, west coast poetry and poetics.

Henry Tsang is a visual and media artist, curator and researcher exploring the relationship between the public, community and identity in the new global order. His artwork incorporates digital media, video, photography, language and sculptural elements. He teaches at the Emily Carr Institute of Art + Media + Design in Vancouver where he is the Head of Critical & Cultural Studies.



Ai Weiwei. *Template*, 2007. Courtesy: Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing-Lucerne, Frank Schinski and the artist.

forays into cocoons

how to unload bags and practice failure



Dear Con-Edison, Porters and the 6th Precinct, NYPD:

We had our eyes on a bag—a beautiful bag, for quite some time. Con Edison uses them when doing excavations under the street. It must hold a tonne. It is white with blue straps and steel rings, it must be made of a plastic coated nylon. When full they look like industrial sized marshmallows bloated with rocks and dirt and bits of garbage; lovely, actually. They leave the bags on the street or sidewalk until someone comes along to pick it up with a back-end loader.

You see, we were building cocoons, lightweight and portable structures that we could hang in tree tops or construction scaffolding or old buildings. We were building squats, portable squats. With a harness and rope you can get up almost anywhere and with a back-pack that unfolds into a cocoon cities' heights, their surfaces and cracks turn into habitable plateaus. We were building these cocoons from all sorts of free, stolen and cheap materials: tyvek envelopes from the post office, the netting used on construction scaffolding to stop dust from flooding the streets, and \$1 dollar beach mats. And, we hoped, a Con-Edison bag. We wanted to turn this bag, normally filled with the underground stuff of the city, into a home. We wanted to use the infrastructure of the city against itself.

To do this you have to find cracks. But cracks aren't always easy to find. We hoped we were good crooks. Smart crooks.

So we had our eyes set on two bags. They must have been there for weeks. One on Bergen and Flatbush in Brooklyn, the other on 5th Avenue and 13th Street in Manhattan. We chose Manhattan. And so two Canadians and a Mexican set out to liberate some goods from the biggest energy company in New York in one of the most paranoid and surveilled cities in North America.

We need a plan. The bag is full of 500 pounds of asphalt and it's in plain sight of everyone. We buy garbage bags, about 200 hundred of them and set up our assembly line; we first unload the asphalt chunks into any flower bed and little sidewalk square cut out for trees we can find. All of the beds fill up with this second layer of displaced road. And we fill up garbage bags with dirt and rock and carry them to the garbage piles at each end of the block.

Carry two bags each if you can and be careful not to break anything. And it's starting to get hot and there really is so much stuff in these damn bags. Backs are starting to ache and it's a bit like we are digging ourselves out of prison, tedious, inefficient and a little paranoid.



A waiter from across the street comes to check out what we are up to. "We're sculptors" we tell him, doing an assignment for class, sculpting with asphalt. And we're rooting through this bag to find the perfect piece of rock. As you can see "we've put aside some great chunks." "Strange, but good luck", he tells us, "I like art, too". And he gets inside the bag in his tux and shiny shoes for a photo op with his thumbs up.

BREAKING THROUGH BOUNDARIES IN CURATORIAL



And as if we were in a stop motion film the bag empties bit by bit. And the flower beds are stuffed with asphalt while the garbage piles swell with bags of dirt and rock.

About three hours into our work the police swarm us. Three cars take the intersection and drop their headlights on us. They hop out of their cars determined and reassured like only cops can be, and grill us. Again the same story: "We're art students...." They find us funny and cute. One of us is a lady in a dress and the other two, non-threatening young guys. There are times when claiming 'I am an artist' is not an embarrassing thing to say but can be the best strategy you've got at your disposal. As an artist you are allowed to be stupid and incomprehensible, you have a leniency otherwise impossible to achieve. And this is the first crack we found and slipped into. They even wanted us to call them when we exhibited the stones so they could come see our 'sculptures'.

"Just call the 6th precinct, we'll hear about it". "Just be sure to clean up after you are done, ok" and the cops left us to our business and total victory.

How did they know about us? As we realized it was the undercover cop walking the street with an empty McDonalds soda cup and sideways ball cap, and the porter of one of the fine apartment buildings close by was checking us out.

We got back to work as soon as the cops pulled away with only another 8 inches or so of dirt in the bottom of the bag to go. We considered just flipping the bag over, calling a cab and taking off but then we imagined the cabbie driving us straight to the 6th precinct. As we tried to figure out our best course of action stuck in a thicket of victory and paranoia - a fragile kind of hope, a Con Edison truck pulled up, also called in by someone, probably the porter who in a fit of adamant concern over the obviously deeply troubling act of unloading a Con-Edison bag called Con-Edison and the cops at the same time.



They also thought we were strange but harmless and decided to stick around until we finished up. We were forced then to clean up, grab some rocks to take with us so that it looked like we were actually using them and walked off down the street, leaving the empty bag behind and dropping our asphalt chunks as soon as we turned the corner. Empty handed and leaving behind an empty bag.

In the end, destroyed a little by the ridiculousness of ourselves, all we did was re-divert some rock and dirt from a bag to gardens and garbage bags. And the bag, almost empty, with its sides slumped over like it was exhausted stayed there for weeks. I would ride by it on my bike almost everyday. This stupid little bag that



I could really just go over and tip upside down and ride away with. But now it was impossible, untouchable. For some reason we don't quite understand yet.

It may just have been laziness but it was more like defeat and sometimes you can't go back on your defeats, you've just got to look at it, empty handed, with a little pang in the stomach. But you learn about cracks and you try to find more.

There is something about excessive, inefficient and pointless labour for the sake of art that is kind of beautiful. Maybe it is that labour in other contexts, like at our jobs, is usually equally as inefficient but there is a lie to it, the lie that it matters, which however meagerly keeps people going back to their jobs. But unloading a bag for nothing, for no result just makes its pointlessness explicit, so obviously useless, and in some strange way more satisfying. And, what is also beautiful is when you go into something with a goal and by the end the goal is destroyed and in place of the goal you are left with a situation.



This is an unlicensed work by Forays. If you see something, do get involved.
www.forays.org

REVIEWS

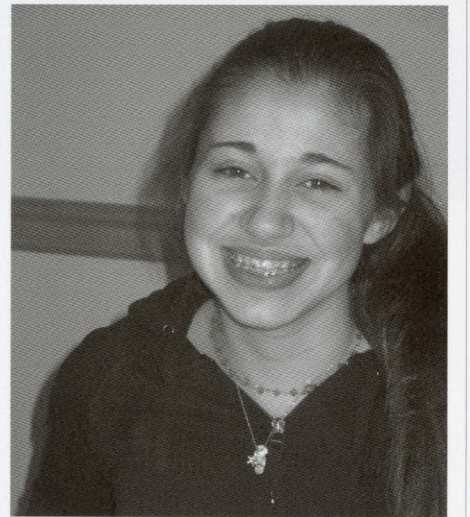
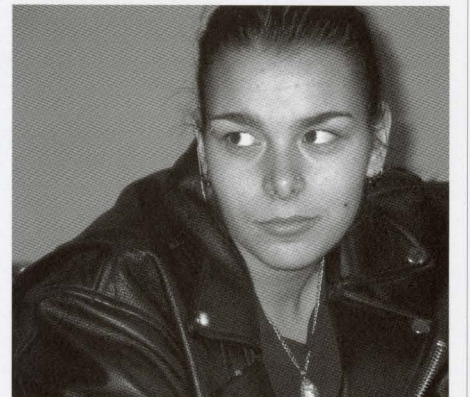
BREAKING THROUGH BOUNDARIES IN CURATORIAL METHODOLOGY

— *Overstepped Boundaries: Powerful Statements by Aboriginal Artists in the Permanent Collection*

1 April - 13 May, 2007
Kamloops Art Gallery
curated by Ayla Joe, Erika Lakes and Julienne Ignace in collaboration with Jen Budney, David Tremblay and Kathie McKinnon.
review by Charo Neville

In art historian Marie Bouchard's 2003 essay "Curating in Relation to Community" she argues that "in rethinking the place of Aboriginal art and Aboriginal curatorial practice in contemporary culture, the question that we need to ask is whom do we wish to serve? A community-based curatorial approach makes it possible for Aboriginal curators to think outside the white box/black cube paradigm in translating Aboriginal artistic expression into the language of contemporary art."¹ It could be said that an increasing number of experimental curatorial projects have emerged in recent years and that funding programs are in fact becoming more and more focused on projects that are "outside the box," but how many of these experimental projects actively challenge the role of the professional curator and the notion of "the expert," especially when exhibiting Aboriginal art? Although there has been a growing shift in focus on "community" across disciplines since the 1990s, collaborative approaches to curating are still less established than community art practices. Taking a cue from the dialectical approach of collaborative art projects, perhaps a place to start when forging new experiments in curating and attempting to engage diverse audiences is to envision exhibitions as conversations or exchanges of ideas.

In an effort to address the reserve communities surrounding the predominantly white, right-wing, conservative community of Kamloops and to expose the Kamloops Art Gallery's collection of Aboriginal art, curator Jen Budney began the process for the exhibition *Overstepped Boundaries: Powerful Statements by Aboriginal Artists in the Permanent Collection* by dismantling her own position as gatekeeper of these art objects. In January 2006, Budney put out a public call for young participants within the Thompson-Nicola Regional District school system, stating: "The Kamloops Art Gallery has over 200 works of art by Aboriginal artists in its collection. A public institution, the Gallery holds this work in trust for everyone in the community, and particularly for the young people who hold the keys to the community's future."² After an initial selection of nine participants, the resulting core group of three young First Nations women (Ayla Joe, Erika Lakes and Julienne Ignace — 15 and 16 when the project began) stayed committed until its completion. Over a 14 month period they participated in workshops that were facilitated by Jen Budney, Secwepemc artist and teacher David Tremblay and artist, educator and social worker Kathie McKinnon. The young curators were involved in every part of the curatorial process, working directly with KAG staff, looking at work in the collection, learning skills of analysis and interpretation and pulling out common themes to formulate their curatorial objective. The resulting selection of work, which spoke most directly to their experiences, was not the traditional Aboriginal art in the collection but work in a wide variety of styles and mediums by contemporary artists Carl Beam, Rebecca Belmore, Joane Cardinal-Schubert, Fred Johnson, Jim Logan, Mary Longman, Teresa Marshall, David Neel, Jane Ash Poiras and Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun. The curators identified recurring themes of racism, identity, colonialism, appropriation and essentialism, relating to the notion of boundaries (personal, cultural,



Top: Ayla Joe, age 18.
Middle: Erika Lakes, age 17.
Bottom: Julienne Ignace, age 16.

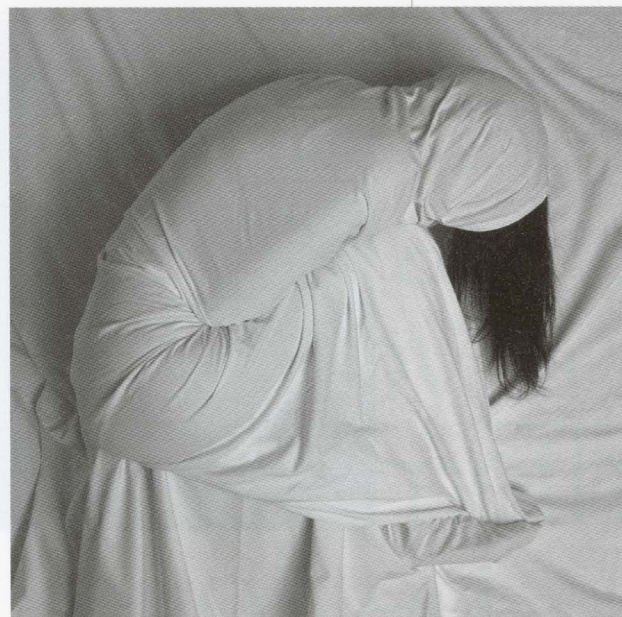
spiritual and environmental), which they saw the artists confronting in their work — appropriately mirroring the project's own process of overstepping established institutional boundaries which restrict access to knowledge and limit the voice of expertise.

Many of the works the curators chose were mixed media collage, a format that draws its symbols from real life and is thereby easily accessible to a diverse audience. In Jim Logan's 1993 work, *Shhhhh!*, he displays a white satin glove, a strand of pearls and historical photographs against a black background perforated with painted red dots as a way of making apparent the secrecy of sexual abuse, an issue that one of the curators writes "has been present in many people's childhoods" and "speaks of many boundaries being crossed, particularly moral boundaries."³ At the same time, highly minimalist works, such as Rebecca Belmore's 2003 photo-

graphs *Bloodless* and *White Thread*, speak to the racial and gender boundaries that exist for Aboriginal women through the depiction of tightly constrained bodies bound in fabric. Works such as Teresa Marshall's *Cultural Briefs*, 1999 – 2000, Jane Ash Poitras' *Indian Blackboard*, 1999, or Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun's *Clayoquot Sound Environmental Terrorist*, 1993, addresses larger institutional injustices and inequities by cleverly recuperating the objects and iconography of colonial forces, such as the briefcase, blackboard or chainsaw.

Clearly stating the project's intentions, the KAG's exhibition handout explains: "an experiment in access and pedagogy, the exhibition is as much about empowering our community's young people as it is a study of artworks... Visitors will notice that the "voice" these curators use is not the anonymous voice of institutional authority that customarily meets us in

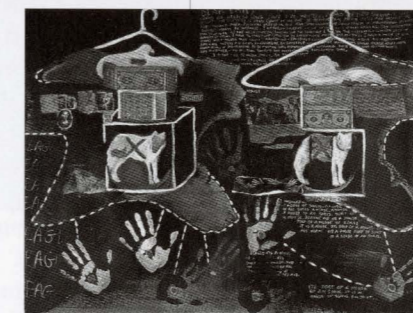
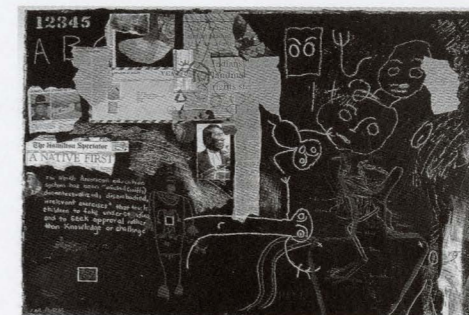
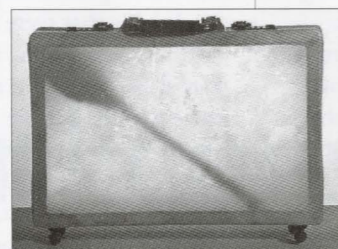
public art galleries and museums." The young curators' voices were prominent in the catalogue produced for the exhibition and were evident throughout the exhibition design: in the curatorial statement presented as wall text, in the red line that wound along the exhibition walls, the artificial boundaries created by heavy red curtains that viewers had to pass through to enter the gallery and in the red plexiglass divider that subtly separated this space from the Jimmie Durham exhibition in an adjacent gallery. The work was displayed with extended labels written collaboratively by the curators and two of the curators were physically present in the gallery through the use of "video-labels" in which they gave amateur talks about the work via LCD screens mounted on the wall. The exhibition also extended beyond the confines of the gallery to visitors outside its doors through the use of giant red letters that



Top Left: Rebecca Belmore. *Bloodless*, 2003. Courtesy: Kamloops Art Gallery.

Top Right: Teresa Marshall. *Cultural Brief*, 2000. Courtesy: Kamloops Art Gallery.

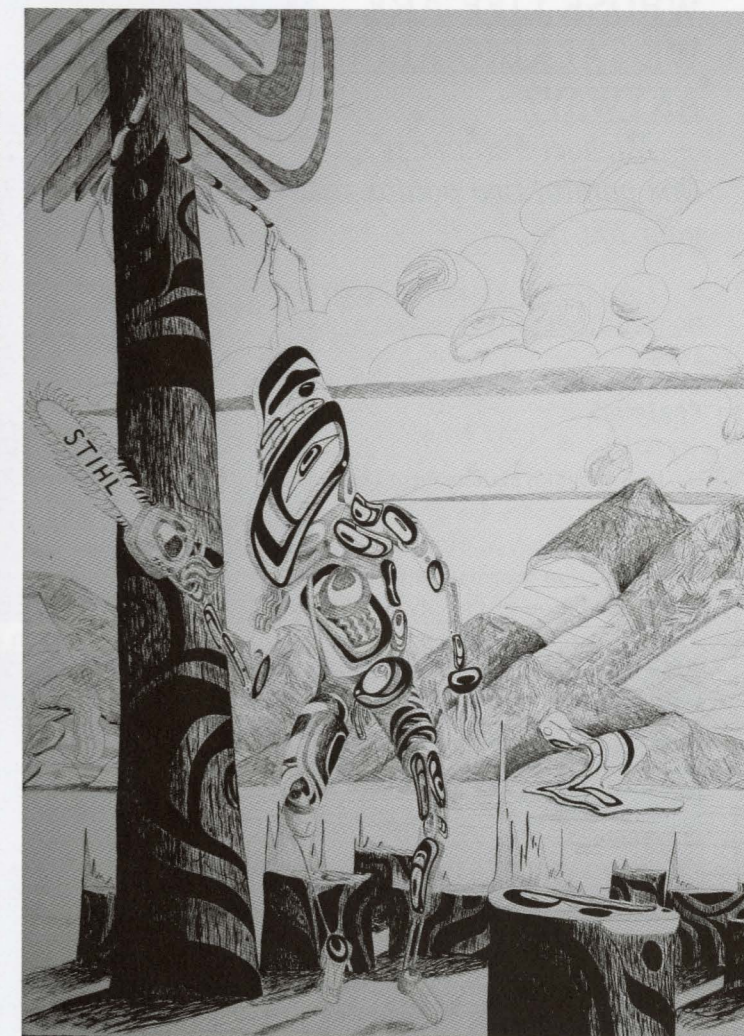
Bottom: Teresa Marshall. *Cultural Brief*, 2000. Courtesy: Kamloops Art Gallery.



Left Top: Jane Ash Poitras. *Indian Blackboard*, 1989. Courtesy: Kamloops Art Gallery.

Left Bottom: Joane Cardinal-Schubert. *Birch Bark Letters to Emily Carr: House of All Sorts*, 1991. Courtesy: Kamloops Art Gallery.

Right: Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun. *Clayoquot Sound Environmental Terrorist*, 1993. Courtesy: Kamloops Art Gallery.



stretched across an entire wall facing the exterior windows, contending: "an exhibition of art that makes strong statements." While perhaps a bit overstated, this text was drawn from the curatorial statement in which the curators admitted "when we started this project, we knew practically nothing... Now we understand that art can make strong statements and change people's ways of thinking."⁴

At a time when the phrase "engaging diverse audiences" seems to be overused and under-practiced, this project's community outreach approach truly succeeded in expanding the experience

and knowledge base of the three participants, encouraging new audiences to visit the Gallery and at the same time inciting new readings of the work for viewers who, like me, were already familiar with it. In this way, the exhibition made important shifts towards overstepping firmly established traditions of exhibiting Aboriginal art by engaging in a two-way conversation between the institution and the local community.

Notes:

1. Marie Bouchard. "Curating in Relation to Community" in *Making a Noise: Aboriginal Perspectives on Art, Art History, Critical Writing*

2. KAG exhibition handout.
3. Ayla Joe et al. *Overstepped Boundaries: Powerful Statements by Aboriginal Artists in the Permanent Collection*. (Kamloops: Kamloops Art Gallery: 2007), p.22.
4. KAG exhibition handout.

Charo Neville is a graduate of the curatorial Masters program at the University of British Columbia. She currently works as a curatorial assistant at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Her independent work as a writer and curator has focused on community art projects in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.

WHOSE LIFE ARE WE TALKING ABOUT ANYWAY?

— *Michael Fernandes' One potato, two potato...it's your life...*

8 February - 31 March 2007
Montréal Arts Interculturel (MAI)
review by Christopher Régimbal

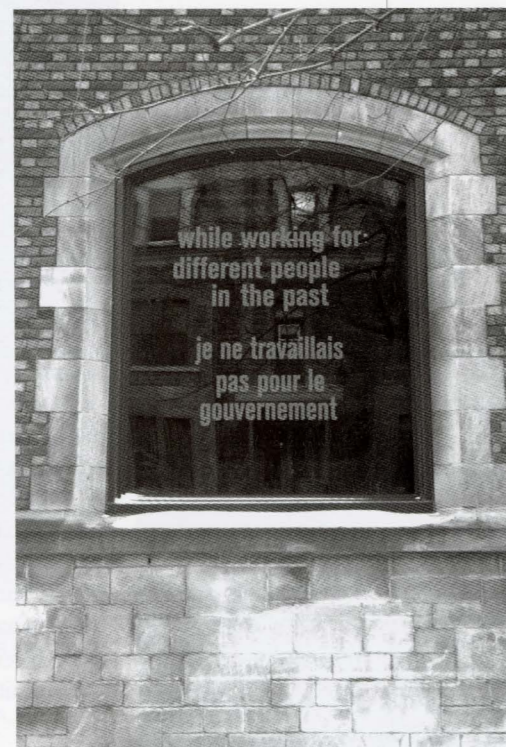
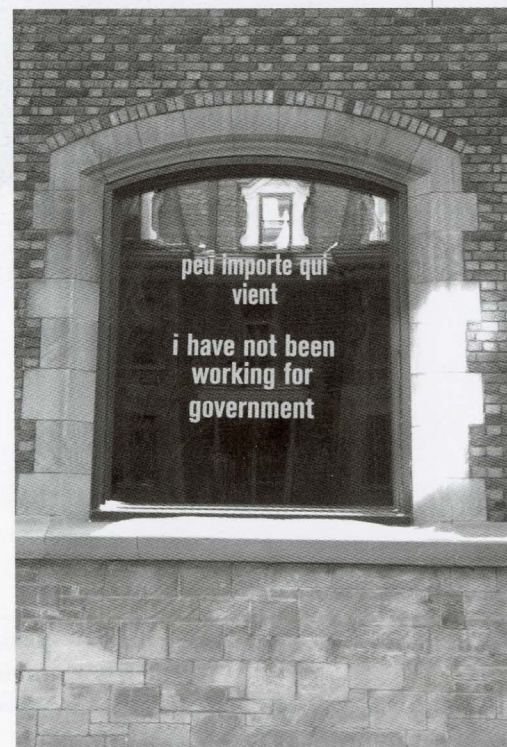
In July 2006, Halifax-based artist Michael Fernandes was invited to take part in a residency at Montréal Arts Interculturel in preparation for his first major exhibition in the city since the 1990s. Fernandes, who was born in Trinidad in 1944, immigrated to Canada when he was 16, living first in Montréal. Treating the 10-day residency as an opportunity to reconnect with his

former community, he staged and recorded a series of conversations with Montréalers. Many of these collaborators, like himself, were born outside Canada. Their conversations became the central component of *One potato, two potato...it's your life...* and were presented alongside a street-level text installation and postering project. Taking up notions of chance and place, Fernandes presented a socially engaged yet fractured narrative, investigating the make-up of Montréal by inviting the community into a self-reflexive dialogue.

Seeing as *One potato, two potato...it's your life...* was first encountered on the street, it seems like a perfect metaphor for entering into the work. We all create paths as we move through our lives and it is on the street that chance encounters happen and we come into contact with our extended community. By reading the text of the city as we compose our paths through it, we engage with the places where the col-

lective values of community are formed. Turning north onto Jeanne-Mance to face the MAI, one discovers Fernandes' series of eight colourful signs written across the gallery's exterior windows. Continuing up Jeanne-Mance toward Hôtel-Dieu they read, "They are not going anywhere else to some war-like activities" and "I'm working for my country / I have not been working for government." Not only are the texts presented with little contextualizing information, the vitrines bear little discernable connection to one another and the French and English versions appear in different orders. Faced with these ambiguous insertions into their public space, pedestrians apply their personal experiences to the verses, reconciling them internally and engaging with their environment in a new way.

Entering into MAI from the street, visitors are plunged into darkness and enveloped by a cacophony of voices in



All photos: Michael Fernandes. *One potato, two potato... it's your life...*, 2007. Courtesy: Paul Litherland.



different languages. There are four stations in the dark gallery that contain blank video projections with soundtracks made up of the conversations Fernandes recorded during his residency. The recordings are comprised of his collaborators speaking in one of four contexts: cell phone conversations, to their dogs, giving directions and telling stories. As the viewer engages with each station for up to 20 minutes at a time, they stand in front of the projectors, casting their silhouette onto the wall and inserting themselves into the conversations as participants. By erasing any visual reference from the video installations, Fernandes once again shatters the narrative, leaving large portions of it to be deciphered by the viewer.

In *Cellphone* and *Dogs*, the first two stations in the gallery, the listener is transported back onto the streets of Montréal. In *Cellphone*, the listener is subjected to a recurring feature of our urban environment — listening to one side of someone else's cell phone conversation. These unguarded instants provide the contemporary flaneur with moments of insight into the lives of those who make up their extended community; the enigmatic half-stories that pepper our modern lives. *Dogs*



brings the listener into parks and public spaces where people and their pets go to escape the isolation of their homes. In the city, dogs, like humans, are partitioned into too-tight spaces, secluded from the rest of their community. It is in the public spaces of the city, ranging from the smallest neighbourhood square to large urban parks, where social animals (dogs and humans alike) come together to stretch their legs and hang out with their neighbours.

The third station, *Maps*, is by far the longest-running piece in the exhibition. In it Fernandes asks his collaborators to give directions from one point of the city to another and to describe what

one would encounter along the way. *Maps* takes the listener into the speaker's homes and the recordings are layered with the sounds of birds and traffic clatter in through open windows, the clatter of dishes in the background and maps being scratched onto paper. Most of these episodes are in a language other than French or English, with street names and landmarks betraying the nature of the stories. The retransmission of the physical layout of a community is how the idea of place is reproduced over time. With this in mind, describing the physical layout of Montréal seems redemptive, as each of the participants would have at one time

been new to the city and have themselves been the recipients of quickly sketched directions.

The final station, *Story*, contains three short episodes that explore displacement and the weight of distance. In the first, a young French Canadian girl, presumably from Montréal, describes her experiences in a Mexican market where she gave a mango to another young girl who was obviously hungry. In the second story, an older woman from Uruguay discusses her anxiety about returning to her homeland because of the isolation she fears she would experience there. In a very short segment, the final collaborator, a woman from the Caribbean, describes the difficulties of returning home to visit her family after living in North America. We enter all three of the stories at seemingly random times, often in mid-sentence, leaving the listener to make sense of brief moments in time. With two or three people speaking at the same time, switching between English and French, these are more like conversations than any of the others. Because the listener doesn't know the lead up or culmination of these episodes, they resemble chance encounters; anecdotes overheard at a party or through an open window. Whether discussing a young girl's first experience of poverty or the slow drift of distance, all three stories make the listener reconsider the meaning of home.

Fernandes brings us back out onto the streets for the third and final part of the exhibition by littering the city with innocuous posters in search of a missing cat called "Fernando" who, as it says on the poster, answers equally to the names Nintendo, Orlando, Innuendo and Bonanzo. Fernandes knew that his insertion into the public sphere would get lost amongst the accumulated detritus of the contemporary city, but with a dry humour that has come to characterize much of his work, he opened his exhibition back up to chance. What if someone had actually come across that cat and tried to call the number?

One potato, two potato... is a game of



chance played by children, usually in order to figure out who is "it" at the start of a game of tag. The element of chance is not inherent in the mechanisms of the game, but instead in the conditions under which it is played. The same game of *one potato, two potato...* played 100 times with the same number of children standing in the same order will yield the same results; an algorithm based on a division by eight. Any child who has the capacity to perform a series of mathematical equations would theoretically never have to be "it." In effect, we are not actually dealing with chance, only the appearance of it. The same is true of the seemingly chaotic makeup of our cities. Though they are composed of millions of diverging singularities, if we take a step back, we see that it is from within our converging paths and chance encounters that a city becomes a community.

Christopher Régimbal is a writer, artist, and curator based in Montreal. He curated Portrait of a Young Artist at the WKP Kennedy Gallery and his work was included in the Ontario Arts Council's Mobile Media Tour and the Back Gallery curatorial project in Montreal. He is currently completing his MA in Art History at Concordia University.

ASSERTING THE RIGHT TO SOVEREIGNTY, AUDIO-VISUALLY

— *RED EYE First Nations Short Film and Video*

11 September – 5 November 2006
 Carleton University Art Gallery
 curated by Ryan Rice
 review by James Missen

In *The Interstitial Paradigm: Between a Rock and... The Politics of Presenting Aboriginal Media Art*,¹ media artist and curator Steve Loft argues that because native artists work from a history persistently grounded in the colonial experience, the place of what he terms "an Aboriginal cultural specificity" must be continually re-examined as more Aboriginal media art finds its way into galleries, educational and cultural institutions and presentation spaces. Loft writes, "What is important here is that this is not a dialogue about the formation of some pan-Indian identity politic, but that experimentation in media art by Aboriginal artists challenges control by others of our image and our perception. Aboriginal film and video makers take on the responsibility to help self-determine the image that manifests the reality of Native life."

Curated by Ryan Rice during a recently completed two-year aboriginal curatorial residency at Carleton University Art Gallery in Ottawa, *RED EYE First Nations Short Film and Video* is an ambitious, vital exhibition featuring 28 works by 19 artists. The sheer scope of Rice's program is necessarily vast, for its aim is not simply to portray a diverse survey of media art productions realized between the years 2000 and 2006. Rather, in keeping with Loft's important assertion that experimentation in media art by First Nations artists must be read as a reclamation and re-assertion of the power inherent in representing oneself, *RED EYE* demonstrates



Kent Monkman. *Group of Seven Inches*, 2005, video stills. Courtesy: Jody Shapiro.

that these inherently political contemporary acts of cultural expression rightfully assume a heterogeneity of forms and aesthetic qualities.

What is pertinent then about each of the individual works featured in Rice's nearly two-hour program is how, in spite of their varying modes of address, when viewed as a whole, they speak to the ongoing efforts on the part of Aboriginal peoples' to assert the right to sovereignty through a breadth of culturally-specific means. It is for this reason that *RED EYE* appears consciously organized to be a varied viewing experience. The films and videos range from: queer performance-based works by Thirza Cuthand, Kent Monkman and Gisele Gordon to evocative lyrical explorations by Dana Claxton and Shelley Niro; a Slangblossom music video directed by Daybi to Cynthia Lickers-Sage's PSA for the Canadian Race Relations Foundation; abstract experimental images assembled by Stephen Foster and Frank Shebagaget to the Super 8 interventions of Terrance Houle; Kessic Douglas and Sally Kewayosh's narrative shorts to dark poetic pieces by Ariel Lightningchild

and Darlene Naponse. The overall curatorial strategy is anti-assimilationist by design, as each work retains its own formal and aesthetic sensibilities, operating to broaden and deepen the possibilities of what currently constitutes Aboriginal media art practice in a contemporary global context.

RED EYE demonstrates how media art is an especially productive terrain for experimentation by Aboriginal artists, as media art itself is a nexus influenced by

technological development as well as literary and visual discourses; it, too, is discursively positioned between notions of tradition and "innovation." In turn, much has been written with regard to how mainstream (North) American cinema appears to problematically engender a system of hegemonic order in which alternate, or marginalized, subject positions are either effaced, entirely absent or appear as grossly mischaracterized stereotypes. Yet paradoxically,



Stephen Foster. *Squelch*, 2004, video stills. Courtesy: the artist.



Terry Haines. *Skin For Life*, 2005, video stills. Courtesy the artist.

this cinema's very dominance and popularity as a formal, ideological engine for a supposedly naturalized viewing experience opens up the potential for resistant responses by artists who make work that "makes use" of their social, cultural and political position of marginality to re-configure, challenge or

problematize dominant representations.

By participating in the screening of experimental works, embodied audience members confront themselves in the mirror of the work of art, which at the same time serves as a window on the politicized forces that shape shared, ever-shifting notions of per-



Shelly Niro. *TREE*, 2006, video stills. Courtesy: the artist.



sonal and social identities. It is for this reason that *RED EYE*, as a unifying title for the exhibition, is particularly suitable and evocative, resonating with multiple meanings. On the one hand, the title imagines Aboriginal audiences which, like Loft suggests, are not particularly interested in categorizing a non-existent "pan-Indian" post-colonial aesthetic, but are concerned instead with how media art can serve as a means to express lived identities in all of their complexity and diversity. Conversely, the title *RED EYE* imagines non-Aboriginal audiences invested in visualizing the world we all inhabit through the deep cultural lens of First Nations peoples' traditions, histories and identities in a non-reductive manner. This, perhaps, is the exhibition's most laudable quality; it avoids falling into the common trap-pings of "cultural exchange" that Loft so rightly critiques when he writes, "Too often, the work of Native people is presented in a reductionist format in order to best engage a "wide" audience, predominantly of non-Natives. In this model, issues and larger concepts of identification are not addressed for fear of alienating this audience. Contextualization, in this sense, is relegated to "promoting understanding or awareness" and not to issues of aesthetic analysis and/or cultural sovereignty."

RED EYE is a major contribution to the wider, emerging cultural discourse that includes the aesthetic, critical and pedagogical concerns also being investigated by Rice's peers and colleagues in the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective (ACC), at Canadian artist-run centres such as Urban Shaman and Tribe Inc. and at festivals like imagineNATIVE and Weeneebeg. All of these arts organizations are concerned with the integration (not assimilation) of Aboriginal art into a larger cultural milieu in this country and elsewhere. Rice's curated works put the relationship of institutions of art, mass media and academia, theories of subjectivity and reception, strategies of narrative and representation, delineations of history and questions of address and audience at stake. It is the prevailing societal power structure that is held in opposition to the aims of new alternative forms of image-making on view in the exhibition. Such expressions implicitly provide a means for artists and their audiences to not only imagine alternate forms of social organization, but in the examples of Aboriginal media art experimentation, to re-assert the rightful sovereign position of First Nations' peoples on their own terms.

RED EYE First Nations Short Film and Video is on view at the Art Gallery of Calgary until 5 January 2008.

Notes:

1. Steve Loft. *The Interstitial Paradigm: Between a Rock and... The Politics of Presenting Aboriginal Media Art*, in *Conundrum*. Winter 2003. This journal of Contemporary Aboriginal Artists and Aesthetics is now available online at www.conundrumonline.org/

James Missen is a member of Ottawa's Available Light Screening Collective and was recently the Cultural Policy Advisor at the Canadian Conference of the Arts (CCA). He has previously taught as a contract instructor in Film Studies at Carleton University.

CURATORIAL PROGNOSTICATIONS:

Curating Subjects

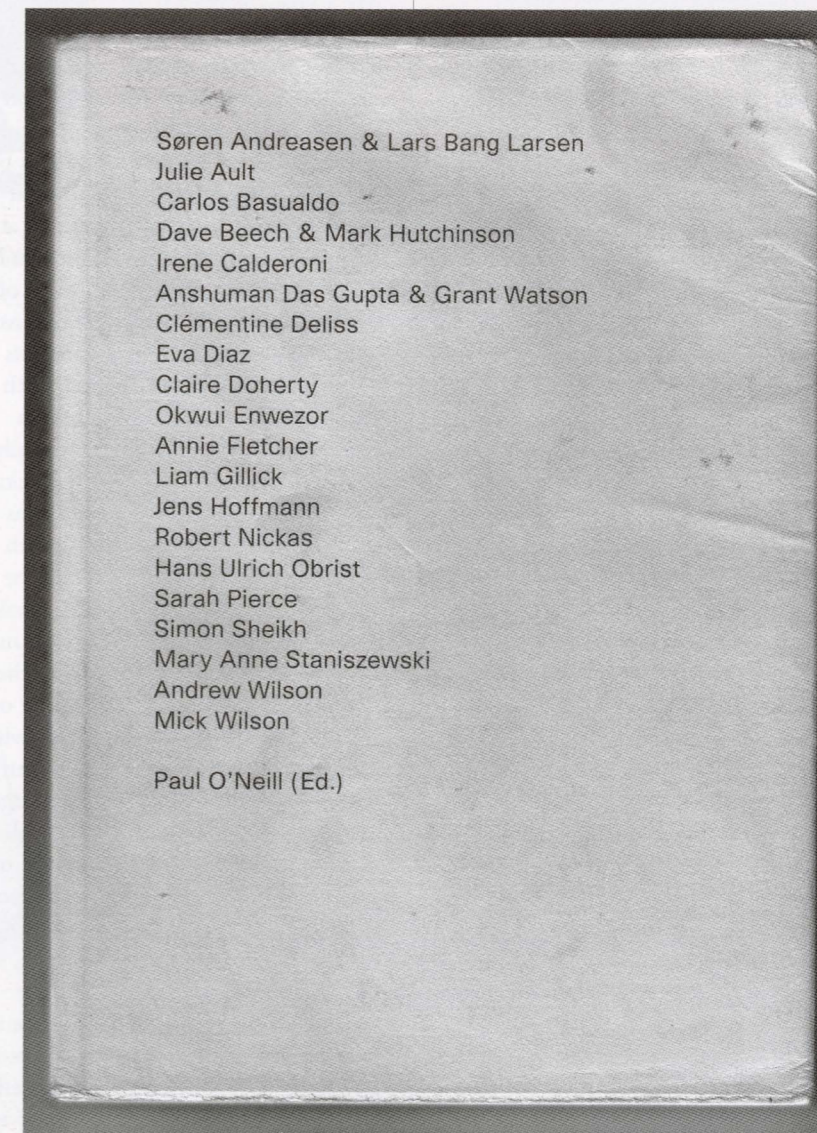
edited by Paul O'Neill

Open Editions, 2007

review by Tim Whalley

Among the density of arguments on the state of curating contained in *Curating Subjects*, one particular statement stands out. Echoing the senti-

ments of many contributors to the anthology, San Francisco-based curator and writer Jens Hoffmann claims that contemporary curators are unable to find a "free zone" where they are uninhibited by institutional and financial restrictions that are largely a result of broader shifts in the international art market and institutional structures. Contemporary art audiences, he argues, have also grown tired of heavy-handed exhibit themes while many artists are



Søren Andreasen & Lars Bang Larsen
Julie Ault
Carlos Basualdo
Dave Beech & Mark Hutchinson
Irene Calderoni
Anshuman Das Gupta & Grant Watson
Clémentine Deliss
Eva Díaz
Claire Doherty
Okwui Enwezor
Annie Fletcher
Liam Gillick
Jens Hoffmann
Robert Nickas
Hans Ulrich Obrist
Sarah Pierce
Simon Sheikh
Mary Anne Staniszewski
Andrew Wilson
Mick Wilson

Paul O'Neill (Ed.)

suspicious of curatorial intentions. Explored in most of the essays in *Curating Subjects*, these themes reflect the tenuous position of curators and make for some interesting reading.

Hoffman's statement relates to a larger discussion on the emergence of the curator as an active agent in creating and representing contemporary art, particularly since the 1990s. Within this broader lens, contributors to the anthology such as Lars Bang Larsen and Soren Andreasen, Carlos Basualdo and Okwui Enwezor look at the recent explosion of interest in contemporary art and those responsible for its representation and mediation. Others such as Julie Ault, Dave Beech and Mark Hutchinson, Claire Doherty and Sarah Pierce weigh in on how curators have adapted to more recent art practices that function outside of the white cube and question institutional and curatorial authority. In "Creating Shows: Some Notes on Exhibition Aesthetics at the End of the Sixties," Irene Calderoni looks to the late 1960s and early 1970s as the roots of the most recent shift in curatorial practice. Focusing on several important New York exhibits, such as *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials* at the Whitney and *Spaces* at the MoMA, she describes projects in which, "the context of artistic production coincided with the context of the exhibition." For Calderoni the legacy of these projects was a curatorial position that attempted to abandon neutrality and embrace exhibition poetics. While this resulted in some innovative projects, it also brought criticism for being too invasive of artists' works.

Meanwhile, Simon Sheikh takes us back to 19th century Europe to examine how the role of the curator has been shaped by the legacy of the bourgeois museum. The topic of the museum appears at several junctures, although perhaps not as often as it would have a few years ago. Citing recent projects such as Thomas Hirschhorn's *24h Foucault* and John Bock's *Klutterkammer*, Clementine Deliss discusses the pedagogical function of the museum and

how it relates to contemporary art curation and production. Playing with the didacticism of conventional museum exhibits, for Deliss, worked against the conformity of pedagogical instruction in many curated exhibits.

The effect of international biennials, art fairs and other extensive projects on contemporary curatorial practice is the most prevalent theme in *Curating Subjects*. While the general tendency among writers is to approach large-scale art extravaganzas with a critical eye, Okwui Enwezor affirms that these projects provide an alternative to traditional exhibition models, offering deviations that introduce risk and avoid the repetition that prevails in conventional exhibits. Carlos Basualdo provides perhaps the most measured assessment in his investigation of how biennials and international art fairs have impacted upon the logic of the institutions of modernity. For Basualdo, the real issue is that biennials, large-scale projects and art fairs remain under-studied, with more work needing to be done in order to understand their potentially destabilizing qualities. Robert Nickas, on the other hand, sees biennials as being more closely connected with business and commerce than art, he simply claims that the art fairs, "make a lot of sense. Dollars and cents." A number of the contributors probe further, specifically into the intermingling of large-scale international projects with cultural tourism and schemes for urban regeneration. As Claire Doherty argues, the promotion of a particular locale in biennials and site-specific projects may lead to a problematic notion of place that is out of date and overly determined by geographical location. Doherty sites the 2005 Istanbul Biennial, curated by Charles Esche and Vasif Kortun, as an example of a project that succeeded in combating this effect by actively engaging with the city and dealing with intersections between the local and national.

Perhaps predictably, *Curating Subjects* suffers from a lack of international representation, particularly for an antholo-

gy intended to poll curatorial practice globally. All of the writers, save Anshuman Das Gupta, are located in or affiliated with institutions in Europe and the United States. The jet-setting curators and critics that appear in the anthology speak of elitism, with writing that is often far removed from most of those working in a field characterized by smaller-scale, under-funded projects. Furthermore, considering the intersections between art and the realms of design and architecture, among other cultural fields, it is surprising that *Curating Subjects* does not include perspectives from these disciplines. These shortcomings are partly overcome by the inclusion of artists, including Liam Gillick, Mark Hutchinson and Julie Ault, who discuss their respective projects and how their work has intersected with curatorial concerns.

Curating Subjects works when the writers do not dwell on well-worn and frequently discussed issues in curatorial discourse. The anthology introduces topics that are explained through historical perspective, but also speak to contemporary circumstances, such as the impact of market forces. Despite the prognostications among some contributors about the uncertain future of curating, the tone is generally hopeful. As many attest, the lack of definition that has been the hallmark of the curatorial field is also its biggest asset. Doubt, uncertainty, dissonance — these are the conditions that will facilitate innovation in the future. Despite a somewhat limited pantheon of opinions, *Curating Subjects* should find a place in the repertoire of curators and artists battling to take down barriers.

Tim Whalley is Program Coordinator at Scarborough Arts Council. His independent curatorial and art projects have been featured at the Toronto Free Gallery, the Market Gallery, the Drake Hotel, Pages Art Window and Museum London in London, Ontario.

FUSE



A FUSE FUNDRAISER

Buy your limited edition posters by artists Diyan Achjadi, Brendan Fernandes, Freda Guttman, Terrance Houle, David Poolman, Mark Schilling and Z*otz Collective. A pack of 12 posters sells for 250-150 dollars sliding scale.

www.fusemagazine.org

Posters pictured clockwise: Diyan Archjadi, Brendan Fernandes and Z*otz Collective



short FUSE/short FUSE/short FUSE/sh

THE WRONG ARM OF THE LAW

— *The Persecution of Steven Kurtz and Robert Ferrell*

BY CYNTHIA FOO

What would you do if, as an artist, your art practice was suddenly deemed illegal and you were accused of being a terrorist? I imagine you'd probably laugh incredulously and figure the whole thing would blow over. But what if you were faced with a grand jury trial? If your health started to suffer because of the stress and years went by as you waited to hear whether the other side was going to come to their senses and stop playing the expensive legal equivalent of chicken?

This is precisely the situation that Steven Kurtz and Robert Ferrell have found themselves in. In 2004, Kurtz was charged with "bioterrorism." An associ-

ate professor of art at the University of Buffalo, Kurtz is a founder of Critical Art Ensemble, an internationally-respected art and media activist group. Amongst other practices, the group uses commonplace bacteria to test for the presence of Genetically-Modified Organisms (GMOs) in food, drawing critical attention to these ubiquitous yet grossly under-studied products.

When Kurtz's wife Hope died in her sleep in 2004, the paramedics that arrived saw the Petri dishes and lab equipment that Kurtz was in the midst of packing for an art exhibition at Mass MOCA and alerted the FBI. Kurtz's house was sealed, his wife's body confiscated, his computers, books and art equipment removed and his cat trapped in the attic behind sealed plastic sheets. Although the New York State Commissioner of Public Health determined that the materials seized by the FBI posed no public safety risk, Kurtz was charged with bioterrorism. The charges were eventually changed to two counts of "mail and wire fraud" and widened to include Kurtz's frequent collaborator, Dr. Robert Ferrell, then Chair of Genetics at the University of Pittsburgh.

Already suffering from non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, Ferrell struggled through two strokes since being charged. In October 2007, he finally took a misdemeanor plea. While he says he wasn't pressured to plead guilty, his wife and daughter call the prosecution a "persecution," adding that "the government has been relentless" and that Ferrell could not physically survive continued prosecution.

This news came to me while in the thick of organizing a fundraiser for Kurtz and Ferrell's legal fees. We'd already arranged to have Naomi Klein speak at a gala benefit; our tiny team of volunteers had been politely and persistently soliciting artists like Ken Lum, Jin-me Yoon and Ed Burtynsky for donations; and we'd been organizing a two-day event designed to draw attention to the case and raise money for CAE. It was a blow to imagine, however briefly, that maybe Steven would — maybe he should — opt for the misdemeanor route. If he did, however, Kurtz would signal a capitulation to obscene charges that have added to a growing chill on academic and artistic freedom.

In this climate Kurtz keeps fighting and so do many people around the world. This is not simply a US issue: it concerns all of our rights to freedom of thought, expression and practice. Here in Canada, we also live under the threat of secret trials and Security Certificates. And that is why we resist: because the alternative — of permitting a government to trample its citizens' fundamental rights — is totally unacceptable.

Cynthia Foo is the Chair of the Board of Directors of A Space Gallery and is completing her PhD in Visual and Cultural Studies with the University of Rochester. She gratefully acknowledges Toronto CAE fundraising committee members Doris Sung, Stephanie Rogerson, Lina Rodriguez, Gloria Kim, John Greyson, Sholem Krishtalka and the many volunteers, including Kathleen Troy, who donated many hours of their time to the fight.

FUSE

Thinking of contributing to Fuse? Well you should ...

Fuse is looking for editorial cartoons, artist talks and letters to the editors along with our regularly featured sections.

See a show that you'd like to review? Make a submission. Attended an arts conference? File your report with Fuse! Annoyed with arts policy? A shortFuse might be just the right place to express your frustration.

Check our website for submission details. www.fusemagazine.org

ARTIST-RUN CALGARY

triple threat

STRIDE

1004 MacLeod Trail SE
Calgary, AB T2G 2M7
403.262.8507
stride2@telusplanet.net
www.stride.ab.ca

T N G

The New Gallery

Eau Claire Market
200 Barclay Parade SW
Calgary, AB T2P 4R5
403.233.2399
info@thenewgallery.org
www.thenewgallery.org

TRUCK 

815 First Street SW, Lower Level
The Grain Exchange
Calgary, AB T2P 1N3
403.261.7702
info@truck.ca
www.truck.ca



Canada Council for the Arts

Conseil des Arts du Canada

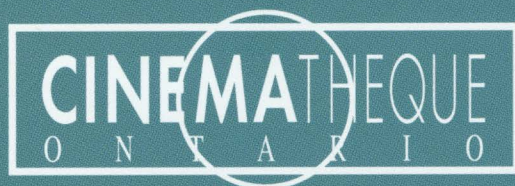


Alberta Foundation for the Arts



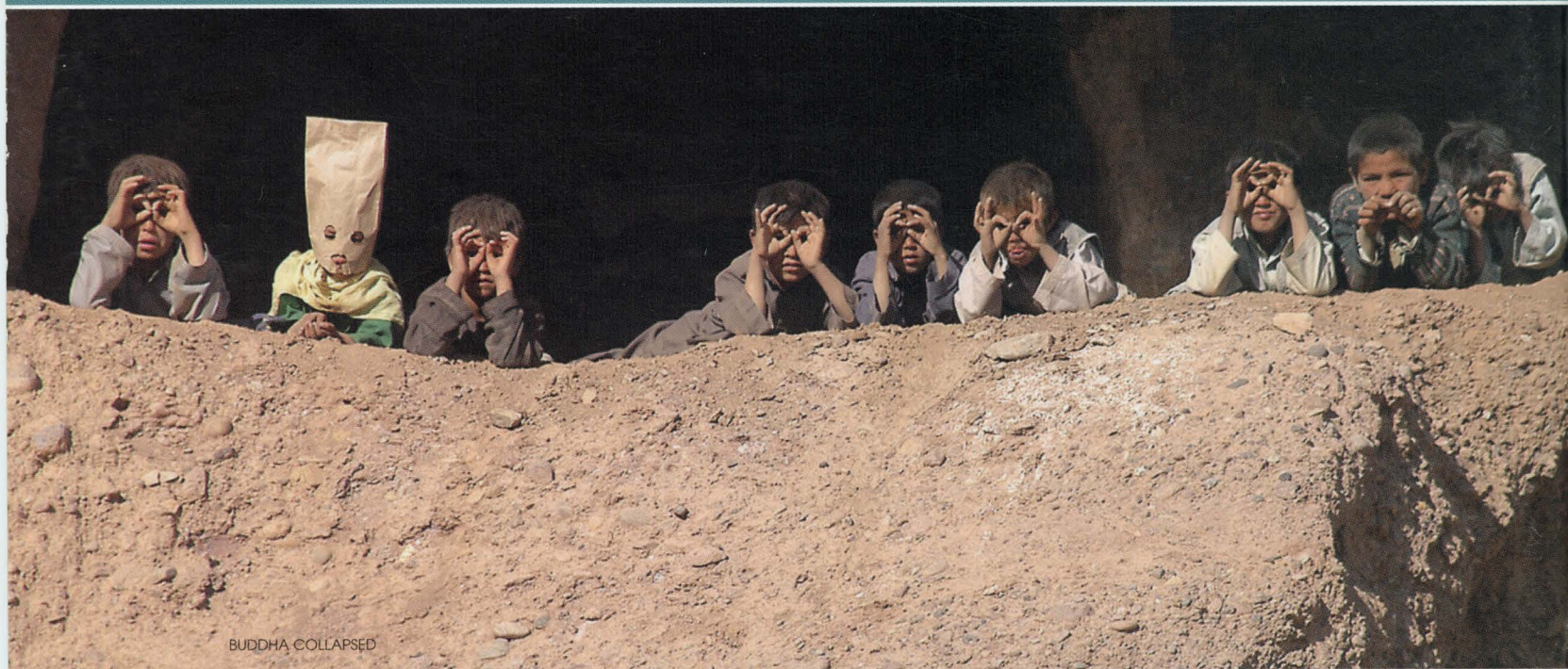
sustaining independent artist-run culture in Calgary

TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL GROUP presents



WINTER SEASON

JANUARY 18 TO MARCH 16



BUDDHA COLLAPSED

Featuring WAR AND PEACE, JACQUES DEMY, CANADA'S TOP TEN,
HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, EDWARD YANG, AND MORE

(416) 968-FILM
cinemathequeontario.ca



Canada Council
for the Arts
Conseil des Arts
du Canada

Transforming the way people see the world

tiffg.ca