

no more potlucks

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# EDITORIAL

This May-June 2011 issue of NMP scratches away at the surface and explores the theme "veneer." For us, "veneer" is a theme that implies the superficial only to expose it. Artists and activists featured here give us insight into how the thin layer of veneer is decorative, but deceptive, a facade torn down in a number of contexts ranging from political turmoil to fandom.

By definition, veneer means:

- a superficially valuable or pleasing appearance: "a cruel person with a veneer of kindness";
- to face or cover (an object) with any material that is more desirable as a surface material than the basic material of the object; *revet*;
- to give a superficially valuable or pleasing appearance to;
- aspect séduisant et superficiel : c'est ainsi que nous sommes, dès qu'on gratte un peu le vernis : de petits barbares;
- évêtement avec une matière qui est plus désirable en surface que le matériau dont est constitué l'objet;
- venir : revêtir d'un aspect séduisant et superficiel.

This 15th issue of NMP presents a wide array of works, including four exclusive interviews. Each of these interviews makes visible the layers of meaning, dismantling first impressions, and divulging identities.

Cover photographer for this issue, Aydin Matlabi, is interviewed by NMP's Dayna McLeod. A lucky few got a chance to see Matlabi's photos printed large at the Fofa Gallery (Montreal) last month; a selection of these amazing photos accompany Matlabi's incredibly raw and honest interview... definitely more than a snapshot moment in the press.

Renuka Chaturvedi interviews author Nairne Holtz on her novel *The Skin Beneath* and her collection of short stories, *This One's Going to Last Forever*. Buy your copy online right now, right here.

Joannie Veilleux speaks with Velma Candyass—activist of the *Save the Main Coalition* and active member of the burlesque troupe *Dead Doll Dancers*—about the controversial development project in Montreal, Quartier des Spectacles. Go Cleo's Go!

New Brunswick-born Jeremy Freeze (of pop band the Silly Kissers) interviews Constellation Record's Don Wilkie about the label's role in fostering an artistic community.

This issue of NMP also invites back two of its favorite writers: Fiction writer Farzana Doctor presents an excerpt of her latest novel, *Six Metres of Pavement* reviewed here, here, here and here. And, NMP regular contributor Yasmin Nair reminisces about her childhood fascination with comic book character Modesty Blaise.

New voices, visionaries, and videographers in veneer include: Hamilton-born, Montreal-based artist, Cam Matamoros' *Untitled Landscapes* is an

ongoing archive of prints produce by the artist's chin hair waxings.

Originaire de Kitcisakik, une communauté algonquaine située en Abitibi, Kevin Papatie interpelle sa propre Nation avec un film-manifeste *Nous sommes* suite à sa rencontre avec les Zapatistes au Mexique. Ce projet fait partie du Wapikoni mobile.

Dans l'ombre est une réalisation de Catherine Boivin de la communauté Wemotaci de la Nation Atikamekw. Ce film a aussi été réalisé grâce au Wapikoni mobile, un studio ambulante de formation et de création cinématographique et musicale pour les jeunes des communautés autochtones.

*"The Wapikoni Mobile is a traveling audiovisual and music training studio, has been visiting Quebec's First Nation communities over the last 7 years. [...] The Wapikoni Mobile gives young Aborigines the opportunity to express themselves through video and music, to expand their horizons beyond their usual surroundings and allow them to shine in their own communities as throughout the world. While encouraging the emergence of diverse talents in Indigenous youth, the project facilitates exchange and communication between these young people and helps reduce their isolation."*

I was lucky to catch Julie Lequin's *I Am Your Biggest Fan* programme at La Centrale this winter. NMP asked her to reflect on the experience and give us an extended curatorial statement explaining her selections and the themes that connected the works to each other so beautifully. Lequin is Laval born and LA based.

Thank you to all the contributors, editors, copy editors who make NMP run smoothly. Special thank yous to M-C MacPhee, Dayna McLeod, Tamara Sheperd, and Momoko Allard.

Stay tuned for issue no. 16, July 2011, for which the theme is "motive"... an issue in which we at NMP also question our motives and make several significant changes to NMP that have been a (too) long time coming. Stay tuned for details or just check back to the site often and you'll see what we mean.

You may now pitch us ideas for 2012 issues by consulting our submit page. Note that issues are now booked almost a year ahead of publication, so contact us now!

Nous accueillons toujours avec grand plaisir et intérêt toute idée que vous souhaitez nous soumettre.

Si vous donnez plus de 30 \$, votre nom sera mentionné sur notre page de remerciements. You can also donate money to NMP; 30\$ or more gets you a mention on the thank-you page.

As always, do comment on the articles - contributors are thankful for this.

Follow us on Twitter: @nomorepotlucks

Dear readers, we are still and always committed to bringing forward a profound and multi-layered magazine bimonthly.

Mél Hogan



# AYDIN MATLABI: RELATIONSHIP WITH REVOLUTION

*Dayna McLeod*

*Having lived the revolution, Aydin Matlabi is a photographer to be reckoned with. Stunningly powerful in content, conflict and composition, Matlabi's work seduces us with sumptuous imagery while kicking us in the teeth with the potential violence of political upheaval. NMP is very pleased to present an interview with Matlabi about his work and his practice, and to showcase images from his series: "Came Like Water, Like Wind I Go" that captures the uprising in Tehran on the eve of the 2009 election; and "Sufi Vision" that explores Iranian culture and Islamic doctrine.*

**Dayna McLeod: What is your background, and how has this personal history influenced your approach to your practice?**

Aydin Matlabi: I am from Iran, both of my parents are Turks, and I see myself as Canadian more than anything else. Yet, I have an emotional attraction to my parents' heritage. For the past six years, I have been investigating my heritage by exploring

Iran. Every year, I try to find answers and create new questions. Unfortunately, it was a very bad and abusive relationship, a love/hate relationship. I was in love with Iran, but Iran just hated me. And like a fool, I always ran back to embrace her and to receive another beating. Now that I think about it, I feel foolish.

Born in Iran during the Iraq/Iran war, I was raised under bombardments and fanatical dictatorship. My parents immigrated to Montréal, and I left dictatorship for Persian street gangs. When I finally left the streets, which was the same time I started university, I decided to explore war photography, and that brought me back to Iran for the first time in 17 years.

I did not picture such a contradiction. Nothing made sense, Islamic doctrines were convoluted, Persian traditions were lost and people hated their neighbours. Just imagine Allah wearing fake Armani jeans, counterfeit Gucci shoes, and



a shiny Chicago Bulls t-shirt, with an omnipotent, pretentious smile. That is downtown Tehran. You must understand that Iran is an Islamic Republic that is bombarded with American and western stereotypes. On one hand, you hear the Mullahs preaching the Koran on the radio, while the television shows the latest hits of Britney Spears. Girls in black hijab are downloading porno on their cell phones, and beside a poster of Khomeini there is an ad for Diesel Jeans. This pretense is a build-up of three generations of suppression, economic growth, cultural pride and religious imprisonment. The first generation lived through a dictatorship of the Shah and then revolution by conservative religious leaders. Their sons were drafted to fight and sacrifice their lives in a savage war with Iraq, all for the sake of Allah. And the final generation has grown up watching satellite television and living in a world of mass communication, while their parents continue to believe in the Sharia law and conservative Islamic power. The mass population prefers reality shows on MTV to the study of Holy Imams. The religious leaders have lost the battle; the only way to stay in power is by use of strength and censorship. And I was welcomed into this with pollution, car horns and a homeless child selling me Sufi poems.

My last trip in the summer of 2009 was to finish my thesis project for my Masters degree, "Promiscuity in a Islamic state," as an alternative to getting pulled into the mass demonstrations that shocked the power base of Iran. Upon my arrival, I was greeted by people who were excitedly anticipating the elections, their excitement stemming from the emergence of hope for democracy. Crowds of smiling faces were chanting and breaking into

song, they were dancing in plain view in a country that has a history of repressing such public displays. People emerged from seclusion, gathered and formed crowds, and for the first time in thirty years, they felt they would have a say in the outcome of the elections, in the future of their country: a say that could bring about change. However, their voices remained stifled. A week before the election results were made official, I received a literal blow to the head, foreshadowing the blow that would be delivered to the collective psyche of hopeful Iranians. I soon realized that my country was to revisit a violent chapter that had become all too familiar in its history.

I had witnessed my share of violence and believed I was ready for whatever may be the outcome of the demonstrations. I did not, however, expect such cruelty and brutality. I did not expect what some have called a revolution. Least of all, I did not think that I would take part in a revolution.

As I marched along with the swarm of demonstrators and became a part of them, I was no longer attempting to maintain a level of impartiality as a photographer trailing a subject. Instead, I kept in stride as we walked side by side, and in doing so, I became an outlaw in my own country. Since it was illegal for any foreign correspondents to document or participate in the demonstrations, I became the only western photographer who dared to break the law and witness the uprising.

Then like a bad nightmare, I woke up. Banished from my native land, brandished as a rioter and a criminal, I was left with nothing. That is when I decided to explore Iran with my personal vision



in focus, to explore its seductive literary narrative and mythology.

**DM: In your website biography, you state that your “work has reached a new level where [you are] able to incorporate the medium of documentary photography, the narrative of art history, and the theoretical understanding of pop culture.” What was the impetus for this significant shift?**

AM: I was a war photographer and a bad one. I could not stop myself from helping people. It sounds stupid, but if you want to be a good correspondent, you need to be morally silent. I could never do that; I became friends with the soldiers, citizens, insurgents, etc... I got attached to the subject. Which is a very bad idea when you know that you may never see them again. Yet my role model is Robert Capa: “If your pictures aren’t good enough, you aren’t close enough.” This quote is always taken to mean physically close, but I think it means to be emotionally and mentally close.

Art history is the most important rulebook for any artist! If you do not know your history, you are not an artist! Art is a language, and a great artist is able to translate that language to any audience. I truly do not believe that art is subjective and that every person has his way of reading it.

The way my photography evolved was simple: I stopped calling myself a photographer and referred to myself as an artist. That sounds so cliché, but it is true. Like a painter, I learned to create the images beforehand. It was no longer about

capturing the moment, it became about creating the moment.

**DM: Who has influenced your work? Who do you look to for inspiration?**

AM: Painters are the greatest source of visual inspiration. My favorite time would be the Romantic/Realist period. They were masters! Their skills were immaculate, they were inspired by their time, and when they broke the rules, they had a vision beforehand. When I look at their work, I am overpowered by their visual esthetics.

The greatest artist in my eyes is Alfredo Jarr. He is able to communicate a feeling to any type of audience. His work is always political, honest and powerful.

Finally, history: I have a naïve belief that by understanding the past you can predict the future. Reading about ancient civilization, humanity’s ups and downs, cultural struggles, etc... They inspire me to look for patterns that could happen and inspire me to understand the time we live in. Even though it never works out, it is still entertaining to try to predict humanity’s future.

**DM: How do you use symbolic language and iconic representation in your work?**

AM: A simple hand gesture can demonstrate weakness or strength. There are poses that purposely strengthen the composition and prevent a fragile subject from being viewed as such. I enjoy creating narrative in a photograph; I believe a great image is one that prevents the viewer from











looking away. It helps to create a dialogue with the audience. It also prevents the subject from remaining silent.

I also try to understand how western culture views Islam. There are images that have been embedded in western subconsciousness that automatically creates a stereotypical idea of the Muslim face (e.g. the famous photograph of the Afghan woman or the hidden face of a terrorist). I use eastern stereotypes and push them by mixing western iconic representations of faith (e.g. crucifixion, angels, the Virgin Mary). At the end you get an uncomfortable but strange balance. I use these symbols to guide the viewer to understand the work.

**DM: How does identity factor into your work?**

AM: You know when portrait photographers say that they have the power to capture the sitter's identity? Well that is an arrogant and ignorant lie. It is impossible to create a personification of an individual with one image; it is like saying I can describe your life with one phrase. I think that as artists, we have the capacity of creating our own identities, but to dare say I am showing someone else's? That to me is impossible: I would never say that I am showing the subject's true identity.

I create a metaphysical identity of a subject. I create a narrative and frame the image in a way that dictates a specific dialogue. By seeing the world through the subject's eyes, I understand how to compose a final image.

**DM: In your series, 'Came Like Water, Like Wind I Go' captures the uprising in Tehran on**

**the eve of the 2009 election. In this series we feel, as viewers, immersed in the action of the protests and not simply as spectators through the intensity of the images, their composition and movement. What is the role of conflict in this work – is it the (in)visible subject? How is this work autobiographical?**

AM: I need to say first that photographing the revolution was one of the most stressful moments of my life. I have worked in war zones, but I was never the subject. Just imagine that you are in an illegal demonstration that has gathered over a million individuals, you have the Islamic guard shooting at you or beating you, that on every rooftop you are looking out for snipers who are targeting journalists or cameramen, and I am in the middle of all of this trying to frame images using a medium format camera. All I had in the back of my mind were my three rules: 1) never photograph a bloody situation, 2) never point the camera down, and 3) never become the subject. As you can imagine, the last rule did not really work out.

While framing, I was looking for frozen moments. It sounds absurd, but I felt the crowd was posing for me. I was even telling them how to stand, how to pose and where to look. And they listened. I think they saw that there were no other photographers, and figured my camera was a camcorder, because of its size. Seriously, sometimes I still wonder how I pulled it off.

The only way I can see this work as autobiographical is that I was in the middle of it. I wanted to be part of the movement that brought freedom to Iran, and I was one of the rare ones who survived.



**DM: What is the relationship between documentary and photographic truth in your practice?**

AM: I do not believe in photographic truth. It does not exist. You can document an event, but you can never bring to view the reality of your experience. I just try to show what I believe to be my version of truth. With regard to documentary and photo-journalism, they are as useful as the next reality TV show. For example, the 2009 summer revolution was on every channel for over two weeks. Then Michael Jackson died and the voice of millions of Iranians just got turned off. I am not mad and I understand how the media works: I just do not wish to work that way.

When I got back, every agency wanted to see and publish my images. I turned them down.

I did not want my work to become a snapshot moment in the press. I wanted this moment to exist over and over again. An audience's reaction to the work is so much stronger when they get to look at it hanging on a gallery wall than in a magazine; seeing a physical art piece forces them to try to understand what they are looking at, one cannot just flip the page.

**DM: What was your process and intent with the series 'Sufi Vision'?**

AM: 'Sufi Vision' is an exploration of, as well as a departure from, my research into Iranian culture and the Islamic doctrine. I wanted to let myself be inspired by the poetry and philosophy of the romantic Sufis who dared to critique and turn religion into an ironic satire. I put a face on Fatima as she whispers in the ears of Imam Reza and I recreate the flight of Gabriel after he has delivered his message to Mohammad. My intention is to make an art piece that demonstrates the seduction of martyrdom and the absurdity of it, creating an iconic vision that introduces intimate moments of faith and

mysticism with a punctum of reality.

**Then Michael Jackson died and the voice of millions of Iranians just got turned off. I am not mad and I understand how the media works: I just do not wish to work that way.**

Here, I am interested in the concept of brotherhood from the Koran, the lustful depiction of the Sady (young

male dancer/wine giver) and the significance of female power in Iranian history. I want to show images that bring back shape and form to a lost tale of lust, passion and religion. This narrative has always been abstracted, and is being reenacted and performed, thus giving a new and fresh look at Islamic beauty.

'Sufi Vision' explores the mystical realm of Persian mythology and is inspired by spiritual Persian poetry and the social experience of contemporary Iranian life. Islam has forbid the representation



of any visual art throughout its history. I took it upon myself to create a visual portrait of a modern Persian vision. I am interested in examining Persian heritage and bringing to light the spiritual sensuality that has framed modern Iranian culture. Breaking the stereotypical propaganda of the Islamic regime, these images open a door to a culture that has been forced to silence. Like the great Sufi writers who bypassed the prohibition on freedom of speech, I want to use irony and satire to challenge the stereotypical imagery of Persian philosophy and show a different view of Persian mythology.

**DM: What are you working on now?**

AM: I usually have a few projects that I am working on at once. The main one is continuing 'Sufi Vision'. I have many more characters and would like to create more scenarios. The other is a project I started by representing Iranian females

and males in comfortable but seductive poses. I am trying to bring back the seductive and erotic heritage of Iran. Finally I am working on a production fellowship to explore contemporary cities that have survived war and genocide.

Until then I am finalizing two exhibits. One at the Fofa Gallery in Montreal during the month of April and the other in collaboration with the CONTACT Photography Festival, in Toronto during the month of May. Both will represent work done in Iran about landscape, revolution and people.

*Aydin Matlabi is a Canadian photographer of Iranian descent. He left a country of war for the social liberty of Québec. Traveling the globe and befriending a variety of cultures, Aydin tries to understand the world he lives in while depicting his emotions in his work.*

**<http://aydinmatlabi.com/>**



# MY MODESTY

Yasmin Nair

As a child growing up in Kathmandu, I was once given a set of Batman and Robin dolls and instructed to give either one to my favourite playmate and friend Victor. We were kindergartners, and while I fully understood the mythology of Batman and Robin and that they both fought on the side of good, I devised an alternative story. I gave Victor the Robin doll, and invented a game which involved Batman and Robin apparently fighting to the death. Yelling, "Die, die," and "Boom, boom," and "KAPOW!", the vocabulary of warfare I had picked up from the comics, I made them enemies and I made Batman win. Victor, the sweetest playmate I have ever had, took it all in good humour, although I do seem to recall him saying at one point, "are they really supposed to fight?" At the end of the day, he went home happily with his only slightly battered doll.

This was Kathmandu in the early 1970s, when I was very, very young and lived in a time and place that

I have since tended to colour with a tinge of nostalgia. Cat Stevens, who was not yet Yusuf Islam, had popularised the idea of the place with a song that both misspelt and mispronounced its name: it's spelt "Kathmandu," not "Katmandu," and is pronounced "Kahthmandu," not "Catmandu." I was, even as a child, strongly aware of the mystique of the city – how could you miss it, in the eyes of the enraptured and immensely stoned hippies who wandered around like grungy flies floating around the temples and stupas that dotted the landscape?

At the time, *JS* (originally called *Junior Statesman*, and put out by the venerable and far stuffier Calcutta-based newspaper, *The Statesman*) was a popular and pioneering youth magazine which, as some have claimed, helped to invent the Indian/subcontinental teenager.[1] *JS* has since been widely hailed for its cutting-edge reviews, journalism and interviews with everyone from Naxalites

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lover who pleaded with her to  
stay.

to rock stars, but my main interest lay in the comics section, which included the serialised *Modesty Blaise* strip, by Peter O'Donnell. I've never let go of my early fascination with Modesty Blaise, who ignited my fantasies and set my imagination adrift, and who may well have been the inspiration for my aggression in the newly invented Batman-Robin Chronicles of War.

Blaise is supposedly based on a real girl O'Donnell and his friends briefly encountered in 1942 when he was stationed in today's Iran as part of the British army. In the strip, her story is that she escaped from a displaced persons camp in Kalyros, Greece. She wandered, learning to survive in ways whose violent and possibly sexual details are hinted at in various episodes. As a child, she met a Jewish Hungarian scholar and fellow refugee named Lob, who gave her the first name Modesty and taught her everything he knew, including five languages. She would later take the last name Blaise after Merlin's tutor. Lob died when she was 17, and Blaise went on to form an international criminal gang called "The Network." Along the way, she met Willie Garvin, a Cockney rogue who became her closest friend. Eventually the two retired, relatively young, from The Network, but were lured into working for the British Secret Service. The Modesty Blaise comics and accompanying thirteen novels are still immensely popular. O'Donnell died in 2010, at the age of 90, but the comic strip went on until 2001.

All of this is both standard for the spy fiction of the time, but made unique by the insertion of a female character who was unapologetically strong and unafraid to literally take down men. As a child

and later as an adult, I was intrigued by Modesty because she was so different from the other women and girls who dominated the comic book landscape. I disliked Wonder Woman, with her silly costume of tiara and boots, and I held her in contempt for leaving her world for a man, Steve Trevor. Modesty had no need for a secret identity, since her cool façade provided all the protection she would ever need from the incursions of the world outside. I loved her easily sexual looks and her jet-black hair, usually piled high into an up-do that would look stuffy and prissy on anyone else, but which she carried off with elegance.

I loved her for her sex life, which was presented without apology or, well, without modesty. I remember the shock of delight I felt when she was shown naked from the back, languidly arising from a bed she had just shared with a lover who pleaded with her to stay. She fucked like a man, and her gender was no constraint. In a strip about the first time that Tarrant meets with her, we see her trying to say goodbye to an American millionaire who decides to force himself upon her. With a few simple moves, she has him writhing in pain at her feet before she literally throws him into the elevator, calm and composed all the while. Modesty represented power and an ability to reinvent oneself without giving a damn.

I eventually lost touch with the Modesty Blaise strips, after *JS* shut down production sometime in the 1970s, and as I moved on to undergraduate and then graduate studies in texts that bore no similarity to O'Donnell's creation (the popularity of "graphic novels," which I still refer to as comic books, in academic studies, had not yet begun).

Then, in the late 90s, I moved to Chicago, fleeing the monotony of life in Indiana, and found myself wandering down the streets of the city's Boystown (the predominantly gay area) in search of nothing in particular.

I was walking down Halsted Street when a store window caught my eye. It was the sort of establishment that is peculiar to Boystowns everywhere, a mixture of kitsch-style and glam rock, desperately cleaving to a postmodern hipness that has long since faded in its glory. Intrigued nevertheless, I went in and began to browse, largely ignored by a sales clerk who was on the phone discussing the possibilities for the evening, interspersed with comments about her roommate. And that was when I saw it, a round plate-shaped object, about 5 inches across, with a swirl of black lines around representing a target. In the flat middle section was the familiar yet long-forgotten face of Modesty Blaise. Her eyes looked warily to the side, and her right hand held a colt perpendicular to her right ear.

The clerk was uninterested in my squeals of delight, clearly wanting to get back to her conversation with her friend. But I was ecstatic about being reunited with my icon, seeing it as a sign – of what,

I have never been quite sure. Mostly, I think, I saw it as a validation of the life and possibilities that were being increasingly obscured by a gay and lesbian culture which insisted that meaning could only come from staid respectability and tax breaks, in the form of newly-minted marriage battles. I came out as queer among gays and lesbians who made it clear that sluts like me were to shut up so that the straight world might believe that we deserved our “rights.” Gays and lesbians, who surely had the most reasons to be suspicious of the prison industrial complex, were now clamouring for hate

crimes laws that would increase penalties and put more people in jail. It may seem like a huge burden to place on the black and white inked shoulders of a woman who only existed on paper, but in that moment it seemed

**For me, she remains a black and white illustration, the gun cocked close to and away from her face, eyes ever watchful, allowing us to stare and giving us nothing in return.**

like I had recovered my balance in the world.

Years ago, I thought of returning to Kathmandu to reclaim for myself an idyllic period of my life, or at least what I thought was an idyllic period. I called a travel agent to inquire about fares, only to have her ask where that was. “Nepal,” I replied. And then filled in the silence: “It’s on the Northern border of India. You know, Mount Everest.” I never made it, reluctant to exchange my surety of intangible memories for the reality that would return,

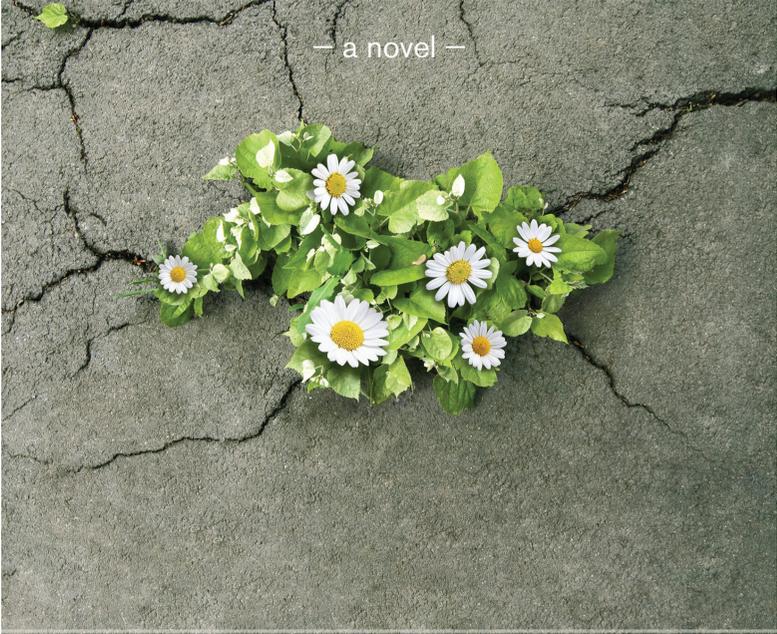
intruding upon my memories. I never followed the comics to the end, but the always informative wiki entry on her tells me that she was killed off in O'Donnell's novel *Cobra Trap*, as was Willie shortly after.

Modesty Blaise haunts the world of cultural icons, often appearing as sly allusion, most notably in Quentin Tarantino's films. The Bride, or Beatrix, in the *Kill Bill* films, is clearly modelled after her. In *Pulp Fiction*, Vincent Vega (John Travolta) is seen carrying around a copy of *Modesty Blaise*, the first novel on her, and there have long been rumours of a Tarantino movie about her. For me, she remains a black and white illustration, the gun cocked close to and away from her face, eyes ever watchful, allowing us to stare and giving us nothing in return. No lost tragedies, no dramas of revelation, waiting silently and tautly, and intently understanding that someone, somewhere might pull the trigger before her.

#### References

[1] <http://himalmag.com/component/content/article/53/4146-the-worlds-oldest-...>

*Yasmin Nair is a Chicago-based writer, academic, and activist. Her website is at <http://yasminnair.net>. Yasmin Nair is a regular contributor to NMP.*



— a novel —

# SIX METRES OF PAVEMENT

FARZANA DOCTOR

## EXCERPT FROM 'SIX METRES OF PAVEMENT'

*Farzana Doctor*

YEARS AGO, LONG BEFORE Ismail Boxwala came to this country, a school friend told him that the only way to survive misfortune is to stay in motion. The friend was in a philosophical mood induced by too many beers and a recent heartbreak and imparted these words: if the body never moves, if the limbs are not exercised, sadness will turn the blood and lymph stagnant. Regret will cause the heart to grow weak, infection will creep in, and a person will die a slow, painful death.

Ismail Boxwala had no courage for this sort of dying.

After the tragedy that befell him, he remembered his friend's words. He went back to work, fraternizing only with colleagues who were better at forgetting than he was. On holidays, he visited his older brother, Nabil, and his family, people who showed him a measure of warmth and never pitied him too much. Ismail paid the mortgage, the hydro bills, his taxes. He borrowed library books and read the *Toronto Star* on weekends. He managed to get out of bed, shake out his arms and legs, moving through life purposeless, a man directionless; alive, but lifeless. His heart grew weak.

Ismail later supposed that his college chum would have said that he hadn't really stayed in motion, or not quite enough, anyway. He'd have to admit his friend would be right, for he was hesitant to draw attention to himself, maintaining the belief that he could be invisible if he just stayed still. For almost two decades, he kept his head down, became a watcher of sidewalk cracks, rarely noticed the sun.

He never imagined his life could change and so when it began to, he almost didn't notice the first tiny clues.

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Ismail was first introduced to Celia on a warm, late September evening. It was a brief encounter, casual, and easily forgettable. Despite this, each would remember it, even though they wouldn't see one other again for over a year.

At five-fifteen Ismail returned home, and prepared the same meal — an omelette and toast — that he ate every second day for almost twenty years. On alternate days, he opened cans of Patak's curries. That evening, like most others, he gulped beer while chopping a limp onion, a chunk of ham, and whisking the eggs. He drank more beer while waiting for the butter to warm and pool in the centre of the frying pan.

Routines comforted him, but not completely. Sometimes, in the middle of the night, he awoke from dreaming this supper ritual, only in the dream he looked away for just a moment while the omelette was in mid-flip, and his dinner landed on the floor, where a carpet of cockroaches devoured it lustily while he watched in horror. His dreams were always like this — just a tad melodramatic. There were other dreams, with various insects and creepy crawlies, but the dreams' messages were always the same: *don't look away, don't let the mind stray, always be attentive.*

Luckily, that evening, his eggs landed safely on his plate and he ate them in the company of *Wheel of Fortune*. He mouthed vowels and consonants through two rounds, doing slightly better than the contestant from Idaho. He gulped back the rest of his beer, already itching for another. He grabbed his keys and headed out to the Merry Pint.

Scanning the sidewalk ahead, he cringed when he spied Rob Gallagher, rake in hand, tending his yard. Gallagher was the know-it-all of the block and one of Lochrie Street's few thirty-year veterans. Doesn't every neighbourhood have one of them? The person who could write a book about the area, knows everybody, and likes to be the local spokes-person whenever possible? Gallagher made a career of watching all of the neighbourhood comings and goings for decades, had written endless letters to successive city councillors, griping about potholes, burned-out street-light fixtures, and noise bylaws.

Ismail couldn't cross the street now; he'd already been spotted. He speculated on what flavour of animosity his neighbour would exhibit that evening. Would Gallagher stare coolly like he did three days previous or turn up his nose like last month? He was sure that Gallagher had cast him in the role of villain, and Rehana, his ex-wife, as a tragic victim, ever since their daughter died eighteen years earlier. Fragments of previously rehearsed but never verbalized defences crowded Ismail's mind; he wished to say something to redeem himself, but never felt entitled enough to resist Gallagher's judgments, because he shared them, too.

His first and predictable line of defence in these situations was to perspire. Profusely. He cursed the early autumn sun pressing its way through the clouds and wiped his brow with his handkerchief. He felt a little faint, so he forced himself to do the breathing exercises a therapist once taught him: inhale one, exhale two, inhale two, exhale four, inhale three, exhale six. It didn't work at first, and he considered retreating to the house, he would make his break to the bar later, after darkness had fallen.

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On a breezy summer morning almost two decades earlier, Zubi squirmed in her stroller and pointed stubby fingers toward a small, white dog. It surged ahead of its owner, testing the leash. "Doggeeee!" she screamed, and Ismail thought, *When did she learn this new word? Why hadn't Rehana mentioned it?* Reflexively, protectively, he stopped, waited for the dog's owner to catch up to them, and to reel in his pet.

"Yes, that's a dog," he told Zubi. "Don't touch it."

"It's all right, he's friendly," the man said apologetically, pulling the dog just out of Zubi's reach. He stretched out his free hand, gave Ismail's a firm shake, and introduced himself as Rob Gallagher. Ismail, Rehana, and Zubi had lived in the neighbourhood since the previous winter, and although Rehana had met some of the neighbours, Ismail had not. He rarely accompanied Rehana and Zubi on their speed-walks, finding Rehana's baby-fat-burning pace and strapped-on ankle-weights both difficult and embarrassing. He wasn't sure why, but he hardly ever took Zubi out alone. Perhaps being the one solely responsible for her well-being never sat comfortably with him, even then.

But that day, Rehana had an errand to run and had left Ismail with instructions to take Zubi out for some fresh air. He spent a good five minutes wrestling with the stroller before it

popped open and he was ready to deposit Zubi into it. Then it was another three minutes of fiddling with the complicated straps, while Zubi squealed *Out! Out! Out!* before the pair finally left the house. So there he was, strolling to the park with Zubi, when he met Rob Gallagher for the first time.

“Well, isn’t she growing fast these days!” Gallagher said, smiling exuberantly at Zubi. “I swear she’s bigger than last week, even.”

“Yes, she is,” Ismail agreed, regarding his daughter proudly. And then he questioned how well acquainted the stranger was with his daughter and wife, a detail Rehana hadn’t shared with him.

“How old are you now?” Gallagher leaned in, speaking in a high-pitched voice that made him sound like an old woman.

“Doggeee!” she replied.

“That’s right, this is a doggy. His name’s Jack. He’s friendly, want to pet him?” Ismail watched as the dog jumped up, its front paws resting on Zubi’s seat. Zubi recoiled, afraid.

“Er, she’s probably too young for petting the dog. She’s fifteen months old now ... actually almost sixteen months,” Ismail said, pulling the stroller back until the dog’s paws fell back to the ground.

The men talked about property values, the good weather and being amongst the few non-Portuguese people in the area. Ismail found it puzzling that Gallagher lumped himself and the Boxwalas, who hailed from India, in the same broad category of “non-Portuguese.”

Gallagher went on to detail the history of their neighbourhood, explaining that the original occupants were labourers at nearby turn-of-the-century rope factories. Ismail listened patiently, feigning interest, while Zubi babbled to the dog. Their relations remained friendly for a couple of months after that. Then Zubi died, and Gallagher stopped talking to Ismail, as did many of the others on the street.

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Ismail continued his debate about whether to continue walking to the Merry Pint. When he looked down the street again, he saw that Gallagher was busy chatting with two women. Gradually, his breathing slowed, and a fresh breeze blew through his open jacket. He inhaled for a count of four, exhaled for eight, and prayed to nobody in particular to permit him to pass by Gallagher unnoticed. When he was just a few feet away from the group, Gallagher looked up, and Ismail thought he saw a look of hesitation cloud over his neighbour's green eyes. Gallagher frowned, cocked his head slightly to the right, and cleared his throat. Ismail stopped breathing, and felt heat rise through his collar and around his flushed face.

"Ismail, have you met Lydia?" Gallagher asked, with an oddly bewildered expression, gesturing to the younger woman, who was pushing a stroller with a young boy inside.

"Um, well, she's your neighbour from across the street ... and this is her son, Marco. Meet Ismail Boxwala." Ismail flinched at the poor pronunciation: *Eyes-smile Boxwaala*.

Gallagher's face looked leathery and lined from the sun. Both men were in their early fifties, but Ismail thought Gallagher already resembled a retiree.

"And I'm sorry, I don't know your name?" Gallagher gaped at the older woman earnestly, who responded to his inquiry with a slight frown.

Finally she muttered, "Celia. Celia Sousa."

"My name is Marco!" the little boy screamed at Ismail. Then he giggled, wittlessly. He shook his head from side to side, bouncing brown curls over his eyes.

"Uh, hello," Ismail replied, his voice squeaking. He gave each woman a tight smile and a loose handshake. He wasn't sure what to make of Gallagher's unexpected courtesy.

"This is my mother. She's just spending the day with us, helping me out," Lydia said, gesturing toward the older woman. "Three-year-olds can be so exhausting." The adults looked down at the boy, who was struggling to undo his stroller straps. "She lives nearby, close to College and Ossington," Lydia continued, pointing in a northeasterly direction.

Celia's deep amber eyes locked on Ismail's, and he averted his gaze, realizing that he'd been caught staring at her. She wore an unbuttoned burgundy coat with feathery trim

and with her tanned olive skin, small stature, and near-black hair, she looked almost Indian to him, perhaps a little like that eighties Bollywood actress, Rekha. The little boy laughed uproariously again and Ismail suppressed an urge to giggle along with him.

“Oh yes, you live in the *old* Little Portugal, the original one,” Gallagher said.

Ismail suspected his neighbour was trying to impress Celia with information that was more than likely made up. Still, she paid him no mind, focusing instead on Ismail. He noticed that her irises had an unusual shape, with rippling around their outside edges, resembling petals. They called to mind a girl from his college days who had the same uncommon eyes, who everyone called “Daisy” even though her real name was Sunita.

Surprisingly, the older woman’s odd stare didn’t make Ismail nervous. Rather, her attentions were a strange comfort; he felt the sweat on his neck and face drying in the cool breeze, and the sun’s rays seemed to cast a golden glow over them all. Finally, she turned away from Ismail and looked to Gallagher. She shrugged in his direction, acknowledging him as though he were a bothersome child. He didn’t seem to notice her indifference.

“Well, we should go, *Mãe*. We need to get Marco home and fed,” Lydia announced. A rowdy flock of Canada geese flew over them in a crooked V formation, honking noisily, and Lydia had to raise her voice to be heard over them. They all watched the birds fly toward the lake.

“Nice meeting you,” Ismail said, turning to walk away.

“Uh, yeah,” Gallagher said, blinking and rubbing his eyes as though startling awake from a less-than-restful nap.

Ismail hurried off, surprised at the lack of enmity in Gallagher’s voice. And the women didn’t squint at him, like others had done in the past, their brains working to identify the troublesome details that accompanied the name “Ismail Boxwala.” Rather, there was amiable conversation, sincere greetings, and of course, Gallagher’s unexpected demeanour. Ismail had tried to follow along with this unfamiliar routine, hoping that he had responded in kind, appropriately shaking hands, talking to, and complimenting Lydia’s three-year-old (*What a smart young man you are!*).

However, he was sure that once he was just out of earshot, Gallagher would lean toward the women, in that way that backstabbing neighbours do, and whisper, in not so hushed tones, the terrible history that kept him alone all those years. But when Ismail looked over his shoulder, he saw that they were not gossiping. Gallagher was back at work, raking leaves, and the women were pushing the stroller toward the house across from Ismail's. Was it possible that he was slowly being unwritten from the history books? Was he no longer worthy of gossip?

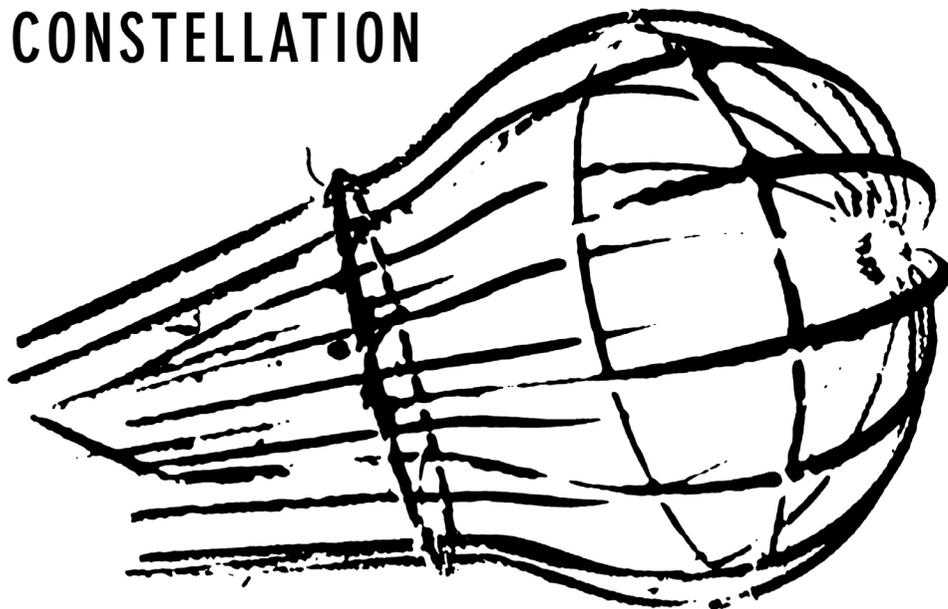
Ismail resolved to shrug off the encounter, not wanting to become too comfortable with its civility. But as he walked the rest of the way to the Merry Pint, he replayed the conversation in his mind, reviewing each and every word. Mostly, he evaluated his own participation, assessing whether he had said the correct, normal, expected things. He chided himself for one or two stupid-sounding errors. He also pondered the older woman's attentions, and the feeling of ease that came over him when she looked his way.

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*Farzana Doctor's first novel, Stealing Nasreen, received critical acclaim and earned a devoted readership upon its release in 2007. Her second novel, Six Metres of Pavement (Dundurn, 2011), is a novel about tragedy, redemption and unexpected love and has been praised by Publishers Weekly as "...a paean to second chances." She lives in Toronto, where she is co-curator of the Brockton Writers Series. [www.farzanadoctor.com](http://www.farzanadoctor.com)*

*Six Metres of Pavement is available in paperback at your favourite bookstore and as an ebook everywhere ebooks are sold. See the promotion video for it here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cCpFPX2MXW0>*

**CONSTELLATION**



# AN INTERVIEW WITH CONSTELLATION'S DON WILKIE: THE STARS SHINE BRIGHTEST TOGETHER

*Jeremy Freeze*

I wait at the back entrance to an unassuming white house in Montreal's Mile-End district, until I'm greeted by an equally unassuming man who I know has every reason not to be. This small white house is home not only to Constellation Records, one of Montreal's most well-known and respected independent music labels, but also to Don Wilkie, who co-founded the label with friend Ian Ilavsky in 1997 and is currently showing me to his apartment above the Constellation offices. As we enter, he cracks open the bottle of wine I have brought him as a gift and asks if I'd like a glass. I suppose it would be rude to say no.

As we chat at the kitchen table of Don's tidy apartment and wait for Don's playful and somewhat hyperactive dog, Zach, to calm down, I can't help but take note of his calm, contemplative disposition. This is certainly not the demeanour that one might expect from the co-founder of an influential music label, responsible for releasing acclaimed records by the likes of Godspeed You! Black Emperor, Do

Make Say Think and Thee Silver Mt. Zion, but as I soon find out, Constellation is not your average record label.

As I press the record button and ask Don to explain the context and circumstances surrounding Constellation's inception, it soon becomes apparent that the emphasis he places on the label's role of creating and fostering an artistic community guides all that it does. Maybe I shouldn't have been surprised that he offered me the wine.

Don begins by describing Montreal in the late 90s as "utterly lacking in infrastructure for any of the things that we cared about. There were no bona fide places for bands to play, all the stages were pay-to-play, all the venues were run by business people who couldn't have cared less what was on the stage so long as it was selling beer. There were no record labels that we cared about or were interested in, [making] any of the music we were interested in. There were no affordable recording

studios, there was basically just a complete lack of infrastructure.”

As Don elaborates on Constellation’s development within this wild-west of the Montreal music scene, he describes the idea of establishing a trusting, meaningful relationship between the label and its artists. “We take pretty seriously that idea of taking people on,” he says, “because more often than not, we’re making some kind of, you know, not forever marriage, but a commitment to say ‘yeah, we’re interested and we would like to work together, and that doesn’t mean we want to just make a record with you. We want, you know, we want to actually explore whether there’s a long-term relationship to be had here.’” This notion becomes further emphasized when he states that “we don’t work, nor have we ever worked with legal contracts, so having the ability to sit down with people face to face and keep lines of communication wide open is crucial.”

The regional focus of the label further reinforces Constellation’s role in the cultivation of a thriving artistic community. “We consciously chose to work on a very local level for lots of very good reasons,” says Don, “not the least of which is wanting real, personal relationships with the people we’re working with.” He goes on to explain that “[w]hat’s nice about Montreal as a music city is that it’s never been kind of a one-hit wonder. The amalgamation of things that happen here is incredibly broad and diverse, and it constantly sort of reinvents itself because there are a lot of talented people here.”

Discussing the early years of the label, Don frames Constellation’s communal development

as a natural result of like-minded artists working together. “[There was] just tons of cross pollination, tons of people in multiple projects, because some of these bands were large and all made up of people who had no other vocation in life than to be musicians,” he explains. “It was an incredibly fertile time in Montreal and [there was] tons of great music being made. Not unlike now, just a different time and a different kind of music.”

To Don, it seems, all levels of the music-making process are communal artistic practices, and should be viewed as such. Even the packaging of the albums was an “obvious thing that we wanted to pay attention to knowing that we could actually craft things that were aesthetically pleasing to us and give some dignity to the music that we cared passionately about, that we were releasing.” And, once again, Don reveals his passion for nurturing an artistic community as he states that this focus on artistic packaging allowed the label to “work with local screeners and printers and dye cutters and people that were also trying to forge an existence in a world that wasn’t very friendly to them. So, [we were] able to take whatever meagre resources we had and spread it around.”

Don’s vision expands the conventional notion of an artistic community to include not only musicians, but artists working in a variety of mediums. In some ways, Constellation’s artistic process even involves those purchasing the records, who interact with the label on an intimate, communal level. “For fourteen years, every single mail order that has left here, and that’s tens of thousands of them, has a hand written note in it,” Don tells me. “That’s not a long letter. It’s simply trying to humanize an

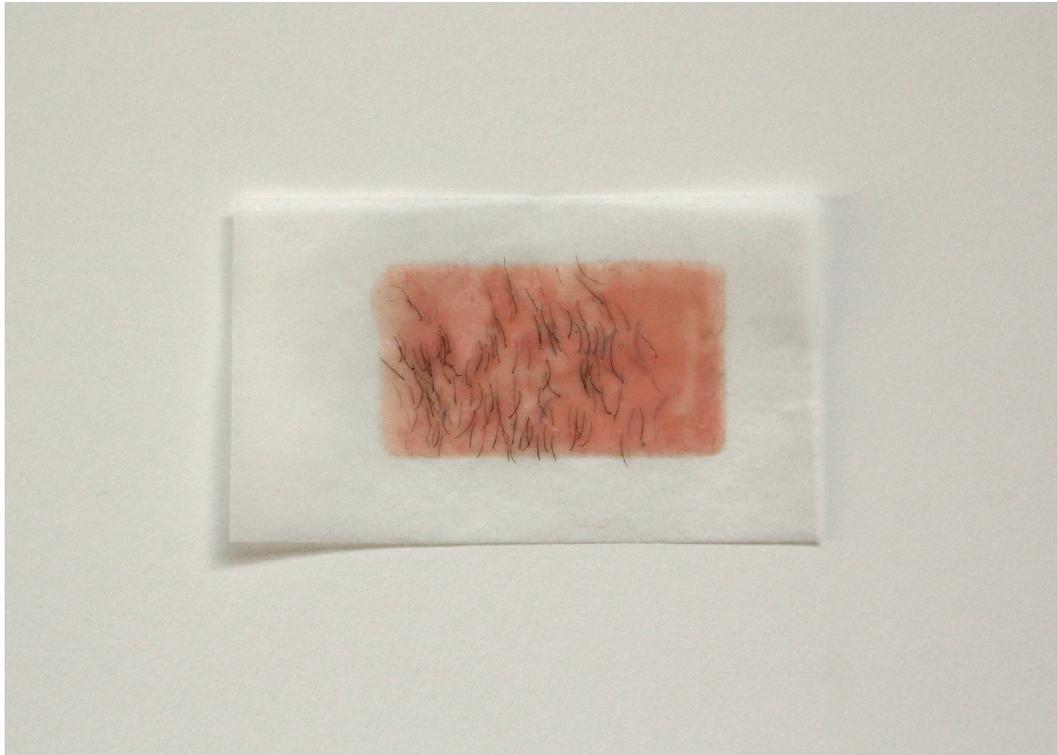
otherwise pretty clinical and inhumane transaction, all the more so since we've moved onto the internet and people are no longer writing us. You know, we've saved, for some romantic idea, or some romantic reason, we've saved the boxes and boxes of direct mail orders that came, letters and whatnot, which is the only way it happened up until four or five years ago."

It also becomes clear that fostering an artistic community is not only an important aspect of Constellation's mission statement, but is in fact much more important to Don and the artists than financial gain: a dynamic that would certainly (and unfortunately) seem counter-intuitive in the music industry. "We're good businessmen in some ways, but we're shitty businessmen on the level of caring about what the net profit is. What we've always cared about is having a sustainable model," he says. "We're just trying to be active in that ways that bring us closer back to the idea of community and human interaction."

After the interview, I expect to pack up my equipment and hit the road. I know that Don is incredibly busy and has certainly put a strain on his schedule

to take the time to talk with me. As I press the stop button on the recorder, however, Don refills our wine glasses and begins to ask me about my own musical experiences. We sit at Don's table, drinking wine and talking about everything from family (we're both east-coasters) to humane ways of removing mice from one's house, until the bottle is empty and well over an hour has passed. It seems the emphasis on community truly does expand beyond the label's borders.

*Jeremy Freeze is a Communications & Cultural Studies student at Concordia University. Between his infrequent ventures into the service industry, he may be found performing with local pop group the Silly Kissers. Although his transition from New Brunswick to Montreal was fueled mainly by a desire for reasonable tuition rates, he has since found greater purpose in his new-found friendships, musical endeavours, and cultural studies research. His main areas of academic interest are media policy, online gaming culture, and race and gender representations in film and television.*



# UNTITLED LANDSCAPES

*Cam Matamoros*

Herein is a selection of photographs from an ever-growing archive. The set so far comprises approximately 50 prints of landscape drawings. The drawings are executed by using mass-produced facial waxing strips to remove the hair from my chin. The used strips are then photographed and enlarged to double their original size. Photography mediates the hair-on-wax drawings in order to emphasize the image over the material. This allows the viewer a freer play of association before they begin to recognize the content as the waste product of a beauty process.

The materials used to produce these drawings invite questions of socially mediated desire and of the construction of beauty as implicitly bound up in definitions of gender, race, and hygiene. However, this work is more emphatically about linking these concerns to a history of representing landscape.



Like the borders that contain a country or distinguish one person's property from another's, landscape painting has historically been symptomatic of the urge to contain the natural, the wild, the unruly, and the un-ruled. The containment of a landscape within an aesthetic image grants a perspective from which the viewer can feel mastery over a vast expanse of terrain. I am insisting that a body is always present when we represent the land. I am observing the ways in which the ideologies that shape the representations of landscapes are inseparable from the ideologies that shape the representations of bodies. I wonder how what we are presented with shapes not only what we see and how we see, but I also consider how this applies to how we see pictures, ourselves, and others.

This work is broadly about negotiating borders and surfaces. It is about the possibility of recognition and about haunting and vision. It is also about how images condition us to be subjects and how our subjective imaginations construct the images we see. And finally, it is about the slippages between how we are interpellated and how we articulate some agency regardless of how we are called by larger bodies and by institutionalized languages.

*Cam Matamoros is a Hamilton-born, Montreal-based artist. Her work has been exhibited in festivals and galleries across Canada; in Brooklyn, Rochester and Minneapolis, USA; and in Turku and Helsinki, Finland. She holds an Interdisciplinary BFA from Concordia University and has been the recipient of multiple scholarships and awards.*

*Cam's interests are varied. In her more materially-based work, she produces a sort of unconscious language of images related to the embodied experiences of knowing, or of remembering. In her video and performance projects, she is always striving to become someone else, someone better. Sometimes this is a better version of herself, other times she tries to become some specific famous artist. This entails performances of mimicry and of earnest effort in the face of certain failure. She embraces the generative moment of failure as the place where something unpredictable, special, and somehow 'true' emerges.*











# BRANDING AND RESISTANCE: AN INTERVIEW WITH VELMA CANDYASS ABOUT LE QUARTIER DES SPECTACLES

Joannie Veilleux

*Who in Montreal has not heard of the Quartier des Spectacles (QdS)? This controversial urban project seeks to give a new 'politically correct' identity to what used to be the Red-Light District. Citizens, artists and scholars, among others, have been resisting the project since its inception for a number of reasons. One of the most active opponents to the project is the Save the Main coalition, which focused on saving the Café Cléopâtre cabaret from expropriation. Over the two last years, Save the Main has been actively fighting the QdS by various means. Velma Candyass, one of the activists in the coalition and an active member of the burlesque community (which happens to perform regularly at the Café Cleo), agreed to meet with me to talk about the issues at play in the project, as well as Save the Main's strategies for resistance.*

**Joannie Veilleux: The QdS aims to revitalize the neighborhood by creating a new identity for it, concentrating on a vision of art and culture that has been highly criticized for its exclusivity.**

**Considering the project's goals and its effects on the neighborhood – including, among other things, the erasure of an entire local culture and 'underground scene' – what kind of message does the Quartier des Spectacles promote about art and culture in Montreal?**

Velma Candyass: They are trying to wipe out what is there and has been there without any recognition of the area's past or present. Their plan for later on in the Quartier des Spectacles project is to acknowledge artists from the past by placing little bronze plaques all over the city that say, "here is where so-and-so performed." It is pretty nice to have all those little plaques, but that does not help to keep the art form going, nor does it support those who continue practicing various art forms. The project then ironically wipes out venues that were functioning very well to create a vibrant nightlife and performance scene here. Basically, QdS are not supporting the scene that is already in place.

**JV: They are just trying to replace it.**

VC: Yes, by basically saying, “this is art, this is what we think art is and these are the types of artists we wish to support.”

**JV: On March 9th 2011, we learned that pressure from the Save the Main coalition had led the developer, Project Angus, and the City of Montreal to officially abandon the court case for the expropriation of the Café Cléopatre, which had been in process for over two years. The coalition has been very successful in their dissent, even though you were facing powerful players. What are some of the key elements of this success, according to you?**

VC: Time is money, and money is time – for the developers, the more money they are losing while the project is on paper is not beneficial for them, nor for the city. When it comes to creating dissent against a project like this, the more of their time we can waste, the more money they are losing, the more frustration builds up for them and causes them to abandon. That can also happen for those who are dissenting: sometimes you can give up because it costs too much money, or because too much effort and energy is involved in this sort of thing. But in this case, it seemed to work on the City and Angus. We knew from the beginning that time was a pressure for them. They were very insistent about creating this in the shortest amount of time possible. We knew that the more time we could spend, the better it was for us. Obviously that worked!

**JV: What does this victory mean to you? How will it influence future activist work that Save the Main will undertake?**

VC: I’ve been surprised at how successful it has been so far. After the OCPM (Office de consultation publique de Montréal) hearing, I thought that we had lost the case and that it was gone, finished. But obviously things have worked out. OCPM hearings are not perfect, but they still allow us to have a bit of a voice. The louder you are, while conducting yourself properly within the procedure, the easier it is to make things happen. It is a satisfying victory in many senses, but it means that we will have work ahead of us nonetheless; they have not completely abandoned the building project. Now, they are proposing to build two big buildings on either side of Café Cleo, which frustrates some because they are planned as large office towers. But it just encourages us to continue.

**JV: On that matter, Eric Paradis stated in an article on *Forget the Box* that “the Cleo will never be safe as long as corporate interests rule above those of the artists.” Angus and the city do not seem to have abandoned the expropriation project, despite the interests of the artists that have their residence in this venue, showing little respect for their work. Would you like to comment on that?**

VC: The battle is just beginning, in the sense that we have to make sure that Café Cléopatre still has a right to exist. The expropriation issue has been won for the moment, but that doesn’t mean in the future or further along the line that this will not happen again, for Cléopatre or other places. We

are still losing performance spaces in the QdS. We have to remind them that even if they have given up on the expropriation issue, it is not enough, we have all sorts of great ideas for this area and yet no one has listened to us. We have always been saying that we want good things for the area: we are interested in this area, there is a reason why we like being here. So the process needs to include everybody, and make sure that everybody's voices are heard. Furthermore, Paradis is totally correct when he says that as long as there is corporate interest trying to take over the space and areas, trying to brand the areas in a sense – saying this is what art should be and this is what artists should do – we will still have work ahead of us. How can an artist be created in a laboratory? Well, you can't create art in a test tube. Art can't be clean and sterile. That is not where art, artists or people come from. So we've got to make sure that our voices get heard.

**JV: The QdS is creating a very sterile environment. Making the area white with red spot lights does nothing to offer a space which encourages people to be creative. Part of the charm of the district is the diversity among the people who just hang out there.**

VC: The project is framing the area as a district of entertainment, arts and training. So why aren't there more dance studios? Why aren't there more creation spaces and rehearsal spaces? We have been proposing all sorts of ideas, it is just a matter of being heard. We already had an organic process of development for the area before the city came in two years ago and ruined everything. Things were happening and now, if anything, activity is

getting scarcer: where is the development there? I don't know.

**JV: It is that organic process that they are basing their project on, but by doing so they are killing the very process before it can hatch. Take the plaza for example: its architecture, the design, the colors, the material; it is not warm or inviting. The spaces evoke exclusion, delimiting who can and should be there. They are creating the space for a specific type of person: the "creative class" and/or middle class.**

**Now that we have pinpointed some issues that are still at play for the coalition, what does Save the Main plan on doing as pressure tactics in the future? How can people can help and get involved?**

VC: Right now, some people in the coalition are involved in reminding federal politicians running for election that the lower Main is recognized by the federal government as a heritage site, and since it has been severely neglected by the city, the federal government should do something about it. We are also planning to put together a couple more fun videos to raise awareness. We noticed that having people sending letters to the various media about Café Cléopâtre and getting those letters published seemed to help a lot. This is something else you can do: it is important to express yourself. Maybe you are not going out on the streets, but you can write a letter and voice your concerns. We are certainly going to do a call for people to present papers and questions at the OCPM hearings. More people should show up to the hearings, learn the process, see what it is

about and get their voices heard. It is possible for Monsieur et Madame Tout le Monde to be part of it. City Hall also has a question period: go to it, and ask your questions. Go to your local Bureau and express your opinion on something. It is there, it is a tool to use. Obviously for more radical activists, it is not sufficient enough, but it is okay, they engage in other kinds of action; there is place for everybody.

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*The Quartier des Spectacles is an urban project in Ville-Marie, Montreal. It aims to revitalize the square block bordered by Sherbrooke, City Councillors, Berri and René-Levesque, which is considered to be deteriorating. The project is also seen as a stimulus plan for the city of Montreal because of the attention that it will receive on the international scene. The revitalization particularly affects the lower Main, previously known as the Red-Light District. With the QdS, the city of Montreal is perpetuating what was started by Mayor Drapeau in the 60s: the erasing of the memories of the Red-Light District, an area which has been considered shameful (because of the sexual activities supported in the district) by the entrepreneurs and the upper- and middle-class[1]. But erasing these memories also entails erasing the realities around social inequalities and struggles, especially those related to sexuality[2].*

*A project like this has a serious impact on the collective identity of the inner-city resident. For some it is positive; for others, especially those that live or participate actively in the life of the neighborhood, it is a detriment[3]. The Quartier des Spectacles*

*project seeks to change the aesthetic, the memories, and the history of the district by adopting an architectural design that is sterile and that conforms to other projects of the same nature in other cities. It is rather contradictory that while it advocates for cultural and artistic democratization, as well as accessibility and diversity, the project is displacing, if not destroying, the current art scene.*

*Moreover, Montreal, with its aspirations of becoming a cultural metropolis, is actually moving further and further away from culture. Rather than encouraging and promoting a flourishing artistic scene in the QdS, this project seems to want to control and sterilize the Main by depriving it of its history, its inspiring places and the venues where artists of all vocations continue to perform. Some questions need to be posed: is the vision of culture offered by the Quartier des Spectacles the one we want as our definition of culture? Do we want a uniform understanding of culture, of the 'spectacles,' governed by the revenues they produce? Or do we want a more diversified, accepting and inspiring scene that includes all genres that are out there? Cleo's victory is very encouraging for activism. It shows that resistance can work! But as Velma said, "it is just the beginning."*

<http://www.savethemain.com/>



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*Velma Candyass, teacher, choreographer and performer extraordinaire, is in the vanguard of bringing neo-burlesque and striptease classes to Montreal. Her comedic, innovative style of performance has made her a household name in the Montreal, Boston and Las Vegas neo-burlesque and cabaret scenes. Her focus on 'real bodies' has allowed women of all ages, shapes, sizes and abilities to embrace and enjoy this technique. She teaches regularly in Montreal through Joy Toyz and in Boston through Boston Burlesque. She is choreographer for the Dead Doll Dancers and Optative Theatrical Lab. <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Dead-Doll-Dancers/19503550265>*

*Joannie Veilleux is a last year undergrad student at Concordia University majoring in Cultural Studies. Her research interest is situated in social inequalities, especially those related to sexualities and gentrification.*



# SEVEN QUESTIONS, SEVEN ANSWERS: AN INTERVIEW WITH NAIRNE HOLTZ

Renuka Chaturvedi

*Perhaps it is fiction that, more than any other form of writing, works a sort of alchemy in our minds whereby a writer is transformed into a mystery about whose motivations and inspiration we readers can only wonder. So when Nairne Holtz contacted me to request an interview I was delighted. Rarely do we readers get an opportunity to speak directly to the writers whose labours bring so much contemplation, enchantment, frustration, confusion and pure pleasure to our lives. To engage with an author about her work is a singular experience, and I leapt at the opportunity. I had read two of Holtz's publications, a mystery novel entitled *The Skin Beneath*, and the collection of short stories *This One's Going to Last Forever*. I was familiar with the works but not the person behind them, and here an opportunity to change that had presented itself.*

*Double-entendre intended, Holtz's voice is authorial. Her voice is as authorial in conversation as it is in her writing. She doesn't mince words and she*

*makes no apologies. Holtz knows how she wants to be interviewed and the questions she wants asked, and if she doesn't respect a question she'll let you know. She's here to get the job done, not to make friends. In a world of plastic smiles and pleasant-ries, this is refreshing.*

*And so is her approach to publishing. Holtz has rejected taking the routes of which she is well aware to writing popularized fiction. She writes what she knows and what she cares about, commercialism be damned. Here is a writer that knows her audience, is bare about her intentions and who, if you dislike a character or a storyline she's written, doesn't seem to care terribly much. Here is a writer who, at least ostensibly, eschews the hand-wringing, the neuroses, the crippling insecurity that plagues the profession. Holtz writes. This is what she does. And it is this frank engagement with her craft that leaves me with the impression that here is a strong woman, a powerful femme, who can command a room and make her readers listen.*

“ I’m a middle-aged femme  
who has spent her life  
desiring and loving butches,  
so I have lot to say  
on the subject.

**Renuka Chaturvedi: In conversation with one of NMP’s editors, you thought “Veneer,” was an appropriately named issue in which to discuss your work. Why is that?**

Nairne Holtz: You can’t talk about veneer without talking about what is under it. The theme of my first novel, *The Skin Beneath*, is cover-ups: conspiracies, what people hide from each other and from themselves, and, paradoxically, what is hidden in plain sight. In *This One’s Going to Last Forever*, I explore sexual relationships and probe what lies beneath the surface: the junkie who secretly wishes she was a soccer mom; the geek factor at the heart of a wild, kinky party.

**RC: You have said that you write butch and femme characters, and about dynamics in butch/femme relationships. What is it about butch and femme that inspire you to write about them?**

NH: I’m a middle-aged femme who has spent her life desiring and loving butches, so I have lot to say on the subject. My intention is to write affectionately but also critically. When one of my butch characters refers to the dildo she uses with her femme lover as ‘their dick,’ it’s funny, but at the same time I’m making a statement about the fluidity of gender and sexual roles. I also address the harsher realities of shame and homophobia and sexism from the perspective of an insider.

**RC: In an interview you stated that your audience is lesbian. I’m curious as to your thoughts on that. Has it been a conscious decision on**

**your part that you’ll write queer stories for queer readers? If so, why?**

NH: I don’t set out to write for an audience; I write for myself and sometimes for the people I love. The easiest way for me to gain a large lesbian audience would be to churn out lesbian romances, but I have no interest in doing so. My work generally features lesbian protagonists and diverse secondary characters, but at the moment I’m working on a novel told from four points of view, only one of which is queer. By the same token, I’m not writing this novel to gain a straight audience; I could care less about that sort of thing.

I have described my audience as lesbian because that’s who I hear from, that’s who shows up at my events. I think the reality is if your work features lesbian characters, the majority of your readers will be lesbian. Sarah Waters is an exception to the rule, but she is an exception. Emma Donoghue went from being a small press indie writer to mainstream success with *Slammerkin*, her first book to have no queer content. Most readers are women, most women are straight, and they like to read stories where men are the objects of desire. As a result, they sometimes connect with gay male storylines, but usually not with lesbian ones.

When it comes to marketing my work, I’m more comfortable at queer events. A lot of mainstream Canadian literary festivals are boring and stuffy and full of competitive writers who ask you questions about your publisher and agent. I’ve also dealt with homophobia, such as a festival that took out every queer reference in my bio for their

program. It is way more fun to read a sex story in a gay venue and have cute bois flirt with you.

**RC: The protagonist in *The Skin Beneath*, Sam, is heavily tattooed. What functions do the tattoos serve in relation to her character's development? In other words, why was it important that she have many tattoos?**

NH: Tattoos struck me as a useful image and metaphor for a book about cover-ups and what lies beneath the surface. My interpretation of the function of Sam's tattoos is she's literally covering up her skin to hide her vulnerability, while drawing public attention to a pose of toughness, style, and disaffection with straight middle-class life. Her daily life includes harassment for not conforming to gender norms, and in the course of the story she actively courts danger, so it is not surprising that when she feels compelled to get yet another tattoo, she asks herself if it is a "talisman."

**RC: Sam didn't strike me as a very likable character. Of course, flawed characters are what can make books interesting. What's your take on Sam's appeal, and her personality?**

NH: Sam begins the novel as an angst-ridden, somewhat superficial butch dyke who is drifting. In some sense, she fits a popular type in lesbian fiction, especially lesbian romantic fiction: the butch player who can't commit to a girl because she's been scarred by some type of trauma. But I also turn that trope on its head. For instance, Sam sees herself as a Don Juan who has the upper hand in her relationships, but that reality is constantly undermined by Romey and Amanda, my sexually

confident femme characters. Also, Sam doesn't get off lightly for her mistakes; unpleasant things happen to her, and by the end of the book she is a more responsible person.

**RC: The title of *This One's Going to Last Forever* seems tongue-in-cheek, as the majority of relationships in which your characters are involved come off as pretty dead-end. Now, for a culture saturated with the logic of the romantic comedy, your stories are refreshing but definitely a bring-down. What was your motivation for writing a book of short stories about largely dysfunctional relationships? What was your intention, what you hoped to accomplish?**

NH: Many of the relationships in *This One's Going to Last Forever* are doomed but not necessarily dysfunctional. In my opinion, the only story that embodies exploitation and dysfunction is "The Crows," which is about addicts, and in that piece the irony is that a relationship that should end could very well last forever.

I set out to explore the mistakes people make in relationships, and at the end of each story, most of my characters gain knowledge and awareness and sometimes friends. I think the collection is hopeful and has a balanced perspective on relationships. My first story, *When Gay is the New Straight*, which is about a gay man who performs drive-through weddings dressed as Elvis, was inspired by my own drive-through wedding. Here I was getting legally married to my girlfriend, but I wanted to make a statement that it's just as valid to be gay and not take that path and be critical of it. And I

end the collection with two happy (but not sappy) love stories.

**RC: What projects do you have in the pipe?**

NH: I'm currently working on two books. The first is a novel set in Nova Scotia in the 1970s and 80s and is about a Quaker hippie family, and the second is an autobiographical collection of lesbian sex stories.

*Nairne Holtz is the author of This One's Going to Last Forever (Insomniac, 2009), a finalist for a Lambda Literary Award, and The Skin Beneath (Insomniac, 2007), which won the Alice B. Lesbian Debut Fiction Award and was shortlisted for Quebec's McAuslan First Book Prize. She lives in Toronto with her lover and rotten but beloved terriers, and works part-time as a librarian.*

*Renuka Chaturvedi is a gamer and all-around nerd who enjoys fiction and talking with the people who write it. Here she interviews author Nairne Holtz on her novel The Skin Beneath and her collection of short stories, This One's Going to Last Forever.*

**The Wapikoni Mobile**, a traveling audiovisual and music training studio, has been visiting Quebec's First Nation communities over the last seven years. Initiated by the filmmaker Manon Barbeau, this intervention and essential skills-learning initiative was co-founded by the Attikamekw Nation Council and the First Nations youth council, with the support of the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador, and the assistance of the National Film Board of Canada, as well as funding from many financial partners and all levels of government.

The Wapikoni Mobile gives young Aboriginals the opportunity to express themselves through video and music, to expand their horizons beyond their usual surroundings, and to shine in their own communities and throughout the world. While encouraging the emergence of diverse talents in Indigenous youth, the project facilitates exchange and communication between these young people and helps reduce their isolation.

With their short film screenings, first within their own communities, then before both Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences from all cultural backgrounds, the Wapikoni Mobile's young Indigenous creators become ambassadors of a rich contemporary culture that is all too often unrecognized. The long-term objective is to increase their knowledge of communication tools and establish an international network of First Nations creators who speak up and are heard.

[www.wapikoni.ca](http://www.wapikoni.ca)

# DANS L'OMBRE

Catherine Boivin de Wapikoni Mobile

vidéo :

<http://nomorepotlucks.org/article/veneer-no-15/dans-lombre>

Elle s'est perdue, au milieu de la foule, anonyme.

Réalisation: Catherine Boivin

3min 06

Documentaire: 2009

Communauté: Wemotaci

Nation: Atikamekws

*Née en 1989, Catherine Boivin est une Atikamekw de Wemotaci, petite communauté de 1300 habitants située à 400 kilomètres au nord de la ville de Québec. Elle parle la langue Atikamekw couramment. Chanteuse, dans plusieurs groupes, elle était la vedette principale du vidéo clip *Awin ni nin?* en 2004. Entre temps, Catherine a travaillé au studio permanent de Wemotaci. En 2007, elle a réalisé son premier court-métrage dont le titre est *Excursion d'enfer* avant d'aller étudier quelques temps au cegep du Vieux-Montréal à Montréal. En 2009, elle signe une deuxième réalisation avec le film *dans l'ombre* basé sur une trame poétique de son cru.*

# Nous sommes

*Kevin Papatie de Wapikoni Mobile*

*vidéo :*

<http://nomorepotlucks.org/article/veneer-no-15/nous-sommes>

Suite à la rencontre avec les Zapatistes au Mexique, Kevin interpelle sa propre Nation avec un film-manifeste.

Réalisation: Kevin Papatie

3 min 14

Documentaire: 2009

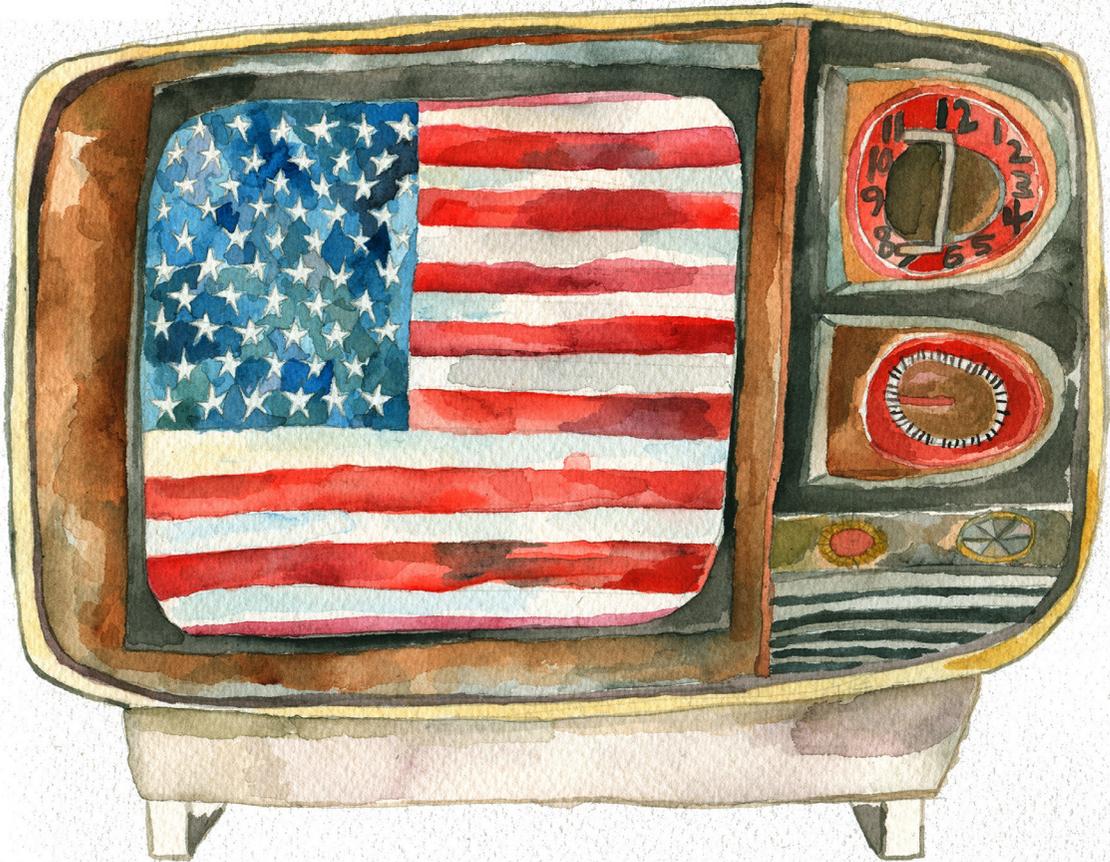
Communauté: Kitcisakik

Nation: Algonquine

*Kevin Papatie est originaire de Kitcisakik, une communauté algonquine située en Abitibi une région du Québec (Canada). Il participe au Wapikoni mobile depuis cinq ans, en tant que participant, réalisateur, caméraman, preneur de son, musicien et coordonnateur. Il a réalisé 6 courts-métrages dans le cadre du projet. Son film Wabak, réalisé en 2006, a remporté le prix du Meilleur film expérimental au Winnipeg Aboriginal Film Festival 2007 et le prix de Jeune espoir «Mainfilm» au Festival Présence autochtone 2007. Son film L'Amendement a été présenté en première partie du film L'Âge des ténèbres, de Denys Arcand, distribué dans 120 salles au Québec et vient tout juste de remporter le Prix du meilleur film en langue autochtone au Festival ImagineNative 2008.*

*Son film, Nous sommes, réalisé en 2009 a été sélectionné dans 20 festivals nationaux et internationaux et de nombreux évènements de diffusion.*

*Kevin Papatie continue aujourd'hui de mettre son savoir-faire au service du Wapikoni Mobile en tant que coordonnateur. Il est présentement impliqué dans les activités du studio permanent de Kitcisakik et fait ses premières armes dans l'écriture d'un long-métrage de fiction.*



# ONE NIGHT DOWN SOUTH

*Julie Lequin*

Having recently relocated to Montreal after living in Los Angeles for a few years, La Centrale invited me to present a one-night program of video art. I curated the event without any particular topic in mind. I made a list of artist names whose work I admire. I emailed them. These artists were friends, classmates or colleagues I had exhibited with previously. Some of these artists were in the same age range as me. Others were a bit older. Pretty much everybody emailed back. The selection of video work was inspiring, hip and quirky. The program was titled "I am your biggest fan" and it took place in February 2011.

Being a French-Canadian video and performance artist, I tend to scribble only for the purpose of telling stories in my video work. While living in the United States, I took on the habit of writing in English to differentiate myself from the narratives I create. When I write, the voices of my personas are fictionalized, but based on things I notice and on anecdotes from my own little everyday dramas

(and those of others too). These days, people refer to what I am interested in as 'auto-fiction.'

That said, I have always been interested in humour. Humour is a key component of my practice, and I enjoy laughing when I look at other artists' projects. It pulls me in and then keeps my attention. But of course humour is often used to cover up more delicate subjects; one such topic might be solitude.

In the program "I am your biggest fan," solitude made a strong impression. This common thread intrigued some viewers. Apparently there is a fear going around: we are afraid of being alone. Solitude is taboo nowadays; we find the idea of being single repulsive, and we don't leave the house without an iPhone. But perhaps this is a false conception for artists? I personally don't find solitude that shocking. True, there is layer of solitude in the work, but in order to create monologues for a camera, artists have to retract from

their everyday into narrative. Some artists feel an urge to be alone, to go into retrospect and find something meaningful there. Being alone is part of the process, and it shows on camera. I could describe the videos included in "I am your biggest fan" as a confessional container. The artists have carefully constructed narrative around their 'attractions.' For each of them, narrative is being used in a compelling way, a way that makes me interested in their idiosyncrasies.

Besides solitude, other topics could come to mind.

In the video "Joe DiMaggio 1, 2, 3," artist Anne McGuire's camera follows an old man walking through the Bay Area landscape. We quickly learn that the man she is tracking is baseball icon Joe DiMaggio. Or that's what she makes us believe. Anne is alone in the car, singing a wonderful stalker love letter to herself, while filming the old man speed walking by the ocean. I am disturbed with the length of "Joe DiMaggio 1, 2, 3." I wonder: Is this man really Joe DiMaggio? Does Anne McGuire follow Joe DiMaggio everyday? Has she followed other people before? Is she singing live while stalking Joe DiMaggio? Is this scripted? Is she like that for real? Obviously I laugh to let go of my nervousness. I laugh because I am uncomfortable. I fear I am being fooled. But I keep watching.

In "One week Walden," we witness Jennifer Sullivan's quest to live as simply as Walden from Thoreau's novel. Leaving Brooklyn, where she normally lives and works, she chooses to isolate herself in upstate New York, in her dad's camper parked in his backyard, behind the house. In a whiny yet sincere voice, Jennifer narrates her

days, filled with dramatic alienation, boredom, confusion about having an art career versus being homeless, versus living in her parents backyard while trying to have deep thoughts about art and life. She doesn't know what to make of her days. She tries to stay occupied. And really what I find upsetting (and interesting) about Sullivan's video is how art world pressure can paralyze an artist's process. And then again I laugh. I laugh because I feel sorry for her and also because I see myself in her testimony.

The other art videos in the program included: Catherine Ross's "Fingering and Footing," based on her childhood fascination with *The Price is Right*, which brought her to L.A. in 2005, where she repeatedly attempted to be chosen as a contestant on the popular television quiz (requiring her to camp out every night outside the CBS studios on Fairfax Boulevard). She was never picked, and with dejection, she returned to New York a week later. Her experience in California triggered "Fingering and Footing," a bricolage created with found footage of the show.

There was also Lucas Michael's "U don't bring me flowers," where we see a split screen of two bare-chested Lucases, wearing only (maybe) iPod-type headphones. He is waiting to listen to a song. Then we hear the first musical notes of "U don't bring me flowers," the popular tune sung by Barbara Streisand and Neil Diamond. Lucas lip-syncs on both parts. I laugh quietly. Is this practice for a drag show? As the song unfolds, I understand that the narrative of "U don't bring me flowers" is basically an argument about a woman's reproach to her lover. He doesn't bring her flowers

anymore. Looking at Michael talking to himself via his mirrored image, I can't help thinking of tale of Narcissus and wondering which gender perspective he comes from.

Also included was Nina Schwane's video titled "k-a-t-e (s)." Inspired by the numerous Hollywood public figures first-named Kate (Kate Gosselin, Kate Beckinsale, Kate Moss, Kate Hudson, Kate Spade, Kate Winslet) that Nina read about in the tabloids, she scripted monologues for each of them. Right away we are seduced by the delivery of Nina's personas, they all look so different with wigs, props, costumes, makeup, all the different voices and accents that she mastered. It doesn't matter if I can't remember what Kate Hudson looks like. But as minutes go by, the monologues get entangled, and the Kate tale turns into a flat, incessant blur of feminine caws. And I laugh with guilt because I enjoy reading the gossip columns even if they are insipid stories.

In Kelly Sears's "Voice on the Line," the deep voice of the narrator leads us into this well-crafted tale of moving still images: a spy saga from the 1950s. Sears invented a fable around telephone operators with 'warm' voices, where the sound of their voices entranced and disturbed a whole community. I smile wondering how Sears has come up with this crooked yet sexy story.

The screening ended with Harry Dodge & Stanya Kahn's "Let the Good Times Roll," where the main character opens up to someone she just met and shares with him an unusual yet intimate adventure plot. Kahn's delivery is so graphic that it seems

like you were with her that night. I blush just remembering her monologue.

I work alone from the sunny room in my apartment. There is no distraction outside of the window. It's tremendously rewarding to have an unexpected laugh by myself or be entertained when I put words into the mouth of one of my characters. I have never talked to any other artists about this, but I assume it's similar for them.

P.S. I would like to thank Julien Bois for listening to my rambling.

*Julie Lequin (born in Laval, Quebec in 1979) is a French Canadian artist. She received a BFA from Concordia University (Montreal, PQ) in 2001 and an MFA from Art Center College of Design (Pasadena, CA) in 2005. Julie's multidisciplinary practice interweaves personal history with fictionalized events and circumstances in a manner that constantly blurs the line between the artist as individual and the artist as self-consciously constructed persona. Julie's first book and DVD project was published in 2007 by 2nd Cannons Publications. In 2009-10, she exhibited at the Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum in California, La Centrale Powerhouse in Montreal, White Columns and Horton & Liu gallery in New York City. Julie was awarded a fellowship from the California Community Foundation and residencies at Yaddo, Art Omi, Macdowell Colony and Les Recollets in Paris. Julie is currently based in Quebec and her work can be found online at [www.julielequin.com](http://www.julielequin.com).*