

SUMMER 2014
TRAGEDY PLUS TIME



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DUNLOP
ART
GALLERY

EXHIBITIONS

CENTRAL AND SHERWOOD GALLERIES

Tragedy Plus Time

Sonny Assu, BGL, Michel de Broin, Jason Cawood, Mark Clintberg, Troy Coulterman, Robyn Cumming, Thirza Cuthand, Keren Cytter, Kim Dorland, Emily Vey Duke and Cooper Battersby, Erica Eyres, Hannah Jickling and Helen Reed, Alison S.M. Kobayashi with Christopher Allen, Divya Mehra, Christine Negus, Craig Francis Power, Joshua and Zakary Sandler, and Walter Scott

Curated by Blair Fornwald, Jennifer Matotek, and Wendy Peart

JULY 4 TO AUGUST 25, 2014

Divya Mehra Artist Talk: Friday, July 4, 6:00 pm, RPL Film Theatre

Central Gallery Opening Reception: Friday, July 4, 7:00 pm

Free shuttle service between Dunlop Central Gallery, First Nations University Gallery, Sâkêwêwak Artist' Collective, and MacKenzie Art Gallery between 7:15 and 9:15

Jason Cawood Artist Talk: Saturday, July 5, 1:00 pm, Sherwood Village Meeting Room

Sherwood Gallery Opening Reception: Saturday, July 5, 2:00 pm

“Comedy is tragedy plus time.”

This statement, attributed variously to Mark Twain, Steve Allen, Carol Burnett, Lenny Bruce, and Woody Allen, articulates the effects of time and critical distance, and the transformative and political dimensions of comedy. The artists in *Tragedy Plus Time* use humour to address a spectrum of difficult content, from the trauma

inflicted by general societal ills, to tragedies which are more personal and specific.

Humour is inherently social, though often unkind. Plato described laughter as “a certain kind of evil, specifically a vice” directed toward a ridiculous subject unaware of their shortcomings.¹ Sigmund Freud posited that laughter is a safe means of divesting libidinal or violent desires. Henri Bergson described it as an intellectual response, requiring an absence of feeling and a suspension of empathy to be called forth, “intended to humiliate” those who transgress social boundaries.² Uniting these disparate theories is the notion that we tend to laugh at subjects that trigger anxiety. Several works in the exhibition support this notion, addressing subjects like ugliness, aging, death, and anxiety itself with unsettling wit and playfulness.

The images used in Robyn Cumming’s *Bad Teeth* were culled from eBay, using the search term “bad teeth.” Cumming’s rearticulations of these pictures are horrifying, embarrassing, and comical. By scanning and folding the original pictures, the artist generates a psychological distance that makes it easier to respond to the abjectness of her subjects, displacing some of the guilt one might feel for laughing at them. Brothers Joshua and Zakary Sandler’s video, *You’re Gonna Go Bald* speaks to the ways past traumas can breed current and future obsessions – in this case, anxiety about aging. When during a routine haircut, one asks the other if he thinks he’ll go bald like their father, the video cuts abruptly to a reenactment of a childhood fight where the victim is punched and

taunted with the threat of baldness. While the fight is staged, it is nonetheless unrelenting, obnoxious, and affecting. Troy Coulterman's figurative sculpture, *Digesting*, depicts a woman amidst a sea of clouds in a state of psychological and physical discomfort, rendered as though she walked out of the pages of a graphic novel. Christine Negus's animated videos *bloodbath*, *the only light*, and *stillborns* are similarly-rendered, featuring cartoon children ruminating on subjects of death, suffering, anxiety, and trauma in disconcertingly adorable little-kid voices.

While not all laughter is an assertion of dominance over an errant subject, it generally arises in response to incongruity or surprise. Immanuel Kant writes:

In everything that is to excite a lively convulsive laugh there must be something absurd (in which the understanding, therefore, can find no satisfaction). Laughter is an affectation arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing.³

The protagonist of de Broin's *Lost Object* is a soft tube which shrinks in and out of an opening in the gallery wall, in response to the prying eyes of gallery visitors – absurdly behaving as though afraid of being seen. In de Broin's video, *Cut into the Dark* the protagonist has an absurd objective: to better “see” the dark. Violating the social norm of respect for public property, his chainsaw buzzes through a lit lamppost, which is pushed over and shatters on the ground. *Cut into the Dark* is an act of revenge against light, and a video about a desire not to see. Artist collective BGL's photographs capture moments of fiction that are plausible, traumatic, and



passed. *Pattes d'original (Venice)* depicts the hoof of a taxidermied animal, scraping into a gallery floor as if it were still alive. Doubly decontextualized, the dead (likely Canadian) moose in Venice is living/dying to escape its cultural confines, or just plain misbehaving. *Good Night Darthy (With Prince)* remixes two of the most vengefully satisfying moments in film history, which likely imprinted on an entire generation of children (the death of Darth Vader and the melting of the Wicked Witch of the West.) This tragic moment, positioned in a royal environment while a Prince looks on inquisitively – mashes up fairy tales with popular culture. The visual narrative is ambiguous yet subconsciously readable, since each element carries with it an epic tale's worth of signifiers.

Hannah Jickling and Helen Reed celebrate ugliness with gifts of paradoxical beauty in their project, *Your Lupines or your Life*. This eight-week engagement with a group of grade six students culminated in a project whereby funeral home floral arrangements were reconfigured into less-somber bouquets and wreaths, which were then bestowed upon unappreciated places and things in celebration of their abject properties. Awards were given to the dirtiest lake, the biggest wad of gum, the grimmest, most covered lampposts. *Tragedy Plus Time* features three photographs of students holding bouquets festooned with ribbons that read "ABJECT," "EWW-WORTHY," "FORGOTTEN," and "MOST IGNORED" in front of their faces, enigmatic portraits documenting this oddly generous act.

Combining elements of superiority and incongruity theories of humour, researcher

Dr. Peter McGraw's theory of benign violation posits that humour occurs "when something seems wrong, unsettling or threatening (i.e., a violation), but *simultaneously* seems okay, acceptable or safe (i.e., benign)."⁴ Thus, humour may be found by either revealing the odd nature of a seemingly-benign circumstance, or by making a violation benign, a process aided by time and psychological distance, complimentary strategies used by many artists in *Tragedy Plus Time*.

"I sold my washing machine and bought three friends for warm memories" repeats the occasional narrator of Keren Cytter's *Open House (3D)*, underscoring a common but nonetheless troubling dilemma: the desire to "live well" and realization that determining how to do so can be pathetic and dehumanizing. Shot in 3D, it takes the form of a surreal and endlessly-looping real estate video, punctuated with intermittent musings on the near-impossibility of satisfying contradictory desires. Erica Eyres's video *The Situation Comedy* is also visually familiar, utilizing clips from *America's Funniest Home Videos*. Eyres's voiceover narrative, about a single dad struggling with depression while raising a teenage daughter, takes progressively darker and more pathetic turns as the video progresses, creating a strange and doubled archive of schadenfreude. Christine Negus's ongoing series, *oh, those sad and lonely beasts!* is benign and horrific in equal measures. A constellation-like cluster of wreaths are assembled and decorated with cheerily innocuous artificial flowers and polyester satin ribbons. They also incorporate plaits, falls, and braids of human and synthetic hair, creating an eerie presence that recalls Victorian hairwork and memento mori, and disturbingly, the handicrafts of serial killer and grave robber Ed Gein, who fashioned home

HOLDING YOU LIKE PISS

décor and accessories from his victims.

Perhaps considered the most benign form of humour, the pun is a violation of linguistic norms, simultaneously carrying contradictory statements both rational and absurd. Mark Clintberg's rooftop sign, *Not over you*, for instance, is installed upon the roofline of RPL Central, an oxymoron that points to the ways that we simultaneously occupy physical and psychological space. Michel de Broin's *Embrasse-Moi*, made of a long heating coil twisted into the titular words, might be mistranslated as "kiss me" (*embrasse-moi*), while it actually demands, in script hot enough to burn flesh, to "inflame me" or warns "I'm on fire." Christine Negus's golden glitter-paper text banner, *holding you like piss*, is at once festive, crass, and deeply sad; a silly pun that contains within it considerable emotional gravitas. Divya Mehra also addresses an ambiguous subject in *The Postulation of Reality*, a text piece in which a pink neon sentence that reads, "I'm fucking you" glows in an elegant script font. The word "fucking" flickers on and off to hypnotic effect, so that the statement "I'm you" is also present. Neither statement has a clear subject/object relationship. Who is fucking and who is getting fucked? The linguistic ambiguity diffuses shame and blame.

Benign violations do not require empathetic detachment from the subject of the joke, and a violation need not be violent to be palpable. Jason Cawood's series, *Little Butch Girl* is comprised of found images of a tough, tomboyish child in rural surroundings, circa the late fifties or early sixties. The artist rescued a box

containing hundreds of 35mm slides from the trash, and came across numerous photos of the same girl with a blunt bobbed haircut and stern expression. Although nothing is known of the child, Cawood's identification of her as a "little butch girl" comes from a place of self-identification, as he similarly grew through a queer childhood in Saskatchewan – underscoring how often the best comedy emerges from keen observations of life.

Walter Scott similarly addresses (a potentially autobiographical) youth, tracing a series of moments illustrating how the pathetic may become comical: in *A Somatic Conversion*, a naïve character, seemingly caught in a pattern of self-derailment, traces out a path of alcoholic consumption and regurgitation, activities rarely celebrated with festive banners. In *MFA Application 2018*, a letter balances precariously atop a stick-like figure, creating a state of impending anxiety or personal failure. Masked in the not-too-distant future, Scott creates the temporal distance needed for humour to override empathy.

In the late nineties and early two thousands, BGL handcrafted hundreds of replica cellphones from reclaimed wood, selling them for twenty-five dollars apiece. At a time when mobile phones were expensive and less ubiquitous, they offered a symbol of wealth and status for a fraction of the price. A decade or so later, the artist's charmingly crude renderings of big telephones with wooden antennas and once-sleek flipphones are as non-functional as their real-life counterparts. They illustrate the way that a joke may change over time: the biting social critique that



the work once carried has been replaced with the gentler humour of nostalgia and anachronism.

The photographed pieces of cut wood from Sonny Assu's *Longing* series, which look like uncanny human and animal faces, also serve as a reminder that so much of what is funny relies on context; the found sculptures, which resemble Northwest Coast masks, were inadvertently produced by "the guys working the chainsaw that day" on a log-home developer's site on Assu's reserve on Northeastern Vancouver Island.⁵ Craig Francis Power's hooked rugs on burlap also reference culturally-specific identities and regional politics and art forms, combining bawdy humour, folk-art aesthetics, and wry social commentary. Power replaces traditional Eastern-Canadian iconography— salt box houses, fishermen's coves and lighthouses — with images of a decidedly-less picturesque reality — a drunk man pissing, a "fucked up" horse, a sickly cat spewing up a mass of tangled threads, and other banalities that are no less part of everyday experience. Kim Dorland's *Wooded Area #2* depicts the Canadian landscape not as a pristine wilderness, but as the background for a rural Alberta bush party, where lanky youths drink, smoke, and get up to no good. Ambiguously referencing the 1990s, the work provokes curiosity as to what extent it may be autobiographical.

Tragedy Plus Time examines the complex function of humour as a coping mechanism, a release in possession of latent malice that appears seemingly benign.

Art and comedy, too often held separate, share a common goal: to show different ways of seeing and being in the world through the setting aside of conventional wisdom. The transmission and reception of both art and comedy are contingent on perception, listening, and deep engagement. The best examples of each often flow out of thoughts derived from real observations, and from feelings expressed as honest truths. As Horace Walpole asserts, “this world is a comedy to those that think, (and) a tragedy to those that feel.”⁶

¹ Plato in John Morreal, *Philosophy of Laughter and Humour* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 11.

² Henri Bergson, *Le rire, Essai sur la signification du comique* (Paris, 1900), trans. Cloudesley Brenton and Fred Rothwell, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1911); reprinted (Rockwell, MD.: Arc Manor, 2008), 92.

³ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J.H. Bernard (London: Macmillan, 1892), pt. 1, div. 1, sec. 54, quoted in Morreal, 47.

⁴ Peter McGraw and Joel Warner, *The Humor Code: A Global Search for What Makes Things Funny* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), 10.

⁵ Sonny Assu, email correspondence with the authors, May 21, 2014.

⁶ Horace Walpole, letter to Anne, Countess of Ossory, August 16, 1776.

CREDITS

MICHEL DE BROIN *Embrase-moi*, 1993-2013, heating element, detail

Photo: University of Regina Photography Department

EXHIBITION VIEW

Photo: University of Regina Photography Department

CHRISTINE NEGUS *bolting you like piss*, 2010, gold glitter banner

Photo: University of Regina Photography Department

EXHIBITION VIEW

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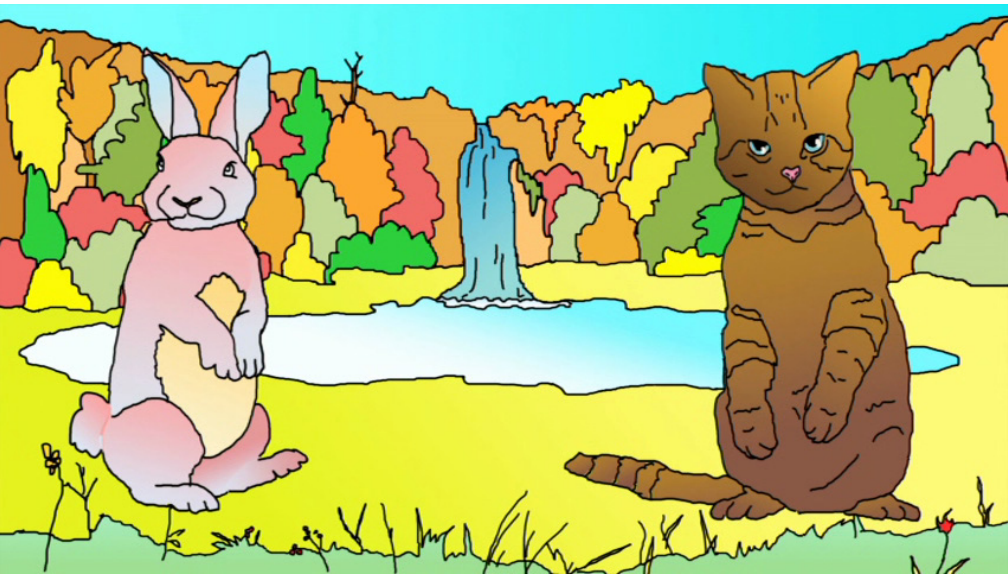
CENTRAL MEDIATHEQUE

Emily Vey Duke and Cooper Battersby: *Here is Everything*

Part of *Tragedy Plus Time*, curated by Blair Fornwald, Jennifer Matotek, and Wendy Peart

JUNE 21 TO AUGUST 27

Dunlop Art Gallery's Central Mediatheque features Lafayette, NY collaborative duo Emily Vey Duke and Cooper Battersby's most recent single channel video, *Here is Everything*. Narrated by an animated cat and rabbit who claim to be speaking to us from the future, *Here is Everything* is a bittersweet reflection on heady themes: the inevitability of death, the existence of God, and the possibility of redemption. In contrast to many of the works in the exhibition, *Tragedy Plus Time*, the humour in *Here is Everything* is gentle, comforting, and profoundly empathetic, even as it gives pause to consider subjects we'd rather push aside.



COMMISSION

Mark Clintberg: Not over you

Part of *Tragedy Plus Time*, curated by Blair Fornwald, Jennifer Matotek, and Wendy Peart

JULY 4 TO AUGUST 27

CENTRAL LIBRARY

Commissioned by Regina Public Library and Dunlop Art Gallery, 2014

Montreal-based artist Mark Clintberg's work often uses text-based forms of public address like neon signage and billboard displays to express privately-held sentiments of longing, desire, and love. As part of *Tragedy Plus Time*, Dunlop Art Gallery and RPL have commissioned Clintberg to create a new work for Central Library's exterior façade. The phrase "NOT OVER YOU" looms over the building and over the individuals that pass through its doors, a clever pun on the dissonance between the physical and emotional spaces we simultaneously occupy.

NOT
OVER
YOU



IN SITU

Thirza Cuthand: I Could Kill Myself With My Panties

Part of *Tragedy Plus Time*, curated by Blair Fornwald, Jennifer Matotek, and Wendy Peart

WEDNESDAY, JULY 30, 8:00 PM

THE ARTFUL DODGER, 1631-11TH AVE.

Dunlop Art Gallery presents an evening of performance featuring new work by Saskatoon filmmaker and performance artist Thirza Cuthand. Based on a short story of the same name, *I Could Kill Myself With My Panties* tells the tale of a stay in a psych ward. Darkly humorous, this autobiographical work explores subjects including race and sexuality, desire and longing, and the stigma of mental illness from a candid perspective.

The evening also features long-form improv by the Tragedy Plus Time Players – Jayden Pfeifer, Katie Moore, Colby Richardson, and Judy Wensel. Working within the Armando format (sometimes known as “Assssscat”) the piece will start with a monologue by Cuthand, which will be used as the basis for the improvised and unscripted scenes to follow.



IN SITU

Alison S.M. Kobayashi with Christopher Allen: Thinking as She Thinks

Part of *Tragedy Plus Time*, curated by Blair Fornwald, Jennifer Matotek, and Wendy Peart

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 27, 8:00 PM

THE ARTFUL DODGER, 1631-11TH AVE.

Dunlop Art Gallery welcomes Brooklyn, NY-based artist Alison S. M. Kobayashi and collaborator Christopher Allen to present a new performance, *Thinking as She Thinks*. Found objects that Kobayashi has collected over the last decade (audio recordings, diaries, sprawling lists, and other ephemera) comprise the narrative content of this one-woman performance that merges consumer technology with an array of dark, funny, and strange characters. Taking these documents from unknown authors as a starting point, the artist reanimates details found in the source material, then proceeds to fictionalize the rest of the story. As one vignette morphs inventively into the next, the audience experiences shifts in time and space, gender, age, class and race.

The evening will also feature Armando-format improv. Kobayashi will provide a monologue that will serve as inspiration for a series of unscripted scenes by the Tragedy Plus Time Players – Jayden Pfeifer, Katie Moore, Colby Richardson, and Judy Wensel.



CREDITS

MICHEL DE BROIN *Embrasse-moi*, 1993-2013, heating element, detail

Photo: University of Regina Photography Department

EXHIBITION VIEW

Photo: University of Regina Photography Department

CHRISTINE NEGUS *holding you like piss*, 2010, gold glitter banner

Photo: University of Regina Photography Department

EXHIBITION VIEW

Photo: University of Regina Photography Department

EMILY VEY DUKE AND COOPER BATTERSBY, *Here is Everything*, 2013, video

MARK CLINTBERG, *Not Over You*, 2014, LED channel letters, housing

Photo: University of Regina Photography Department

THIRZA CUTHAND, *I Could Kill Myself With My Panties*

Photo: Eagleclaw Thom

ALISON S.M. KOBAYASHI WITH CHRISTOPHER ALLEN, *Thinking As She Thinks*

Photo: Eagleclaw Thom



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Central Gallery & Mediatheque

2311 - 12th Avenue

HOURS

Monday through Thursday
9:30 am to 9:00 pm
Friday 9:30 am to 6:00 pm
Saturday 9:30 am to 5:00 pm
Sunday 12:00 pm to 5:00 pm
Closed statutory holidays

Sherwood Gallery

6121 Rochdale Boulevard

HOURS

Monday 9:30 am to 6:00 pm
Tuesday/Wednesday 9:30 am to 9:00 pm
Thursday/Friday 9:30 am to 6:00 pm
Saturday 9:30 am to 5:00 pm
Sunday 12:00 pm to 5:00 pm
Closed statutory holidays
Closed Sundays in July and August

Office

2311-12th Avenue

HOURS

Monday through Friday

Dunlop Art Gallery researches and presents a diverse range of contemporary artworks, and promotes visual literacy through activities that include exhibitions, programs, publishing and collecting. For more information, please visit our website, www.dunlopартgallery.org.

FREE ADMISSION

The Dunlop Art Gallery is wheelchair accessible.



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