



FOREWORD

When I set up my temporary installation called *Manifestation pour la mémoire des quais*, I was aware that some of the groups that gathered at the Miguasha wharf might be a problem. Erected on the remains of the fishing wharf, my flags were to be a warning sign. The dereliction of the wharfs in the east of the country was a source of social discontent that was not expressed. The images I chose for these flags evoked the feeling of powerlessness felt by the people who had to deal with this major shift in the maritime identity. I was convinced that the loss of these gateways to the sea was bound to have an impact on seaside communities. But little did I imagine that a intrigue would add to the complexity of understanding the spirit of this gathering place.

The installation was destroyed within less than 48 hours of its inauguration. What followed may appear to have been an investigation to find the 19 lost flags, but in reality, it was a quest for meaning.



On the night of August 14, 2011, the night before I was to set up my unauthorised installation on the old Fisheries and Oceans Canada wharf in Miguasha, I had trouble sleeping. Like several other harbour facilities abandoned by the government, it had suffered from the December 2010 storms. Its wooden deck had been swept away in a single piece, carrying with it the fence that had been set up smack in its centre to keep people from going onto the wharf. The raft-like structure had run aground on the beach. I chose this place because I felt it had been orphaned.

On August 15, 2011, working with a team, I installed the 19 flags and their staffs. Throughout the morning, we kept busy under the questioning eye of a local regular. My father reassured him, telling him “it’s modern art!” He shared the same message with every other person who showed up. The inauguration drew a local crowd until sunset.

Later in the evening, we gathered at the Carleton wharf for an outing on the water; I wanted to give people the chance to see the installation from the deck of an old fishing boat. A retired fisherman was trying to give new life to his boat by taking groups out to sea. An hour after setting out, we ran into serious trouble with the engine and an electrical circuit, bringing the boat to a dead stop in the water... in the dark... in the middle of the bay. We had to head back to the wharf aboard the smoking boat without ever having reached Miguasha. This mad adventure lasted three hours aboard a poorly maintained vessel that left an oily wake in the canal. We can only suppose that the initial destruction of the flags took place during this time.



On August 17, 2011, I noticed that 7 of the staffs and flags were missing. An early riser who regularly walks down to the wharf told me that 2 or 3 staffs were already broken the morning before.

On August 18, 2011, I had to take photos of what was left of the installation. From the road leading down to the wharf, no flags were visible against the horizon. Wave of sorrow... everything had been trashed. A friend who had accompanied me to the wharf found three flags wrapped around their staffs behind a concrete wall. I resigned myself to taking photos of the site and the graffiti that had appeared. I had my scuba mask with me in the car and decided to explore the area around the wharf, where I found three other staffs without their flags.



The next morning, I decided that the project had to go on, if only in another direction. I sparked discussion and arranged meetings to get people to talk. The wharf is normally a friendly place and I was counting on the prevailing spirit present there to get people to help me in my quest. During our conversations, I would refer to the disappearance of the wharves and the impact this was having on the people in the neighbourhood in an attempt to get people to tell me what they felt.



Over the following days, I would strike up conversations with the wharf regulars. Without waffling, I introduced myself as the person who had set up the flags on the remains of the wharf. I said I was trying to understand what had happened. I was told that the flags had been burnt. Listening to them, one might think that the inexplicable had occurred. I sifted through the ashes of the beach fires to try to find the flags' metal eyelets. I found nothing that would lead me to validate the fire hypothesis. So I took a photo that reminded me of a case of spontaneous combustion.

Opinions

Écrivez-nous

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Miguasha : Colère au sein de la terre rouge!

Mon article fait suite à la parution de l'article concernant le vol ou le vandalisme, paru le 24 août dernier dans la section A de votre journal local.

Originaire de Nouvelle, mon adolescence fût bercée par Miguasha, qui était à cette époque très animé. Le ferré, les visiteurs, les différences de cultures... Tous ces gens uniques qui attendait pour se diriger de l'autre côté chez LES N-B... les feux de grève avec les chanteurs de la région, Bob Dylan, Cat Steven... Tout le monde chantait et riait. Combien de jours et d'étés nous avons festoyé et ce, jusqu'aux petites heures du matin?

C'était la belle époque...

Malheureusement, ces petites fêtes ont produit les conséquences que j'ai constaté lors de ma dernière visite : TRISTESSE et désolation, un vrai désert. J'espérais revoir le berceau de mon enfance, mais je vous avoue, j'ai eu un pincement au cœur de voir notre beau petit quai ravagé et meurtri... Fini les rassemblements et les baignades. Interdit de s'y rendre en véhicule sur le bord de mer du côté de notre beau Musée...

INTERDIT -INTERDIT - INTERDIT

Dans mon cœur, j'ai ressenti une grande tristesse, car reconnue mondialement par

l'UNESCO, le musée est une fierté. Cependant, notre culture de buveur de bière doit avoir déplu à plusieurs personnes de cette belle industrie. Maintenant, c'est l'industrie du tourisme et les gens qui n'ont pas été écouté qui sont divisés.

À ceux et celles qui ont détruit l'art de Maryse Gaudreau : j'ai constaté que sur chaque drapeau, un masque empêchait les personnages de parler, et si c'étaient vous ces personnages sur les drapeaux? Est-ce vous qui êtes muselés face à toutes ces interdictions? Peu importe, au final, c'est vous qui n'avez rien compris : le manque de respect envers autrui engendre les interdic-

tions et les interdictions engendrent la frustration... Un engrenage qui peut devenir un cercle vicieux. Avant de détruire des biens qui ne vous appartiennent pas, la prochaine fois, pensez donc à l'image que vous donnez de Votre municipalité!

Je tiens également, au nom de toute la population de Nouvelle, à m'excuser auprès de l'artiste pour ces gestes dégradants et violents... Pensez-y donc deux fois avant d'agir ! Cette artiste vous avait compris et vous, vous l'avez meurtri comme votre quai...

**Marie-Josée Bois,
Chandler**

Several people told me they were irked by the vandalism.

I spoke with a young man who, drunk, defiantly told me:

The faces on the flags where nonsense! If local people's faces had been on them, this wouldn't have happened! It's your own fault if your stuff got trashed, you planted them on our territory."

"Your spot being the wharf that's going to be removed?" I asked.

I tried to explain the meaning of the work that had been vandalised. Some people heckled but others shouted that they should listen. So I asked them, "and you, what are you people doing with this gathering place?"



I noticed a man leaving the wharf. He went to phone someone who might know where the flags were. He told me the person on the other end of the line didn't want to say anything because of his troubles with the law.

A group of young men tried to make themselves look good by telling me about their weapons exploits. The talk shifted back and forth for the next half hour, moving from hit-and-runs to the loss of a driver's licence, bootleg cigarettes, drinking and driving to vandalism. One of them told me in confidence that he was disturbed by a girl who had accused him of rape. I got the impression that I was surrounded by the people who might have trashed my staffs, but none of them admitted what I wanted to hear.



Every time I went to the wharf, I noticed the same thing: there were no boats in view. This gateway to the seaway had become a dead end. My comings and goings at the wharf inevitably led me to make connections between the tire skid marks left by people not getting anywhere and this ferry dock leading nowhere.



On October 21, 2011, my mother received an anonymous phone call from a woman who arranged to meet her. The next day, she showed up with five intact flags. The woman didn't want a reward and insisted that she hoped above all to avoid problems. She revealed that the people who had destroyed the work simply didn't understand; she also said that one woman intended to make a dress out of one of the flags. After returning the nicely folded flags, she left saying, "You never saw me".

More than a month after the incident, an anonymous phone call let me know that the flags were underwater at the end of the ferry dock. A diver offered his assistance. Visibility was good, but the seabed resembled a dump. After expanding his search area, the diver returned to the surface. His search had turned up two flags still attached to their staffs.

I told a close friend that five of the flags had been returned to me anonymously. He replied that it was partly due to him and that he already knew. He told me that the savvy woman who had gone to see my mother had convinced the adults responsible for the theft to give her the flags. He thought the woman had a thing for him and that she was trying to find the flags to earn his favour. He was sure she would find other flags.



On January 12, 2012, I found another flag on my doorstep. It was the eleventh of the nineteen lost flags. It was returned to me by a young woman who, I believe, felt badly about having taken it. I had suspected that there was probably a woman in love involved in the story because a series of heart-shaped graffiti had appeared at the scene of the destruction.

As for me, my quest ends here.

I emptied my pockets.

I found a shred of the Canadian flag.

I had picked it up when I first began my search after a woman getting out of a sea canoe told me some bits of fabric had washed up on the beach at Pointe Fleurant.

Although there's only a fragment left, the object is still powerfully evocative. These stories that are told and which weave the fabric of our lives make each of us a component of the places we visit and those we inhabit.

