

RETURNS AND EXCHANGES

a project series



third space
tiers espace



Returns and Exchanges is a series of projects that explores the conventional structures within the art world. The projects in this series, a video store, a clothing shop, and a fictitious art lecture, use frameworks of familiar institutions to make art accessible and available to a broader public.

because the
problem of
representation
has everywhere
replaced the
question of
how to use
our lives

Going out of business like its going out of style
(formerly titled *make yourself a ~~version~~ aversion of your self*)

with Sophia Bartholomew

Oct 30 - Nov 2- 2014

122 Germain Street (beside Backstreet Records)

Hours of Operation: 9:00am - 9:00pm

Artist Talk: Thursday Oct 30th, 7:00pm

Can you begin by introducing yourself?

Sure. I mostly grew up on the side of a mountain, just outside of Vancouver. I left to work and study in Norway, and then in France for awhile, but I ended up taking my BFA at UBC, in Vancouver. I enjoyed this visual arts program a lot because of the conversations and relationships I was able to develop with some of my colleagues, but also with the staff and faculty, with MFA students, and with the art history and critical curatorial studies students who were part of the same department. Studying at a university allowed me to take a lot of specialized courses in subjects outside of 'art,' which was also quite important for me.

Now I've ended up on the opposite coast. For the last two years I have been based in Fredericton, New Brunswick – in a rented apartment along a wooded river valley. Here I am able to work as an arts administrator at Connexion ARC (artist-run centre) and keep up with my own art practice.

At Connexion ARC, I co-direct the centre with another contemporary artist - John Edward Cushnie – and we work with a pretty dedicated board and an increasingly involved membership to support the presentation and dissemination of experimental contemporary visual art practices. This continues to be extremely interesting and rewarding work, for me.

Artist-run centres are amazing and relevant institutions because they can be so fluid and adaptable, but then it is these same qualities make them very challenging to work with, at times. Because there is no road map, you know?

I do find there's a strong culture of working together in the Atlantic provinces, and maybe this is one of the things I like the best about working out here. Through organizations like APAGA and AARCA there is an incredible amount of communication and collaboration between the different artist-run centres, university galleries, and public galleries in New Brunswick, PEI, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland & Labrador. I'm kind of in love with this sense of community.

When we met earlier in the summer, you mentioned that you had been to Saint John a couple of times before. Can you describe what experiences you've had in Saint John so far?

I think Saint John is great! The first time I visited was sort of a rainy coastal day, so I felt right at home. The weather, the landscape and the older buildings really reminded me of Bergen, where I studied in Norway. I was also here for the East of There conference last June, which was really great. Third Space was presenting a pair of new media installations, and also organized some great social gatherings during the conference. There was a lot of interesting discussion of writing, publishing, myth-making and place-making, and then we all went out dancing at Callahan's! That was the best.

Jacqueline Collomb and Mike Landry were such gracious hosts when I came in to run a half marathon here in February. We talked late into the night, and then I rolled out early the next morning to do this run along the waterfront, which was both strikingly scenic and hugely industrial, intermittently.

This was the project: three hundred and eighty two consecutive t-shirts; a different one every day. At once submitting to what Andrea Zittel calls "the tyranny of variety" and refuting it – this late-capitalist paradigm that intones insistently – CONSUME CONSUME EXPRESS YOURSELF

Third Space Gallery exists without a permanent exhibition space. As an artist-run centre, this opens the doors for projects that encourage community involvement, partnerships, and innovative thinking. As a part of Somewheres, your project, "make yourself aversion of your self", existed in a gallery setting. One thing that I've noticed is that while staying true to the concept of your project, you've been flexible in terms of thinking how your project might take form in Saint John. Can you comment on the process of reimagining how your project will take form?

I'm really excited about working in this site-specific way, on a project-by-project basis, and Third Space has been enormously supportive of my project taking shape and changing shape, over the many months of its development. As you describe, this is perhaps an intrinsic part of the centre's character. The initial artwork – making and wearing a different text-based t-shirt every day, for more than a year – involved a level of endurance, of exhaustion, and so a 'truth' that I'm trying not to shy away from in presenting materials from "make yourself aversion of your self" at Third Space is that I am really tired of this project. I'd like to revel in that.

"make yourself aversion of your self" was also (in-part) about making a 'space' that I could use for what I needed, but one that could also be opened up to others so that they could alter the space to suit their own interests or needs. I understand that this work wasn't the right size or shape to be useful to everyone, but I'm still interested in this kind of invitation. I've been trying to understand something about the community I'm working with in Saint John, because I'd like for my exhibition at Third Space to function similarly. What are we hungry for?

Can you describe what form you imagine "make yourself aversion of your self" will take in Saint John?

Well, this is it folks: the last gasp, the last hurrah. Baby, it's over.

The windows are crowded with clearance sale signs. EVERYTHING MUST GO.

Over the course of the Halloween weekend in Saint John, I will be selling off all inventory for one dollar (or best offer). In a performance akin to Claus Oldenberg, Martha Rosler, Tracy Emin and Sarah Lucas' forays into shop-keeping and yard-selling, I will be keeping shop 9 AM to 9 PM, over four days. Thursday evening we'll host an out-loud reading group in the space, looking at "How to Begin Living in the Trees," an collaboratively voiced e-flux journal article (journal #53 March 2014).

Friday might be ripe for a getting-into-costume party, yeah? Sunday night we'll eat cake and have a bonfire down at Tin Can Beach: burning any stock that doesn't sell, once and for all. THE END.

As a broad and general comment about art-making- some projects are short-lived one-off's, while other projects are on-going and can mutate over time. While neither type of project is more or less potent, can you talk a little bit about being an artist who is open to or actively seeks opportunities for on-going projects?

Yeah, that's funny. "make yourself aversion of your self" in particular was kind of both of these things: it was an ongoing project, but it was also an interminable series of short-lived one-offs, day in and day out. The material instability of these types of projects and the kind of slow unraveling they emphasize appeals to me. I might also be a little 'slow on the uptake,' as it were. Synthesizing concepts or theories comes to me easily enough, but when it's a material process or lived experience I'm drawing on, my thoughts are not so easily gathered. These sorts of slow, evolving projects have given me more time and space to think.

Earlier this year you were one of thirteen artists exhibiting work in "Somewheres", an exhibition curated by Pan Wendt at the Confederation Centre of the Art's in Charlottetown P.E.I. "Somewheres" was, "a survey of the work of emerging contemporary artists living in the Maritimes and their engagement with the question of region". In the exhibition write-up, Pan Wendt challenges the popular belief that critical mass leads to a greater exchange of new ideas and that it can actually produce homogeneity. In contrast, through its "failures of communication", a small centre like that of the Maritimes is more likely to produce new ideas that contribute to the creative process. As someone who has moved from Vancouver to the Maritimes, has this notion of region informed your explorations of communication and identity? How about language?

A friend said something to me recently – that it must be strange that there's almost nobody in Fredericton that really understands this specialized knowledge of mine: contemporary art – this thing that I do. I hadn't thought about it like that before, but yeah, it's a little strange. I mean, we always find ways to talk about it, but it involves a lot of building bridges with people from different disciplines, different backgrounds: a sort of translation process. I think that can be enormously generative and exciting, but sometimes it's a little lonely. I do use email and Skype a lot.

Yeah, if I'd stayed in Vancouver, I imagine I would have remained insulated in my own artistic and political community, and that my way of working would have continued to be governed by a lot of unchecked assumptions.

The Maritimes have been a good context for me, though I think an important part of that this was just a matter of getting out: stepping back from the invisible imperatives that govern every school, every city, every community – really weighing them out and deciding which ones to keep, which ones to throw away. It's been two years since I drove across the entire country to get here, and yeah, I'm quite happy to stay here, for now.

On the subject of language, where did the text for your 382 t-shirts come from?

These texts were lifted from conversations I had with friends and strangers, from novels and critical theory texts I was reading at the time, from news media, from Facebook, from song lyrics. They were readymade texts, mostly.

Can you comment on the t-shirt as acting as a sort of uniform or disguise for the individual?

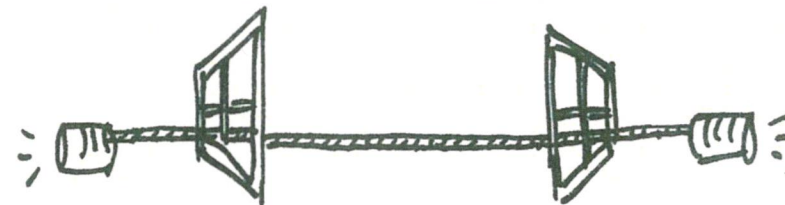
Yeah, I felt like the shirts were these day-to-day acts of self-representation in an image economy obsessed with symbol management and branding, you know? I mean we accept that this is part of how companies and corporations behave, but I think it's also infiltrated our individual understandings of self.

In this project I was actively constructing myself as a visual object, and part of that was feigning legibility in this literal, textual way.

As I was becoming increasingly aware of acts of self-presentation, I think I was trying to fashion a disguise for myself – a distraction tactic that might protect me from constantly trying to anticipate how I would be perceived – in person and in images, online.

But then, there is no escape from this. There is only habituation, of one kind or another.

Can you see your phrases existing apart from their home on the t-shirts? What might this look like? Most of the phrases had a whole other life prior to their t-shirt incarnations, so it doesn't seem strange to imagine that they will return to the world they came from, in various ways, now that the project is over. I imagine them slinking away into the night...





Love at the End of the Art World

by

Steven Cottingham

Dec 1 - Dec 6 - 2014

"Love at the End of the Art World comprises a lecture and group discussion about the infrastructures that support and, oftentimes, override art."


In your piece, *Love at the End of the Art World*, you analyze the formulaic processes in the contemporary art world. Do you see this piece as a loving satire of artist-run culture, or as criticism? What is your goal with this publication/performance?

For me, this project is simultaneously a loving send-up of artist-run culture and the dual social/artistic role of vernissages, as well as a self-deprecatory examination of how I spend my time and the venues in which I experience meaningful work. Like, I feel fully immersed within contemporary art and the communities it entails. Sometimes the infrastructure overrides the content, though: the gallery's bar can be more appealing than the exhibition, nervous interactions with exes require more attention than artist statements, press releases distract from the work as curatorial intentions collide with PR vocabularies, and the list of who's attending the event on Facebook provides more of a reason to see the work than the actual description. I guess my goal, inasmuch as it could be called that, is to draw attention to the overwhelming nature of the purportedly supplementary activities that exist around art, exhibitions, studio practices, and professional achievements. We get caught up with these things that overshadow content and I'm curious about the merit of these extraneous accoutrements. They are sort of separate but definitely not unrelated or unimportant. To reference the Contemporary Art Gallery in Vancouver's mandate: I wonder what it's like to "signify an understanding of art as something of meaning in our daily lives, asserting a continuum, enmeshed within and of significance to all other experience?"

You seem to take an interest in the human tendency to assign meaning to objects and events. Would you say that sentimentality plays a role in your work?

I am definitely prone to sentimentality and melodrama; I think this is sort of a side effect of constantly attempting to articulate feelings that can be so minute and complex as to avoid having any conscious or linguistic presence.

When I talk about examining the infrastructure of art, and the way the content almost gets ignored in favour of more immediately gratifying things (networking, partying, real-time conversations), I suppose I am searching for meaning outside of the 'regulated' areas of finding meaning. Maybe viewing art is not always the fastest way to an epiphany. Maybe reading reviews won't always create an important, life-long memory. Sometimes writing applications can teach you more about yourself than any studio visit, or standing outside a gallery smoking cigarettes with a stranger results in more inspiring thoughts than a graduate commencement speech. I think it's important to consider non-specific occurrences happening outside formal circumstances as being of equal value. You just need to recognize them.



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www.maggiehiggins.com

Drawing: Christiana Myers

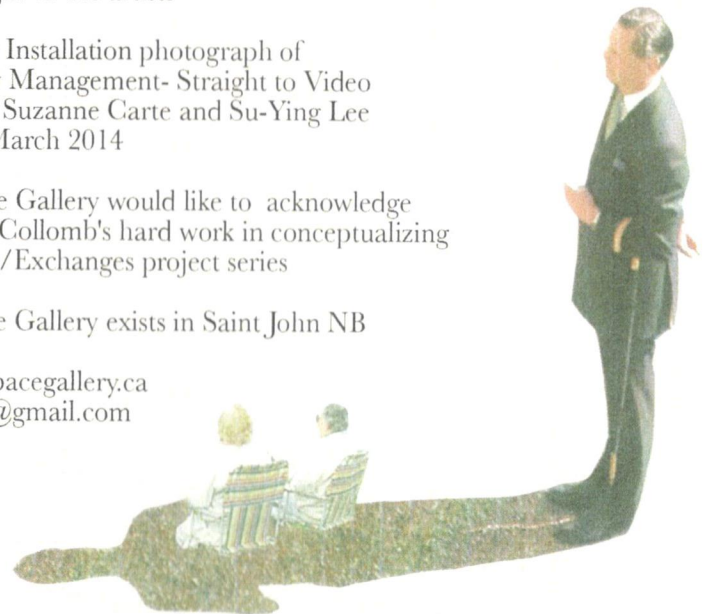
Exhibition photographs courtesy
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February/March 2014

Third Space Gallery would like to acknowledge
Jacqueline Collomb's hard work in conceptualizing
the Returns/Exchanges project series

Third Space Gallery exists in Saint John NB

www.thirdspacegallery.ca
tiersespace@gmail.com





I'm
just
looking
thanks.