

FUSE

MAGAZINE

High Tech Storyteller:

A Conversation with Performance

Artist Lori Blondeau

by Lynne Bell & Janice Williamson

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Working between Memory and Imagination:

The Visual Art of Sarindar Dhaliwal

by Meera Sethi

Tashme²: Early Works of Kazuo Nakamura

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VENICE BIENNALE 2001

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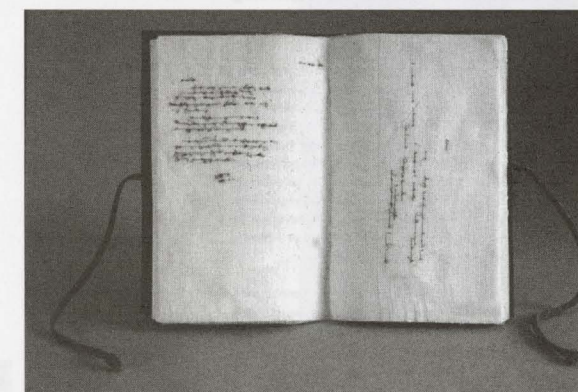
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Cover: Greg Staats

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Editorial

The world has changed —or so the claim goes— since 9.11.

Just how it has changed, or how much, can be seen as a question of perspective: whether one perceives "it" as an unprecedented world event, or as a particularly horrific event that has brought anglo-North America into the real time that much of the world was already living. Either way, much is changing fast: public opinion polls are reporting alarming stats about citizens willing to give up civil liberties for a comfort and safety they thought they had, but never really did. Could it be that post-cold war "wars" and the "new wars" of global reordering are finally "trickling down" and hitting closer to home? At this juncture, we would do well to remember North America's terrible history of internment in times of crisis for those whom it is always willing to read out of the national body politic.

Indeed, was the recent flip-flop decision of the Museum of Civilization—to postpone and then schedule as planned an exhibition by Arab-Canadian artists—a hint of how quickly state institutions are willing to resurrect the politics and practices of internment in all its symbolic and real forms? From a contrarian stance, the very reinstatement of the exhibition following intense political pressure from the Government of Canada is as troubling—whatever happened to the myth of arms-length institutions?

Let us remind the Museum of Civilization that their decision was not only unthoughtful and ungenerous, but that it smacked of the kind of discourse that both leads to internment and then supports it in practice. With new anti-terrorist laws being quickly passed in Ottawa (sunset clauses notwithstanding) there is much need for vigilance on these matters.

Speaking of the need to be vigilant, Finance Minister Paul Martin has announced the date of his next budget to coincide with this issue going to press (Coincidence? Certainly). The arts and culture sector has seen very little of the budget surplus of late, especially those of us who live our lives at small magazines and in artist run-centres—organizations that do not cater specifically to the elite arts that, arguably, have the greatest chance of receiving corporate sponsorship. As artists and art supporters, let us not be silent on this budget. We should oppose the continued diversion of any economic surplus toward bailing out the wealthiest sectors of the economy, with the remainder being diverted to the war industry. We can also ask, along with the anti-globalization protesters of whom many may soon find themselves on the other side of Ottawa's terrorism bills, if there really is a difference between these two beneficiaries.

Can we possibly demand support for the arts in the current political climate? If we accept the mainstream view of the irreparable rupture that was caused by 9.11, perhaps the answer is no. But if we see these events as a wake-up call on every level—social, political, cultural—to enter the real-time of the rest of the world then it is our duty to insist that Martin's budget restore and increase funding to the arts, one of the areas of economic (yes, economic!) activity that has been eviscerated by the deficit-reduction practices of the 1990s.

At times like these artists often offer us the best ways to make sense of our times. Artists are not therapists, and should not be, but they do offer ways to think and work through recovery, to assess our sense of time and place and to critically engage with events that appear irrational and too close to home to process. And while we do indeed live in a time of constant change, we must make sure that the evisceration of arts funding witnessed in the 1990s does not become the modus operandi for economic policy in the months and years to come.

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The Stores of Venice

by Sarindar Dhaliwal

Is the idea I've got the right idea?

Will I manage to complete my new work?

When my work is complete will it be beautiful?

What will people think of my work? Will they like it?

Will I be successful?

Will I be satisfied and happy about my new work?

These are questions we hear German artist Christian Jankowski's disembodied voice ask in careful, faltering Italian. We are watching a video projection of taped segments lifted off an Italian television phone-in show called *Telemysticas*. Jankowski is the caller.

In 1999 Jankowski produced this installation for the 48th Venice Biennale. He had spent some time in Venice, prior to the opening, phoning a number of television personalities who read the tarot, gaze into crystal balls or just pluck answers from the ether in response to viewers asking questions generally referring to love lives, health or financial queries. The telemysticas do business in studio sets that resemble furniture stores catering to a suburban ideal of Italic: a heavenly vision of plaster cherubs, artificial exotic flowers and plants amidst replicas of urns and plastic-wrapped sofas. This is the habitat of the telemystica. My favourite was Barbara (pronounced with a purr... Bahrrbarrah). She was friendly and didn't seem peeved that Jankowski's request was a little different and more challenging than her typical customers' yearnings. They had obviously communicated through an intermediary sometime earlier. This edited transcript of Jankowski and Barbara's conversation underlines the gulf that stretches between contemporary conceptual artists and the general public (i.e., the audience of the telemysticas).

Christian: Hello, good evening Barbara.

Barbara: Is that an English accent?... English?

C: I am Christian.

B: Let me explain to our viewers what this is all about. Do you want to explain it?

C: Yes?

B: What is your work in the Venice Biennale? What is your role in

the Biennale?

C: Yes... I am an artist. I am working to exhibit my work in an exhibition... yes?

B: And your work..... I will speak in a simpler manner so that we can understand each other. What is your work made of—the work that you will present at the famous Venice Biennale?

this. You will feel a little bit down because you still haven't reached what you want. There will be other difficult moments. I tell you this in advance, but don't get desperate because I can see that you will do it. Don't think you are by yourself.

C: Okay.

B: I can see something else here. In which country do live?

because I can see that this career will take you away from your family and home.

slowly, slowly you will reach your goal but be between your home and your family. This is because that you will work more outside of your home than you're on the side of the young artists and with ideas who want to get somewhere. So, all I can remember what I told you. You will do it.

waterways of Venice one is hard-pressed to find activities such as watching afternoon TV (let alone believing in it). The water lapping against the stones of these pastel-painted buildings, a tradition prior throughout the centuries, is nurturing the very "natureness" of these fronds and the apotheosis of the aerials that poke out from the terracotta roofs. Jankowski taps into this nurturing himself (and the mysterious activity of temporary art) into the everyday cultural life of the Venetian citizens. Jankowski himself works as an earnest innocent who, unlike the history of intrigues permeating her stones, forward questions.

Jankowski's piece seemed despite its clever art-worldy introspection to have disingenuously strayed onto a psychological underpinning of the Biennale and similar international mega-exhibitions—the desire of artists to participate in an arena that resembles a snake pit fraught with the possibility of being crushed under the weight of public approbation, disdain and disinterest or be whisked off their feet onto a glamorous global circuit. In other words, the relationship between the artists and the Art World. Jankowski uncovers the naked hunger of artists to be liked and to be successful. If they could ask prescient beings for the answers before embarking on their work or unveiling it to the public gaze or critical analysis, it would avoid so much angst. Or maybe not...

A friend also exhibited two video projections in the same section of the Biennale as the Jankowski installation. The first morning of

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C: Ah, good... hmmm.

B: Well, listen to me! You will soon start an important project.

C: Yes?

B: Yes, shortly.

C: Two weeks?

B: Yes, maybe even three. But the project will definitely start with a positive change of situation for you. Don't be insecure because I can see that someone promised to help you but you don't really believe in it.

C: Two weeks?

B: Yes, in a short time. There is a project and financial support, call it what you will. I don't know what it is. Maybe that means money.

C: Yes, all will be fine? Yes?

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C: It will be an installation..... a video installation.

B: A video about fortune-teller programmes, right?

C: Yes, yes.

B: So you are a young artist... how old are you?

C: I am thirty-one.

B: So Christian you are a young artist who thought that the occultism that is so popular today could be the subject of a work that is to be presented at the Venice Biennale?

C: Okay, I wanted to ask this question. Will I realize my work and will I find some people to help me complete my work? These are my problems. I don't have much time and not much money, but I have much will power.

B: Like all big and young artists. Well done, never let go, not even for a second because desires come true only with strong tenacity. You have to hold on and insist. Now we will see if you will finish your project, if someone will hear you, come to you and help you, right?

C: Yes.

B: Now I will make three stacks and you choose one. (Shuffles cards)

C: The central one.

B: (Turning the cards from the middle pile). Now we will see... not much money, I can see that. You didn't lie to me because the cards tell that there is little money. I'll tell you more... from what I can see you definitely will be a successful person in life, I see it and if I tell you this it means it is so. You are a winner. I'm not just telling you this to make you happy but being a winner means that probably you have innovative, good, valid, concrete ideas.

C: Ah, good... hmmm.

B: Well, listen to me! You will soon start an important project.

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C: Okay.

B: I can see something else here. In which country do live?

C: From Germany.

B: From Germany. Because I can see that this career will take you away from your family and home.

C: Yes, I understand.

B: That means that slowly, slowly you will reach your goal but there will be distance between your home and your family. This makes me suppose that you will work more outside of your home country. So look, I'm on the side of the young artists and intelligent people with ideas who want to get somewhere. So, all the best. And remember what I told you. You will do it.

Sailing along the waterways of Venice one is hard-pressed to remember quotidian activities such as watching afternoon TV (unless one looks up), let alone believing in it. The water lapping at the foundation stones of these pastel-painted buildings, unchanged in exterior throughout the centuries, is nurturing mossy green growth. The very "natureness" of these fronds and velveteen stubble is the apotheosis of the aerials that poke out from the landscape of terracotta roofs. Jankowski taps into this contradiction by inserting himself (and the mysterious activity of conceiving contemporary art) into the everyday cultural engagement of many of the Venetian citizens. Jankowski himself comes across in this work as an earnest innocent who, unlike the dowager Venice with a history of intrigues permeating her stones, asks plain, straightforward questions.

Jankowski's piece seemed despite its clever art-worldly introspection to have disingenuously strayed onto a psychological underpinning of the Biennale and similar international mega-exhibitions—the desire of artists to participate in an arena that resembles a snake pit fraught with the possibility of being crushed under the weight of public approbation, disdain and disinterest or be whisked off their feet onto a glamorous global circuit. In other words, the relationship between the artists and the Art World. Jankowski uncovers the naked hunger of artists to be liked and to be successful. If they could ask prescient beings for the answers before embarking on their work or unveiling it to the public gaze or critical analysis, it would avoid so much angst. Or maybe not...

A friend also exhibited two video projections in the same section of the Biennale as the Jankowski installation. The first morning of

the preview days he greeted me warmly. He was excited, smiling, happy. Three days later he looked as if he had had no sleep, nor shaved since our last meeting. Dishevelled and disheartened, he said, "they just keep wanting things from me. They won't leave me alone—not for a minute." They, the monsters, are curators, museum and gallery people and collectors even. Most biennales and prestigious international art forums have an underbelly that that can, cynically, be described as a high-brow trade fair. *This style would sell in our location—let's book a show.* All above board, but why does it feel sleazy? As if they are no-good characters that hang around train stations in major cities waiting for the next fresh kid from Berlin or Barcelona. The artists, anxious for the same things as Christian Jankowski, charm with their work again and again until they get so busy that they don't have enough time to do their own shopping for their installations.

Shopping is a facet of Venice hard to ignore: little stores, some no more than large closets storing and displaying all those theatrical masks and delicately proffering glass bon-bons in their vitrines to tempt the window shoppers. These are the kind of things I might buy as gifts but more about my shopping inadequacies later. The Industry comes to shop. For Art, for Films, for Carnevale. It's when Harald Szeeman, curator of the Aperto section of the 1981, 1999 and 2001 Venice Biennales, shows off his wares from his curatorial research over the past two years. The result of all this commerce parading as selective choice high-brow intelligentsia might be why, in the summer of 1999, I saw one overworked artist's oeuvre in four European cities. She meanwhile was probably working under the gun to produce work for a big exhibition in North America later in the fall. Rumour has it she was discovered crouching under the bed in her hotel room, unable to attend her own opening, unready and delirious (like my friend!). Had they just kept wanting things from her?

Harald Szeeman doesn't need to *come* to Canada to shop for his Canadian artists. Though this year his choice included four or five artists rather than the sole Canadian shown in the previous aperto and they are some of our favourite artists to be sure, they were the usual suspects. Household names in that uncannily miniscule but global town that is known as the Art World. More disappointing were his nods to women and minorities. Cuban artist Priscilla Monge was represented by a plywood room, every inch of the inside walls covered by a layer of sanitary towels, still white save for a few dusty footsteps where viewers must have entered the pristineness of the space. The work would have made sense if the artist had been able to, in the year of her birth (1968), jump from her crib and race to the pharmacy to buy these

materials and participate in a movement which was speaking to women in many different parts of world. More than thirty years later presenting this particular piece devoid of all historical context seemed contemptuous of a movement that nurtured and interested not only generations of artists but also curators and museum goers. The page-long essay contextualized her practice and placed her padded room within a curatorial reading that embraced notions of psychological solitariness, madness and internal dialogues—but all the viewer is faced with is the silence of the sanitary towels. At times, it seemed too that Szeeman would, during his travels, stumble on a cell of artists working in the same town, in the same medium and with very similar devices and methodologies. There were in Amsterdam, for example, a number of film artists who take archival footage of anthropological studies of cultures, recut the images, recolour the film in intense glorious hues and rerun it for us.

As we run, from reception to opening to party, sometimes in raggle-taggle packs, losing the odd straggler after a series of narrow turns through the casbah of alleys and ruelles that make up the city, the social hierarchy of the Biennale becomes clear. The bodies whose presence is most desired at these functions are the non-practioners, the non-makers—that is, the leading buyers, sellers and disseminators of art. We, the hoi polloi, our bodies just take up too much room and distract from the general business of forwarding the agenda of the few. Besides, artists are notorious for eating too many canapes and drinking far too many glasses of champagne.

On my final day I met a female acquaintance, a purveyor of the aesthetic, who had a gleam in her eye. She was going to take me shopping. I meekly followed her from shop to shop. We were like butterflies darting from shoe store to fashion boutique to optometrist's to olive oil and tangerine-flavoured liquor emporium. Assertive, shameless, she stormed the fortresses of the snooty Italian shopclerks. Looking at everything. Asking questions about size, colour and price. Brazenly trying on garments and efficiently rejecting them in a no-nonsense manner impervious to the saleswomen's haughtiness. It became clear that I was a big disappointment to her—unable to commit or take a leap of faith I was able to talk myself out of buying anything. Like Bahrrbarrah, she had some advice for the artist in me. *Your career will go no where unless you start buying shoes. The more pairs you acquire, the better things will be. Believe me.*

Sarindar Dhaliwal is an artist who lives and works in Toronto. For further information, see the feature in this issue.

Indian and Northern Affairs
Affaires indiennes et du Nord

\$

400 Laurier Ave. W.
Ottawa, Ont. K1A 0M4

July 30, 1975

TO ALL REGIONAL DIRECTORS

CIRCULAR W-17

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

It has been brought to our attention that the number of dogs on Indian Reserves has been increasing at a rate far beyond the capacity of this Department or the Indians to administer them. The Indian Reserve Dog Regulations are optional in nature, and though the last revision of these was on June 10, 1954, few reserves have put them into effect. It has therefore been found desirable, in concurrence with our general review of the Department's policies through the publication of program and policy guidelines, to establish a definitive statement of our position on this question. In view of the apparent attachment of many Indians to their dogs, it can be expected that this Circular will meet with some opposition on the local level, but with proper moves on the Department's part to forestall any fears the Indians may have, there should be no real problems in the implementation of this policy. It should be noted that this Circular is of a preliminary nature. Proposals for change should be directed to J. Wright, Director of Program Development, Local Government Program. It can be explained to the Bands in your districts that the Department's intention is not to do away with dogs altogether, but merely to ensure that they are properly administered, and that any improvement in dog administration will be to the advantage of all concerned in the long run. No program can function efficiently without some rules for its planning and its day-to-day operations, and surely this axiom applies to the Indian dog situation as well.

INDIAN BAND DOG GUIDELINES

POLICY CIRCULAR W-17

- 1.1 These guidelines govern all dogs on Indian reserves, whether they be male or female, old or young, and owned by residents of the reserve or by others, except that dogs owned or kept by employees of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs shall be exempted from the provisions of paragraphs 3 and 7 of these guidelines.
- 1.2 All dogs on Indian reserves shall be registered and placed on the Band Dog List for that Band. A copy of the Band Dog List shall be kept at the Regional Office and amendments, additions or deletions to the list shall be communicated to the Regional Office within one week after they are made at the Band level.
- 1.3 Where the sire of a litter of pups can be ascertained, the pups shall be entered under his Band Dog List number until such time as they receive names or reach the age of three months, whichever comes last.
- 1.4 Where the sire of the litter cannot be ascertained, the pups shall be listed under the Band Dog List number of the mother, except that where it is known that the sire is not a Dog resident on the reserve or belonging to a member of the Band, then the pups shall not be included in the Band Dog List.
- 1.5 Pups born to a Reserve Dog mother and a Non-Reserve dog sire shall be considered enfranchised and shall not be subject to the provisions of these guidelines.

-2-

- 2.1 Where a Reserve Dog that is registered on the Band Dog List has not, after three months have elapsed from its date of birth, been given a name, that Dog shall be known by the Band Dog List Number assigned to it. This provision does not apply to Dogs that are enfranchised or die within that three-month period.
- 2.2 Reserve Dogs shall not chase automobiles or other vehicles registered in the name of Her Majesty in right of Canada or to the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs.
- 2.3 Failure to comply with the provisions of 2.2 may result in action taken by the Regional Director to:
 - (a) remove the Dog's name from the Band Dog List.
 - (b) require that the dog be subject to co-management by the Department and the Indian or Indians the Band Dog List describes as its Owners.
 - (c) outright denial (as a last resort) of Core Funding to the Reserve with respect to all dogs.
- 3.1 It shall be the responsibility of the Chief and Council of the Band to ensure that all Dogs on the Reserve shall be of Good behaviour and shall not be vicious or engage in the excessive consumption of alcoholic beverages, drugs, or other intoxicants.

OTTAWA, Ontario K1A 0H4
July 20, 1976

Dear Sir;

Enclosed please find Band Dog List Number 02 for your District, covering those dogs registered at the Gull Bay Band Office, in conformity with the memorandum issued by Mr. Mc Gilp's office pursuant to Guideline Circular F-7 of May 30, 1975.

As this program appears to be progressing more slowly than was originally planned, as the acceptance of the underlying principles met with some resistance at the local band level, it is imperative that you take the appropriate action as soon as possible and practicable.

You will collect the Band Dog Lists from the other bands in your District and forward them to the Office of the Registrar in Ottawa as soon as you can: you will inform your Indians that the consequences of omission of their dogs from the lists at this time may result in the loss of the dogs' status or the cancellation of their dog program.

May I anticipate your response by August 20, please.

Director General,
Operations Branch

J.G. McGilp
J.G. McGilp

REGISTERED INDIAN DOGS AS OF DEC 31/75 PAGE 02734

RESP/ CENTRE- 492 LAKEHEAD DISTRICT			BAND-02 GULL BAY					
AMNO	SURNAME	GIVEN NAMES	BIRTH DATE	PR	RL	M	F	S
33451	NEMOOSH	RIN TIN TIN	22 04 971	05	RC	3	1	2
33452	NEMOOSH	LASSIE	05 12 972	05	RC	4	2	2
33453	NEMOOSH	BLACKIE	21 08 953	05	RC	3	1	2
33454	NEMOOSH	FIDO	05 05 976	05	RC	4	2	2
33455	NEMUSH	ARFER	13 09 969	05	RC	3	2	2
33456	NEMUSH	HOUND	05 11 970	05	RC	1	2	2
33457	NEMUSH	MISS MUTT	17 03 972	05	RC	2	1	2
33461	DOG	SPOT	21 02 972	05	PR	2	2	3
33462	DOG	CORNELIUS	06 06 972	05	PR	1	2	2
33463	DOG	PUPPY	19 05 976	05	PR	2	3	2
33464	DOG	PUPPY JIM'S	19 05 976	05	PR	2	3	2
33465	DOG	PUPPY WHITE	19 05 976	05	PR	1	2	3
33466	DOG	PUPPY LOVE	19 05 976	05	PR	1	2	3
33467	DOG	PUPPY POOPY	19 05 976	05	PR	2	2	2
33501	DOG	MEAN OLD	31 03 960	05	NA	1	3	2
33521	DOG	BIG BLACK	20 12 970	05	PR	1	2	2
33522	DOG	HOWARD JOHN	04 11 971	05	RC	1	2	3
33601	WOLF	RABID	19 11 969	04	NA	2	2	2
33602	WOLF	AKELA	23 09 973	05	NA	2	3	2
33603	WOLF	BIG BAD	30 11 975	05	NA	2	3	2
33621	RETREIVER	LABRADOR	04 04 970	05	RC	3	2	1
33622	RETREIVER	GOLDEN	13 06 971	05	RC	3	2	2
33623	RETREIVER	MOLSON'S GOLDEN	13 06 971	05	RC	3	2	2
33623	RETRIEVRE	ROVER	13 06 971	05	RC	2	2	1
33631	MONGREL	PUP	07 10 974	05	PR	2	2	2
33632	MONGREL	MURPHY	24 08 975	05	PR	2	1	2
33633	MONGREL	MC GILP	24 08 975	05	PR	2	22	3
33634	MONGREL	JUDD	24 08 975	05	PR	3	2	1
33641	MONGREL	FAT OLD	13 12 968	05	NA	2	2	2
33651	WAGOOSH	HERMAN	24 02 971	05	RC	2	1	3
33652	WAGOOSH	DAISY MAE	20 07 971	05	RC	3	2	3
33652	WAGOOSH	ABRAHAMABOY	14 12 974	05	RC	3	3	2

The Politics of Curating

The Trouble with Normal: Queering Our Identities

by Elleni Centime Zeleki

This column is a revised version of a paper presented at "Persistent Vision: A Conference on Twenty-five Years of Queer Cinema" held at the Yerba Buena Centre for the Arts in June 2001.

I must confess that I feel like somewhat of a fraud, sitting up here, attempting to deliver a paper at a queer film and video conference/festival. Why do I feel like a fraud? Well, one reason is because I have not worked for a queer festival since 1999 and as I continue to do programming, this time for Doxa, a documentary film and video festival, I find myself more and more disavowing programming whose criteria is based around identity.

Moreover, I have just returned (it's been exactly two weeks) from a trip to the country from which my passport is issued, that country being Ethiopia. Returning, which always commences long before one leaves a place, I found myself writing a number of curious phrases, one of which expressed doubt about whether I should in fact come to San Francisco, wondering whether I cared enough about the notion of queerness to present at this conference, indeed, lamenting the fact that unfortunately I seemed not to care.

But of course here I am and I do not wish to invoke the death of queer or the end of queer anything if only because when one invokes the end it more often than not comes off sounding pedantic or juvenile, neither of which I wish to be this afternoon. But it did cross my mind that I should perhaps have called my talk "reverse exoticism." Why such a title? Because, all of this curating and programming that I have been up to has always remained a bit of a joke.

I have been living in North America for just about ten years and it was in the early '90s at a feminist rally that I remember being amazed and shocked by the passion and anger with which many of the speakers delivered their talks. Watching them, I remember my embarrassment at how much the speakers believed in the structure and syntax, indeed the content, of what they were saying. Despite the fact that I had grown up in a variety of Third World settings I had never witnessed anything quite like this. Nevertheless, witnessing this rally was the spark for me. I wanted

to be a part of such passion; I wanted to understand such belief. I then joined my first feminist collective and on and on until finally I found myself curating artists film and video, particularly those made by queer people of colour at a variety of venues, including the Pacific Cinematheque, Video In and the gay and lesbian film festival in Vancouver.

But now the joke is over. I am both tired of it (surely there is other work better suited for me) but also having experienced the joke for long enough I think it's time for a little ruminating. What I offer to you today then is a rumination on my practice as curator of difference working in Vancouver since 1996. I offer this rumination, although personal, because I believe it may shed light on curatorial practice and the uncomplicated notion of queer, as is the intention of this panel. Also I offer this rumination in the form of a series of letters because clearly I am in dialogue with a series of objects/subjects but also because the time limit on my presentation allows me only to offer you fragments.

Dear Peter,¹

In Ethiopia. Interesting to see a certain kind of identity politics with a jumbled Foucauldian genealogical twist play itself out in this context. Interesting to see how discourses travel. Interesting to see how well-meaning international civil servants force communities to articulate their complex issues within certain frameworks (today, along ethnic, sexual and even gender lines) as if these things are real. Why gender? Because women are oppressed. Why ethnicity? Because there are dominant groups. Really... there has got to be more interesting ways to speak than simply importing these discourses which in my mind don't solve the communities' problems but create more of a headache. Hard to explain to the well-meaning types that just because it is necessary to articulate things around the trope of race, etc., at one particular moment in time and space, this does not mean these things are real. In Cairo I had the unfortunate experience of travelling with the Canadian peace-keeping troops for the Eritrean/Ethiopian border. Any attempt to have a wronged and a right group in this Red Sea region is a useless waste of time anyway. Hard to explain that to the well-meaning types when they are so convinced that there is someone to save.

Dear Centime,

Yup. Discourse travels. And travel discourses. Endlessly. I agree that identity, gender, race, ethnicity, are not real (if by real we mean that they aren't just sitting there as natural things). But they are real in that they make very real transformations in a state of affairs. Identity → people → nation → nationalism → flags → trumpets, you know the rest. So there are two problems. On one hand there's the problem of being wrong—which would be attaching the wrong concept to a situation. On the other hand, there's being right—that is, the right concept in the right situation—but not understanding either the instrumentality of that concept, or the certain "ontological bite" (as Witt. put it) that the concept will have. So, is the question, how can one apprehend a state of affairs—and thus intervene—and simultaneously remain aware that what one had in hand to begin with was a trope? When one thinks of a trope, it leads to the ideal. But what if you have a trope that also has a substance of expression? The exo-semiotic of discourse ...

Dear Peter,

A couple curious phrases in your e-mails and mine that I have been turning over in my head. I wonder what you are trying to get at when you speak of a trope that also has a substance of expression as opposed to an ideal. Moreover I wonder if you can explain what you mean by the term 'exo-semiotic of discourse.' Is it sort of like the outside of discourse? The outside of discourse is a slippery slope. Where are you pushing this?

Dear C,

The slope may be slippery, but it is a slope, a territory and slippery or not, a material that articulates with discourse. A trope is an experiment that requires a kind of forgetting. To posit an exo-semiotic is, I think, to bring back the slope, even though it may be slippery, treacherous.

Dear Monika Gagnon,²

These days I have been attempting to sketch out a curatorial proposal of excess and explosion. I have tentatively entitled this project "Exceeding Differences, Exploding the Subject." The project is a way for me to escape the tirelessly circular debate about the normalizing tendencies of identity politics without myself returning to an essentialized body radiating from its core. That is, my curatorial project is an attempt to avoid conversations where work is discussed simply as good or bad art yet I do not want to revert to an essentialized body as a criteria of excellence.

My project takes as its cue Renee Baert's essay "Subjects on The Threshold, Problems with Pronouns." In the essay, Baert examines the first twenty years of Canadian feminist video art and argues that the practice reflects one of feminism's primary struggles which is for women to tell their own stories in their own voices. Changes in how these stories are told has been a major site of battle and has coincided with changes in feminist theory, which in turn has been influenced by changes in philosophy. In particular the changes have been influenced by philosophy's attempts to think through the constitution of the "I." Queer theory, very much in step with feminist theory I believe, has also been involved with a similar struggle. I also want to suggest that we can understand curatorial strategies for dealing with queer film and video as constantly negotiating a place of enunciation.

In the late '80s and early '90s Canada witnessed a burgeoning of queer film and video programs and festivals. This burgeoning erupted, I believe, at a particular historical moment where on the one hand we wanted to follow the Foucaults and Judith Butlers of the world who argued that identity was performatively constituted and yet we still wanted to fetishize experience as the site of meaning.³ This ambivalence led eventually in the late '90s to those who "moved on" rejecting identity politics as a legitimate basis for curating and those who seemed to be nostalgically holding on to a movement that had seen better times. Monika, Butler's seminal text, *Gender Trouble*, has always depressed me. While I cannot but agree with her that the "I" is without substance, that "the one who speaks is not the individual but language,"⁴ the question remains for me, if we are only performatively constituted why would we want to "call into question the regulatory practices of identity itself,"⁵ could we not just get used to anything? In fact getting used to anything might be the best way to describe queerness in the early part of this new century of ours. So my question to myself

and to you is, how do I, given the 1990s queer, anti-humanist position regard the queer, black body, still quivering and in pain, invisible and unheard, even while she stands up to be heard—fiction as she may be?

Dear Abigail Child,
I recently read your essay "Poetic Meditation on B/Side," published in *Lux: Ten Years of Artists Film and Video*. I was surprised by your use of the notion of an event without witness developed by Shoshana Felman in her commentary on Claude Lanzman's film *Shoah*. You use this notion because, as you say, "a crisis of representation happens in several direction when artists turn to social issues." (171) Contentious points such as the responsibility of the artist to the subject of their work, what formal techniques best suit the subject or how does "language meet" the silence and invisibility experienced by marginalized groups are examples of what contributes to this crisis. However, Felman's notion helped you resolve this crisis. Felman argues that Lanzman solves this crisis through recourse to poetics. According to Felman the Shoah (the event not the film) is an event without witness because it is impossible to bear witness from the inside of death. Moreover, no one can bear witness from the outside since the outsider is by definition excluded from the event. Felman then claims Lanzman's film makes a connection between inside and outside through recourse to song and poetry, through an aesthetic maneuver. Such a strategy, as Giorgio Agamben points out, reduces the meeting point between art and politics to technique. But can it really be that simple?

There are two stories that Agamben tells in his book *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and The Archive*, which I think would be appropriate to share with you. The first story is to do with Francois Frintisi-Ducroux's study of Greek sculpture, in particularly the Gorgon. Frintisi-Ducroux tells us that the Gorgon, breaking away from Greek iconographical tradition, is always painted flat—without profile, without a third dimension. The Gorgon is a non-face, a pure image of the horrid medusa face, that when looked upon produces death. According to Agamben, Frintisi-Ducroux establishes a parallel between the Gorgon's frontality and *apostrophe*, the rhetorical figure by which the author, rupturing narrative convention, turns to a character or directly to the public. This means that the impossibility of vision of which the Gorgon is the cipher contains something like an *apostrophe*, a call that cannot be avoided.

The second story I want to relate to you is one repeated from Primo Levi about a child inmate at Auschwitz. The child looks about 3 years old, cannot speak and is paralyzed from the waist down. From time to time the child articulates the one word he knows. Despite the many languages present at the camp no one is able to make this word have meaning. In Levi's book, these sounds are translated as M-A-S-K-L-O and a few other variations. Thus Levi writes that through "these words of mine the child bears witness."⁶ But Levi also says the child cannot bear witness, it has no language, its speech uncertain and meaningless. What the child is bearing witness to, then, is the impossibility of speech. Thus Agamben is able to write,

That at the bottom of the human being there is nothing other than an impossibility of seeing—this is the Gorgon, whose vision transforms the human being into a non

human. That precisely this inhuman impossibility of seeing is what calls and addresses the human, the *apostrophe*, from which human beings cannot turn away—this and nothing else is testimony. The Gorgon and he who has seen her are one gaze, they are a single impossibility of seeing. (54)

M-A-S-K-L-O is what lies before the human-being/doing, before subjectivity and language. M-A-S-K-L-O is human flesh capable of resembling life without being or doing. M-A-S-K-L-O is what lies before the "I" that is the sole concern of Butler and all the queer theory that has ensued from her school of thought. M-A-S-K-L-O exceeds the S(s)ubject or perhaps it explodes it? M-A-S-K-L-O is what calls us. It is what motivates us to insist that "the one who speaks is not the individual, but language."

To speak, to bear witness, is thus to enter a vertiginous movement in which something sinks to the bottom, wholly desubjectified and silenced and something subjectified speaks without truly having anything to say of its own (I tell of things... that I do not actually experience). Testimony takes place where the speechless one makes the speaking one speak and where the one who speaks bears the impossibility of speaking in his own speech. (120)

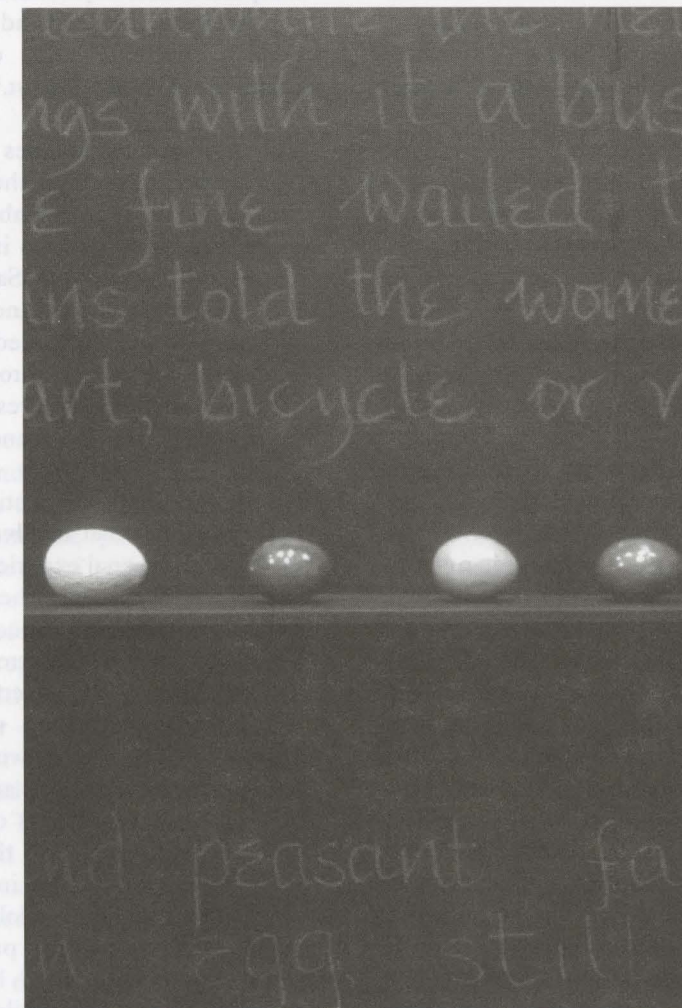
Dear Peter,
I know that you are also reading Agamben's latest book *Remnants*. I have come to think that if anything M-A-S-K-L-O must be the exo-semiotic of, the substance of, expression contained in all speech. Remembering M-A-S-K-L-O as that which founds all testimony, all speech must be the beginning of a practice where we can calculate with the trope while not taking it too seriously. These days when I hear of expressions of beauty or justice it is this remembrance that I search for.

In 1999/2000, Elleni Centime Zeleke was the programming director of Doxa: Documentary Film and Video Festival and in 1998 she was the program coordinator for the Out On Screen Film and Video Festival. Her writings have appeared in a variety of national and international journals. Centime is presently a graduate student in Communications at Concordia University.

Notes:

1. The correspondence reproduced here between Peter C. Van Wyck and myself was excerpted from a series of email letters exchanged between the two of us between March and May of 2001. The correspondence was initiated while I was a graduate student of Professor van Wyck at Concordia University, Communications Studies, Montreal. Thanks to Professor van Wyck for permission to reproduce these excerpts. None of the other letters were sent to the people addressed.
2. See Monika Kin Gagnon, *Other Conundrums: Race, Culture and Canadian Art* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press with Artspeak Gallery and The Kamloops Art Gallery, 2000).
3. My notion of the fetishizing of experience has been heavily influenced by my reading of Ann Cvetkovich's "Marx's Capital and the Mystery of the Commodity Fetish" in her book, *Mixed Feeling: Feminism, Mass Culture and Victorian Sensationalism*. Cvetkovich writes, "[representations of] the body in pain as a visible and tangible sight of exploitation or oppression offer reality effects, often by effacing the signs of their production and appearing to be mimetically real or to possess immediate and transparent meaning." (167) And later, "[f]etishism is the substitution of a material object for a system of relation." (179).
4. Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and The Archive*, 117.
5. Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 42.
6. Quoted in Agamben, 39.

Working between Memory and Imagination: The Visual Art of Sarindar Dhaliwal



Punjabi Sheets #3: Birbansian 1953 (detail), Sarindar Dhaliwal, 1991, mixed-media installation. Courtesy: the artist.

by Meera Sethi

"I have been trying to capture that which rises from the gap between memory and imagination."

(Dhaliwal, Castle)

As we approach the twenty-first century, we find ourselves on a continent marked by extreme cultural intolerance and the active repression of critical and creative cultural voices. In this climate, it is increasingly important for us to amplify and celebrate the voices of those who speak in politicized aesthetic languages that challenge hegemonic histories of various kinds. Sarindar Dhaliwal is one such voice. Her visual artwork pushes us to imagine cultural identity as located in spaces of radical difference and uncertainty. She challenges grand, oversimplified imperial, hegemonic masculinist histories through the remembering of intimate and personal details of her past, suggesting all the while that if a politicized cultural identity is to be rewritten, we must first create a politicized self-identity from the stuff scattered between memory and imagination.

For Dhaliwal, "that which rises from the gap between memory and imagination" takes the form of mixed-media artwork that is rich in colour, texture, imagery and personal history. What also rises from this gap is a feminist reclamation of the self and a diasporic redefinition of identity that refuses simplification and containment. Dhaliwal's visually stunning artworks chart journeys of migration that unmistakably mark the pleasure and pain of hybridity onto the body of remembrance.

Using her experiences of migration from India to England and then to Canada, Dhaliwal probes the fractured identities and destabilized landscape she encounters in wake of her migrations. The result of this personal and cultural exploration is artwork that addresses the contemporary realities of diasporic postcolonial peoples whose lives are marked with the fluidity of identity and "home," and the power relations that structure postcolonial conditions. To address the complexity of her feminist diasporic subjecthood, Dhaliwal does not offer us simple fragments of her past haphazardly pasted together as romanticized vignettes, but instead weaves her memories and experiences through a creative and politicized consciousness in the

present to create artwork that is layered over by time, place, history and imagination.

Renee Baert, curator of "Margins of Memory," a group exhibition in which Dhaliwal's work was shown, states: "In these works, personal history or heritage is employed as an archive, one that provides material through which to engage larger issues of cultural memory."¹ Indeed, this can be said of much of Dhaliwal's work. She skillfully combines personal and cultural history, the near and far of the self, to produce artwork that serves both as an archive and an argument for complex rearticulations of the self in the present. Further, Dhaliwal's insistence on visualizing and narrativizing migratory histories and actual and metaphoric border crossings destabilizes the ideologies of apparent impermeable nation-state boundaries and their gendered and racialized codes. By inserting visual cues in her artworks that point to her own "transnationality," Dhaliwal approaches the question of national belonging through the interpretive lens of diasporic sensibility. What also rises, therefore, from "the gap between memory and imagination" is artwork that crosses borders and emerges as transnational, multicultural and feminist.²

The most striking qualities of Dhaliwal's aesthetic are the highly textured surfaces, the bold and striking colours, the use of repetition and her labourious working method, all of which in varying degrees inform her artworks. "It is not surprising," writer Kerri Sakamoto says, "... to discover the stunning colours and textures and shimmering surfaces—all in heightened detail, seen as if in intense sunlight—that recur throughout Dhaliwal's work...." Dhaliwal's artwork captures the eye from afar and invites the viewer to step closer and take a deeper look.

Clearly for Dhaliwal, creating artwork is an intimate act. It is an activity that involves the collecting and working through of personal experiences, memories and histories. In her works on paper the inclusion of creative writing and image fragments of people, doors, windows, animals, fruits, flowers and maps creates an intimacy that is rarely paralleled. In a slide lecture given by Dhaliwal, it is interesting to note the strategy she used to attach meaning to her visual artworks. Dhaliwal approached her artwork by narrating an autobiographic journey of her early life. Rather than discussing the creative and aesthetic strategies and the intention of each of her artworks, Dhaliwal chose instead to speak of experiences she had as a child or adolescent that prompted her to make each work with particular images. This slide lecture clearly inscribed her work within a frame of personal history and childhood experiences. It is no surprise then, that the artistic and intellectual richness of Dhaliwal's practice is imbued with a vision and skill that

takes pleasure in what Baert describes as "the active transformation of the fragments of memory itself." Beyond remembrance, Dhaliwal's powers of visual imagination complicate the archival elements in her work by weaving them through with desire and fantasy. Like a dreamer, she plays with the linearity of time and history to construct a narrative that exists in equal parts in the past, present, and future.

Dhaliwal has said: "My work is concerned with mixtures—combinations of diverse materials, figurative drawing within a geometrical structure, works which hover on the borderline between being two and three dimensional." Dhaliwal's use of different media such as painting, textile work, sculpture and storytelling, two-dimensional and three-dimensional forms, and text and image—sometimes combining each of these aesthetic strategies all in one work—suggests an interest in the complex, conflictual and layered quality of personal expression and its manifestation in art. The heterogeneity of Dhaliwal's materials, which include paint, powder pigment, handmade paper, pulp, handspun wool, cloth, straw, aluminum, and video projection also extends, in the case of her mixed-media works on paper, to the use of multiple and varied images that are often arranged within a grid-like structure on the surface.

Images such as those of gardens, vegetation, buildings, doorways, windows, maps and people such as family members and other artists are dispersed throughout her artworks, often repeated from one piece to another. While the energetic assemblage of various images in Dhaliwal's works on paper give the impression of highly decorative surfaces that transform into distinct images only when the viewer steps closer, the images themselves reference her multiple homes and her many journeys of migration. In her conceptual mixed-media installation works she often incorporates handmade objects such as bricks, balls and patties into architectural and geometric arrangements. Together, the imagery in her two-dimensional work and the objects in her three-dimensional work evoke ideas of the transitoriness of "home" and the constructedness of belonging.

Perhaps, it is no coincidence that the heterogeneity of the aesthetic strategies, materials and images used by Dhaliwal reflect a personal history that is just as wide-ranging. While there are individual artworks of

Dhaliwal's that take on specific issues such as appropriation³ and gendered whiteness,⁴ a large body of Dhaliwal's mixed-media works on paper and mixed-media installations explore her particular postcolonial migratory history and cultural identity. In 1998, Dhaliwal wrote, "My subject matter has always been informed by my ethnic background meshing with the experience of being raised in a geographical and cultural oppositeness." Dhaliwal's diasporic history traces a path from Jullunder, a town in the Northern state of Punjab, India⁵ where she was born, to England where she migrated at the age of three and later went on to complete a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree, and then to Canada where she now lives and works. This double migration Westward and the added strain of the partitioning of her birth province into two separate countries is an experience that marks Dhaliwal as a "postcolonial" subject. Belonging first to a South Asian diaspora in England and then to a South Asian diaspora in Canada, Dhaliwal's migratory history charts one border crossing after another.

For Dhaliwal, the formation of a politicized art practice is part of a reclamation of her history and the subsequent reconstruction of a politicized cultural identity

"The re-negotiating of identities is fundamental to migration as it is fundamental to Black women's writing in cross-cultural contexts," writes literary theorist Carole Boyce Davies. While Dhaliwal's creative outlet is not so much writing as it is

visual art, Davies' argument can help us understand the relationship between Dhaliwal's experience of migration, her practice as a visual artist, and the renegotiating of identity in her artwork. The unavoidable experience of dislocation that results from the crossing of borders and the then-necessary project of continually renegotiating identity is a project that Dhaliwal has wholeheartedly embraced. As Dhaliwal's visual artwork suggests, memory and imagination also play a crucial role in identity formation. It is at the intersection of cultural and personal identity that the artwork of Dhaliwal is at its most illuminating and intimate. The visual effects and the issues addressed in her work convey a certain "inbetweenness" that holds a strong resemblance to her own identity and that of other postcolonial diasporic subjects.

Without reducing Dhaliwal's artwork to its purely pedagogic possibilities, it is important to note that her artwork contributes to the deconstruction of "received meanings." Working in a socio-political space that produces "Third World" immigrants and peoples of colour as "ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc." Dhaliwal's



Triple Self Portrait with Pomegranates & Persimmon, Sarindar Dhaliwal, 1988, mixed-media on paper, 60x150 cm. Courtesy: the artist.

uncompromising inclusion in her artwork of signs of her personal and cultural history is an act that in and of itself resists the marginalization of her cultural identity by reclaiming a space for the imagination. According to Jacque Alexander and Chandra Mohanty, remembering and rewriting history, in this case revisualizing history, are crucial components of a politicized feminist self-identity:

Feminist analysis has always recognized the centrality of rewriting and remembering history. This is a process which is significant not merely as a corrective to the gaps, erasures, and misunderstandings of hegemonic masculinist history, but because the very practice of remembering and rewriting leads to the formation of politicized consciousness and self-identity.

For Dhaliwal, the formation of a politicized art practice is part of a reclamation of her history and the subsequent reconstruction of a politicized cultural identity. In order to deconstruct received meanings of her identity as a diasporic Punjabi woman, Dhaliwal has had to take the risk of inserting herself into public discourse, albeit in a critical mode.

Deconstruction of received meanings however, is a process that requires more than simply reinsertion. The particular strategy of reinsertion in the face of cultural erasure that Dhaliwal employs does not simply reproduce the signs of her cultural past and juxtapose them with the signs of an "unmuddled" European culture that constructs a binary of East/West. Instead, Dhaliwal's work

attempts to challenge simplistic readings of identity by presenting layered and unfinished pictures of identities that are diasporic, hybridized and transnational.

For many postcolonial diasporic artists, probing identity has been a tremendous site of creative investigation. Refiguring identities in oppositional fashion has played an important role in the project of cultural decolonization. Dhaliwal, whose work attempts to reclaim cultural identities, provides us with constructions of identity that posit identity as always already contradictory and layered over by memory, imagination, history and desire. What can be extrapolated from Dhaliwal's articulations of identity is the challenge to revisit the dominant formulations of our own subjecthood and re-examine the various forces that shape it (gender, race, class, sexuality, culture ...).

Hyphenated identities such as that of Dhaliwal's, who is Punjabi-Canadian, have been referred to as belonging to a "third time-space" or a "third-space." Reframing identity as "third time-space" places emphasis on the "inbetween-ness" of identity. "Third time-spaces" indicate a cultural location that is produced as a result of the meeting of two or more religious, cultural and ethnic affiliations. Smadar Lavie and Ted Swedenburg explain how the hyphen lends itself to the "third time-space": "Borders and diasporas are phenomena that blow up—both enlarge and explode—the hyphen: Arab-Jew, African-American, Franco-Maghrebi, Black-British. Avoiding the dual axes of migration between the distinct territorial entities, the hyphen becomes the third time-

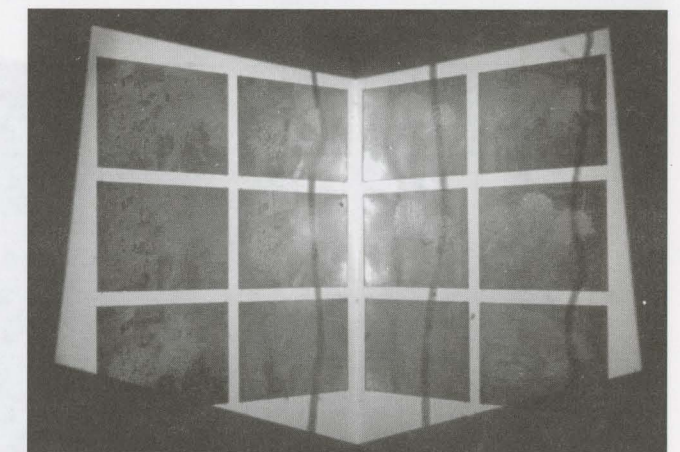
space." Unlike traditional identity claims that suggest "identities ought to be... still points in a turning world," newer formulations of hybrid identities turn this formulation on its head. Since social locations are never constituted through singular affiliations and furthermore are constantly changing, for identities to claim singularity would be to obfuscate social reality. By accentuating the hyphenation of identity, "border backpackers," Dhaliwal's term, would not be asked to choose primary affiliations and could instead take pleasure in belonging to a distinct "third-space" of identity.

Nowhere is Dhaliwal's complex picture of identity more apparent than in her early mixed-media work on paper entitled *Triple Self Portrait with Persimmon and Pomegranates* (1988). In this work, the viewer is confronted with a large (40" x 60") surface radiating with colour and overflowing with lush visual imagery. In it are twenty-eight individual visual and text images neatly contained in rectangular frames and surrounded by decorative and colourful vines punctured with triangles. The visual and textual images are comprised of painting and collage elements which include three self-portraits as well as images of Dhaliwal's mother; an image of Frida Kahlo; various animals, birds, flowers and fruits; feathers; a sign that reads "TAYLOR WALKER'S PRIZE BEERS"; a map of India fractured into seven parts; and two text excerpts from her short stories. Complicating this piece further are the borders of the work on which we see multicoloured dabs of paint, scribbles and scratches. The elements that compose this self-portrait are conventionally thought of as symbols of warmth, nourishment and personal strength, particularly those of her mother, animals, vegetation and interestingly, Frida Kahlo. The images are also ones that signal "home," landscape and Indian and British geography. However, the most vivid symbol of place in this piece, that of a national map, is fractured almost beyond recognition. Forming a central "V," the map of India is surrounded by the various other elements of the "self-portrait," suggesting a geography of identity that literally fractures the Indian nation-state and inserts evocative images of a personal and intimate nature in the interstices.

This self-portrait, which literally "carves up" the map of India and places within it racialized and gendered images taken from Dhaliwal's own history, is a powerful map of identity that uses a transnational feminist analysis to open up questions of singular, stable and one-dimensional identities. Dhaliwal's own image appears at three different places in this self-portrait, suggesting a physical movement between multiple locations, not unlike Dhaliwal's actual history of migration. It is interesting to note that the figure three reappears frequently in this piece in the form of a triangle. Not only is there a

scattering of actual triangle shapes throughout the piece, but there is also a subtle overlap of three triangle formations that intersect in the centre of the work. The first of these triangles is an inverted one, formed between images of Dhaliwal, her mother and Frida Kahlo. The second triangle is formed by the three images of Dhaliwal herself, and the last triangle is formed by a fractured map of India. In the uppermost left corner, we see the line of partition between India and Pakistan. While there are no outward signs of loss and psychic violence in *Triple Self Portrait with Persimmon and Pomegranates*, there are also no images of togetherness and predefined community.

In all but one image, we see isolated figures, be they of people such as Dhaliwal, her mother and Frida Kahlo or of animals and birds. The one image that stands in contrast is that of two elephants, a mother and baby elephant. However, even in this image, we see that the baby elephant stands alone as the mother's body has been divided by the frame. Like the two elephants, we realize that Dhaliwal is separated from her mother, both by the division of frames and by the cultural distance signified by the difference in her and her mother's dress. The pain of familial separation suggested in this piece foreshadows Dhaliwal's 1995 mixed-media installation entitled *Punjabi Sheets #5: Bibi's Last Words, Version #2*, a piece created in



chrysanthemum/spider mum, Sarindar Dhaliwal, 2000, zinc plates with video projection, 215x390 cm. Courtesy: the artist.

memory of her mother's lonely death. Together, these images stand as metaphors for a divided emotional, physical and psychic landscape. The images of lush tropical vegetation that puncture the divided land and figures can be read as representative of a longing for coherence and abundance unavailable to those who have experienced dislocation by way of political, economic, and social forces. Dhaliwal's *Triple Self Portrait with Persimmon and Pomegranates* forms a rich tapestry of interwoven desires and losses that engages various threads of postcolonial experience. In doing so, Dhaliwal also draws

attention to the constructedness of national identities and the complexities of personal memory. Further, the painter's marks on the edges of the painted surface signal the role of agency or "creating" in constructing politicized identities, as well as, the perpetual incompleteness of identity constructions themselves.

In the "Recollection Project," a recent group exhibition held at the Gendai Gallery⁶ in Toronto, Dhaliwal exhibited a mixed-media installation entitled *chrysanthemums/spider mums* (2000). Each artist who participated in the "Recollection Project" was asked to select an item from the collection of the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre in which the gallery is housed and create an artwork in response to it. The items in the collection mostly consisted of archival remnants and crafts objects that included photographs, film canisters and objects such as kimonos, dolls and ceramics. Dhaliwal selected a photograph from 1955 of a man unknown to her standing behind tall, potted chrysanthemums. Although this photograph does not actually appear in the work, it was the inspiration for Dhaliwal to delve into her past and "recollect" her memories. The installation that resulted is composed of two parts: the first is a video projection and the second is a series of etched zinc plates mounted on a corner wall.

The zinc plates have been etched with images taken by Dhaliwal during her visit to a flower show in New Delhi, India. The images of Dhaliwal's visit depict potted plants as well. Onto the hard and metallic surface of the zinc plates is projected video footage of transferred film stock hand painted in vivid shades of greens and oranges forming abstract shapes. The fluid and ephemeral effect of the video projection sharply contrasts with the crisp sharpness of the zinc plates, together creating a tension of both material and imagery.

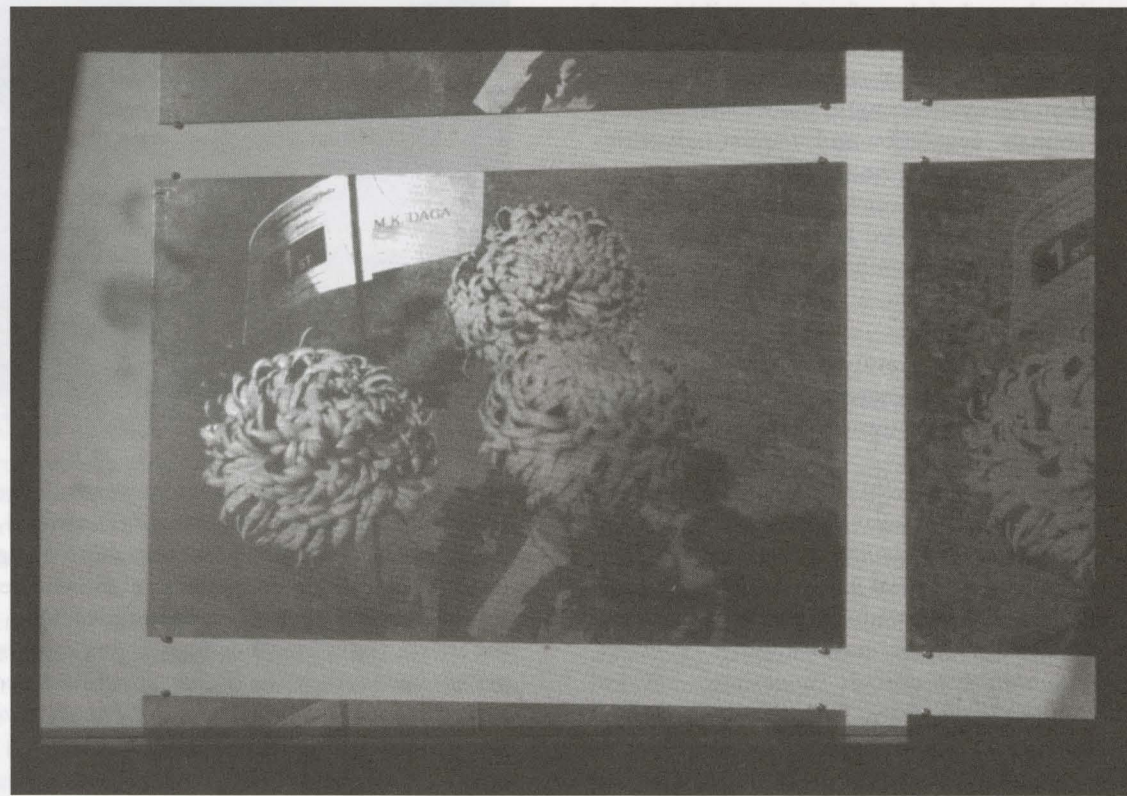
In *chrysanthemums/spider mums* the dynamic layering of changing video projections combined with the reflective and slightly shifting surface of the zinc plates (because of the viewer's movement) evokes the palimpsest of memory accumulated over time. The effect is reminiscent of a collision between internal processes of remembering and forgetting, and the external indicators of a "factual" and recorded past. In an earlier artist statement, Dhaliwal makes an interesting observation regarding memory. She says, "How and what I see has everything to do with what I already know." The video projection suggests exactly this idea. The changing video projection along with the shifting reflection of the etching gives the impression that the images on the plates are always shifting, never the same. Each viewer

therefore, depending on the time of their visit and the location of their bodies will leave with a different "impression" of the photographs etched onto the plates; no two visions will be exactly the same. In this way, *chrysanthemums/spider mums* recalls the fluid nature of identity and the sliding nature of memory, particularly as experienced by Dhaliwal herself. The two photographs—one of the Japanese-Canadian man in front of his flower patch in Canada and the other of the artist herself, a South Asian-Canadian woman wandering in a flower show in New Delhi—also convey a story of diaspora. This partial story in *chrysanthemums/spider mums* expresses both the joy and pain of lives marked by hyphenated identities and the chaos of new homes. Dhaliwal writes in the exhibition brochure: "The photograph's pinked edges pegged it as a memento from the '50s. Fall in urban/suburban Canada [...] Forty years later I take refuge from an Indian city's smog and dust in an oasis of potted plants [...] Linking me to him and twining our two threads of a twentieth-century diaspora to a third host culture." By recovering the photographed

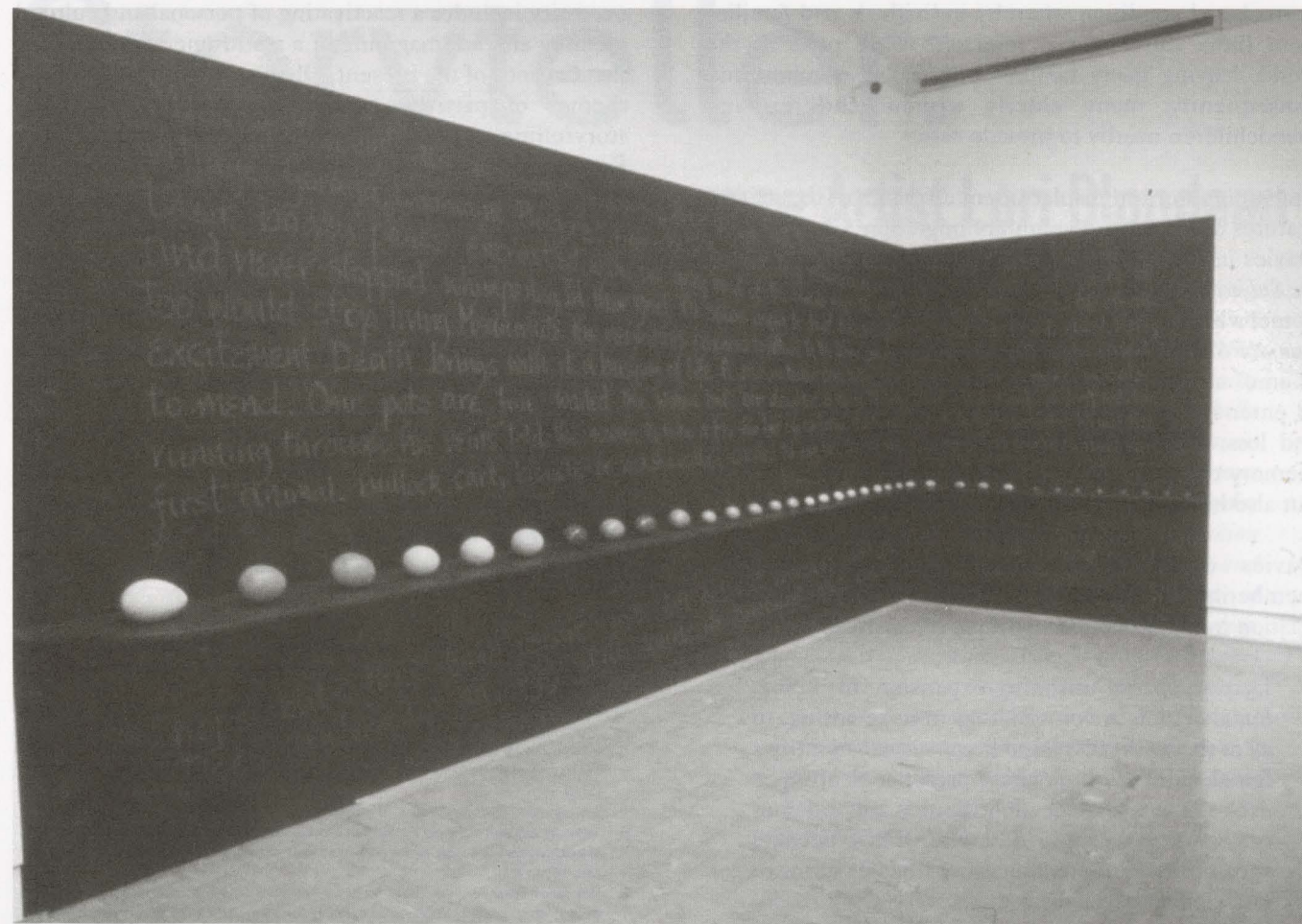
memory fragment of a previously unidentified Japanese-Canadian man and using it as a starting point for her own recollections, Dhaliwal has taken part in a cross-cultural sharing that not only celebrates the hybridity of their identities, but also ensures against erasure in the Canadian national imaginary.

Dhaliwal performs another recovery of memory in the mixed media installation entitled *Punjabi Sheets #5: Bibi's Last Words, Version #2* (1995). In it, Dhaliwal recovers her mother's last words before her death and uses them to bold effect:

For three years she was dying. Her sorrow was a future filled by the absence of her family, and the loss of her golden grandchildren. As she slipped into a nether world of memories and veils of morphia she was young again. Fourteen years old. She was running through flat fields of mustard, towards the river, calling to her sister. We heard her whisper "Come, it's time to dye the skeins of wool." Saffron, indigo and cochineal.



chrysanthemum/spider mum (detail), Sarindar Dhaliwal.



Punjabi Sheets #3: Birbansian 1953, Sarindar Dhaliwal.

This text borders a panel on which Dhaliwal has painted colourful camellias, pansies, and roses. The panel is accompanied by another painting of flowers and a vibrantly coloured painting of a human heart. All of these images have been mounted on two dark grey wall panels that resemble arched doorways. Directly in front of the wall mount is another similar black panel lying on the floor with nine balls of various coloured yarn resting on the top. The yarn has been handspun by Dhaliwal. The combined visual effect of this mixed-media installation is that of intense and dramatic colour, text and visual imagery, a common characteristic of Dhaliwal's artwork. There is however, also the added suggestion of a deep sadness and pathos that accompanies the work.

The intensely emotive quality of *Punjabi Sheets #5* results not only from the image of a human heart and the observation that this piece functions as a memorial for Dhaliwal's mother, but also from the realization that Dhaliwal's mother, whose life was marked "by the absence of her family, and the loss of her golden grandchildren" was alone in the last days of her life. Dhaliwal's installation references a particular capitalist postcolonial condition whereby individuals and families from India and Pakistan migrated to all parts of the world, leaving many families physically separated and consequently, many elderly without children and grandchildren nearby to provide care.

Fragmentation and displacement are some of the painful features of forced and voluntary migration. Carole Boyce Davies in *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* suggests that "Migration creates the desire for home, which in turn produces the rewriting of home." In *Punjabi Sheets #5*, Dhaliwal undertakes the rewriting of "home" as symbolized by her mother and allows viewers to enter into a personal story of familial fragmentation and loss. This reverential piece uses imagination and memory to signal not only Dhaliwal's own sense of loss, but also her mother's loss while still living.

Davies writes of the relationship between "re-membering" female elders and the rewriting of home in relation to black women's writing. She states:

In the spatial meaning-expansion of home, female elders are crucial links in its rewriting. In all of the works discussed here, one can identify a female ancestor [...] whose presence or absence evokes a very specific identification and redefinition of the meaning of home. They become specifically gendered ancestral links in terms of knowledge of healing arts, survival skills for Caribbean women, nurturing, re-membering.

The memory work taking place in *Punjabi Sheets #5* is a creative act that suggests Dhaliwal's "specifically gendered and ancestral" attachment to the place of her birth and to the cultural identity she holds as a result. Dhaliwal's recollection of her mother's last words are part of a rewriting and remembering of "home," but they are also an articulation of her own identity. Davies adds, "the rewriting of home becomes a critical link in the articulation of identity." Thus, as Dhaliwal strives to understand and commemorate the sense of "home" embodied in her mother's words and memories, she is also reconstructing an identity for herself as a diasporic woman living in Canada, away from her ancestral home and separated from her mother. In this evocative comment on loss and identity, Dhaliwal poignantly articulated the lifelong relationship between place (as signified by the flowers), pain and longing (as signified by the heart), remembrance and reconstruction (as signified by the balls of yarn), and family (as signified by the textual reminder of her mother). For Dhaliwal, the loss of her mother signaled yet another remaking of "home."

Finally, Dhaliwal offers us a vision of identity that of necessity includes a reactivating of personal and cultural memory and an imagining of a world unencumbered by the divisions of the present. Dhaliwal's exploration of the themes of partition, colonialism, history, diaspora, storytelling, "home," autobiography, appropriation, Eurocentrism and cultural difference vividly capture the tangled and contradictory experiences of connection and displacement. Her artwork critically engages established meanings and discourses and turns them anew, thereby confronting and challenging commonplace understandings of identity and belonging. Dhaliwal's work is not merely celebratory of history and ethnicity; rather it complicates the project of memory and identity so that we might all be at home in the world.

Meera Sethi is a writer, visual artist and cultural critic living in Toronto. She recently graduated from the interdisciplinary studies program at York University.

Notes

1. Dhaliwal's installation piece *Punjabi Sheets #2: Family Tree* (1989) was shown as part of the group exhibition "Margins of Memory" guest-curated by Renee Baert at the Art Gallery of Windsor, November 20, 1993 – January 9, 1994.
2. See *Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age* edited by Ella Shohat and *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* edited by Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan for an elaboration of these interlinked concepts.
3. See her mixed-media installation "Teepees & Tigers: from One Indian to Another, Version #3" (1998).
4. See her mixed-media installation "Hey Hey Paula" (1998).
5. Jullunder was part of the old Punjab that was subsequently partitioned by the British in 1947 to form Pakistan. Jullunder remained in India while other parts of Punjab formed the nation-state of Pakistan.
6. The Gendai Gallery is a new public art space devoted to exhibiting contemporary art and design with a curatorial emphasis on works by Canadian and international artists of Asian heritage. It is a not-for-profit organization.

High Tech Storyteller:

A Conversation with Performance Artist Lori Blondeau

by Lynne Bell & Janice Williamson

Lori Blondeau is co-founder of Tribe: A Centre for Evolving Aboriginal Media and Performing Arts in Saskatoon. Her witty decolonizing performance art not only "talks back" to historical colonial representations of indigenous peoples but it also addresses the continuing imperialism of present-day commodity culture (films, fashion magazines, mainstream TV shows and children's books). The parodic parade of performance personas invented by Blondeau (in collaboration with Bradlee LaRocque) refer at once to the injuries of colonialism and to the ironic pleasures of displacement and resistance. The following is an excerpt from a conversation between Lori Blondeau, Lynne Bell and Janice Williamson, part of "West of Where: Contemporary Prairie Women's Culture," a study funded by a SSHRC Women and Change grant.



CosmoSquaw (aka Betty Daybird), Lori Blondeau in collaboration with Bradlee LaRocque, 1996. Photo: Bradlee LaRocque.

CosmoSquaw

LYNNE: Can you talk about your performance persona *CosmoSquaw* who uses the parodic mode to re-function the cultural stereotype of the "squaw"? I know she made her debut as a magazine cover girl in a light-box image which you and Bradlee LaRocque created for a show entitled *Native Love* (1996). Since then, she has appeared in live performances, videos, television interviews and on the internet. Now, where did this audacious persona, with her attitude and her flamboyant clothes, come from?

LORI: Well, when we lived in Montreal, Bradley and I decided to do a piece for the *Native Love* show curated by the aboriginal collective *Nation to Nation*. So we started thinking about "love."

JANICE: You say it with an incredibly ironic face!

LORI: Yes. [laughter!] We were thinking about where Native women look for love. In Montreal, I worked in a Native women's shelter where all the counselors were single women. One of the women used to bring in *Cosmopolitan* magazine every week and all the counselors and clients got involved with the quizzes. I just thought: How can you read this? The magazine targets white middle-class women. How do you think you're going to find a man using the tips it gives? But at

the same time, I was tempted to read it because I was a single woman looking for a man. So I started thinking about inventing a magazine like *Cosmopolitan* for Native women. I talked to Brad about what it would be called and what kind of articles it would have. Coming up with the name *CosmoSquaw* was a hard thing to do because I knew people would feel bad about the word "squaw." It was *such* a negative term for me when I was growing up. It was my grandmother who first taught me to reclaim the word. When I was sixteen, I remember these boys calling me, "a fucking ugly squaw." It wasn't the first time I'd been called this but I went home crying. My grandmother was visiting and she was annoyed I'd let this incident upset me. She said, "Do you know what squaw means?" and I said, "No." And she goes, "Well, it means woman." After that whenever people called me squaw, I would say, "Yes, I am a squaw and proud to be a squaw." So, it's about taking away the negative connotations and replacing them with something positive. We added the prefix *Cosmo* because I believe all women and especially Native women are CosmoSquaws or women of the universe. After we'd decided on the name of the magazine then the titles for the mock feature articles came: "Spoon Feed Your Man" plays on the fact that in Saskatchewan a lot of Indian women refer to their vaginas as spoons, and "Killer Bingo Face" because you'd like to have a killer

face when you go to bingo. If there really was a magazine called *CosmoSquaw* there would be something in it about gambling and how it's destroying a lot of families in our communities.

JANICE: Is the gambling destroying a lot of families?

LORI: Oh yes, gambling, alcohol and drugs. But I think gambling is on the rise. A lot of children are growing up with no parents because they are at bingo all the time. I know one person who works as a Native liaison worker with the inner-city schools and she was telling me about this nine-year-old who was prostituting herself because her mother was never home and she needed new runners. It's heart-wrenching that a lot of our leaders don't see this. I would love to ask: When was the last time you drove down 21st Street in Saskatoon and saw the nine- and thirteen-year olds selling their bodies? It's so hard to see. This is something our people have to come together on and deal with because this is the next generation. A lot of my work has to do with issues like that.

LYNNE: I notice that other indigenous artists have posed as *CosmoSquaws* for the light box landscape you use in your live performances.

LORI: Yes, the women from the Native arts community have responded very positively. Dana Claxton wants to do a *CosmoSquaw* and Zachary Longboy has done one...

JANICE: ...Zachary Longboy is a man in drag?

LORI: Yes.

JANICE: So *CosmoSquaw* is also playing with fixed notions of gender and sexuality?

LORI: With gender, sexuality *and* our identity as Native people, yes. Bradley and I started talking about this after we'd done the first *CosmoSquaw* light box. I wanted to continue with the work because of the performative aspect of the shoot. *CosmoSquaw* is a character whose whole purpose in life is to find a man and get married and I keep coming up with all these things she does. The performance means something different for me and Bradley. But the one connection we do have is our identity as Native people. And we've started questioning how much the media and popular culture have defined our identity as Native people.

JANICE: We heard the writer and lawyer Mary Ellen Turpel talk about the representation of aboriginal women at a conference, and she said she didn't like the notion of decolonization because she didn't think it was possible to go back to some "original" culture which maybe never

existed. I see your work as a response to that, saying: This is the culture we live in—it's not some pure culture that's uncontaminated by American magazines. I see you engaging with popular culture to reclaim a space for yourself in this present, everyday moment.

LORI: Yes. I have a hard time with the word "tradition." I believe every culture has traditions but they evolve. Although, as I've said, my ancestors have always done performance, I do it differently because this is the time I live in. I can't go back. I'm carrying on the tradition of performance but I don't have to wear feathers or beads to be authentic. That would be ludicrous! We had a show by contemporary Native artists [*Traversing Tribes Terrain*, 1998] and the *Star Phoenix* gave it a wonderful review but in the concluding paragraph the reviewer said she would like to see the artists use the mediums their ancestors used—hides, bones and sinew. This whole romanticizing about us just kills me!

LYNNE: The unspoken assumption being that indigenous art is not contemporary.

LORI: Exactly! It seems to be a way to keep us in our place...

JANICE: ...as a sort of Heritage Day entertainment.

LORI: Exactly! One of our artists [Edward Poitras] had to be invited to the Venice Biennale for us to be recognized as contemporary artists. Everybody needs their culture but you also need to create something here in the present. I think it's important to learn how to clean and tan hides, make drums, and learn to sing but you have to bring this knowledge up into the present. Even though the majority of society would probably love to see me whacking on drums, singing and burning my sage in performances, that part of me feels sacred—it's private. I've seen a lot of people abuse this stuff and I think it really devalues our culture and heritage.

LYNNE: What about the critical response to *CosmoSquaw*?

LORI: Well, it's not all been positive. A Native critic wrote an article in a local paper with the title "Let's Get Rid Of The 'S' Word." She called me and Bradley "Bad Indians" and "Bad Artists" for using the "S" word. A part of me knew it was bound to happen, but the thing that really bothered me was that the criticism came from my own community. And when she said we should get rid of the "S" word, I was just irate because that's like saying: Let's get rid of one of our aboriginal languages. Which is so crazy because that's exactly what society wants us to do. But we did set out to cause dialogue around the word "squaw." So, actually, I would like to thank her.

LYNNE: The critical response to *CosmoSquaw* reminds me of the controversy over Srinivas Krishna's film *Masala* [1991]. Many critics did not appreciate the irony of his stereotypical portrayals. It seems that whenever artists or filmmakers attempt to rework cultural stereotypes they often get embroiled in a debate about the need for "positive images" for marginalized communities. And the strategy of challenging the stereotypical assumptions an audience may bring to a work gets missed.

LORI: Right! And what is a positive image? When I see a National Chief on the news wearing a Sioux War Bonnet that's not a positive image for me. That's abuse. I don't think we need to put our culture on display to get national attention. I don't think the images we have out there for aboriginal people are positive. I think the positive images get put in the back pages of the newspapers. You don't see big headlines, for instance, about my friend who graduated from the National Theatre School of Canada. She is the first aboriginal woman to graduate from that school since its inception. I think our community has to start foregrounding this type of news.

Ghosts That Are Affecting Me

JANICE: I want to ask something about suffering. I've done a bit of work on child sexual abuse narratives and how women and men write about their suffering both in fictional terms and in documentary memoirs. But I was thinking about how *CosmoSquaw* seems to take suffering and transforms it into something humorous while at the same time acknowledging the pain that's there. It elicits a kind of knowing laughter from the audience at the best of times. I'm wondering how you see suffering as playing a role in your own productions?

LORI: Oh, it plays a huge role. I was a victim of sexual abuse when I was a child. It happened to me with two different people, neither of them members of my immediate family. I think it's because of those experiences that I dress up provocatively in a lot of my performance work. It's not something I would do in my everyday life. It's almost like living out this fantasy. Those experiences I had to go through as a child, and the process of dealing with them in my twenties after I had my own children, have influenced a lot of my work. It's very hard even looking at the photographs of *CosmoSquaw*. When we got them back, I just thought: I can't do this. I can't put myself on display like that. And then I thought: Well, you're a performer, that's what you do. And the people who know you, they know it's not you. And it isn't me. I think for every artist, any life experience makes your art stronger. It's when you don't recognize these experiences that your art can be weak. Being an artist makes me confront and try to resolve

things—I don't like putting things on the shelf. This comes from being a battered woman myself and from counseling battered women for five years. My art is a way of dealing with a lot of the ghosts that are affecting me. In the show we did for the Fringe Festival, *Snakes in the Grass* [1996], we all wore skimpy dresses and the man was in drag. All the men I perform with end up doing drag...

JANICE: ...I think they're safer that way! [laughter]

LORI: Yeah! In the performance *Snakes in the Grass* I wore this really skimpy dress and did things I wouldn't normally do. It's really great because in performance I can live out this fantasy or alter-ego of mine that wants to show: Hey, I'm not ashamed of my body, I don't care if I have a pot belly! These characters I develop, of course, are me in one way but in a bigger way they aren't. It's just something there that has to come out.

Lonely Surfer Squaw

LYNNE: Talking of skimpy outfits, can you tell us about the *Lonely Surfer Squaw* persona who first surfaced on the Internet in a virtual exhibition entitled *Virtual Postcards from the Feminist Utopian* [1996].

LORI: Yes, Lori Weidenhammer curated this project for MAWA [Mentoring Artists for Women's Art]. There were six artists and we all had to do postcards. Mine was called *Lonely Surfer Squaw* and I made it for the Native woman critic who was so mad at my *CosmoSquaw*. It's a photograph of me as a classic 1950s or 1960s surfin' babe—only I'm an Indian woman standing on the prairies in the middle of winter! I made a fun fur bikini bathing suit and hired someone to carve me this big phallic surf board out of pink insulation. The performance artist Vern Checkosis did my makeup and hair and we did a photo shoot by the South Saskatchewan River in deep snow...

JANICE: ...it sounds fantastic!

LORI: It was lots of fun to do! There are six postcards called *6 tips for prairie surfin'*. Because it was my first Internet project, I decided to play with the image in Photoshop and took out the background details—the train bridge, houses and all the bush. But when I look at the *Surfer Squaw* images now, I see new work because if I put the train tracks back in, the image is about displacement—about trying to fit in and not fitting in.

LYNNE: Do you think the *Lonely Surfer Squaw* will develop into a performance?

LORI: Well, it's like doing a performance when I go on these shoots. I call this work "performative

photography." I just love the medium of photography and the idea of a moment being captured forever. I've been fooling around with different images of the *Lonely Surfer Squaw* to make a photographic triptych...

LYNNE: ...will there be text with the images?

LORI: No, I think the images speak for themselves. Using text would take away from this woman standing in the cold. Actually, it was quite warm because my board was made out of pink insulation Styrofoam.

LYNNE: It is a hilarious piece. Clearly, humor is an important strategy in your work.

LORI: Right! It's so easy to get caught up in a negative frenzy but in performance you have to watch you don't drag your audience down. I come from a culture where humor is important. When you go to wakes on the reserve, people sit with the dead body of someone they love for maybe three days, and the majority of them will be sitting there laughing because it's the humor that's getting them through. You have to laugh in order to survive what some of our people have survived. My grandmother is eighty-seven and she has the greatest sense of humor. My grandfather died twelve years ago and every time I phone her I ask, "So, have you found a man yet?" We joke about sex. You know it amazes me how chauvinist Native women can be when they talk about sex. But that's how *CosmoSquaw* came about—sitting around talking about "love"!

LYNNE: The *Lonely Surfer Squaw* is such a spoof on the babes in TV programs like *Baywatch*...

LORI: Yes. What I've been doing with *CosmoSquaw* and *Lonely Surfer Squaw* is performing myself into women's images in popular culture to see what I get out of it. We don't have magazines that target us as Native women but I am affected by popular culture's images of women: I think I should be really thin with the latest hairstyles. Just because I'm Native it doesn't mean I'm not affected. It's about telling these popular images from my point of view as a Native woman.

Minding the Motherload

LYNNE: In *Minding the Motherload* [1997] you bear witness to the wounding legacies of the residential school experience for your own family. I saw this work when you first performed it in Emily's, a small cafe in Saskatoon filled with diners. The piece was part of a festival organized by "Women in the Arts" [University of Saskatchewan] which focused on artists and mothering. Listening to you activate the traumatic legacy of the residential school in telling the stories of three



Lonely Surfer Squaw, Lori Blondeau, 1997. Photo: Bradlee LaRocque.

generations of women in your family, I was profoundly moved by the performance in which you historicize and racialize the discourse of mothering.

LORI: I was honored to be asked to participate in this project. I had a month to put it together. My process is to start by jotting down things. I don't script anything until about a week before the actual performance. I'm a mother with four children so I started by talking to my mother and grandmother about affection. They are both victims of the residential school system. I am the first generation not to go to residential school but I am still affected by it and I believe my children are also affected by it. My mum says that when she went to residential school they would just clean, clean, clean—there was very little academic work—and then they'd go out and sleep on the playground. She said she felt just like a cow in a herd! When I started talking to her about affection I asked her why she enjoyed picking head lice. I used to think it was only Native people who got lice. I remember the first time I got lice, my mother and grandmother picked them out of my hair for hours. They really enjoyed doing it, cracking the lice, and I just thought: Ugh! So I asked them why they liked doing that. My mum said she enjoyed it because of the residential school experience. She grew up with very little affection from her mother because she was taken away at such a young age. When her parents came and visited her at the residential school they weren't allowed to go beyond the fence, they would have to visit across a chain-link fence.

JANICE: Oh my God!

LORI: Yes, there was no real affection allowed! So when my mom told me that picking lice was her way of showing us affection, I thought: Wow, isn't this neat. Who would think that lice could bring a mother and child together? My grandmother's story is very similar to my mum's, she said picking head lice was a way of showing affection because they weren't used to touching one another. So for the performance, my dad gave me a ribbon shirt and I hot-glue-gunned all these tiny baby dolls onto it: I bought them in a craft store and painted them all brown because I couldn't find any little brown babies!

LYNNE: During the performance you combed the long hair of a woman seated in front of you. And as you searched her head for lice you told stories about the relationships between the women in your family and of the pain inflicted by the colonial stereotypes of indigenous people which are still circulating today.

LORI: Yes, I talked about my experiences of growing up with such stereotypes as "Only Indians get head lice" and "All Indians are dumb." My grandmother has a very

strong Cree accent and I always thought she was dumb, along with everybody on our reserve, because she talked with a strong accent. I didn't learn until 1988 that Cree was her first language! Growing up with all those negative stereotypes has affected my life profoundly. But one of the things I hope to accomplish with my art is to create a whole new set of images which show us as contemporary people, living in contemporary society, making contemporary Indian art.

We Want to be Like Barbie: That Bitch has Everything

LYNNE: Another cultural stereotype you've tackled is that of the Indian princess in *We Want to be Like Barbie: That Bitch has Everything* (1995). You wrote the script for this performance after seeing Walt Disney's animated film *Pocahontas*.

LORI: Yes. It was a two-person performance cabaret in the gay club in Regina. The movie *Pocahontas* had just come out and we wanted to deconstruct how Disney had turned this legendary Indian woman into a Barbie doll. Just think of the way they had her dressed—in a little mini skirt with a cut-off shirt! I mean how many women back then would wear an outfit like that? They had to work hard, you know! In the performance, I played Pocahontas and Vern Chekosis played Ken, Barbie's pal.



Sisters Performance, Lori Blondeau, 2000. Photo: Shelley Niro

WANTED



Belle Savage Wanted, Lori Blondeau, 1999. Photo: Shelley Niro

I saw a connection between Pocahontas and the Ken doll because they were both living in Barbie's shadow. The storyline tells how Pocahontas, even though she is made to be like Barbie, still doesn't have all the nice things Barbie has. And Ken comes to visit Pocahontas because he likes to wear her clothes and because he can be so open with her. At the end of the performance, Pocahontas tells Ken to stop living in Barbie's shadow and to come out of the closet as a drag queen. So both Ken and Pocahontas get up the courage to say, "Screw Barbie!" It's sad when you think of what that movie has done with our history. You now have millions of kids around the world who think Pocahontas is just this Barbie doll who frolicked in the forest with the humming birds and raccoons. She's no longer an important figure in history. I did a lot of research for the work in the library and on the Internet, trying to find out about her history from both a Native and a White perspective. The last few years of her life were really sad. She died in England.

LYNNE: The Disney movie, like most conventional histories of her life, represents her story as a romance. But indigenous scholars and performers like yourself are pointing out that she was an important figure of cultural resistance. As a performer, you are clearly concerned with telling history from an indigenous perspective and with telling your own stories.

LORI: Yes! That's something the performance artist James Luna talks about. He calls himself a high-tech storyteller, which hits the nail on the head, because that's what aboriginal artists are. It's really important for me to tell my own stories in my work. A lot of aboriginal artists are telling our ancestor's stories. I think that is scary because we have to start telling our own stories in order to have an accurate history a hundred years from now. If we keep on re-hashing the past history of our people what is going to be written for today's community of aboriginal people? In telling my own stories I am leaving something for my children. My stories are being recorded in slides, video and photographs, and maybe my kids will pass them on. That's why it's really important to tell your own stories.

Tribe

JANICE: One of the things we have been talking about is the role of the public intellectual and how artists do intellectual work in the public sphere. It seems to me that you are a public intellectual theorizing about what it means to be an Aboriginal artist at this particular moment. I see that you are making an educational space.

LORI: Yes, the whole reason behind founding Tribe was to educate people. The workshops we run, such as the one with the performance artist James Luna, are about education. But I don't want to get stuck with theory or stuck on theory! I love reading but a lot of western theory just doesn't grab me and maybe it's because it's not coming from my own culture. I come from a culture where writing isn't that important, it was more important for ideas to be passed down in the spoken word.

LYNNE: Can you tell us how Tribe was first established?

LORI: Well, I lived in Montreal for eight years. I met my husband Bradlee LaRocque there. And when we came back to Saskatchewan we ran into the problem of not having a venue to show our work. It was very frustrating. So we developed a performance group and began to do street performances. We'd go down to 20th Street where there are a lot of Native people we knew and we'd do a performance on the street. We were also invited out to a few reserves. This was in the spring of 1995. We were called the Nechi Guerilla Street Theater Group. Everyone thought it meant Nietzsche, the philosopher, but Nechi is Cree for "Indian" or "people." We also rented a little studio and we brought in Lori Weidenhammer to do a performance workshop with us. Then we did an underground performance at the Fringe festival. We weren't officially involved with the festival but we did a performance at AKA Gallery on the night of its opening. We were later told by the organizers of the Fringe that this was a really bad thing to do!

JANICE: Because you were subverting the center of the margins!

LORI: Yes, that gave us an insight into how this “arts” thing worked! As Aboriginal people the only way to be included was on other people’s terms which was unfair and frustrating. So after the performance group broke up, we started Tribe with April Brass and Denny Norman because we weren’t going to let the funding organizations dictate to us when and how we could create art.

JANICE: Did you have mentors in terms of developing this organization?

LORI: No! We just researched it and realized it was very easy. We initially secured funding from the provincial cultural organization Circle Vision Arts Incorporated. They wanted to support us because the amount of arts programming going to Aboriginal artists was minimal — maybe one show a year. This was really frustrating as we live in a province where we make up third of the population and we have a lot of talented artists! So we decided to use Circle Vision’s money to set up partnerships.

LYNNE: Can you talk about this concept of partnerships and its potential within the arts community?

LORI: Yes, I invite non-Aboriginal artist-run-centers to do Aboriginal arts programming. When I was first hired as project coordinator for Tribe, I set up a partnership with AKA Gallery. The partnership evolved to the point where they gave us space every year for our programming and we took care of the artists’ fees. This type of partnership is important because it allows us to bring in exciting Aboriginal artists we wouldn’t otherwise be able to afford. It gives us control over our programming and it builds trust between two communities that have been divided in this province since the beginning of the colonial era. We also partner with the University of Saskatchewan and this allows students to see contemporary Aboriginal art from our perspective. I think we are setting a really good precedent here in Saskatoon and I hope that it ripples all across North America.

LYNNE: Can you talk about Tribe’s programming. Over the last few years, Tribe’s projects have included installations, exhibitions, performances, film and video festivals, forums, workshops, conferences and artists’ residencies.

LORI: Well, whenever we have an artist in town they do a residency because they spend a week in the community while they are installing their work. In terms of our programming, our new philosophy is: to take up space! At one point, we talked about wanting to have our own independent gallery but now we’ve come to think that instead we are going to take up space. We are going

to take up space because we have been displaced as First Nations people in this province. So we are going to take that space back.

LYNNE: Tribe’s recent interdisciplinary arts festival, High Tech Storytellers (2000), was a wonderful example of this concept of taking up space. It was a week of events—performances, exhibitions, installations, panels, and lots of informal chat—that took place in five different institutional venues in the city. The festival had a high visibility because of the wonderful posters you created for the event.

LORI: Yes, High Tech Storytellers was a dream I had after I brought in the performance artist James Luna in 1997. After we did the interview for MIX magazine, he told me a story about being at an Indian Studies Conference (MIX 1997/98). He was sitting at a table with an old lady who was about to receive an award for being a storyteller and she asked him what he did and he told her: I’m a high tech storyteller—I use all these props. And after he did his presentation, he came back to the table and she goes: Oh, you *are* a high tech storyteller! [laughter] After Luna’s visit, I knew I was going to do an Aboriginal performance festival entitled *High Tech Storytellers* for the year 2000. Anyway, that’s where the concept of “taking up space” started evolving. The events took place in four venues in the city and when all the artists arrived—Edward Poitras, James Luna, Rebecca Belmore, and Lori Weidenhammer—I was running around between all of the galleries. It just hit me: Wow, we are in four galleries! Plus we had another exhibition at the Saskatchewan Crafts Council. We had five exhibitions during that whole time. It was like we had taken over the whole city. It was very exciting to see that!

Lori Blondeau is a performance artist based in Saskatoon. A co-founder and current director of the aboriginal arts organization Tribe, she curated the interdisciplinary indigenous arts festival High Tech Storytellers (May 2000). Lori’s work as a performance artist has been exhibited nationally and internationally.

Lynne Bell is Professor of visual culture and head of the department of art and art history at the University of Saskatchewan. She has written on topics of contemporary Canadian art in essays and exhibition catalogues as well as numerous interviews with contemporary artists in various journals. Her curatorial projects include the exhibition and publication Urban Fictions (Presentation House Gallery, Vancouver, 1997).

Janice Williamson is a writer, editor, critic and professor of English at the University of Alberta. With Ellen Quigley and Mari Sasano, she recently co-edited two volumes of Open Letter, including a Queer Issue on contemporary Alberta writing. Her innovative text/memoir Crybaby! (NeWest Press, 1998) concerns infertility, suicide, incest and family photography.

Tashme²: Early Works of Kazuo Nakamura

Gendai Gallery, Toronto, April 21–June 30, 2001

Review by Richard William Hill

At the opening of *Tashme²* a Japanese-Canadian family has gathered informally around a small gouache by Kazuo Nakamura. It is a work that the artist painted as a teenager during his time in the Tashme internment camp, near Hope, B.C. The painting provides a view down one of the camp’s darkened streets, with rows of barracks converging toward the vanishing point in carefully rendered linear perspective. A pale white light spills out of the windows and into the street. In the distance a mountain rises up, looming darkly over the scene, its peaks highlighted with grey moonlight. The image has a documentary quality that is reflected in its prosaic title, *March 18/44*, but the artist’s restraint and seeming detachment has its own subtle poetry. He doesn’t need rhetorical tricks to reach us. The sincerity and dark silence of the image is enough.

Squeezed in among the opening crowd, I can’t help but listen as a woman begins to discuss the picture with her family, many of whom are clearly too young to have experienced the camps at first hand. She points to a building and tells those gathered around which friend or relative once lived in it. She talks about her experiences, passing along memories that—like the work itself—(almost) conceal the threads of trauma within the mundane patterns of daily camp life. Looking around, I don’t feel as though I am the only one appreciating Nakamura’s work for more than just its descriptive accuracy. The curator of the exhibition, Bryce Kanbara, has been careful to place this work in the context of Nakamura’s career as a whole, but it seems clear from the



Tashme at Dusk, Kazuo Nakamura, 1944, oil on board, 35x53 cm.

audience at the opening that the Tashme works are special. As the only significant legacy of visual art from the Canadian camps, it is not difficult to imagine the importance of this body of work to the Japanese-Canadian community. Of course the work is also relevant to anyone who cares about injustice and wants to understand this event from the perspective of someone who lived it. All the same, this exhibition is taking place at the Japanese-Canadian cultural centre and that community is obviously (and quite properly) uppermost in the curator’s mind. At the same time, Kanbara is inviting the Japanese-Canadian community not only to understand the legacy of the Tashme work, but to step back and appreciate Nakamura’s contribution to art and culture in a broader sense. One might worry that these two objectives run up against each

other. Perhaps the special significance of the Tashme works might overshadow Nakamura’s concerns as an artist by focusing too intently on identity politics. Or perhaps the political significance of the works as a focus of collective memory will be diluted in the waters of the artist’s long career. Fortunately the opposite seems to be true. The Tashme works are enriched by an understanding of the artist’s career, and at the same time they allow us to ask questions about that career that might not otherwise have come to mind.

Throughout his career Nakamura has been remarkable in his ability to produce work on his own terms. As a member of Painters Eleven he managed to be at the centre of Toronto avant-garde painting in the 1950s while retaining an approach to abstraction that was highly distinctive. Where other

members leaned toward the existential sound and fury of abstract expressionism, Nakamura's work was consistently subtle and reflective, with an increasing interest in science and the abstractions of mathematics. The artist himself claimed that he had looked forward to a career as a scientist, "but because of the war, and being interned, I lost time, and decided not to become a professional scientist, but to go into art."¹ Retrospectively, we might ask to what extent the seeds of the later, mathematical works are present in the Tashme pictures. This may be an unanswerable question, but exploring it is both irresistible and productive.

One has no sense that Nakamura produced his Tashme works with the explicit intention of documenting his community's crisis. Like the works he created in Vancouver prior to Tashme, they are, in part at least, the products of a young artist painting the world around him, trying out the various devices in his artistic toolbox. There are a number of pre-Tashme works in the show and in them we can see the artist assimilating techniques that he has drawn from both Japanese and Western sources. Mastering linear perspective is a preoccupation. In many of the works from before and during Tashme, preparatory perspective grids are clearly visible below the washes of paint. In *Night Class*, the artist has rendered a view of his evening high-school class (days were spent on work crews). From the slightly remote perspective of an observer at the back of the class we look toward the blackboard in a rough and dingy room. The rows of pupils in their desks converge toward a carefully penciled, and still visibly graphed out, vanishing point in the centre of the blackboard. Despite the careful technical construction the mood is dark, the palette bleak and acid. A figure to the left raises both arms over his head. Is it an irrepressible youthful gesture, as Kanbara suggests,² or merely a sleepy stretch? Another mystery.

There is a bleeding over of subject matter in Nakamura's work from Vancouver to Tashme. In Tashme, Nakamura not only paints his new environment, but continues



March 18/44, Kazuo Nakamura, 1944, gouache on card, 28x35 cm.

to paint Vancouver. (After his family moves to Hamilton in November 1944, he also persists in painting a number of Tashme scenes.) The delayed reaction is common enough among artists. It often takes time to assimilate change of location into one's practice. In this case, however, the blurring seems particularly poignant because the change is so radical. From freedom to incarceration. From citizen to enemy alien. Take *Cambie Bridge*, for example. It depicts a Vancouver scene familiar enough for the artist to paint from memory, but, as Kanbara remarks, it is a dark scene and a little vague, as though fading from memory.³ What was it like, using the act of painting to visit the streets that he had walked freely in the past? Did it feel like covert psychic liberation or only make his confinement and distance from home that much more evident?

Something interesting happens to Nakamura's painting in Tashme. Perhaps it is, as Kanbara suggests, that Nakamura is coming up against the limits of linear perspective.⁴ *Tashme at Dusk, March 18/44* and many other works depict the Tashme camp laid out in careful illusionistic perspective, little rational grids plunked down against the sublime scale of the mountains. It would be a convenient bit of postmodern revisionism to read Nakamura's gradual drifting away from linear perspective as a rejection of this celebrated artistic accomplishment of the West. There may be a hint of truth in that. In 1974 he wrote, "The standard thought of visual perception based on perspective vision can also become a doubt, as it is based on visual illusion."⁵ But Nakamura rejects linear perspective in search of a higher, more abstract and universal understanding of space and nature. In

1988 he acknowledged the impact of his Japanese heritage on his view of the natural world, but insisted that "today the dominant flow in art and science is universal."⁶ In the postmodern '80s this could hardly have been the case, but for Nakamura, science and mathematics remained an inspiration, although at a more involved level than the simple ability to create visual illusion. As so many of the titles of his earlier abstract paintings insisted, he was after the "inner structure."

Still, I think of those mountains looming impossibly large in the Tashme pictures, crowding the top edge of his paper. They return later in his career in a series of landscapes in which mountains and forests rise up so high in the viewer's field of vision that we often see only a glimpse of sky in a ragged little band across the top of the picture. The land and trees dissolve in an enigmatic blur of daubed and scumbled strokes of pale blue and blue-green. Like the mathematical equations that he paints onto canvas in the late '80s and '90s, one can get lost in the almost pixelated details (almost, because they are never mechanical). But these works also sweep over us, too large or complex to assimilate each detail, yet on some level we do grasp the whole. Like the artist we are stuck at the human scale measuring our tiny corner of events, events that are at times so large that they pass over us like a wave, so that we can only bear witness and wonder.

Note: Five of Nakamura's Tashme works are on display at the Art Gallery of Ontario as a supplement to the Canvas of War exhibition, until January 6, 2002.

Richard William Hill is curatorial resident, Canadian art, at the Art Gallery of Ontario and a member of the FUSE board.

Notes

1. Nancy Baele, "Nakamura uncovers inner structures in life," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 24 October 1993.
2. Bryce Kanbara, *Tashme: Early Works of Kazuo Nakamura* (Don Mills, ON: Gendai Gallery, 2001), 2.
3. Kanbara, *Tashme*, 3.
4. Kanbara, *Tashme*, 3.
5. Kazuo Nakamura and Kay Woods, *Kazuo Nakamura* (Oshawa, ON: Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1974), 6 (unpaginated).
6. Quoted in Bryce Kanbara, *Shikata Ga Nai: Contemporary Art by Japanese Canadians* (Hamilton: Hamilton Artists Inc., 1988), 22 (unpaginated).

Africa in or out?

Venice Biennale, 2001

By Veronika Klaptoocz

At this stage of post-colonial consciousness, the practical omission of an entire continent from a major international exhibition simply should not happen. Yet here I am at the 49th Venice Biennale, and Egypt is the only African country with a national pavilion (South Africa had one briefly before the imposition of cultural boycotts). Chief curator Harald Szeemann was expected to remedy the situation by including more African artists in the invitational group exhibition.¹ Yet of the 112 artists packed into the Italian pavilion and the Arsenale, only three are African: South Africans Tracey Rose and Minette Vári, and Nigerian Sunday Jack Akpan. (An ambiguous Sarenco l'Africano turns out to be an Italian who shares his studio time between Verona and Malindi, Kenya). As in the previous Biennale and those of his predecessors, Szeemann clearly does not rise to the occasion.

Frustrated by this long-term marginalization of Africa in major international exhibitions, African-Americans Salah Hassan and Olu Oguibe, with South Africa's Emma Bedford as associate curator, installed their own show in the Palazzo Giustinian Lolin. *AuthenticEx-Centric: Africa In and Out of Africa* brings together seven artists from both the continent and the African diaspora, and sets out to address various facets of the African experience. The exhibition belongs to a series of "sideline" shows listed as part of the Biennale, but located outside the main venues of the Giardini and Arsenale.

The opening day's press conference underlined the disadvantages faced by these adjoining exhibitions. The jury claimed that the artists in *AuthenticEx-*



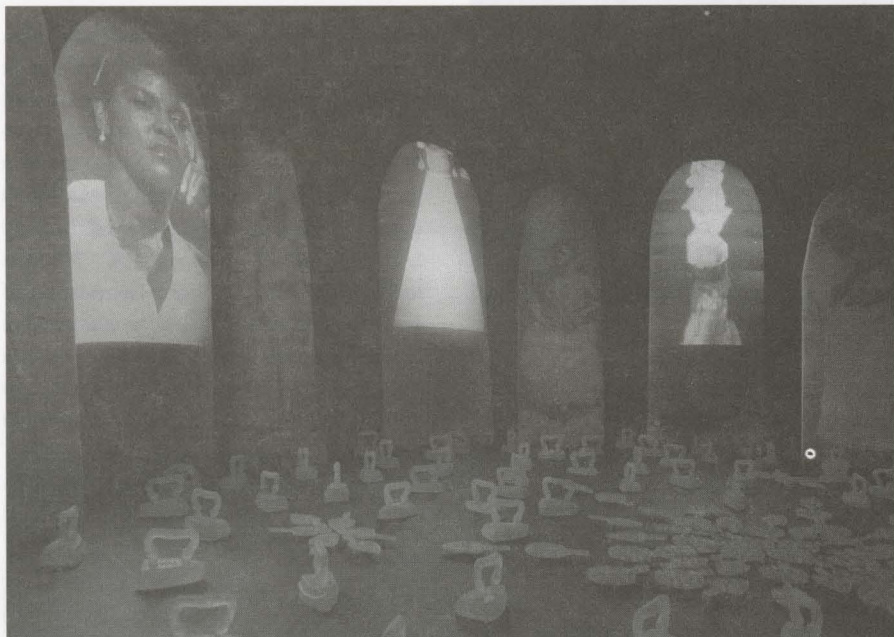
Vacation, Yinka Shonibare, 2000, printed cotton, fiberglass, variable dimensions. Installation at Tate Britain (2000). Courtesy: the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery (London).

Centric would not be judged along with other official entries because "Africa is not a country," and only at the insistent lobbying of one jury member was the exhibition actually viewed. Even so, the work of Willem Boshoff was omitted because it was displayed in another building. Imagine the jury's surprise: they awarded an official mention at the awards ceremony to Yinka Shonibare for *Vacation* (2000).

AuthenticEx-Centric is organized loosely around the theme of conceptualism in African art and Shonibare's installation is its most disconcerting feature. On a platform suspended in an eerily lit room, an astronaut family sets forth on a quest of exploration and relaxation in space. Even for those familiar with Shonibare's wry

ruminations on the origins, meanings and appropriations of African dress, the idea of astronauts wearing suits sewn from African wax-print fabrics is incongruous. Manufactured in the Netherlands and Britain and imported from Indonesia, these fabrics carry patterns many Africans now champion as symbols of their traditional, pre-colonial heritage. Shonibare uses this irony to suggest a complete reversal of roles and identities in the contexts of exploration and colonization.

Godfried Donkor examines the cultural interactions between Africans and Britons in the confines of the eighteenth-century boxing ring. In *Lord Byron's Drawing Room* (2001), Donkor hangs a series of digitally reworked archival images of boxing



Spoken Softly with Mama, Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, 1997 (detail), mixed media, dimensions variable. Courtesy: National Gallery of Canada.

fanaticism in an effort to excavate repressed histories of the black presence in Britain.

Born in Cuba into a family of former Nigerian slaves, Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons now works and teaches in Boston. In an elaborate installation titled *Spoken Softly With Mama* (made in 1997 and owned by the National Gallery of Canada), Campos-Pons feeds personal family history and Yoruba religious traditions through video projections, sculpture, embroidery and a

recorded soundtrack of singing and whispering between a mother and her daughter. The second part of her ongoing project *History of People Who Were Not Heroes*, the installation gives poetic voice and dignity to the labour of women who had to clean and iron for others in order to support their own families.

For South African Berni Searle, familial roots manifest themselves through culinary heritage, which she probes in *Snow White* (2001). Enclosed by opposing video projections, Searle sits naked and facing the viewer as first flour, then water trickle on her from above. When completely covered, she dusts herself off and proceeds to make roti with a fixed, trance-like concentration.

With the end of apartheid in South Africa, redefining communal and personal identities has become the urgent task of artists. Accordingly, Searle's production—she is not-quite-black, and not-quite-white but a mixture of something-in-between (labelled as "coloured" by the apartheid regime)—simultaneously addresses issues of colour, gender and the body. Tracing her familial roots to Mauritius, Saudi Arabia, Germany and Britain, Searle feels a particular connection with her great-

grandfather, a cook, through her mother's concoctions with spices. That fated commodity first brought the Dutch East India Company to the Cape, along with the dire effects of imperialist colonization. Spices began serving Searle as a rich metaphor for skin colour in her earlier *Colour Me* and *Discoloured* series.

Coincidentally, the other South African artist in the show, Willem Boshoff, also created a bread-based work for the Biennale. According to the catalogue essay however, *Panifice* (2001) is not about making bread as in Searle's case, but about "breaking" it. Boshoff installs loaves of bread made of granite in the courtyard of the Conservatorio di Musica. Each loaf sits on a breadboard inscribed with the Biblical passage, "Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask for bread, will he give him a stone?" in 28 African and 28 European languages. Boshoff strives to address the "commonality of the human experience," which transcends barriers of language, race and creed. "Disenfranchised" languages become unified with the "privileged" ones, through the peace offering embodied in the act of breaking bread (in this case symbolized by the unbreakable stone loaves). Boshoff is known for dissecting language and recovering forgotten words from obscurity by compiling them into personal dictionaries.

While Boshoff compiles his own dictionaries, Rachid Koraïchi devises his own alphabet, employing a script of steel and embroidered silk banners in *Le Chemin de Roses* (2001). Born in Algeria and living in Paris, Koraïchi links the act of writing to religious transformation. His installation symbolically traces the journey undertaken by thirteenth-century poet and mystic al-Rumi to Qonya (Turkey) where he met Sufi thinker Ibn al-Arabi. Basins used for ritual ablutions, decoratively inscribed with excerpts from al-Rumi, are filled with fresh rose petals floating in water. Imbued with subtle allusions to mysticism and Islamic thought—references that might elude unfamiliar viewers—the work also speaks at the level of sheer aesthetic pleasure through the elegance of its calligraphic designs.



Panifice, Willem Boshoff, 2001 (detail), engraved granite, 25x43x17 cm. Courtesy: the artist.

Algerian artist Zineb Sedira manipulates the ornamentation and script of Islamic art in her installation *Quatre générations des femmes* (1997). What appears to be pure decorative pattern when viewed at some distance reveals faces, a pair of eyes and handwritten inscriptions. Portraits of four generations of women are inserted into a computer-generated design and reproduced to completely cover the walls of the installation site. Since the production of geometric ceramic tiles is work traditionally performed by men, Sedira's appropriation is a statement of independence.



Le Chemin de Roses, Rachid Koraïchi, 2001, embroidered silk, steel, dimensions variable. Courtesy: the artist.

AuthenticEx-Centric addresses a variety of aspects thought to characterize the African experience. It includes artists who live and work on the continent yet take part in international exhibitions and thus travel extensively; expatriate artists who practice in Western centres but focus on themes relating to their African origins; and those born into African families overseas, who have never traveled to the motherland. But how exactly does one qualify this relationship between the centre and periphery set out by the title of the exhibition? The curators of *AuthenticEx-Centric* feel it is time to "put African artists back in the centre." Although this is a metaphorical statement, do artists who remain on the African continent stand a chance at international exposure? Or are they better off moving to London, Paris or New York, as several of the artists included in this show have done? According to Hassan, if you do not exhibit, you do not exist. What about the artists who suddenly make it big internationally and cannot sell artwork to their impoverished national institutions, because the market value of their work has shot up? These are just the modest beginnings of a complex inquiry.

The Western construct of authenticity is also problematic, especially in relation to "Africa" and African art, where it often refers in a limited way to masks, wooden sculptures, beadwork and wax-print fabrics. As

Shonibare observes, this type of purism does not exist. Furthermore, such demands for "authenticity" preclude the reality of Africa as the home of living, and not disappearing, cultures. Significantly, artists in and out of Africa, as this exhibition shows, produce work using new media and technologies, and conceptual forms of inquiry employed by contemporary artists elsewhere.

Why does Africa have only one pavilion in the Giardini? One patron of the exhibition cites economic reasons and the "lack of consistent national policies that prioritize culture." Visual artists in many African countries lack the support that established networks such as government councils, cultural administrators and funding agencies provide, for example, in Canada. Therefore, the efforts of the organizers of *AuthenticEx-Centric*, in association with the Forum for African Arts, the Ford Foundation and Prince Claus Fund, deserve recognition.²

Security problems have been cited for the premature closing of *AuthenticEx-Centric*, scheduled to end November 2, 2001. An exhibition catalogue (with some enlightening essays) is available through the Axis Gallery in New York (see www.axisgallery.com, under "store").

Veronika Klapotcz is a recent graduate of the University of Toronto, having specialized in art history. She just spent ten months working as an intern for the South African National Gallery in Cape Town.

Notes

1. Bearing the title *Plateau of Humankind* (a quick-fix, politically corrected version of the original "Plateau of Mankind"), Szeemann's exhibition claims to steer away from barriers erected by styles, age limits, nationalities and nationalisms. And nothing illustrates better these curatorial guidelines of free range than the *Plateau of Thought* that greets the visitor at the entrance to the Italian Pavilion. A seemingly random assortment of figures from Africa and Asia—dating from anywhere between the twelfth and twentieth centuries—float on a red platform around the famed Rodin "Thinker"—that pinnacle of Western art, thought and civilization. The arrogance of such a statement can hardly be read otherwise.
2. Perhaps this year will finally award Africa the attention that it deserves. *The Short Century*, a sweeping exhibition focusing on African independence movements conceived by Nigerian-born Okwui Enwezor, currently occupies most of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago (to December 30), while Enwezor already plots the upcoming Documenta. Also at the MCA in Chicago is a major retrospective of South Africa's William Kentridge (to January 20, 2002). Berni Searle recently had her first solo show in New York at the Axis Gallery (September 11 to October 27, 2001).

Venice Biennale 2001

By Corinna Ghaznavi

The Venice Biennale claims to visualize the pulse of international contemporary art. To tap into significant trends exemplifying our zeitgeist in a time of extreme diversity and globalization might itself be an impossible task. Even if we accept curator Harald Szeemann's premise that the Venice Biennale is to be viewed as topical and the *Plateau of Humankind* as a dimension and not a theme, the sheer mass of work and differences in approach and quality make it difficult to summarize as a whole. And yes, perhaps this is indicative of our time in which everything has been deconstructed, depth has given way to surface, homogenization has been implemented and cutting-edge technology has become ubiquitous. Bombarded with sensation we accelerate ever onward, every new experience immediately becoming a "done that" and one wonders if there is anything left to say in what Szeeman terms "the grand narration of human existence."

One significant thread in this narration is that our time is not fraught so much with anxiety as with emptiness and an existential sense of paralysis. The content of much of the work exhibited in Venice is often deeply and disturbingly still. Liza May Post's slow-motion videos capture the aching length of waiting; Chantal Akerman's *Woman Sitting After Killing*, shown on seven monitors simultaneously, shows her bloodied protagonist sitting at a table. Echoes of an intense violence pervade the quietude, forcing the viewer to contemplate what leads to such intense desperation. Ene-Liis Semper's *FFREW* fast-forwards and rewinds so that we view an endless loop of suicide, through

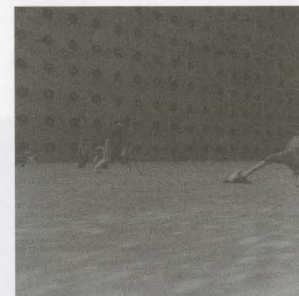


Woman sitting after killing, Chantal Akerman, 2001, stills from multi-media installation.

hanging and a gun—a manipulation of the medium and a dry irony that never allows will, motivation or the act to be resolved. Lucinda Devlin's empty, sterile death-row photographs of the death cell or electric chair are chilling aesthetic reminders of sentences a society has taken upon itself to impose. Their objective emptiness forces the viewer into responsibility and confrontation, as do Rineke Dijkstra's photographs of young Israeli soldiers. We see the same face framed like a studio

portrait of any young girl juxtaposed with her in fatigues and armed. There is no moral dimension to these, but rather the fact that there are no easy answers to complex emotional and political issues.

The violent narrative of Magnus Wallen's *Skyjump* and *Exit*, where the human body is pursued and destroyed in a brutal and senseless animated game, intensifies the reality of pursuit, war and death row. That the gaming zone is recalled leads us to question both our real complicity and the fact of our increased and passive interaction with games whose object is rooted in violence. Computers have disembodied us and technology presents slick exteriors, but what



Exit, Magnus Wallen, 1997, stills from video.

lies beneath? Xio Yu's *Ruans* graphically recall curiosity cabinets and mad scientists showing us frightening hybrid creatures suspended in clear liquid. While Yu points to the ambiguities of advanced science, Georgina Starr rages against the consumer objectification and misuse of the female image. Her haute-couture models stalk down a runway entrapped and fetishized as a thing. The model is the object used to conjure up erotic fantasies and then brutally gunned down by a gang of small vigilante girls, taking back the body? Their future?

verifying the relevance of abstract painting. Salla Tykka captures a poignant moment of penetrating wonder. Tatsumi Orimoto lovingly encases his small, Alzheimer-inflicted mother in absurd scenarios to give her room to play and increase her significance and presence in the world. And there is naturally the critical question posed by Ilya and Emilia Kabakov: what counts in art and how do we choose? The Kabakovs point out that *not everyone will be taken into the future*, and that, in fact, the train is already pulling out. What



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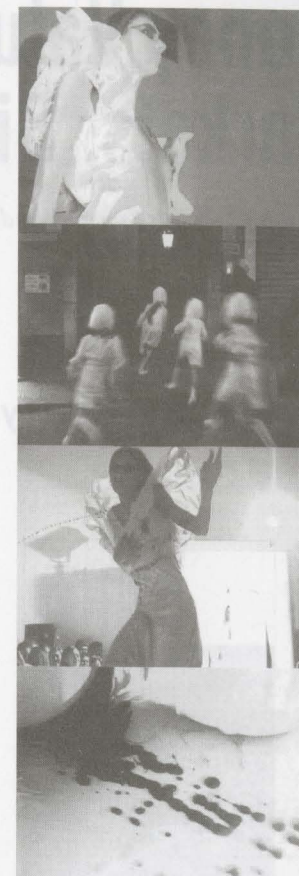
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never definitively concluded. Where the individual gropes for meaning, the voice in the desert is completely incomprehensible. Mark Wallinger's video piece, *Angel*, shows a blind man walking backward on an escalator reciting the gospel of St. John, backward. The parade of people passing on the other escalators serve to underscore that everyone has somewhere to be and that no one can pause for long to listen to the words of a prophet.

What are we left with? There is beauty: Leon Tarasewicz's painting fills the entire floor of the Polish pavilion, dramatically



Tire Tube Communication, Tatsumi Orimoto, 1996, c-print, 300x250 cm.



The Bunny Lake Collection, Georgina Starr, 2000, mixed-media installation.

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Woman sitting after killing, Chantal Akerman, 2001, stills from multi-media installation.

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Exit, Magnus Wallin, 1997, stills from video.



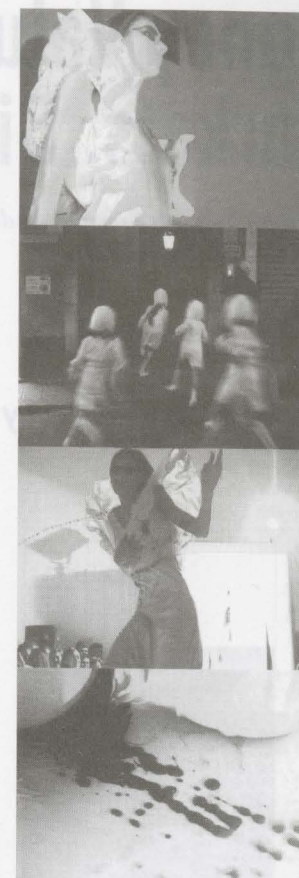
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Oleg Kulik's "windows" are most appropriate in the context of double meaning and entrapment. We view taxidermic animals in a beautiful natural environment that stare out at the human faces reflected in the glass separating them. Who is inside the cage? Which environment is constructed? Which, if any, is still a natural habitat? Alongside Kulik, Milija Pavicevic questions the significance of the individual within the society. His glass house has a few mementos in form of books, objects and photographs that seem to seek answers about the person rather than present a coherent whole. Does the individual have a voice? Does it matter? Ken Lum claims that *There is no place like home* with billboards addressing issues of displacement and racism that complexify identity and place. Stan Douglas' *Le Detroit* moves us into a thoughtful thriller-like atmosphere of seeking from the past in order to make sense of the present. As his protagonist wanders through a deserted yet intact house in the dark we see objects that may or may not signify in a journey never definitively concluded. Where the individual gropes for meaning, the voice in the desert is completely incomprehensible. Mark Wallinger's video piece, *Angel*, shows a blind man walking backward on an escalator reciting the gospel of St. John, backward. The parade of people passing on the other escalators serve to underscore that everyone has somewhere to be and that no one can pause for long to listen to the words of a prophet.

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verifying the relevance of abstract painting. Salla Tykka captures a poignant moment of penetrating wonder. Tatsumi Orimoto lovingly encases his small, Alzheimer-inflicted mother in absurd scenarios to give her room to play and increase her significance and presence in the world. And there is naturally the critical question posed by Ilya and Emilia Kabakov: what counts in art and how do we choose? The Kabakovs point out that *not everyone will be taken into the future*, and that, in fact, the train is already pulling out. What remains in art? Hai Bo's work shows a group photograph from around thirty years ago juxtaposed with a contemporary portrait in the same setting; the progression of time is visible in the faces of the portrayed, in the style of clothing and, most wrenchingly, in the gaps left by those now dead. These images are an enduring testament both to history, the individual and memory. The work makes a bid for the importance of the image and the object in art. It suggests that it will endure because it is tangible, provoking and contributes, however obliquely, to our understanding of our own cultural moment.

Corinna Ghaznavi is a critic and independent curator based in Toronto. Her work has been published in *Flash Art*, *Artpress* and *Artichoke*. She is a regular contributor to *Canadian Art*, *Parachute*, *Espace* and *D'Art International*. Her most recent curatorial project is *Poiesis*, with Marianne Lovink and Sheila Moss at Mercer Union in Toronto.



The Bunny Lake Collection, Georgina Starr, 2000, mixed-media installation.

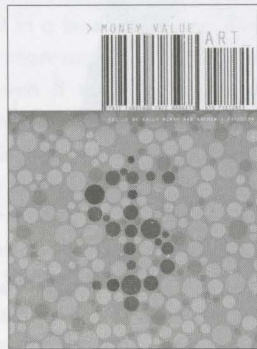


Tire Tube Communication, Tatsumi Orimoto, 1996, c-print, 300x250 cm.

Money Value Art: State Funding, Free Markets, Big Pictures

Edited by Sally McKay and Andrew J. Paterson
Toronto: YYZ Books, 2001.

Review by Emily Andreae



Money Value Art: State Funding, Free Markets, Big Pictures, edited by Sally McKay and Andrew J. Paterson, is a collection of literary and visual commentaries by and about artists and writers affected by the infrastructure of the Canadian art industry. Each entry explores a different perspective on the relationship between money, value and art. Often filled with personal references, the commentaries offer highly individual and informative views of the effects of capitalism on alternative culture in Canada. Much of the book deals with key breakthroughs and setbacks of the Canada Council for the Arts, Canadian Arts Council (Canadian Conference of the Arts), and the Ontario Arts Council. The funding decisions handed down by these bureaucracies ultimately determine the national character of cultural production and threaten to restructure the daily existence of members of the arts and culture communities throughout the country. The editors provide a valuable resource for analyzing this ongoing struggle and a source of comfort in tough times. The diversity of voices, views and visions gathered by this text position it as a material and intellectual site of resistance to mainstream cultural policies and policymakers, adding much to its currency in this funding climate.

The politics

A timeline, beginning in the year 1941, runs from the top left corner across almost every page. In this way, Paterson indicates a main stream of cultural events leading up to the current struggles at issue. This device also

effectively unites these *other* texts that speak from diverse standpoints. The writers, artists and academics who contributed to this anthology write a history of Canadian culture that is vital and dynamic, but none of it is mainstream. The landscape, readers discover, is marked by a history of volatile relations because the Canadian public has been, and continues to be, outspoken and forceful in the policy-making process. Take, for example, Kevin Dowler's "In the Bedrooms of the Nation: State Scrutiny and the Funding of Dirty Art" and Barbara Godard's "Resignifying Culture: Notes from the Ontario Culture Wars." Both cultural critics discuss recent controversial changes and events in Ontario, with Godard suggesting problematic consequences of the oxymoronic thinking that she identifies as underlying Ontario's present cultural policy making:

Transformations currently underway at OAC reconfigure citizens as consumers while contradictorily promoting a quest for beauty separated from the complexities of life. Culture is disembedded from the economy as its longstanding discourse of socio-economic relations is reframed as one of individualized aesthetic excellence.

Current transformations at the OAC do contrast with earlier political agendas, which held Canada's internal and international (economic) relations to be, as Paterson states, "paradoxically tied to [its] colonial heritage and an idealized past."

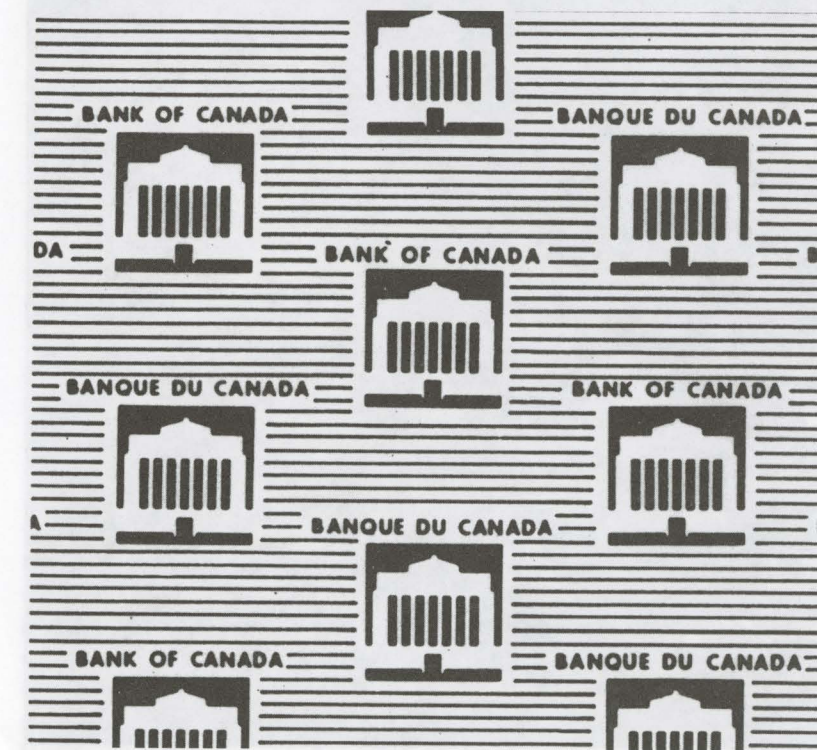
In the early 1950s, cultural policies were amended and discarded, leaving "Canadian arts or cultural sectors [almost unprotected] from the lowest common denominator values of uncontrollable free market capitalist economies." Two essays, Andrew Johnson's "The House Always Has the Edge: The Art Gallery of Windsor and the Ontario Casino Corporation" and David McIntosh's "Mememes, Genes, and Mono-culture," discuss the consequences of such policy changes to the value systems and philosophies of government agencies in the present context of two cultural enterprises, the Art Gallery of Windsor and the Canadian film industry. In each case, the writers argue that the boundary between business and art is blurred by debates arising from economic issues over annual net revenues. Johnson questions the integrity of accepting revenue from cross-border gamblers to support the gallery, and McIntosh discusses the effect of trade agreements with Britain and the United States on the culture of the film industry. Whether an institution or an individual, Johnson argues, recipients of cultural funding must be free to govern its use. He cites problems in Windsor where joint funding provided by the city and casino

compromised the gallery, specifically its right to reside in a new space, originally designated for the gallery (but occupied by the casino in the meantime as a cultural money-raising strategy). "I don't think the fact the AGW receives money from the city means that it should serve the interests of a private developer," a statement by *Artcote's* Christine Buchnall, succinctly expresses a stance on arms-length funding shared by other contributors.

A living

The beginning. The day that you first imagine that you could be an artist. In your dreams you conceived of your future as a giant gameboard. You climbed ladders as you honed artistic skills, made contacts in the art world and sold works to major museums. You imagined avoiding the slippery, snaky slopes, bad reviews from repressed critics, and the devious strategies of competitive peers. In your dreams ...

This text challenges romantic views of the artist's life, for example, by questioning the notion of a lifestyle of fortune and fame on



Bank of Canada (from security series), Scott McLeod, n.d. given.

obituary

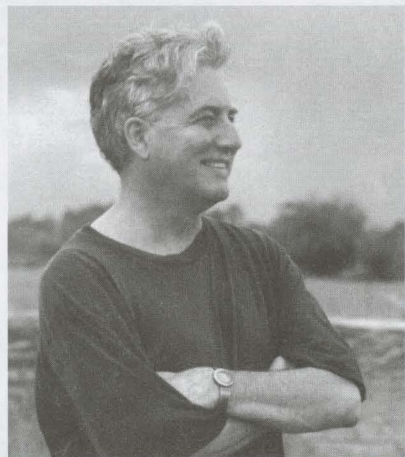


Photo: Almerinda Travassos

Colin Campbell (1942 – 2001)

Colin lived with a rare fluidity and an unflashy courage. This was apparent in all aspects of his life, his videomaking, his novel writing, even his cooking. He was a techno-klutz yet stepped up to the techno plate when he needed it to do his work. Deliberate, never careless, he lived his life very consciously, with generosity, wisdom, wit and insight.

Colin was the kind of friend you wanted.

There was that way he had of inspiring you to be more like yourself—simply because he valued just who you were. He saw things that others (or even you) might see as flaws or foibles or somehow undesirable character traits to be the real you, to be the foundation that made you whole and true. It gave you confidence. You would wear that hat or take that chance or write that story.

So it was with his life as an artist. From the beginning of his work in video, Colin's devotion to detail, his ability to keenly observe life around him lent his scripts, his performances and his videotapes a kind of richness unknown to the artworld at that time. His ability to listen—not just to record amusing dialogue for later use—but to actually listen as when your body opens and absorbs something of the other person. That's what he did and in doing it, he found the humorous, the heroic and, sometimes, the truly harrowing embedded in the everyday.

Colin himself was elegant, soigné, full of grace with a confident, empathetic presence. But his

video personae were at the other end of the spectrum. Self-absorbed social klutzes of various persuasions emerging as much out of the zeitgeist as out of Colin's experience.

His characters—from The Woman From Malibu to Robin to Coleena—have been described as alter-egos. They seemed more complicated than that. They orbit around his nuclear whole like so many positive and negative electrons, drawing energy from him but never depleting him. Usually Colin cast himself in the starring roles. Occupying the central space but never self-centered, he remained on camera throughout—without a hint of narcissism.

The lasting gift of Colin's work is his ability to remain focussed on his innate abilities. He was, foremost, a storyteller. In pure terms this meant a passage in and out of fashion. Yet he stayed. The works we are left with represent a lifetime of listening and absorbing his immediate environment. His loyalty to his own voice and adherence to his own sensibility infuse the work with a rare authenticity and resonance.

Colin Campbell, Canada's premier video artist, died in Toronto on October 31, 2001, after a brief and valiant battle with cancer. Born in Reston, Manitoba, 1942, and based in Toronto since 1973, Colin received his B.F.A. from the University of Manitoba (Gold Medal) and his M.F.A. from Claremont Graduate School,

California. His work was exhibited internationally in such prestigious venues as the Venice Biennale (1980), Documenta and the Toronto International Film Festival. His works are in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa), the Museum of Modern Art, (New York), the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Winnipeg Art Gallery, the Vancouver Art Gallery and others. In 1990, a national touring retrospective of his videotapes (Colin Campbell: Mediaworks, 1972-90), was co-curated by the National Gallery of Canada and the Winnipeg Art Gallery.

Colin taught at Mount Allison University, Sackville, N.B., the Ontario College of Art & Design and at the Department of Fine Arts at the University of Toronto. In his role as an educator, he was inspirational to generations of young artists and was seminal in the implementation of a graduate program in Visual Studies at the University of Toronto.

He is greatly missed by his friends, his wives and family including his partner George Hawken, his son Neil, his siblings Greg, Neil, and Judy.

On December 2, 2001, a memorial in celebration of Colin's life was held at Latvian House in Toronto. It was, as it should have been, standing-room only.

Lori Spring and Lisa Steele

correction

In issue 24.3, we inadvertently omitted this image from the article on Greg Curnoe.



Group photo at opening of the exhibition from London, Ontario, at La Casa de las Américas, Havana, Cuba, November 1988. Left to right: Ron Benner, Hugo Rivero (Assistant Director of La Casa de las Américas), Jamelie Hassan, Greg Curnoe, Carmen Bedia (translator), Murray Favro, Fern Helland, Christopher Dewdney and Michael Kergian (Canadian Ambassador in Havana, Cuba). Photo: Lesbia Vent Dumois/Fern Helland. Courtesy of Archives of Ron Benner and Jamelie Hassan.

short
FUZE

"everything and nothing," or, art and the politics of "war"

by Jayce Salloum

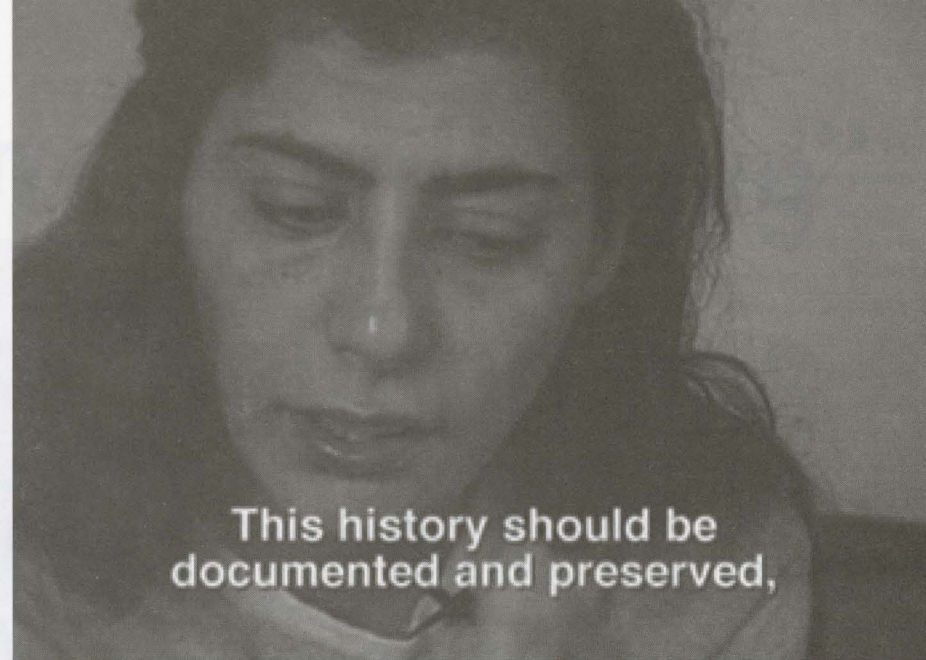


everything and nothing, Jayce Salloum, 2001, still from video installation. Courtesy: the artist.

Soha Bechara, an ex-resistance fighter in the Lebanese National Resistance Movement which fought against the Israeli occupation of S. Lebanon. She was 'detained' in El Khiam, a torture and interrogation centre for 10 years (6 years in isolation) run by the Israeli army in S. Lebanon.

Let's question how things are being said and how we are saying things. We take so much for granted, including language and our local and global relationships. Framing, conceptualizing, grasping and coming to terms with our lives as artists and citizens of this whole wide world may seem more important now than ever. How do you position yourself in the midst of all this? Is your relationship to your neighbours different? Has our role as artists changed? If it has, then we're in more trouble than I thought. I mean, what makes us decide to instill an agency in our work, an embracement of the social sphere or an engagement with politics that would make others want to do the same? Or on the other hand, what makes us want to run away from it all? Perhaps the two motives are the same.

As artists, we do pay attention to language and relationships to the social and political. I fell into the trap of believing that I understood what that meant. Being identified as an Arab now has the same repercussions as before except they are heightened. The repulsion and exoticism of the "arab" subject still exist side by side, collapsing into each other and swallowing "us" with it. We cannot have an exhibition without having to relate it to September 11. We are not allowed to. It is one of the first questions out of the journalists' mouths and they demand an answer, one that fits into a sound bite that they can exploit to "rewrite" you as being one of "us," or one of "them." The question is, how can this be used in a productive sense? Well, with difficulty. In our recent little struggle with the directorship of the Museum of Civilization (MOC) in Hull (across the river from our nation's capital, Ottawa), a few of us "arab" artists and writers (Rawi Hage, Laura U. Marks and myself) found out that a story has a life of its own no matter how farfetched.



everything and nothing, Joyce Salloum, 2001, still from video installation. Courtesy: the artist.

On a recent Monday after a recent Tuesday the MOC "indefinitely postponed" an exhibition of twenty-six Arab-Canadian artists that had been in the works for five years. They stated the need to revisit and review the content of the exhibition and to provide a broader context to the work following the events of September 11. The MOC is the largest public museum in Canada and has very little experience in working with living artists but one thing you can bet they had already provided for was a thorough didactic context. To make a long story short(er), we sent out an email letter of protest that afternoon. By Tuesday, over 200 responses were coming in from around the world directed to the museum and our politicians. By Wednesday, the Prime Minister spoke up on the issue (alas, calling for "tolerance," not empathy). By Thursday, the exhibition had unanimous support in the Senate. By Friday, the Minister of Culture entered the fray and the MOC, supposedly an arms-length institution, reneged and reinstated the exhibition as originally planned. With all factors snowballing, it became a national and international news story. The exhibition opened with over 1,000 people attending and the directors avoided mention of the controversy like the plague. Not surprising—they had not bothered to discuss anything with the artists at any point in the debacle to try to resolve their "concerns" before going public.

At a time when public institutions need to show the most leadership, this museum's directors failed profoundly. Their need for "spin-doctoring" and repackaging of the artworks backfired, inflaming the sensitive content of the works and bringing the issues into a context of sensationalism, hysteria and managerial hubris. In contrast to this, with the diligence of the MOC staff the exhibition design has withstood the undue strains and the works are being presented as originally planned with the artists.

After the fact, voices with spurious comments continue to call for the censoring of my installation because it's "politically opportunistic," saying that the "attacks on the policies of the Israeli government is an inappropriate one-sided promotion of

hostility and divisiveness." (B'nai B'rith Canada press release, 10/18/01) Similar to the MOC's directorship, this group would rather bury contentious histories than acknowledge and analyze them and, in the process, politically cleanse all artworks based on their own agenda. They went on to say, "Mr. Salloum's video is not cultural, it is political." If culture is not political, then what is? The Canadian Jewish Congress (press release, 10/18/01) proclaimed the installation "presents [a] narrow biased political agenda" and contains "political propaganda." They claim that to criticize Israeli attacks and their brutal occupation is something "Canada cannot afford... [To do so is] to allow the promotion of hatred under the guise of tolerance." Their final comments were that it was not appropriate for me to be working with these subjects/subjectivities in the context of an exhibition about Canadian identity. Are we still at a point where we allow anyone else to prescribe or proscribe our identities? I for one will choose who and what I identify with and what issues I address in my work.

In the current climate of suppression and repression of any debate and dissension, discursive activities such that art can be may be one of the few domains left for us to express unpopular ideas, resistance and the complexities of our lives and the lives of those we choose to identify with. We need to protect our right to be self-inscribed. This is one arena that we should not give up on easily, this cultural sphere, these domains of discursivity. We have struggled for this space to call our own and it is one that we can still use to champion difference, to provide a heterogeneous engagement with the social and political realities around us and to facilitate a means of contemplation that can counter the imposition of consent.

Joyce Salloum has been working in installation, photography, mixed media and video since 1975, as well as curating exhibitions, conducting workshops and coordinating cultural events. A new installation of his, entitled "part 1: everything and nothing," can be seen at the Museum of Civilization, Hull until March 2003.

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EXPANDING THE CULTURAL SPACE OF TECHNOLOGY

subTerrain's 11th Annual

LAST POEMS

POETRY CONTEST

\$300 cash prize plus publication

Rules:

Maximum 3 poems per entry. The winning entrant receives a \$300 cash prize plus publication. Runners-up receive complimentary book prizes, plus publication. Entries must be accompanied by a one-time entry fee of \$15. All entrants receive a one-year subscription to subTerrain. Only those entries accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope will be returned. (If submitting from outside Canada, please include 2 International Reply Coupons to cover return postage.) Previously unpublished poems only.

Send submissions to:

Last Poems Poetry Contest
subTerrain Magazine
P.O. Box 3008, Main Post Office
Vancouver BC V6B 3X5
email: subter@portal.ca www.anvilpress.com

Deadline: January 31, 2002 (postmarked)

subTerrain

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TRUENORTH
New Directions in Canada's Oil Sands

SNAP GALLERY
society of northern alberta print-artists

edmonton, alberta, canada

1st prize: \$5,000 (CDN) deadline: May 15, 2002
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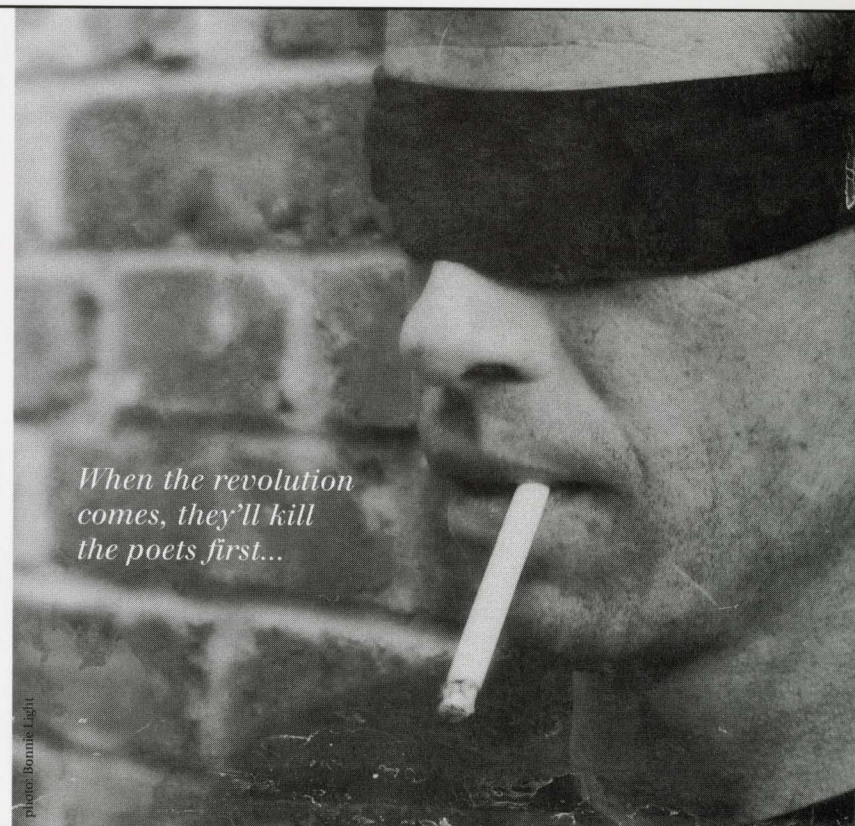


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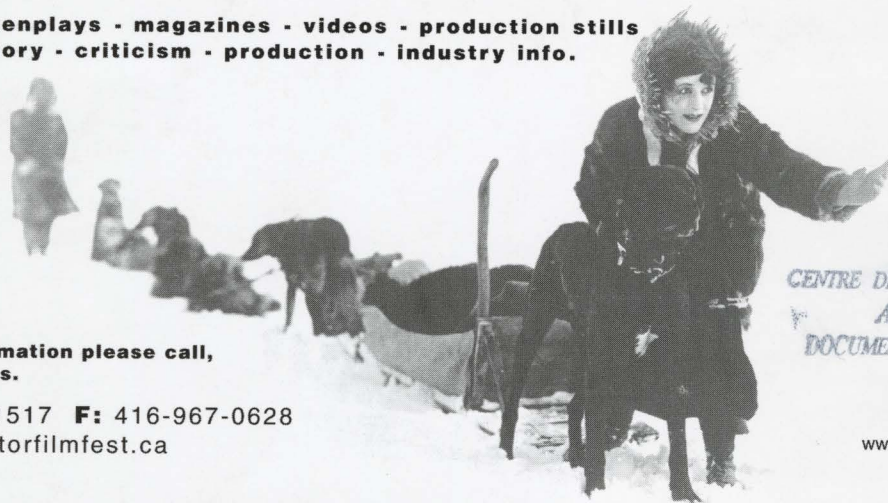
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