Volume 28 Number 3 $5.50

FUSE MAGAZINE

Working Across Communities

www.fusemagazine.org

stones. peanuts mipkus and two eggs.
cooky
SARAH
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Also in this Issue

Carol Condé and Karl Beveridge

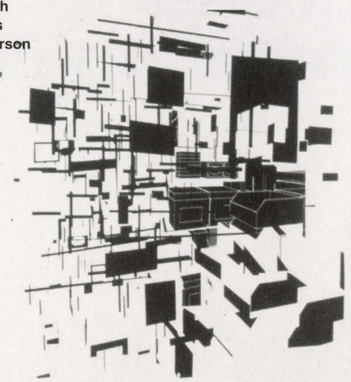
Art and Cold Cash

Marie-Hélène Cousineau of Arnait Video Collective

September 10 -- October 22, 2005
Opening Reception: Friday, September 9, 2005 at 8 pm

Dimensionality
Andy Patton, Curator

Robert Fones
Morna Gamblin
Nestor Kruger
Angela Leach
Sarah Morris
Kristen Peterson
David Reed



Nestor Kruger, *Assembly.* (detail) 2002.
Latex paint on drywall.
Courtesy of the artist.

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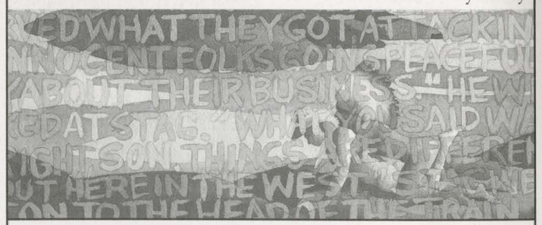

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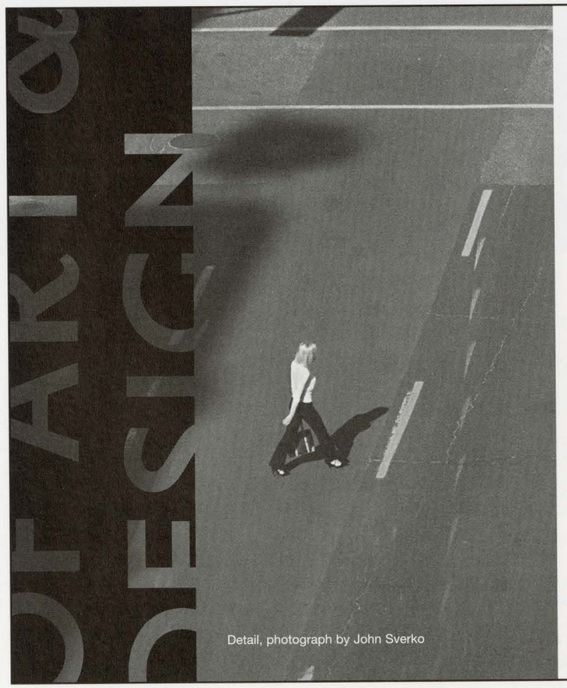

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ONTARIO COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN

FUSE MAGAZINE

Volume 28 Number 3 July 2005

Errata
In Lis van Berkel's review of *Aural Cultures*, the Walter Phillips Gallery should have been listed as co-publisher. We also failed to credit van Berkel on our table of contents. We apologise for any stress and inconvenience that these errors may have caused.

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contents 28.3

6 Editorial
Working Across Communities

7 Letter to the Editors

Columns

9 Reflections of a Former Community Arts Officer
by Melanie Fernandez

Features

15 Persevering Realpolitik: A conversation with Marie-Hélène Cousineau of Arnait Video Productions
interview by Emily Rothwell

20 Art and Cold Cash
A conversation between Patrick Mahon, Ruby Arngna'naaq, Sheila Butler, Jack Butler and William Noah.

33 From Conceptual to Community Art: A Conversation with Carole Condé & Karl Beveridge
interview by Craig Leonard

Reviews

41 Black Arts: An idea ahead of its time: *Shades of Black: Assembling Black Arts in 1980s Britain* (Duke University Press)
by Sunil Gupta

44 A glowing intervention: Kelly Mark's *Glow House #3* (Toronto)
by Andrea Carson

46 Blur: Andrew Forster/PUSH-Montreal's *Cinéma (O fim de Orfeu)* (Montreal)
by Ellen Moffat

49 A Failure of Ideas: *Communism* in Dublin
by Gemma Tippin

Short Fuse

52 Short Fuse
Of Virgins in Blenders and Rats that Sing
by Alberto Gomez and Dot Tuer

Artist Project

29 Artist Project
I Know You, Louise Boothe
by Rachel Kalpana James

editorial

Working across communities

Collaboration, especially the kind that happens across geographic locations, economic, cultural and social groups does the subversive work of bridging and aligning both collectively developed and organically shared interests. The process of coming up with definitions and conceptual frameworks, the importance of examining power relationships, negotiating priorities, assessing risks and understanding cultural differences are all important and relevant issues.

In *Persevering Realpolitik*, Marie-Hélène Cousineau, a founding member of Arnait video collective, reflects on the emergence of a burgeoning video practice in Igloolik. Locating the work produced as an active response to the socio-historical context, Cousineau explores the social, political and economic implications for self-representation, taking the government to task on the dynamics of contemporary intervention and the absence of funding for contemporary Inuit art practice. She insists that, while the establishment of Nunavut gave Inuit channels for political action, the lack of government initiatives to deal with the complexity of northern unemployment creates a situation fraught with confusion and unfulfilled promises.

In *Art and Cold Cash,* the research and arts collective composed of Patrick Mahon, Sheila Butler, Ruby Arngna'naaq, William Noah and Jack Butler embark on a discussion that is grounded in the different experiences of art making that Southern Canadians and Northern First Peoples have as a result of both government intervention and the ideology around the production of artwork. In creating a theoretical context for their artistic collaboration, their conversation raises a number of interesting questions around government intervention in art production and the different ways in which it is subsequently conceptualized in Northern and Southern contexts. Interestingly, the conversation reveals that members of the collective have very different concepts and understanding of both monetary and artistic exchange.

and a delayed newsflash …

On June 8, in the midst of all the intrigue surrounding the passing of the federal budget bills, a spectre from the past came, and passed, without our noticing. Bill C-2 (formerly C-20) which (amongst other things) redefines the lawful defences for child pornography passed third reading in the House of Commons. As this editorial is being written, it is at committee stage in the Senate and is projected to receive Royal Assent before the fall. And no, you didn't miss the newspaper coverage in early June — it didn't receive any.

Most important is not what the Bill contains but what it omits. Namely, upon final passage (which is almost assured), "artistic merit" (remember Eli Langer?) will no longer be an admissible defence. C-2's version of "artistic merit" is "legitimate purpose." (See the Canadian Conference for the Arts and the BC Civil Liberties Association websites for discussions of the drawbacks of the definition.)

You would think that social conservatives would be applauding the passing of the Bill, pointing to the John Sharpe case as proof that "artistic merit" merely protects 'perverts and pornographers' (conveniently forgetthing that Sharpe was found guilty on several charges under the old law). Alas, Russ Hiebert, Conservative MP for South Surrey, rose in the House on 13 October 2004 to declaim the Bill as it would still provide Langer a defence for his "pedophilic paintings."

Whether this is true or not, we can rest assured that once C-2 passes, it will only be a matter of time before Hiebert's theory is put to test and an artist or gallerist (or both) are charged with child pornography. The missing newspaper coverage of early June will be replaced with outrage and accusations (on *all* sides of the political spectrum, not all of it sympathetic to the 'alleged' pornographers). And they will be found guilty, or not, and there will be appeals launched and legal defence funds set up and, eventually, the Supreme Court will review the case and, we can hope, strike it down and ask parliament to try again.

This is not to say that there is nothing to be done now. On the contrary, it is vital to let members of parliament, senators, and the Governor General know your opinion on this matter — and, of course, put aside a little money for forthcoming defence funds.

letters

To the Editors,

I am appreciative that Fuse featured *Aural Cultures* in its pages. However, I want to draw attention to some of the many factual errors and misrepresentations contained in Lis van Berkel's review that ill befits Fuse's reputation for reasoned analysis.

The main judgment by Lis van Berkel against *Aural Cultures* is that it "disappointed" because "it is not a book about audio art." Let me clarify: *Aural Cultures is not a book about audio art.* Rather, it is an interdisciplinary anthology addressing sound and its connections to cultural contexts. While the presence of audio art is significant, it is only one practice among many. If Lis van Berkel consults my introduction, she would discover that one premise of *Aural Cultures* is to facilitate dialogue about sound across compartmentalized, discursive strongholds. What the contributors from philosophy, cultural studies, art history, musicology, anthropology, performance studies, etc. have in common is an interest in investigating sound's relationship to culture, society and politics.

Also troubling is Lis van Berkel's dismissive assertion that there is "little exploration of sound for sound's sake." This is not a lapse as she implies — *it's the other main rationale for Aural Cultures.* My introduction explains that, in contrast to the neo-modernism predominant in recent sound art exhibitions — i.e., "sound for sound's sake" practices that are abstract, self-referential and concerned with perceptual effects and technological processes — *Aural Cultures* explores the social embeddedness of sound. Since the editorial premise is to focus on alternatives to the neo-modernist paradigm, it is no mystery why "sound for sound's sake" could not be found.

It is only possible to advocate "sound for sound's sake" as a singular paradigm by ignoring the multi-faceted history of audio art, its interrelationship with other artforms, as well as the diversity of contemporary practices. Lis van Berkel's critique of the *Aural Cultures* soundworks seems to be the means by which a radio journalist couches her own awkwardness and antagonism towards visual art, which she pejoratively calls "regular art." Certainly the artists in *Aural Cultures*, working in performance, installation and interventionist modes, not to mention in audio, video and new technologies, would be surprised to be categorized under such a dubious label. In any event, thirteen out of fifteen tracks on the CD are "pure" audioworks. Only two are components of visual works (videos) — not their totality as the reviewer states.

It's more than ironic to witness the reviewer's modernist position being used as a justification for critique in Fuse. For a magazine dedicated to "understand[ing] the relationships between art, social change, activism, politics and the mass media," and offering "the cultural context in which [art] functions" (www.fusemagazine.org), one would think that the "art for art's sake" ideology would be antithetical to its interests. The modernist imperative in the reviewer's "sound

for sound's sake" quest — advocating hierarchically ordered media, disinterested contemplation, and autonomy from the social and political realms — should send a warning signal.

Anti-intellectualism is also a strange stance for FUSE to support. Feeling threatened by abstract questions and footnotes, as Lis van Berkel admits, is surely an odd bias for a book reviewer. It appears that she is unaware of YYZ's and the Walter Phillips Gallery's long history and international reputation for anthologies combining academic and artistic practices. Given the achievements already made by *Audio by Artists* and *Radio Rethink, Aural Cultures* expands the discussion to encompass other disciplines and cultural practices. The reviewer's contradictory position — complaining about the difficulty of some essays, then decrying the supposed lack of text elsewhere — evidences a curious double standard. Other inaccuracies, like declaring that two artists "didn't even merit a photograph" when their images appear on pp. 270 and 272, demonstrate her inattention to details and serve to perpetuate a tone of demeaning innuendo. Likewise, what is one to make of the reviewer's confusion between "aural" and "oral"? Even though she attributes it to me, it's not based on anything I've written. And by what logic can the artworks be considered "decontextualized" — when they're elaborated on in a 3,200-word essay? Unfortunately, an opportunity here was missed for an engaged discussion about the issues raised in *Aural Cultures*, such as those concerning the cultural politics of listening, interdisciplinary approaches to sonic phenomena, and the links between sound, bodies, environments and identity.

Moreover, Lis van Berkel's suggestion that *Aural Cultures* is deficient because it failed to provide a CD-ROM containing video clips, photos, interviews and more is based on absurdly unrealistic expectations. If this was the current publishing standard, this criticism might be valid, but I have yet to see such an example in any anthology on sound or audio art. For a reviewer to chastise a publication by an artist-run centre in this way demonstrates her unfamiliarity with the staffing and financial challenges of such organizations. It's disturbing to see FUSE implicitly endorse criticism that replicates the comments of corporatized cultural institutions who deride the efforts of small producers because their projects aren't ambitious or sensational enough.

Ultimately the review falls into the "Why don't you do what I do?" genre of criticism: unable or unwilling to understand a book's position, the reviewer instead projects her own agenda and dismisses anything not satisfying her extrinsic concerns. To provide a credible critique, Lis van Berkel would have had to respond to the book's actual contents and do the hard work of articulating substantive reasons for her criticism. Anybody can have an opinion, but readers expect to find informed commentary from FUSE. Book reviews may seem like a minor item for editorial scrutiny, yet there is still a professional obligation to check for and insist upon a well-argued critical practice. Falsehoods, misrepresentations, deliberate omissions — these traits are not the basis for fair and ethical criticism, nor do they contribute to a constructive debate about the issues. The distinguished history and position of FUSE in the Canadian art scene calls for its criticism to at least attempt to be rigorous, cogent and accurate.

Jim Drobnick

Roberta Jamieson, Chief of Six Nations, visits Audge's Place at the Art Gallery of Ontario, 2003, Photo: Craig Boyko, Copyright Art Gallery of Ontario

Reflections of a former Community Arts Officer

by Melanie Fernandez

As a Community Arts Officer at the Ontario Arts Council (OAC) from 1994 to 2000 with a mandate to create a new policy and funding framework for the Community Arts sector and associated programs, I was in a privileged position.

Following on the heels of three decades of work by Naomi Lightbourn, I led a team through international research, local and provincial discussions, heated debates and questions about the legitimacy of community arts that culminated in the *Vital Links: Enriching Communities Through Art and Art Through Communities* conference.

As a result of this work, the OAC adopted the following definition of community arts in 1996:

> … an arts process that involves the work of artists and community members in a collaborative creative process resulting in collective experience and public expression. It provides a way for communities to express themselves; enables artists, through financial or other supports, to engage in creative activity with communities; and is collaborative — the creative process is equally important as the artistic outcome.

Within this definition, community was understood as:

> … the awareness among a group of people of the bonds they share … a discrete group of people bound together by common ties of race, gender, geography, nationality, culture (language, history, attitudes), physical ability, economic status, age, sexual orientation, ideology or goals.

At the time, this definition represented a landmark for legitimizing the aims and practices of community arts. Given the foundation of community arts in cultural democracy, however, it seems important to always, and at this political moment in particular, challenge the terms by which we define this set of complex practices and histories.

With a number of years between ourselves and this definition (still in use at the OAC),

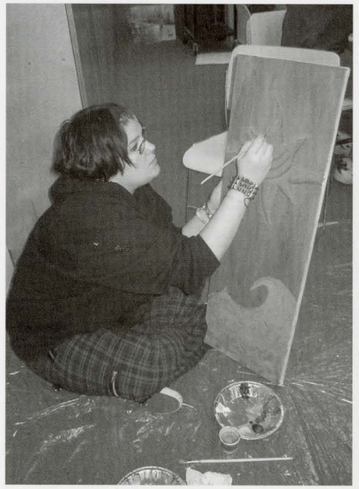
Visitors to Audge's Place, Art Gallery of Ontario, 2003, Copyright De-ba-jeh-mu-jig Theatre Group

we might ask if it addresses the organic way in which communities and community projects evolve. Do the theoretical frameworks that support this definition address the complex and intrinsic relationship between art and community found in many non-western contexts? Does this definition address the spiritual dimension that underlies many community arts projects around the world? Through interviews with a number of community arts practitioners, and having had the benefit of time and distance, I have gradually come to the conclusion that, while useful, our definition limited the scope of our understanding of community arts to those practices grounded in a particular trajectory of European artistic production.

Before probing what was left out, it might be useful to revisit how the definitions for community arts came to be. Up until the time we developed this definition, the OAC's mandate was to support professional arts practice. Within the OAC Community Arts section, there existed a range of funding programs that supported an eclectic group of activities from folk festivals to multicultural arts to folk arts, aboriginal arts, individuals and organizations. An articulation of shared definitions or methodologies did not exist at the OAC. Community artists were often considered to be "amateur" practitioners with little understanding or knowledge of artistic process. One of the more defined programs, "Artist in the Workplace" was created on an Australian model of labour arts and initiated through the hard work of artists and activists such as Karl Beveridge and Carole Condé, among others. This program enabled artists or arts organizations to work with labour unions, locals or labour councils on creative projects with their membership. It was exemplary in the creation of artist residencies.

Since many artists possessed a strong methodological base, commitment to community and strong political conviction, they relayed their desire to gain recognition and funding for their particular skills, expertise and goals within the definition process.

Recognition was a very pressing concern as conversations with artists and stakeholders occurred in the face of the radical budget cuts initiated by the conservative government of the mid-1990s. These cuts provoked a crisis within the OAC about whether community arts programs would survive at all. However, they also created opportunity to initiate a critical dialogue about the definition, practice, process, critical framework, international context and possibilities for community arts as a leader and foundation for arts participation, appreciation and education. The intensity of this moment led us to passionate conclusions about the importance of the role of community arts in igniting civic dialogue, the growing need to frame this work in the language and practices of anti-oppression, to ensure that artists were not only permitted to pursue, but celebrated for their work in, the facilitation of political action within communities. Artists who participated in the facilitation



Secondary Alternative School student participating in a workshop with De-ba-jeh-mu-jig and 7th Generation Image Makers, 2003, Copyright Debajehmujig Theatre Group

were informed by such frameworks as popular education and popular theatre.

Following the adoption of new definitions and funding programs through *Vital Links*, promotional work was done to encourage growing support for community arts from the private sector and other public sector funders. In addition, many information sessions and other development work, including the creation of a workbook, *Community Arts Workbook … Another Vital Link*, were carried out over numerous years to promote the positive benefits of community arts projects within a wide rage of communities across the province and country. Other organizations developed discussion papers and pilot funding programs to support community arts activities. Most of these initiatives either partially or wholly embraced the definition first developed by the OAC.

While the ideas that informed this definition are still crucial to our understanding of community arts, in seeing it implemented and experiencing the ways in which community arts have evolved, it is clear to me that it is not adequate in describing the practices of artists in many communities. Even further, after numerous conversations with artists and cultural animators, I have realized that our definition has done a disservice to groups and individuals whose worldview places creativity within a more organic framework. I have also come to understand that community participation in the creative process is much more complex and multidimensional than this definition has allowed for and that spirituality plays a role that went unaccounted for in earlier discussions. Through more recent conversations, a different picture has begun to emerge about the complex ways in which community arts function, particularly communities for whom arts, public culture and spirituality are not separate spheres of activity.

One of the organizations that has helped me understand organic community arts practice and its spiritual dimensions is De-ba-jeh-mu-jig Theatre Company based on the Wikwemikong First Nation Reserve on Manitoulin Island in Ontario. The members of this talented and unique company have spent a great deal of time considering the nature of their practice; how it differs from the paradigm of professional, mainstream theatre and how culture and worldview frame their process.

Ron Berti, Artistic Producer, states:

> I would say that our work is the convergence of the following: a) a humanistic imperative to engage the people to nurture cultural emancipation, and ultimately, survival; b) a reaction to the lack of aboriginal arts infrastructure, a lack of arts infrastructure in rural, isolated and remote communities … ; and c) a reflection of the values of the communities being served, rather than the values of the outside stakeholders. In the Asishnaabeg worldviews, all things are connected. This leads to an egalitarian nature in the values the community holds. Specialization is a concept that the mainstream refers to as professionalism. Specialization (professionalism) is about distinguishing, standing out, defining the boundaries of — all concepts that are the antithesis to 'all things are connected.'

Although at surface reading this may sound similar to the OAC's definition of "awareness among a group of people of the bonds they share," De-ba-jeh-mu-jig's emphasis on connectivity is very different from the processes of identification and differentiation implied by the definition's emphasis on the "discrete group" that knows itself through its common characteristics (race, gender, geography, etc). In a worldview where all things are connected, it is not what one has in common, but that one exists on the planet that forms this bond.

Over many years of discussions with members of De-ba-jeh-mu-jig and by observing their creative processes and outcomes, I have also learned that our assumption that an artist/professional might work with or join a community represents a very different set of processes than when artists (like De-ba-jeh-mu-jig) are of a community and are participants in its day-to-day community life.

For De-ba-jeh-mu-jig, this difference is rooted in their role as storytellers. Within their community and within the many other communities with whom they work, they are recognized as people who pass on an oral tradition by teaching others how to find and share their stories.

Is this a political process? It most definitely is a powerful political force because it empowers individuals and communities to organize and become self-determining by finding and expressing their voices. There are, however, other powerful forces at play since the spiritual role of the storyteller in an Aboriginal community is equally key to understanding community arts in this context.

In the article *The Art of Inuit Storytelling*, renowned Inuit filmmaker, Zacharias Kunuk, asks, "Can Inuit bring storytelling into the new millennium? Can we listen to our elders before they all pass away? To answer these questions we want to show

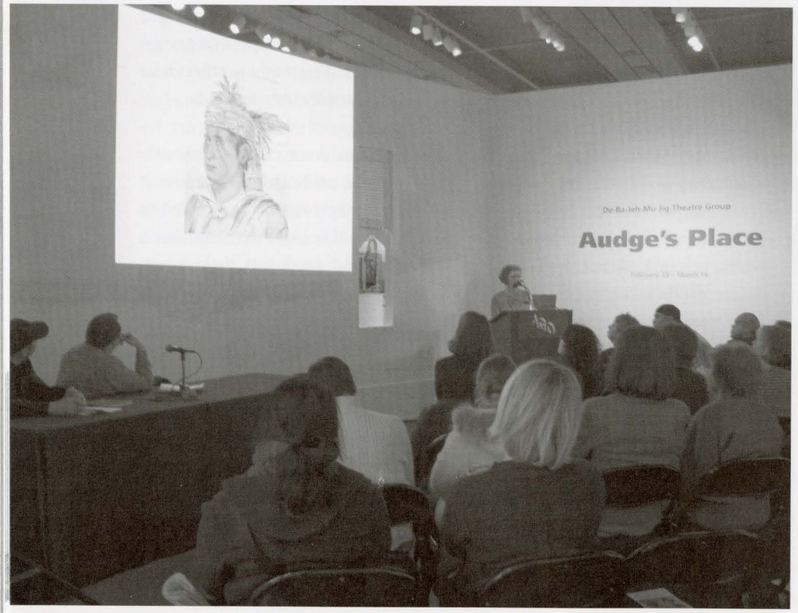
how our ancestors survived by the strength of their community and their wits, and how new ways of storytelling today can help our community survive another thousand years…"

Of Arnait, the women's video collective in Igloolik, he states:

> The originality of Arnait Video's productions is due very much to the efforts undertaken to create a production process that is in harmony with the lives of the women involved in each project. Our production values reflect the cultural values of the participants: respect for community events, for elders, for hunting and fishing seasons, for certain traditions belonging to particular families.

Interesting in the practices of both De-ba-jeh-mu-jig and Igloolik Isuma is that their projects bring people together from different cultural and geographic locations precisely because of this worldview of connectedness, as a way of strengthening the telling of a story and its local and global impact. While maintaining a strong relationship to the past, to place, to language and culture, in these contexts, "community" operates through a much broader network of times and geographies. In both contexts, there is a strong desire to spread the story, to work with others who can help in its translation and distribution. There are many comings and goings, many collaborations across cultural and spatial differences.

It is in part due to these collaborations that De-ba-jeh-mu-jig and Igloolik Isuma can easily frame or translate their process and production within the discourse of community cultural development and cultural democracy. It is important to note, however, that these practices are not entirely *of* this framework. They are rooted in traditional values and spiritual systems with very long histories of development. Acts of collaboration and translation can be seen as part of these traditional frameworks as much as they can be seen through the networks of distribution that operate in mainstream culture.

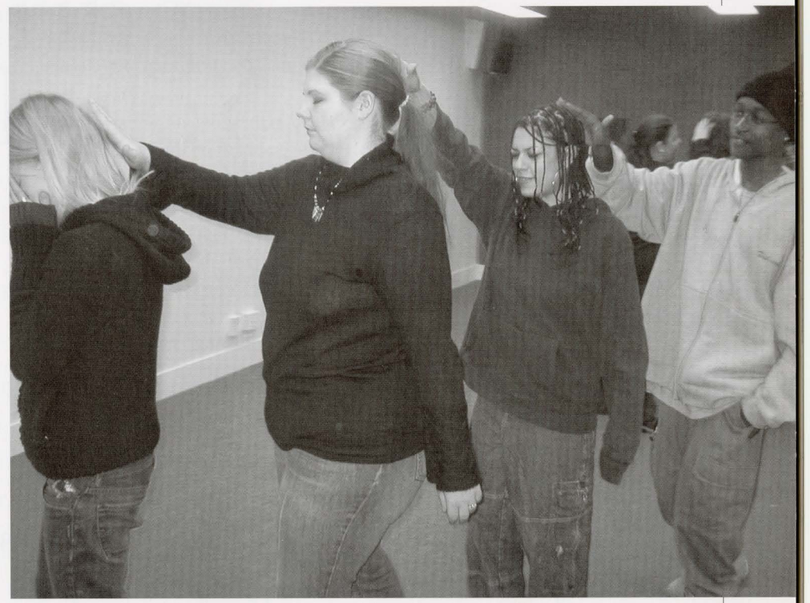


Ulana Baluk presenting at *On Displaying Aboriginal Cultures* as part of the Audge's Place installation, 2003, Copyright De-ba-jeh-mu-jig Theatre Group

This spiritual dimension of community arts is often left out of the descriptions of community arts practices. Though projects such as the popular education work of Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux and the influential Popular Theatre work of Augusto Boal are often used as examples of the possibilities within community arts, these and other community arts practices are often understood exclusively through the lens of civil rights and emancipation struggles along the lines of race, class, gender, age, ability/disability and collective and individual empowerment. Though even these emancipatory projects draw heavily on liberation theology and indigenous spiritual tradition, rarely in my readings do I come across the importance of spirituality in community arts projects. To discuss the spiritual dimension is often seen as outside the critical discourse of contemporary artistic practice.

In my conversations with a number of western and non-western artists, however, spirituality has been a key frame of reference. As Maria Berriozabal, a widely respected community leader and former city council member in San Antonio describes her experience of working on the Americans for the Arts Animating Democracy project *Arte es Vida* at The Esperanza Peace & Justice Centre, "the spiritual dimension is inherently inclusive — it is a way of situating our work within a larger context…."

By spiritual, I do not mean religious. Spirituality can be seen as the act of creating. It informs how the work is situated within the world. Within a worldview where all aspects of a life cycle are linked by a greater force, this provides a very different sense of time and space for a community project.



Secondary Alternative School students participating in a workshop with De-ba-jeh-mu-jig and 7th Generation Image Makers, 2003, Copyright De-ba-jeh-mu-jig Theatre Group

It has been my privilege to have many discussions with Laurie McGauley from *Myth and Mirrors Community Arts* in Sudbury, Ontario. After driving through a blizzard to meet me one day in late winter on Manitoulin Island, a small group gathered over an amazing dinner to discuss community arts. Laurie described her journey through the waves of activism movements of the 1970s and 1980s. She noted that these left her exhausted and dispirited until working with one group, she participated in a collective process that allowed for the creation of a new work that had resonance for all who participated — "creating our own culture, our own voices, through the languages of art (always ambivalent about the word Art)," she writes:

> In working with groups, my intent is to create a safe space, a sacred space, where each person is listened to as we try to create meaning together. I am not stuck in some utopian place and I am a realist about the state of the world but my intent is to create the spaces for this coming together in the hope that more people will realize 'another world is possible.'

Laurie went on to share her definition of community arts and her framework with me:

> A community group of people who explore their truths, their values, their longings in order to create an artistic representation of their collective visions. I am strongly rooted in a pagan spirituality that emphasizes connection to the Earth and to each other; I come to this work as an activist working for social justice. Critical theory provides a framework for understanding our social imaginary, balanced with utopian theory, the urgency to create alternative visions of justice and peace. Celebration and ritual ground us in these visions, and are an important part of my work.

Another artist that has contributed to my understanding of community art and art within community contexts is senior multidiscipinary artist Winsom. She says:

> Through community arts I'm trying to achieve the goal of bringing together many different people of all races and age groups. By doing community arts, one can really see and hear the spirit of a person. If one can see and hear the spirit or soul of a person, then their outer shell does not matter and the light that is carried inside will shine through, breaking down negative images. Therefore, groups of all ages and races that come together will be able to work together in harmony for the betterment of their community.

I have seen such coming together in my trips into the interior of Mexico, where I have had the opportunity to observe community creativity in such events as the Day of the Dead (Dia De Los Muertos) celebrations. These involve the entire community coming together in celebration of family members who have passed away. Known on the Christian calendar as All

Souls Day and All Saints Day, these days are marked by elaborately decorated cemeteries and houses; master papier-mâchè and sugar artists preparing skulls and other vignettes with skeletons; master bakers preparing Day of the Dead breads; potters creating special tableware for the celebration; local benevolent societies preparing pageants, plays and processionals, and many more manifestations of community creative action.

Within these contexts, there is no singular role for the community arts practitioner. Everyone contributes, everyone brings something. Practitioners of all kinds facilitate the possibility of communal celebration. This calls into question the framework of professionalization for which we strove in the mid-nineties.

In describing the creative process the company has defined within its community and within the context of the professional theatre, Joe Osawabine, artistic director of De-ba-jeh-mu-jig Theatre Group states:

> The Four Direction Creation Process, or 4d, is a unique process for creating new works developed by De-ba-jeh-mu-jig Theatre Group. It is a culturally and socially specific process that is holistic in nature. It recognizes the artist as the creation and the performance as the celebration. It recognizes that as humans we create with our entire beings — our physical, our emotional, our intellectual, and our spiritual selves, and therefore it accepts and specifically supports the artist in all four areas. It is adapted to the skills and intuitions of artists who have been strongly influenced by oral tradition. It is a process that nurtures honesty more than accuracy, and sharing more than starring. It is a process that consciously uses personal resources and group creation.

Within these organic frameworks there is less emphasis on the idea of "professionalism" as a result of training in the academy. Within many non-western and aboriginal communities the notion of the "professional" has a completely different meaning. A person may be viewed as a "master" within a certain creative field such as carving, storytelling, music or singing for example. They often earn their livelihood through other means and engage in their creative activities within the context of community gatherings or perhaps as an additional source of income. Therefore trying to frame a definition based on the constructs of artistic practice, discipline-based silos, isolates and marginalizes the work of these creators and their communities.

As described on a Toronto Arts Council application by John Kani, a South African actor, playwright, and Chair of the National Arts Council in South Africa, "... the community is what is important. When you become an artist, you become an artist in that village — a storyteller, a dancer, an entertainer, a percussionist. You're doing it for the village...."

It is clear now, in hindsight, that while a shared definition is still important for community arts, we cannot foreclose on the importance of understanding the ways in which community arts are grounded in their cultural contexts. According to artist Andrea Assaf, "the concept of selfhood and identity, rooted in creative expression and cultural practice, is necessary to empower marginalized communities and individuals to participate actively in public dialogue and civic life." This grounding may differentiate the way in which a community defines itself, the way in which it defines art, the ways in which it defines artist, the impetus for engaging in community creation, the way in which dialogue is facilitated and framed (as story, as debate, as puppet theatre etc.) and the sense of time associated with the project.

Though definitions — of a profession, a community and a set of processes, were necessary as a starting point in legitimizing community arts, establishing funding and developing shared understandings a decade ago, it is incumbent upon us all to constantly challenge the boundaries and change and debate the merits of definitions and frameworks within which we have come to comfortably work. In our re-engagement of a critical conversation about community arts we must ask ourselves: How might we move toward a framework that can accommodate the vast array of important practices in this field? How might we retain recognition and funding for community arts without compromising the multiplicity of ways in which it is practiced? It seems to me that, taking our cue from De-ba-jeh-mu-jig and others, we might look to the connections between practices and communities for the answers to these questions.

Melanie Fernandez is currently Director of Community and Education Programmes at Harbourfront Centre. For six years she worked as Community Arts Officer at the Ontario Arts Council. During this time, Melanie led a comprehensive policy review of community arts in the province that resulted in new definitions, directions and programs. She also currently teaches a course in community arts at the Ontario College of Art and Design and has written extensively in the areas of cultural diversity and cultural production, aboriginal cultural production and community arts.

Persevering Realpolitik:

A conversation with Marie-Hélène Cousineau of Arnait Video Productions

by Emily Rothwell

With the release and subsequent success of Isuma's *Atanarjuat* (The Fast Runner) in 2000, much attention has been focused on Igloolik's Isuma and Arnait video collectives. These collectives now hold international acclaim and bring more than two million dollars annually to their community with the creation of more than 100 job opportunities in the cultural sector. In a community where half the population is unemployed, this is no small accomplishment.[1]

The emergence of a burgeoning video practice in Igloolik did not spring from isolation, but was consistent with cultural developments in communications technology in the north. A community unique in Nunavut for refusing television broadcasting until 1983 on linguistic and cultural grounds, Igloolik only agreed to broadcast television under the stipulation that it incorporated the Inuktitut language and addressed issues relevant to people living in Nunavut. Although this resulted in some reform, the proposals have seen a limited and dwindling success.

Videos produced by Arnait and Isuma are strategically located within a socio-historical context — one that

Arnait Video Collective, *Anana*, video still, 2001, Courtesy: Emily Rothwell

cannot be separated from a colonized past and a neo-colonial present — and in many ways serve as an active response to the marginalization of their works. The obstacles preventing Igloolik artists from accessing government funding channels might today place this work at a standstill. While the era of government control of Inuit art died with the 1989 termination of the Canadian Eskimo Arts Council, new challenges arise with a complete lack of territorial involvement in Igloolik's cultural initiatives.[2]

With the establishment of Nunavut in 1999, Inuit were for the first time given channels for political action. In that same year, Marie-Hélène Cousineau, a founding member of Arnait video collective, reflected on the lack of government initiatives that deal with the complex issues of northern unemployment and its connection to the limits imposed on Inuit videographers, producers and artists' collectives in Igloolik.[3] Although initially intended to provide Inuit with control over the economic, political and social situation in Nunavut, the changes in legislation are fraught with unfulfilled promises. The Canadian federal government continues to maintain jurisdiction over the territory while curtailing Inuit access to the funding and administrative resources necessary to sustain cultural production.

Arnait Video Collective, *Anana,* video still, 2001, Courtesy: Emily Rothwell

In conversation with Emily Rothwell, Cousineau probes Arnait's work, their production process, the contradictions inherent in government policies and funding structures, her hope for new solutions and Arnait's latest productions, revealing the complexities of video production in Nunavut by exploring the social, political and economic dynamics of contemporary Inuit artistic practices.

Emily Rothwell: In reading your paper, "Limits or Alternatives: Dead End for First Nations Producers in the Canadian Film and Television Financing System," it seems the economic framework and, specifically, the hardships involved in fundraising are complicated by the dominant cultural infrastructure. You have said that you brought video-making skills and fundraising knowledge to Igloolik — all of which you have shared with this community. Are the Igloolik video artists able to access these fundraising avenues?

Marie-Hélène Cousineau: When I wrote this paper it was really in reaction to the fundraising situation for *Atanarjuat.* And it was all true. But I think right now for people in Igloolik and for the emerging filmmaker in Nunavut, the problem is more Nunavut itself. It's becoming very embarrassing to always ask for outside money from the Canada Council or a federal agency because the Nunavut government has no system for supporting this.

I worked for the government of Nunavut in 2002. They asked me to be a consultant and wanted to see if they should create a film commission or a film development corporation like those that exist in all the other provinces. So of course I suggested they should. I wrote a proposal and it went through the legislative assembly and they agreed to both create a film commission and put money into it. Since then, they have done nothing with it. And even this year we're having a big argument with the government because while there is money that is supposed to be allocated to film and video production, they're not spending it. They don't have a film commissioner. There's no program in place. At the end of the last fiscal year, they gave money to a few people at the last minute, but there's nothing serious going on.

ER: So it's at a bureaucratic standstill. It's stuck.

MHC: It is stuck. People are not talking. The politicians are not moving forward with it. The Inuit organizations themselves, who have even more money than the government of Nunavut, are not doing anything. So the department of Cultural Language Elders and Youth (CLEY) that gives money to cultural projects, gives very small grants. It's kind of erratic and you never know why. You don't know who is on the jury. Even if you fit the criteria you can be refused. It's really bad. It's a scandal actually.

ER: What do you think the sources of this cultural policy scandal are?

MHC: I think it's a combination of political choices, ignorance, imbecility and just people who don't know how to do things. It's a mix. A lot of white people are working for the politicians. They go and they work in Nunavut for CLEY, for economic development. A lot of people arrive in Nunavut from down south. They don't know about Nunavut and poof! — they get this job to be a policy analyst. They have a $70,000 job and nothing is happening. And there's all the mix with Canadian Heritage, the federal department. They're sort of controlling what's happening with the culture in Nunavut with all their programs and what they're supporting. There's no logic to it.

ER: It's top-down?

MHC: Yes.

ER: It takes, from what I'm gathering, strategizing to play this game.

MHC: Yes. At the Nunavut territorial level it's hard to get an application form. You don't know; you ask for $20,000 and they give you $6,000. If you need $20,000 and you have $6,000, where are you supposed to get the rest of your money? If somebody wants to do a film in Nunavut right now, or video, they cannot, like in any other province of Canada, say, "I'm going to apply to my provincial government for this program." There is no program for film and video. So what can you do if people are not complaining themselves? But they can't complain because they don't know that they should have that funding since they haven't been living in other places where people have it. They don't know how it works.

ER: And the powers that be aren't going to tell them up front.

MHC: No. When they hired me to do their consultation on the film commission there was a big impact with *Atanarjuat.* People were talking about how this was a big success, the world is interested, we can make movies! Since then, they found diamonds in Nunavut. And now all the talk is, "let's look for those diamonds and sell the territory to De Beers."

ER: So we're back to the gold rush here.

MHC: Yes! In Yellowknife there's no unemployment right now because everyone works for the mine. So nobody works to make films. They want to do the same thing in Nunavut. Unfortunately, they found diamonds very close to Igloolik. Diamonds are a very backward industry that is mixed with the worst people dealing arms and drugs. They're saying now, in Canada, they're "clean diamonds," but all the diamonds they mine in Canada they send to Belgium and then back to Canada. There's no way to keep track of whether it's the same diamond or if it's coming from Africa or South America.

ER: It's been an exploitive industry for a long time. So the timing couldn't be worse?

MHC: No. Before, the present government had some-

thing called the Department of Sustainable Development in Nunavut, and they've shut that off. Now it's the Economic Development Department, so the idea of sustainability is gone. I mean, of course diamonds are not sustainable. You know when they are gone. So that's what's happening. The government is geared towards that. Apart from giving a $3,000 grant to a carver to buy tools, that's what they do. The rest is non-existent. It's worse than ten years ago.

ER: Do you think change will come? How could this situation be bettered?

MHC: The government has to keep their promise. There was supposed to be a film commission. They're making all these reports, all these recommendations, but they don't act on them. I'm totally pessimistic about the whole thing. I don't know what it's going to take.

ER: Do you think changes to the present circumstances will come from activism by younger Inuit generations?

MHC: Maybe. Maybe in forty years when there are no more diamonds and no more money from the federal government and the territory is back to zero. Maybe then they'll say, "let's sell our stories, let's do something." I don't know. It's a postcolonial situation and it's just horrible. I think maybe if they [the government] were accountable and more open, and they should be, that would change the situation. Because now they spend money and don't say where. The government of Nunavut is bad news. There's no independent business except for Isuma. And construction, there's one construction business. They rent tractors to De Beers. The territory, villages, the culture is being sold to those mega-corporations. That is what's happening.

ER: The collusion of government and corporations is obvious in this context, and it is a foreboding example of corporations wielding more power.

MHC: Yes. I mean it's happening there.

ER: During production, do the video artists think about the international context in which the videos will be shown or do they have solely their own communities in mind?

MHC: They do think about it [the international context]. They just think they want the greatest number of people to see it.

ER: So that could be the community and beyond?

MHC: Yes, beyond the community and everywhere. We're going to places now; we travel to show our work. So now they understand what it's about. Now the artists understand that when we're not there people come and see it and ask questions.

ER: Are you looking to do more television?

MHC: Eventually. The video production we're working on right now is about adoption and APTN [Aboriginal Peoples Television Network] didn't even give us a license. They refused two Isuma projects saying they didn't have enough money. They're not taking any more documentaries; they want variety shows, quiz shows and all that junk.

ER: Maybe a reality show?

MHC: Almost! I mean I guess the History channel got a program from Isuma that was shown a month ago. But people in regular television or even specialty television, usually want to show things they produce about other people. So if it's a film about Inuit, made by Inuit, they don't seem to be open to that. Television is a very exclusive universe.

ER: And it's commercial.

MHC: And it's commercial — very exclusive.

ER: You began your involvement in Igloolik as a video artist from Montreal. What did you learn from working within these collectives?

MHC: I think I've learned a lot. I learned how the system works in Canada. It works differently if you're French, English, Inuk. I learned about politics.

ER: Has it made you disillusioned? Or more disillusioned?

MHC: Disillusioned? Over the last few years? Yes. Because, when I moved there, a lot of things seemed possible. Right now they don't seem possible. There's lots of incompetence and not a lot of interest. But I also learned good things — collaboration, patience, generosity, curiosity. I learned a lot from Inuit culture.

ER: What is your current involvement with the collective? What are you working on now? What are your hopes for future projects?

MHC: Right now we're working on a documentary about the traditional and the transition to the modern way of adopting within Inuit culture. So we wrote a script, we met, we prepared it in the summer of 2003. We did a lot of research and collected stories and then in April and last summer we recorded it.

We're also working on a script I wrote — a project that's been done with Isuma — that is an adaptation of a book, *For Morgendagen*, or *Before Tomorrow*, by a Danish writer called Jorn Riel. His story about a grandmother and a grandson takes place in nineteenth century Greenland. It's the story of their tribe and how they disappear because they all get sick after a ship visits their village. The grandmother and grandson survive because they had gone to work separately on the island, but then they discover everyone else is dead. I cried every time I read the book. But it's a very nice book and very, very strong. And these are things that actually happened. I mean, aboriginal people died when they met the Europeans. I think, for us, it's also a very basic human story.

ER: Yes exactly. It's something everyone can relate to.

MHC: Yes I think so. I went to Igloolik last summer. And with the women we went through the book and through the script I wrote in English. We wrote it in Inuktitut; they translated it and changed things and made it more real for them. I'm still working on this project. I worked with Mary [Kunuk], Madeline [Ivalu] and Susan [Avingaq] and I really want to work with them on producing, directing and making the film. But it's going to be a different kind of project for us. With all the individuals involved, it's more of a challenge for all of us.

Notes:

1. Marie-Hélène Cousineau, "Limits or Alternatives: Dead End for First Nations Producers in Canadian Film and Television Financing System," ("Gender Perspectives" online conference, accessed http://commposite.uqam.ca/videaz/bio/macoen.html) 1999.
2. Marybelle Mitchell, "The State Organizes Cooperatives for Eskimos," *From Talking Chiefs to a Native Corporate Elite: The Birth of Class and Nationalism among Canadian Inuit* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996).
3. Ibid.
4. In "Limits or Alternatives" (1999), Cousineau collected extracts from correspondence between Igloolik Isuma, Telefilm Canada and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in order "to highlight a number of systematic traps in which Canadian First Nations producers can't help but fall." This documentation related specifically to the funding struggles Isuma experienced during the production of Atanarjuat, the company's first feature film.

Marie-Helene Cousineau is the founding coordinator of Tarriaksuk Video Centre, established in 1991. She formed the collective Arnait Video Productions, and is its coordinator/trainer as well as an active collaborating producer with Mary Kunuk, Madeline Ivalu and Susan Avingaq. She has curated several exhibitions of work from Tarriaksuk and has written about the experiences of women making video in Igloolik.

On 20 March 2005, the Agnes Etherington Art Center hosted cache: three contemporary videos from Igloolik, *a program of artists' tapes produced in Nunavut by Igloolik Isuma Productions and Arnait Video Productions. This exhibition was curated collaboratively by Lindsday Leitch, Erin Morton, Emily Rothwell, Taryn Sirove, Andrea Terry and Michelle Veitch. The interview cam e out of this project, which was born out of graduate seminar* ARTH-868 *Assigning a Category: Inuit Video in the department of art at Queen's University. The contributors would like to thank Dr. Lynda Jessup for her inspiration and support.*

(left and middle) Arnait Video Collective, *Anana*, video still, 2001, Courtesy: Emily Rothwell

(right) Arnait Video Collective, *Qulliq*, video still, 1992 Courtesy: Emily Rothwell

Art and Cold Cash

A conversation between
Patrick Mahon,
Ruby Arngna'naaq,
Sheila Butler,
Jack Butler
and William Noah

The Art and Cold Cash Collective in conversation, Courtesy: Patrick Mahon

In the mid-twentieth century the Canadian federal and territorial governments acted in concert to link Arctic art production to cold cash. At that time, widespread introduction of firearms for hunting, and money to be made by trapping for the fur trade led to increasing dependence on southern commodities for Inuit people. These factors, coupled with the introduction of tuberculosis, brought an end to thousands of years of a nomadic way of life. Settlements were established and formerly nomadic Inuit groups gradually accepted a more sedentary existence, relying far less on hunting and fishing for subsistence. Soon, government arts and crafts production projects were founded in several Arctic communities as interventions intended to provide gainful employment for displaced Inuit. Contacts, mediated by government Crafts Officers, were made with southern art dealers and some Inuit producers became known as artists (in the sense that the dominant culture uses that term). These artists earned money for the first time and became players in global capitalism as both producers and consumers.

Bringing a North/South view to bear on this history, the "Art and Cold Cash" collective is involved in producing art in a social site in the Canadian Arctic, a contemporary context influenced by imported western notions of art operating in tandem with the introduction of capitalist exchange. In an investigative mode, Canadian artists Jack Butler, Sheila Butler and Patrick Mahon are working closely with writer Ruby Arngna'naaq and artist William Noah, Inuit members of the collective who have lived through the change from barter economy to capitalism. The work of the "Art and Cold Cash" collective highlights an important contradiction, in that Northern artists are encouraged today, as over the past fifty years, to produce art and to market their own culture as a means of survival, while Southern Canadian artists regularly take jobs to subsidize their practices.

"Art and Cold Cash" seeks to discuss/explore contemporary Inuit art within a context of a politics of interpretation by Southern Canadian cultural workers. It also acknowledges that in the wake of European nineteenth- and twentieth-century art history, art works as commodities occupy troubled ground. As a creative response to these conditions, on 14 December 2004, "Art and Cold Cash" collective members Ruby Arngna'naaq, Jack Butler, Sheila Butler, Patrick Mahon and William Noah sat down to talk about art and money in a conversation that reveals radically different views of notions of monetary and artistic exchange.

PATRICK MAHON: In the contemporary art world, especially in the noncommercial context, capitalism has for a long time been a dirty word. The idea that you would want to make art in order to produce something that someone would want to buy reveals differing relationships between art and money in Northern Canada and Southern Canada. I think our project is intended to open this question up across cultural contexts.

RUBY ARNGNA'NAAQ: I'm not sure I know what you mean when you talk about capitalism.

SHEILA BUTLER: I think of the historical development of money and economy and value in the Western world, resulting in the way we live now with investment and

Phillip Iksiraq, *Loon,* Recycling Art Project, A&CC, Baker Lake, Recycled table cloth, plastic bags, duct tape, tea tin lids, 2005, Courtesy: Patrick Mahon

wage employment and money as the medium of exchange for everything.

RA: I think of capitalism as the Western way that has to do with money and status and achieving power and "power over." From the time I first heard of this project, and in my discussions with you, I thought it wasn't as much about capitalism as it was about culture.

JACK BUTLER: Well, do we make a drawing because we have the need to make a drawing, or do we make the drawing to make the exchange to get the money?

PM: My earlier point was that in some sectors of artmaking, certainly in many contexts in Southern Canada, there is the notion that our jobs as artists are to resist the idea that we are actually producing commodities that might have material value in society. And this resistance is seen as part of what defines our aspirations. And you know, I think that philosophically that is a useful position to take up in order to think about the other things we value besides money. At the same time, it's pretty naive to think that somehow as artists we are making objects in the context of a capitalist society that won't enter into that potential system of exchange. Even if nobody wants to buy them, art objects propose the possibility of being bought and sold.

RA: But now, within the Western world, there are groups of people who do not necessarily think of themselves as capitalists, but they find that things have culturally

changed. In other words, there are people who are primarily just using money as opposed to gaining it. They're only using money as a trade thing, because they have no choice. They were born into this contemporary society and money is the means for exchange. But it doesn't necessarily define their life. They are not using it as an end, so if you refer to capitalism only as it is in Southern Canada, that narrows it right down. Before money, for example, another type of trading was done in regard to a shaman's services for healing or bringing back someone's life, or empowering someone. A shaman would receive small pieces to add to his shaman's belt, as symbols of how much he helped. It was not so much an honour as a symbol of appreciation.

WILLIAM NOAH: And if the shaman came to perform, the person who wants the shaman to perform had to give him the best quality little strip of weasel or fox fur. It is the same thing as honouring God. God does not want me to come to you empty-handed. I would have to give money or something that is valuable to me; not all of my money or valuables, but some of it, in order for God to use you to help me. It is the same with the shaman — you do not receive something without giving a little bit of something. It is not exactly an exchange, it is just the way the spirit works. It was more a kind of generosity before money came into use, an offering.

PM: So maybe this is a big jump, but do you think that when people from the Hudson's Bay Company first showed up in the Arctic that the idea of "trade" was automatically embraced by the Inuit? I mean, if, as you say, when people were short of caribou, someone gave them caribou in order that they could survive — but that that exchange was not exactly "trade" — how did the idea take hold?

WN: When people were living on the land, we would come to the Hudson's Bay Post once or twice a year when the winter traveling was good. And in the olden days when my father or my grandfather would go to the Hudson's Bay Post to bring some fox or maybe wolf pelts, and they would put the pelts on the table, then the Hudson's Bay manager would grab some long and short sticks and the length of the sticks would indicate how much you are going to get paid, like five dollars or a dollar and fifty cents. If you want more than the manager is offering, he will take two more sticks and put them on a shelf to let you know that when you come back with more pelts then you will have more sticks, something like a savings account. But if you want to spend your savings right away, the manager will give them all to you at once. But the customer will not be too pleased since he is putting himself in debt. He does not know for sure that he will succeed in getting more furs to cover the sticks he is now spending.

SB: Well, the thing is, when the Hudson's Bay Company built those first trading posts, they knew why they did it — because they wanted the furs. So they expected that when they got there they were going to do some kind of an exchange and they would know that the people who had furs to sell didn't have money and they went there with that in mind.

PM: They must have gone there with the idea that they would need to teach people about the whole idea of capitalism.

RA: Yes, but from my grandfather's point of view, he had a very different interpretation. The fur trading with the Bay was so valuable to him that it would be the same as if today someone gave me an airline ticket to Hawaii. The trade goods made life so much easier in my grandfather's time and it is only later we've discovered

William Noah, *Traditional Tools and Canoe*, plastic from water container, duct tape, Recycling Art Project, A&CC, Baker Lake, 2005, Courtesy: Patrick Mahon

that it really wasn't fair. I remember my grandmother saying that metal implements for skinning or working on caribou meat were a treasure because of what they could do. So you know, whether it came from trade with the Copper Inuit or from the Hudson's Bay Company, it was still a pleasure to have it.

WN: I am still trying to understand what Ruby was saying about capitalism, that it seems to me like the term could be used down south in bigger cities, but I don't know how it can be used up North.

SB: I think that everybody who uses money is part of the capitalist system one way or another.

JB: We are all participating in a money economy.

WN: No, not always, because we Inuit have different tastes.

SB: I understand that you mean that you have a different attitude to the whole thing, but everybody is using money, so that's what we call capitalism. That when you go to buy groceries, or when you want to buy gas for your skidoo, you have to have money to do that, so your attitude may be different than someone's attitude in Toronto, but nevertheless we are all part of the capitalist system. The government issues the money and everybody in Canada uses it.

WN: Well up in the North artwork is very hard to sell to just about anybody. But if you send your art work to southern cities, to art collectors or galleries, you have a much better chance to sell one or two almost right away. Because of unemployment it's very hard in the North and things cost so much that people don't have enough money to buy art. Even if they really like it, they cannot afford it. It is a pretty hard life in the North, but down South I think people have more money.

PM: But I'm thinking that not everybody understands money in the same way. What you are saying, William, suggests the idea that people are thinking about money differently in the North. And I would say that in the South there are also people who think about money quite differently from one another. The people who buy art, I would argue, think about money in a different way from those who are below the poverty line, who live very "hand-to-mouth" as we would say — and they probably don't think about money that differently from a lot of people in the North.

WN: For Inuit up North, we do like to have people's art work, but we are not as crazy about it as people down South are, because Inuit art is nothing new to us, and it has something to do with our small population too. The whole population of Nunavut could go into one arena like the Air Canada Centre.

SB: Even down South, the percentage of people who buy art is really very small and I would say that the people who buy Inuit art are usually not the same people who buy art made by Southern Canadians. It's usually two different groups of people. There is a market and galleries and buyers and the public who are interested in contemporary Canadian work and then there is a separate market and galleries and buyers for Inuit work.

PM: Yes, as I said before, in the contemporary art world capitalism tends to be a dirty word, or at least a very fraught one. The accepted idea that Inuit artists make art primarily to produce commodities for purchase distances them from the mainstream of Canadian contemporary art. Certainly the idea of a single motivation for the complexities of human creativity is laughable, but nonetheless we've developed some rather "essentialist" views about what compels producers in the North and the South in Canada.

SB: The Inuit are living Canadians and I believe that their growth as artists would benefit from critical analysis from a position of current theoretical relevance, but this doesn't usually happen. For instance, most Canadian art magazines, including FUSE, don't normally cover Inuit art shows. The great distance

between North and South and the language barrier are big impediments. For Inuit artists, it's as if time stopped with the last generation and younger people who never lived on the land are restricted to a marginal audience that expects a style of art that was innovative in the mid-twentieth century and is now referred to down South as contemporary Inuit art.

PM: It strikes me that it follows that somebody who is already in the mainstream system also has increased access to the system of cultural funding. It takes being part of the system oftentimes to actually get your hands on money, in order to do things that aren't supposedly involved directly in income generation. Like the amount of education people have about money often helps them to know how to get more.

JB: There are other kinds of value in this as well, such as intellectual value. What are the ideas that are most valuable to people; what are they actually prepared to trade in order to get access to aesthetic ideas? In this project we're trying to look around the edge of what we think is really the important idea. We want to use art to look at the idea of value in art.

PM: Recently I was at a meeting of an artist-run centre advisory group and we were talking about trying to get some corporate support, but we realized that it is sometimes hard to convince artists in Southern Canada to go to bed with business, as it were. You know, the concept is still pretty suspect in certain sectors of the visual arts, and yet there are a lot of creative corporate people who would like to give money to interesting projects. I think the whole spectrum in relation to the arts and money is shifting a lot in Canada. But to be truly cynical about it, the not-for-profit system is still set up to get all the sort of "needy" people to try to eat each other. I do think that the smart people in the arts try to resist that trap, mind you.

RA: What is art, then? Because where I live in an area geared to low incomes in Ottawa, many people don't think that they have the need to buy "real art," so they will buy "made in China" items.

SB: Reproductions.

RA: Yes, reproductions. Then there are others like me who live hand-to-mouth, but because you like something so much you are going to pay a little at a time to buy it, because of the value of what you see.

JB: We started this whole project with the consideration of what happens when we have money to pay for people to make art. And we're all now making art as a medium through which we can think about these issues. In "Art and Cold Cash," I think art is going to constantly change its role but it's going to play a part in everything we do. We're making art to consider the nature of art and money and culture. I know that when Sheila and I first went to Baker Lake in 1969 we were introducing both art and capitalism, but it took years to figure out the relationship between what we thought we were doing, and the value that was put on it.

RA: And at that time I was asking myself, "What the heck do I need to do?" And the big question for the Department of Indian Affairs was, "What do we do with these Inuit? We can't just have them in this state forever, right?"

JB: So what do you think the feds wanted you to do?

RA: They wanted us (especially my generation) off welfare. Isn't that what they wanted to do?

SB: Yes, I think you're right. That's my understanding.

JB: They wanted you off welfare but they didn't want you out of money and home. They wanted Inuit to make something that would be worth money.

RA: Yes, to get off their aid and earn a living.

JB: And Indian Affairs had seen it work in Cape Dorset and money came in from making carvings and prints and things, and the idea was, let's try this somewhere else.

SB: Well above all, when we first went to Baker Lake, we just loved the work. We knew how good it was when we saw it. And then to have the luxury of sitting down and hearing people actually talk about what it represented and why they made it was so valuable to me. That insight into another lifestyle, another sense of values, was one of the greatest gifts I have ever had in my life.

WN: At that same time we were having a spiritual revival in Baker Lake in 1970 – 71. Before that, I applied to work in the Co-op shop, trying to file bone and antler, but the place was so gloomy that I just didn't want to work there. Then you guys came to Baker and started our art creation, talking to people, encouraging them to do some artwork. It has something to do with what was happening to the community as a whole. Some people were happy and some were unhappy but it has something to do with your mentality or your spirit or your mind or your strength or the way you communicate to people. Back then, it was right after coming through a time of starvation and we were just learning to socialize in small community life and learning to communicate with *kabloona* [white people] and other Inuit.

JB: But it seems to me that at that time, the sculptures were selling well so some people did not have to be on welfare. And the work was of such extraordinary quality that it gave the Inuit a voice, and an expression outside the community in the world. The work really contained a new kind of vision.

SB: Well I don't think "new" is the word. It was very old, but it was their own vision.

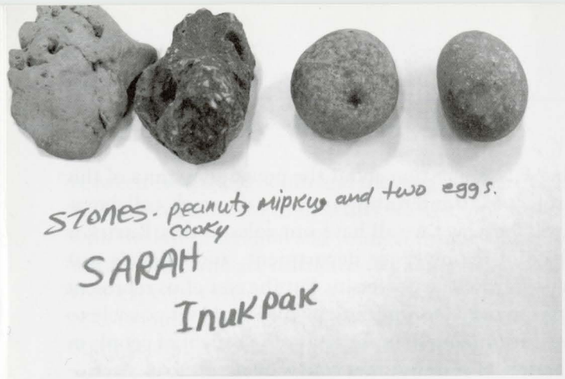
JB: With the funding we got for this project, it looks like institutions, universities and granting agencies are for the first time supporting art making as viable research, with recognition and respect by the academy. Since we are among the people to do the first projects, I think that FUSE's question about the power dynamics of this project is an interesting one. We do work collaboratively here, yet we all have our roles in this. Patrick is chair of a university department, and Sheila's just retired from the university, but the rest of us represent links to other communities which makes it possible to use the funding to make art for the benefit of people in a variety of communities who want access to it.

PM: And you could argue optimistically that we might not have got the grant if it hadn't involved the five of us. The fact that we applied with all five of us as collaborators makes me feel optimistic, meaning that they funded a project that clearly moves well beyond the university as its community. It's not that we are merely trying to do something to expand the knowledge base within the university. Clearly, if that happens that is great, but you know, we are really trying to do something that will have value and consequences in a much broader context.

JB: This was a collaborative venture from the start, putting together who would do what, and how we would do it, with the decision to make drawings because we are all people who value drawing. But the decision that we would use video just sort of developed. I had no idea that we would all be behind the camera and in front of the camera and that the quality involved in the generation of these ideas and images would be shared so well. It was great discovering this when we put the video together with videographer Jeremy Drummond.

RA: They asked us to talk about power dynamics and we also agreed to talk about our work on the languages. And what was "ethnography" again? The study of cultures?

SB: It's the study of living peoples, like when they talk about "anthropology," that could be people who lived thousands of years ago and you study their culture and their language and all that. And "ethnology" means when you study people who are still living today.



Sarah Inukpak, *Rocks*, peanut butter cookie, dried caribou and two eggs, Recycling Art Project, A&CC, Baker Lake, 2005, Courtesy: Patrick Mahon

JB: I thought it was interesting when we talked about language translations and Inuktitut words that have "aki" as a root, and words that are based on the idea of value.

RA: Well it started as a communications issue because the people that we were going to interview were not necessarily bilingual, so it became a way of making sure that they understood exactly what we were coming for, and what this research is about to a degree. Because if they didn't understand, then there was the danger of people thinking the Butlers are going to start something over again that happened twenty years ago, as opposed to what we are trying to do here. Because the Inuit language is a very precise language and the English language is so slippery, you know?

JB: You said when you translate the word "expensive," that the Inuktitut word refers to "cost price" and also to "revenge."

RA: Yes, it could also mean "revenge" — a pay back kind of deal and the root word is basically the same. And in Inuktitut, "precious" more often refers to a relationship, or a value between two people, as opposed to a physical object.

PM: In English we use the word "value" and we talk about money or we can be talking about something that is very intangible, and yet we are using the same word. That connection has to come from somewhere obviously, in the history of the language, but even in terms of the cultural mentality that would allow it, it's interesting. You might say our usage of a word can be "relational," in the way that relations between people are determined partly on the basis of the situations they find themselves in. There is interest in that word — relational — in the art world right now. Rather than thinking of art as a thing that is sort of fixed, it's about a recognition of an exchange between a viewer and whatever is there to be viewed, and between the artist and the experience.

SB: You mean the viewer gets to play a bigger role?

PM: Yeah, and the artwork represents a living exchange rather than acting as a kind of frozen commodity. Earlier on, Jack mentioned something about how we are using art to think about these issues, and you know even this discussion has an element of art in it because we are trying to figure something out, so it is a bit like translation in that way.

RA: It is, because research has finally started to open up. For research in the old academic way, you would remove yourself. I mean, between human beings there is no such thing as removing yourself. You are already influenced by someone. There is already some kind of memory in you. Intelligent people became a little more intelligent and turned around and said, "Maybe research can be subjective, and maybe it is all subjective."

PM: That's the kind of thinking that allows this art project to be supported under a label that calls what we are doing "research."

JB: You talked about Inuit value systems prior to the introduction of money but we haven't talked about what art was in Baker Lake prior to our introducing prints and drawings under the name of art. We both got the idea of what we wanted to do right away and we moved right in to make it work out. The idea was brought in by the government even before we got there that we were going to make art, that you guys were going to make art.

RA: And that's different, because you know, if you're an Inuk you're an artist!

JB: What did you think of that?

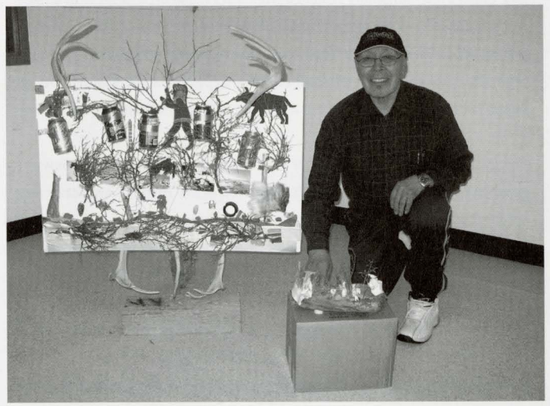
RA: I don't know but I certainly said, "Get real!"

JB: William, you're an artist and you had a mother who was a very famous artist. Was there some connection between the influence of your mother and how you became an artist?

WN: I don't know, it may be in the family, but no matter what our nationality, our mother has the power to destroy or to object; her love is so strong that the mother will sacrifice and love them and look after them from the beginning until their death. Since the day I was born I learned from my mother wisdom, advice; advice that is still with me even though she was gone about twenty or thirty years ago. I will not be able to lift up a pencil if I refuse my mother's advice.

PM: Do you remember, when you were growing up, your mother or other women making visual things, like decorative things?

SB: They always put decorative touches to the garments, like the clothing wasn't constructed only to survive the cold. There were always beautiful decorative designs and aesthetic treatment that was way more work to do, and yet it was done because it was so beautiful.



Simon Tookoome, *Recylcling Sculptures*, Recycling Art Project, A&CC, Baker Lake, 2005, Courtesy: Patrick Mahon

RA: Yeah, the sewers were to show off subtlety without being an exhibitionist. Subtlety was important you know. There was the recognition of having a skill or being able to create something out of pleasure to some degree. There is something that our parents taught us and we can teach our children, how to have the greatest gumption to get up and go, to open up their chances, not to avoid a risk factor as a kind of confidence booster. They one time told me that art is something you are not necessarily born with, but it's often a way of perception. There are people who could very easily become wonderful great artists, but they refused because somewhere in themselves they said, "No, I am not an artist." So it's like value as opposed to price.

PM: I really think you do have to have something you have to say, that has some value beyond yourself, whether it be for your family or for your community. You don't have to be an egomaniac to think that your work could be a vehicle for communication. It's always interesting when you are teaching students, some of them say, "Well, I could never do this," and others act like they are the genius of the century. And in some ways it's like what William was talking about: the sense of connectedness in the case of what he was saying about his mother.

RA: So where does that start then? Where does the value of art start? — and back to the question to William, "How did you start?" Really it starts with the openness, the idea that "ok, I can do this," but then, at the beginning you don't really know.

PM: I'm interested in knowing, when the Baker Lake Co-op was first starting, whether it seemed to everybody that there were certain people who were better artists than others. I mean if everybody recognized who was a better sewer or a hunter, did everybody recognize who was a better artist?

WN: Well if you have a good heart you will be a good community member, a good counselor, a good preacher. There are some people who do real art, not

just the work, but giving it out to everybody and it is automatically giving life, doing a good deed. Like someone told a story about when he was a little boy and his grandfather spotted some caribou walking far away, going fast. Because they needed meat the grandfather advised the boy not to drop the rifle, but to run until he gets to the far hill near the animals. He also sadly tells the boy how tired the boy will feel in fifteen minutes or a half hour of running. Just by obedience the boy started running. Soon he could feel the saliva; he could breathe but with a cough and a little bit of drool. But then it opened up and now he can run and run, just exactly the way the grandfather advised him, and he shot the part of the animal the grandfather advised. So the boy did what he wanted to do by obedience to a wiser, more knowledgeable man. I think it's the same thing all round. If you don't take advice, then what are you going to be?

SB: And you think that it is those kind of people who also became the good artists. Is that what you mean?

WN: Not just good artists; good fishermen, good hunters, good singers too.

SB: Just generally capable people.

WN: If you are injured you don't feel like singing. But if you love somebody, the word comes out and it is easy to do; it is enough to make you do a thing successfully.

Ian Amarook and Bobby Tagoona, *Drum set*, Recycling Art Project, A&CC, Baker Lake, 2005, Courtesy: Patrick Mahon

JB: I'm thinking about Anguhadluq who started drawing when he was about seventy years old. He didn't know if the drawings were art or not, but he knew he made them. And someone said to me, "Well he was a great hunter," and this was the explanation of why he, of course, made great drawings.

PM: You can see that in lots of young artists; it is not always the ones who have great drawing talent, for example, but it is the ones that are committed and focused and have a kind of vision. I mean, it still is ultimately about a vision, and not about genius. It is something that you know because of love or desire, or whatever. I think that idea is fairly common and it is not culturally specific. A lot of what we are talking about is that way, but with some significant variations across cultures.

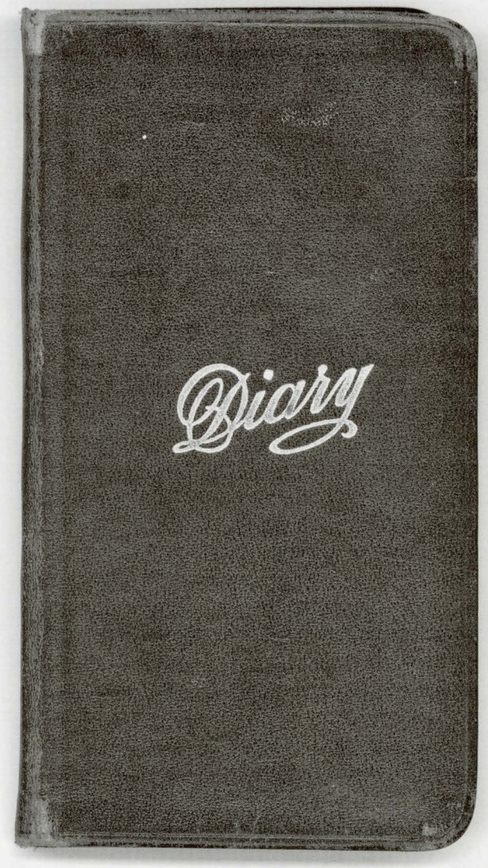
Ruby Arngna'naaq, an Inuk from Baker Lake, Nunavut, now resides in Ottawa. She helped to found the Sanavik Inuit Cooperative in Baker Lake in 1970. She co-produced "Inuit Myths and Legends" and co-directed "Ikajurti: Midwifery in the Canadian Arctic" for the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation (IBC) and contributed to "The First Minister's Conference on Aboriginal Rights and Justice Issues."

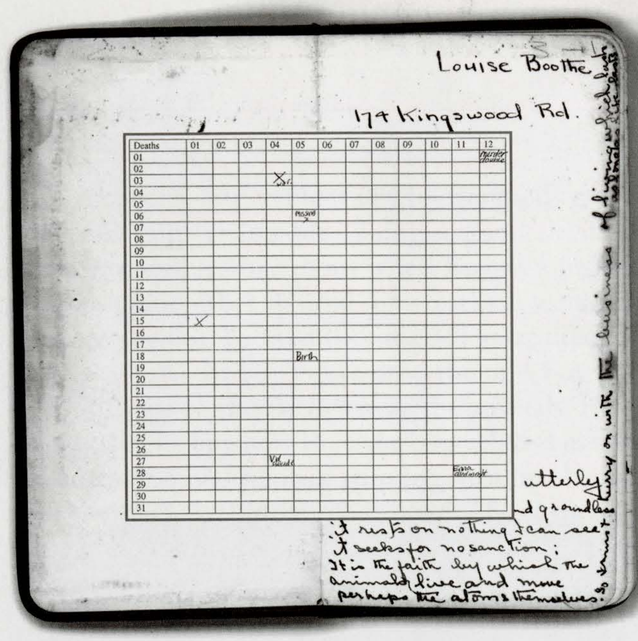
Sheila Butler is an artist/teacher who exhibits in Canada and abroad, including recently in Rotterdam. She was an early member of Mentoring Artists for Women's Art in Winnipeg. In 1989 Butler joined the Visual Arts faculty at the University of Western Ontario, teaching courses in studio production and contemporary theory and criticism.

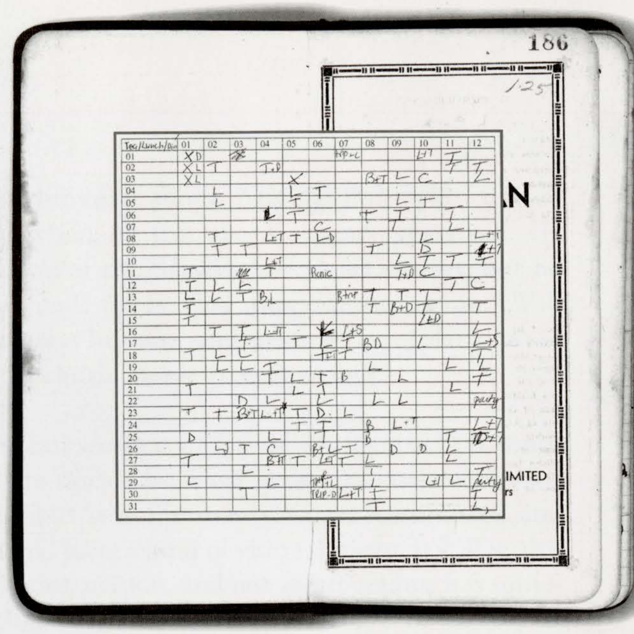
Jack Butler's internationally exhibited work links visual art and medical science in video projections and computer animations based on his experience as a medical model builder and published researcher in human development. He is a founding member of Sanavik Inuit Cooperative, Baker Lake, Nunavut. As an adjunct to his art practice, Butler is a licensed personal financial representative.

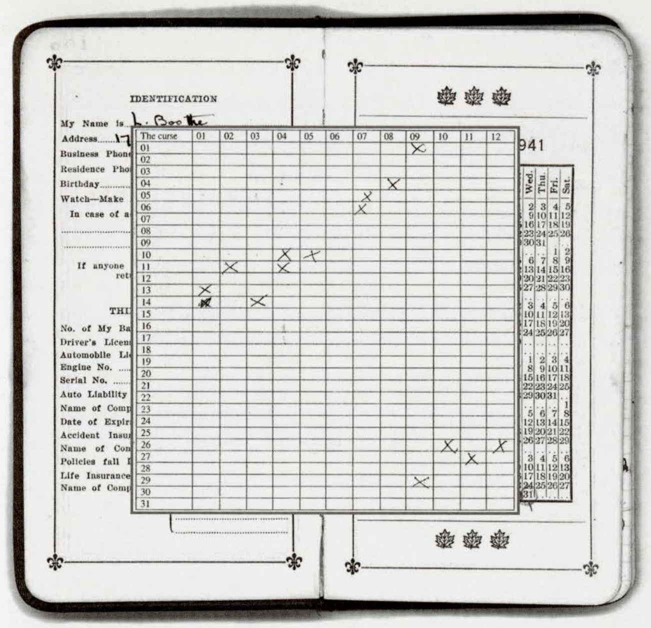
Patrick Mahon is an artist/teacher who exhibits work that reveals how art gains "currency" in cultural contexts. Employed in the 1980's as an elementary school teacher in the Canadian Arctic, Mahon is now Chair of Visual Arts at the University of Western Ontario where he contributes extensive knowledge of cultural theory. Mahon is represented by Leo Kamen Gallery (Toronto).

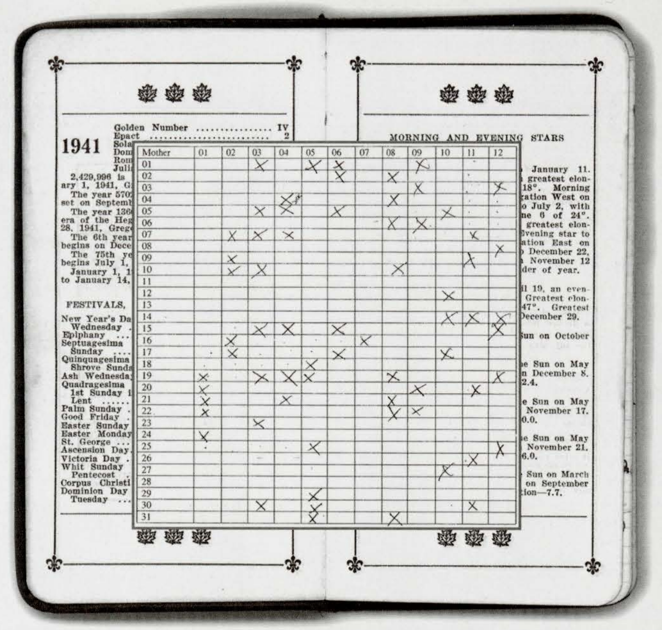
William Noah was born near the Back River, moving to the settlement of Baker Lake in 1958. Encouraged by his mother to draw, and now exhibiting internationally, Noah's work reflects the progressive Westernization of Baker Lake. He has been elected to the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories, the Nunavut Planning Commission and as Mayor of Baker Lake.

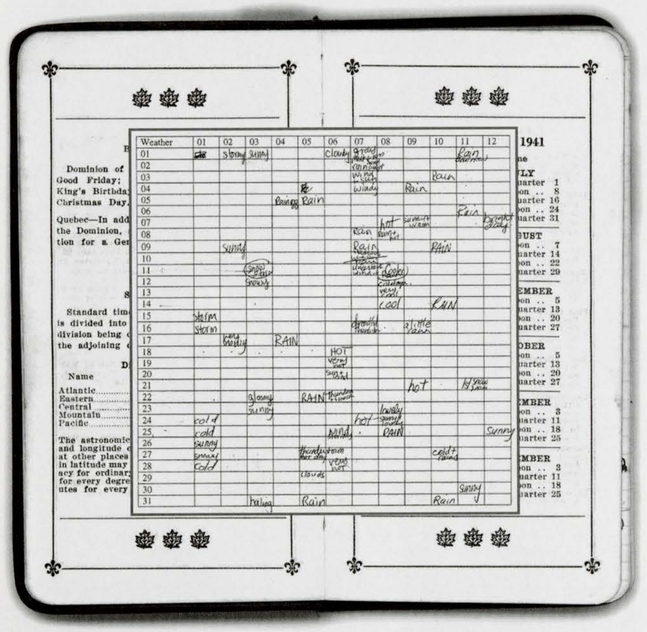


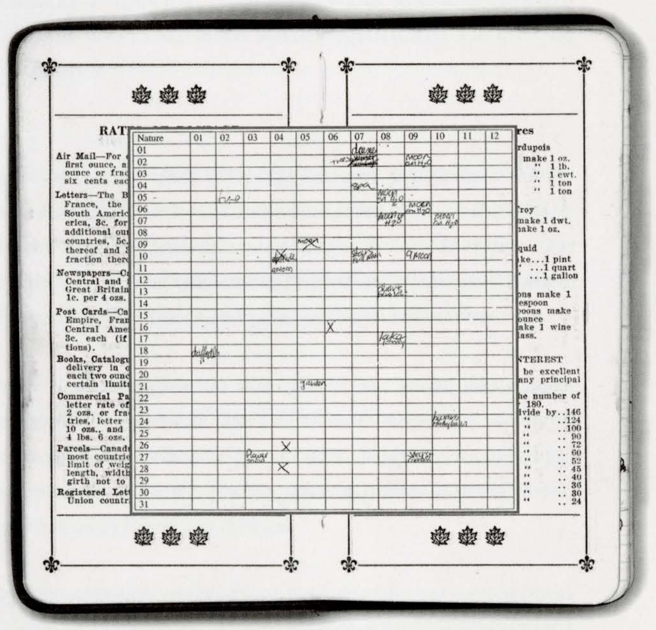

Louise Boothe
174 Kingswood Rd.
Deaths
utterly
and groundless
it rests on nothing I can see
it seeks for no sanction:
It is the faith by which the
animals live and move
perhaps the atoms themselves.

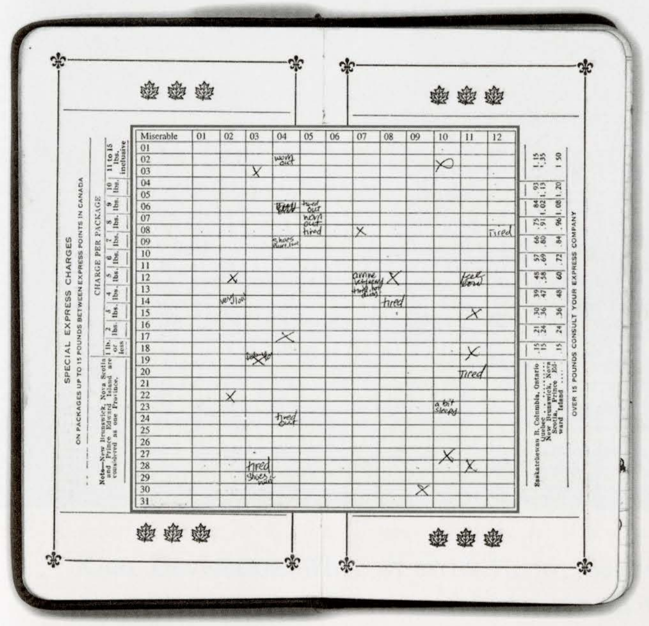

186
Tea/Lunch/Din
LIMITED

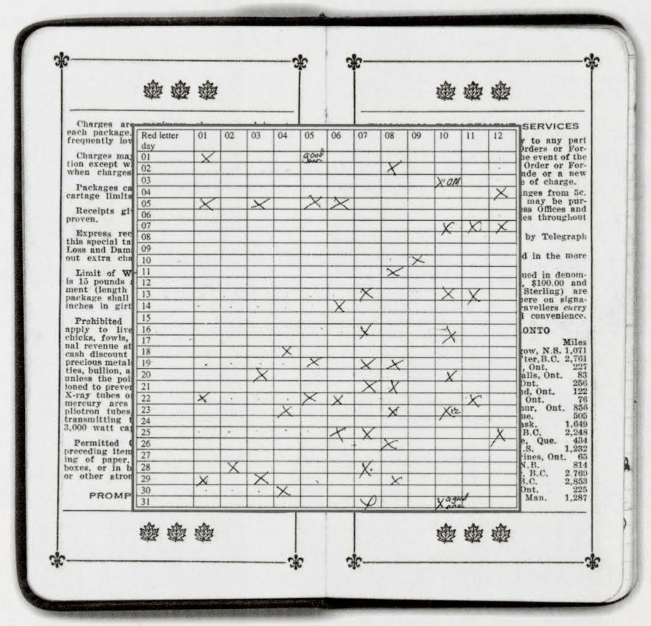

IDENTIFICATION
My Name is L. Boothe
The curse

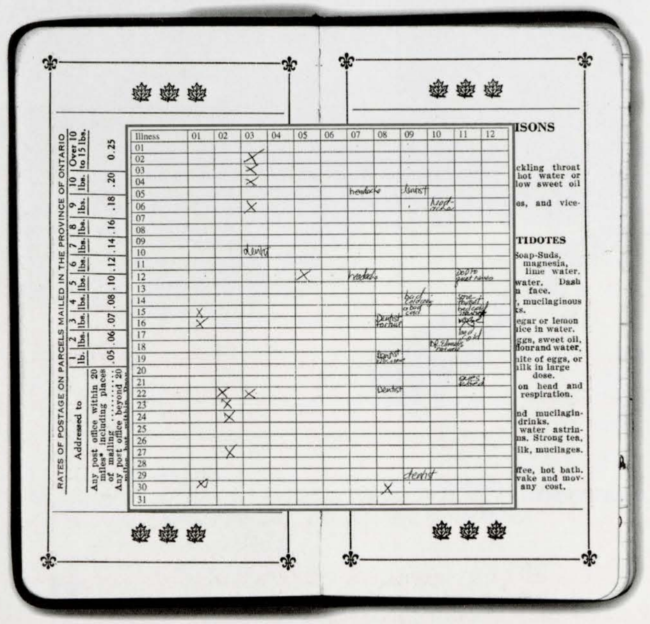

1941
Golden Number IV
MORNING AND EVENING STARS
Mother
FESTIVALS.

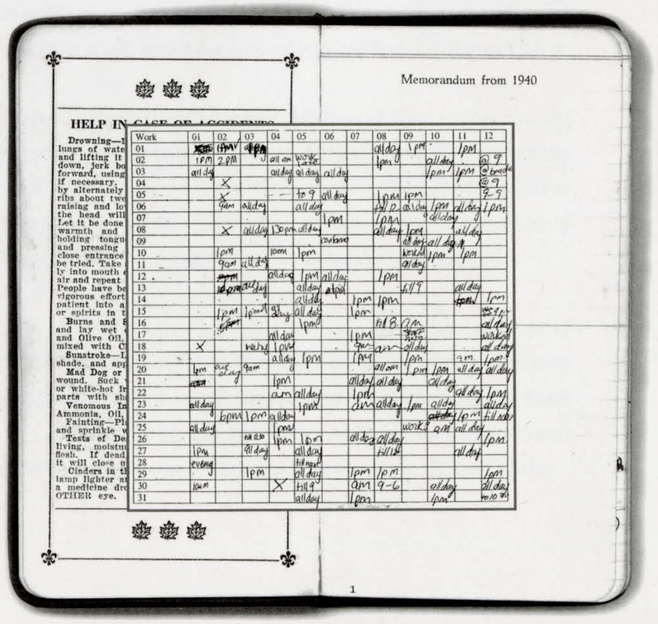

Weather
1941

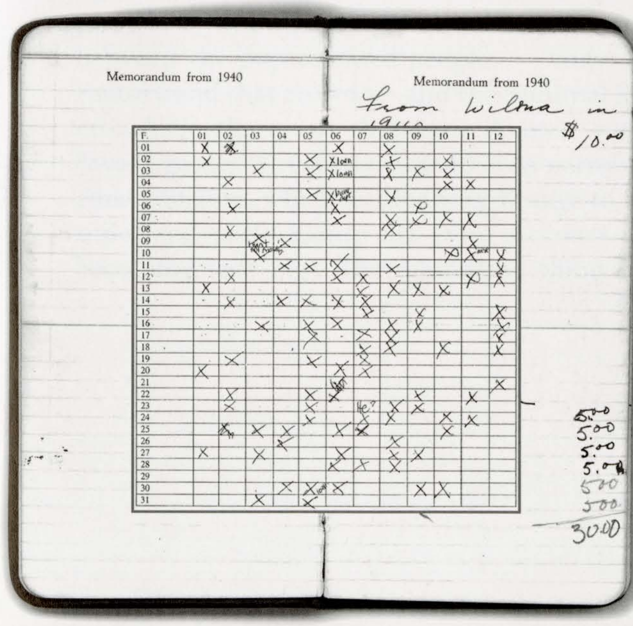

Nature


SPECIAL EXPRESS CHARGES
Miserable


Red letter day
SERVICES


RATES OF POSTAGE ON PARCELS MAILED IN THE PROVINCE OF ONTARIO
Illness
ANTIDOTES


Memorandum from 1940
HELP IN CASE OF ACCIDENTS
Work


Memorandum from 1940
Memorandum from 1940
From Wilma in
$10.00
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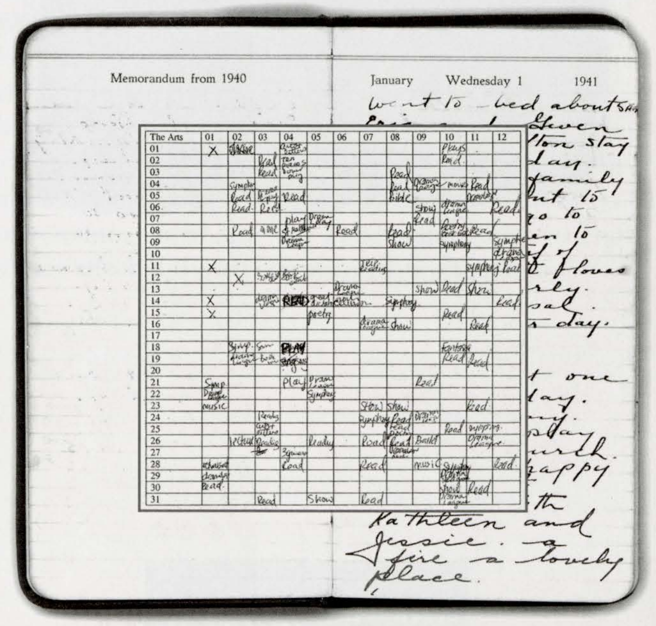

Memorandum from 1940
January Wednesday 1 1941
The Arts
Kathleen and
Jessie.
fire a lovely
place.

From Conceptual to Community Art:

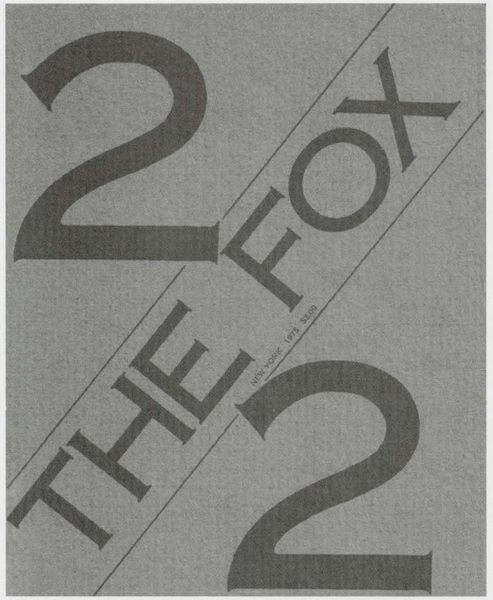
A Conversation with Carole Condé & Karl Beveridge

interview by Craig Leonard

Actively involved in the New York conceptual art scene in the '70s, Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge were central contributors to *Art & Language* and *The Fox*, and participating in the movement toward a critical re-evaluation of both the representation of women in art and the absence of women in the art world.

Craig Leonard met with Carole and Karl in their Toronto home to talk about their experiences in New York, the meltdown of *The Fox* and the effect this period had on the development of their socially oriented, collaborative art practice.

KARL BEVERIDGE: When we arrived in NY, the art scene was still in its glory. This was at the beginning of conceptualism, or when conceptualism was sort of coming up. Of course, we went down there looking at the old masters of minimalism. You could divide New York between the pop-oriented people — Andy Warhol's Factory and that crowd — and the minimal formalist crowd. So there was that basic division within the "avant-garde." But then we could even narrow in with conceptualism, which seemed very strange to us at the time, and performance art (Vito Acconci was just becoming very big). The interesting thing, and this brings us to the moment of *The Fox*, that implicit within conceptualism was that it was an end-run game. Politically, conceptualism questioned the status of the commodity. In other words, the issue of the object in the market and the questions around that. But it was also an end-run game in terms of where you move within the modernist historical drive, which is, basically, to the artist as a personality. Put simply: "I'm an artist, therefore it is art." At the same time, other contradictions began impacting the art scene, the women's movement and the anti-war movement, which had not greatly affected the art community up to that point.



The Fox 2, cover image, 1976, Courtesy: Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge

Carole Condé: And we're not talking *the* women's movement. I mean, this was late. The women's movement was moving into the art world. Every one of these movements was at its fucking tail-end before it even affected the art world. Our kid was already protesting the Vietnam War in high school, and *then* it was coming to the art world?

Craig Leonard: How did you first become connected with the more politically-oriented artists who were producing *The Fox*?

KB: Our connection to *The Fox* was partly accidental. When we were in Toronto, Carole met an Australian artist who we got to know a bit. He was on his way to New York. We remained friends with him in New York, and he was friends with Ian Burn. Through him we met Ian and Mel Ramsden, which began to tie us into those discussions. Initially, they were more formal conceptualists.

CC: They were already part of the Art & Language group.[1]

CL: And the core of Art & Language at the time was Joseph Kosuth, Ian Burn, Mel Ramsden …

CC: Michael Corris …

KB: … Andrew Menard, Jill Breakstone, and Preston Heller.

CC: Those last three were always secondary to the original group.

KB: The other people that followed were Sara Charlesworth, Christine Kosloff, Mayo Thompson and Alex Hay for a little while.

CC: Because the push became that there weren't any women in the group. Men were living this life and believed in it, but why were their wives sitting at home?

KB: But just to backtrack a bit. What lead to the breakup of *The Fox* was its politicization on all our parts, such as issues of representation coming out of both the women's movement and the antiracist movement. This began to impact on the "scene" and people in Art & Language began to see that even non-commodities could become commodified and these contradictions led them into a political dialogue. Our political orientation basically came from our discussions of Carole's experience with the women's movement, what it meant and how it impacted on us.

CC: In a sense, by the time we started getting involved in Art & Language, *The Fox* was being produced and the two of us were talking about critiquing our own individual production.

CL: That was 1976 in *Fox 2*, which had the article Karl cowrote with Ian Burn on Donald Judd. Is it true this started the unraveling of *The Fox* since Kosuth was friends with Judd?

KB: No, no. That is part of the mythology. But it's a fact that Don Judd got totally pissed. We knew him and he came around to see our work, which was part of the game of getting yourself into the scene. You know, you bring the senior artist in to look at your pathetic minimal work. Anyway, it was what you did. So he was pissed off personally and professionally and it was the first time anyone had ever seriously critiqued him.

CC: *No one* had critiqued him. Actually, it had more to do with the fact that he was moving up. He was monstrously big by this point with his building and his staff and all that.

CL: But his work had never been critiqued from an ideological standpoint?

KB: No, none of it had. His in particular in this case. So he got really pissed and he had bought a Joseph Kosuth at Leo Castelli or something and he gave it back to Kosuth and said never to talk to him again. He actually left New York about a year later and went out to Texas into the desert.

CC: [laughter] I don't think you were part of that, but keep going, Karl …

KB: It fueled the fire. Along with all the other stuff that began happening.

CC: To give you the atmosphere of the time, Carl Andre was selling May Day roses on a corner in Soho with a book of Marx in his hand. This was the movement. We would have a political meeting every two or three weeks and there would be three or four hundred people there. They were huge.

KB: So, when *The Fox* came out, a group of old lefty-type artists, like Leon Golub, May Stevens and others, contacted *The Fox* and said we need to get together. So we started these meetings that were initially people like Golub and the established left wing and *The Fox* as kind of the new kids on the block. And that expanded into a large community meeting, which eventually lead to the massive protests of the Whitney Bicentennial Exhibition in 1976. Kosuth and a group of them produced the Anti-Catalogue. It was a whole critique of the Whitney's use of the Rockefeller collection and it lead to all sorts of things. That's when the antiracist groups connected too. So, anyway, at this time it hits Soho in a big way and suddenly everyone realizes that these issues are real.

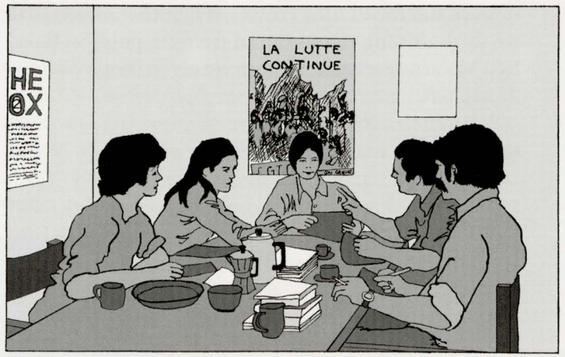
CC: There were panels with *ArtForum* that had to do with the fact that all this money was coming out of the state department to support American art being sent over to France, to Italy, to take over the galleries.

KB: So, [Max] Kosloff wrote about American art and the Cold War ["Art is a Political Act", *Village Voice*, 1976]. It was right in that year.

CC: Those were the meetings that we held, and people would just volunteer and just show up to hear this kind of conversation.

KB: In retrospect, what that signaled, of course we didn't realize it at the time, was the crisis of modernism suddenly hitting. It impacted on many different people and in many different ways, such as understanding art more politically as well as questioning the whole American/Euro-centric doctrine. All those things began to hit, as well as the crisis within art itself. What was interesting was that at that moment we also had an incredible backlash from painters suddenly asking, "What about us?"

CC: They gathered together. They went down to Canal Street and had meetings to bring painting back on the scene.



We attend meeting with other artists and discuss similar problems. A community is essential if we are to gain the 'power' to change our lives. The heated dialogue produces many ideas as well as new problems.

Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge, from *It's Still Privileged Art — a meeting*, 1975, Courtesy: The artists

KB: And they won in the end… . The way New York recovers is by declaring "painting!" — and that's what they did in the late '70s.

CC: It was very difficult because people had dealers and many artists were basically on a stipend. You were like living on a monthly wage from these people. There is this pressure that was happening and that's what Joseph [Kosuth] was going through. And we all started going left at that point, probably more toward China we'll say.

CL: Were you reading leftist literature at this point?

KB: You read your classic [Richard Wollheim's] "Art and Marxism," but that wasn't particularly useful, it was mostly historical. It was stuff like Eva Cockroft's *Toward a People's Art*. Most of it would have been essays. There was Carol Duncan writing stuff on the museum as a site of ideological whatever. Even some of the stuff from Max Kosloff writing on art and the Cold War. Most of it eventually was stuff coming out of England, like Laura Mulvey, Block Magazine, Left Review, Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall.

CC: I've got photographs of a table of people that met, where at one point the tension was unbelievable. We met every day at like 10 o'clock and talked till about 5pm like it was a job. There were two ping-pong tables pushed together and we decided we weren't going to have our individual names any longer. Now this put Joseph in a real mess because he was worried about economics and he set up a Trotskyist line that meant that we were arguing things out in terms of political lines, like Maoism versus Leninism versus Stalinism versus Trotskyism …

KB: … versus anarchism …

CC: …on whether or not we could have our politics and make our art. We were having this very active debate around the table. But, I mean, this was at the end.

CL: But underlying all that were arguments against a more capitalist model of art being an object-based practice.

KB: Oh, but that would be in the larger community.

CC: Within *The Fox* it had to do with whether or not we were getting rid of our individual names. Someone could have a show, but would show as Art & Language. If someone was giving a talk, they did not give it as Ian Burn, for instance, but as Art & Language. This was the concept of collectivity. This is what Joseph objected to.

KB: But there's another story to that. There was a real move on the part of Art & Language NY to get rid of Joseph. Art & Language UK also wanted Joseph out and they knew that if they pushed this through he would leave. And he did.

CL: Was this an ego issue?

KB: Partly. Partly because, particularly with Art & Language NY, they would do stuff supposedly collectively, like publishing the magazine, and of course Joseph would get the credit because he was the name. But probably the ideological struggle, if there was one, was around whether or not we could constitute a political art practice inside the institutions of art, and if not, what this would entail. Those kinds of ideological issues blew everything open.

CC: So, Ian went back to Australia, Mel went back to England, and we came back here [to Toronto].

Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge, from *Work in Progress 1957*, 1980, Courtesy: The artists

KB: It was interesting that the people — Carole and I, Ian Burn, and Andrew Menard — that became involved in a brief "anti-imperialist cultural alliance" with Amiri Baraka's group during our picketing of the Whitney …

CC: … The East Coast Black Panthers, basically …

KB: … left New York partly out of that experience, but particularly because we realized that this was a truly alien political experience and we needed to be in places we understood politically if we were going to work in any type of community situation.

CC: At this point we're reading Mao, Marxism, that kind of literature and the relation between the world, movements, culture, et cetera. So we'd gone from reading theoretical stuff in the art world, even though it was leftist theoretical stuff …

KB: Through the experience with the Baraka alliance, we realized we had to leave New York since we had no real social connection to the place. We were living in an art ghetto there. It was the same reason Ian Burn had to go back to Australia. We had to go back to a place where we knew the politics and the communities.

CC: It's language. It's really subtleties when you start talking about very specific things. It's subtleties in language.

CL: So what emerged out of the New York experience was a necessity to work with a community that was familiar?

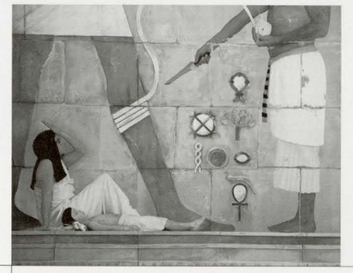
KB: Well, the culture had to be grounded in people's lived experience. And to do that as an artist, because of the gap between art and society, we had to bridge the gap with the knowledge that community arts is a construction and not an organic development. It's a process of construction by which we begin to build connections. Part of what we were doing in New York was asking how culture survives. It was at a point of crisis. We realized that you had to have, what we then called, a "social base." You had to anchor yourself within the actual society you lived in.

KB: When we came back to Toronto, we got involved with local political groups. We realized that if we were going to work with a community, a working class as represented by unions made a lot of sense for a lot of different reasons. One is that it gave us an infrastructure that could mediate our relations with the community.

CC: So we were not speaking with one individual who might be a steelworker next door and putting his opinion in an artwork. We were actually informed by an institution, in other words, an organization's opinions. It always goes back and through the institution and is okayed before it goes out. For this reason, we work with unions that have progressive mandates on issues that we believe in.

KB: You have to respect the culture. One of things you realize when working with any community is that you have to respect the mechanisms and rituals and conventions of that community. Otherwise, there will be no trust. And, part of the agreement is that there is that mutual respect. So, we work within the dynamics of that particular community. But what we can do, of course, with something as large as a trade-union movement — which is many communities within a larger group — like Carole said, we get to know where the issues peak within which local, which union, where the struggles are taking place.

CC: Like the struggle on women's issues. So we did the book *First Contract* [Between The Lines Press, 1986] which dealt with the women's movement within unions. We looked for a union that had been all male and having stronger women coming up and making a push. Now,



Left: Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge, from *Not a Care - Egypt*, 2004, Courtesy: The artists

Right: Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge, from *Non habera nada*, 1994, Courtesy: The artists

you don't make it out as a women's movement struggle, but as a struggle of women within a union that is all men. You show the strength women produced within that union.

CL: That's interesting. Showing that work within the union hall does not guarantee a unified reception. There's as great a probability of multiple interpretations of the work as when shown to an art audience.

KB: Right. In a certain sense you're right. It's like any community, including the arts community, there are conventions — and if you break those conventions, like at the AGO, you get knocked out. So we do things within the conventions, not to say there won't be controversy, but the controversies are with respect to the conventions you are dealing with.

CL: When you mentioned breaking conventions in the arts community, you refer to your 1976 exhibit at the AGO, "It's Still Privileged Art." That exhibit consisted of narrative drawings you had done, some of which were published in *Fox 2*, which were slyly critical of the art world's commercialism. Did attacking this characteristic, or "convention," of the art world cause you, as you said, to get "knocked out"?

KB: It burnt many bridges. We still pay the price. [laughter] No institution will touch us.

CL: Which may have been an objective.

KB: Oh, absolutely.

CC: No, it wasn't and I still don't think it is. But we did do the show and people that I knew later on would always say that it was the first show they thought was absolutely fantastic. They were just going through their own political thing and they saw it at the AGO. So it made connections in some areas, but it actually broke other connections. When I say the community we were living with at Spadina, John McGregor and others, they felt similarly that it was a critique of the art world.

KB: Or a critique of them as artists.

CC: The minute you go internal, and you're from a community, and you make a critique from the community, that's way worse then someone from outside critiquing your community. Then you say, "Ah, fuck them." So it was the same with Art & Language and, say, Larry Weiner. I mean, we were friends up until a certain point. It's like a divide and you get very confused when you socialize in a group of people that you think are your friends until you take a political position and people you assumed were friends were really just business partners. In the business world, you can separate the two, but in the art world all the sudden you can take a position and you find it's really a business world, but you never thought of it in that way. I don't know how better to describe that.

CL: Is it also that an art practice is so close to an artist's identity that you can't criticize the art practice without criticizing the individual?

CC: Absolutely. So people that were our friends, or that we thought were friends, when we took another position than they did, and they saw what we did at the AGO...

KB: We had to get a whole bunch of new friends. [laughter]

CL: Sticking with the reception of your work, and specifically your collaboration with unions, what happens to the work produced for a certain location, such as a union hall, when it is transferred to an artist-run centre or public gallery which would attract a different audience altogether? Are you always walking a fine line that attempts to address audiences that, I assume, have very different knowledge bases?

KB: Absolutely. It's a bridge that crosses over two audiences and the difficulties on both sides. In a certain sense, what we're doing in the trade-union movement is building a cultural politic within the community.

This means, we are building both the capacity and the expectations within the community for culture and arguing the importance and necessity of culture socially. We are developing committees, events like the Mayworks Festival, the Workers' Heritage Centre. We are doing all that work. We are developing policy within the movement and programmes. But what we are also building, in terms of our own work more specifically, is the notion of art and culture as an entity unto itself. The organic culture to the union is an oral culture: storytelling and, to some degree, song and music. The visual becomes much more an abstraction and is seen as having a much more utilitarian function.

CC: As emblematic.

KB: Documentaries of this and that. Mugshots of the leadership and that sort of stuff.

CC: Banners, buttons.

KB: So, beginning to articulate the notion of storytelling, as an important activity within unions, of representation and forms of expression within the movement that address how people experience things. Opening that up. What we're doing is setting up a challenge within the union movement. It's not something they would necessarily expect. You have to develop familiarity at the same time you're developing the work.

CL: Then, the unions weren't initiating that sort of thing themselves?

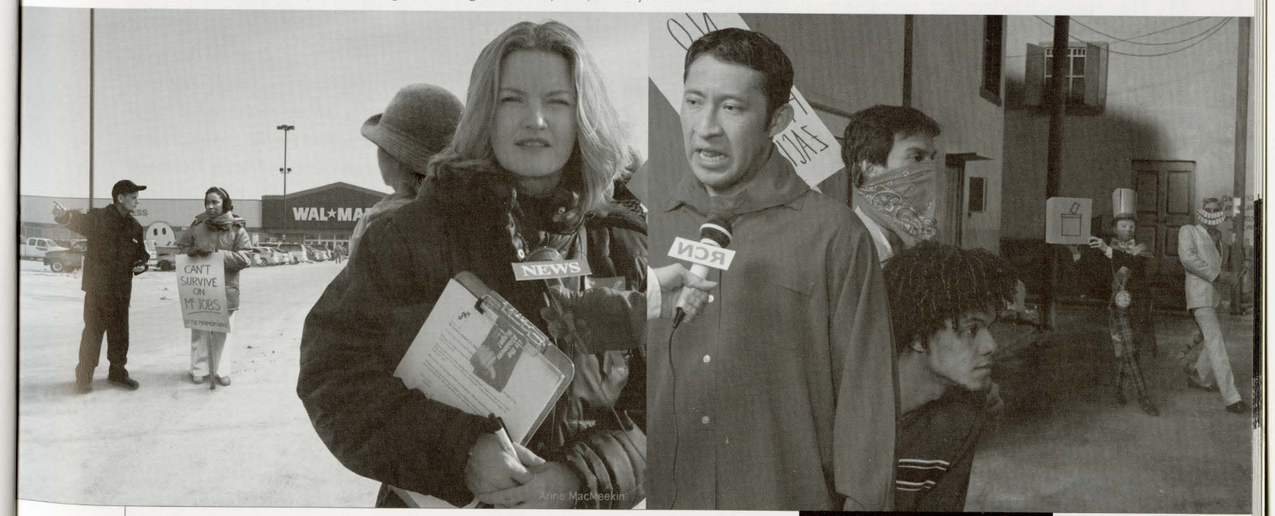
KB: They would do promotion, but they wouldn't do expression, if you see the difference. In other words, they would see media, imagery within media, as being important, but they didn't understand that you could actually produce something that would be a form of expression. That would express notions of experience and issues in expressive forms in and of themselves. Just as stories can stand for themselves in oral traditions. So, you're presenting a certain challenge within the movement itself, which means there's a certain tension in the reception of the work within the movement. In other words, they're seeing their own stories, but it's not in a form they are familiar with. Storytelling is normal, but becoming a form of expression isn't.

Then there's the tension of articulating not only content driven work in the artworld, but community driven art work as well; that is, art work that isn't about individual self-expression, but is about the notion of the expression of a community.

CC: A collective voice, a community-of-interests.

KB: And also a collaborative form of practice. Basically, what we are doing is contested *within* each of the realms, as well as their being the tension *between* the two realms.

Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge, from *Through the Looking Glass Protest*, 2004, Courtesy: The artists



CC: So now we are in with the Laidlaw Foundation to get them to think that way. We are involved with the Ontario Arts Council to get them to come up with an Artist in the Workplace grant. We're involved with people like Clive [Robertson], for example, not only talking about getting Canadian art into a magazine, but talking about what is it that artists do. Like Lisa [Steele] working at a women's shelter. It's a balancing act. We end up getting involved in the takeover of A Space. We then end up having a Community Arts Section at A Space. Those are fights in different areas: one is in our community to get them to respect other forms of culture and the other is to actually get the finances to support the projects. We're fighting on two levels all of the time.

KB: The answer to your question is that we look at your work strategically. The work doesn't answer all those questions. What we're doing is placing it strategically within those various tensions, *between* those two places and *within* each of those places and with awareness of what those expectations are because, in a sense, what we are doing is driving two agendas. As Carole said, we are driving the agenda within the community to understand culture socially and politically, and we're working within the mainstream art scene to basically get them to shift gears.

CC: You're trying to balance and you're not always doing either one of them really well, let me tell you. [laughter]

CL: Has this balancing act and the basic categorical ambiguity of your practice been cause for accusations of exploiting your subjects, the union workers, to drive forward the art-world side of the equation?

KB: That sort of critique is usually swung out by the pseudo-left, but really at their heart, right-wing art critics. I think it's used by the right in the way it used the notion of political correctness to hammer around issues of identity. I think there probably are projects that are guilty of that and I can think of projects myself where people have exploited or are on the edge of exploiting. But I think as a general thing when critics use "exploitation" as a critique against artists who work with other people it is a right-wing attack. In working with a community, it's not that you just do one project and get out, which is another problem, the "parachuting problem," but you have to develop a sustained relationship. That's part of building the long-term sustainability of a community arts undertaking. You have to have that kind of commitment. We hold union beliefs central to our own identities. We are very clearly engaged in those issues and when we approach the project we basically do it as an exchange. People will tell us about their experience at work and the issues around that and we'll tell them about ours. We're informing them from where we're coming from as much as they're informing us about their issues. That has partly to do with why we take these projects on in the first place. In the end, the people who would probably make accusations of exploitation really do believe in the absoluteness of individualism.

(I would like to thank John Massey for urging me to pursue this interview.)

***Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge** live and work in Toronto and are active in several labour arts initiatives including the Mayworks Festival and the Workers Arts and Heritage Centre in Hamilton ON. They have collaborated with trade unions and community organizations in the production of their staged photographic work over the past twenty-five years. Their work has been exhibited across Canada and internationally in both the trade union movement and in art galleries and museums. Their work has recently been included in exhibitions at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, The Nooderlicht Fotofestival in Holland and the Edmonton Art Gallery.*

A graduate of the master of visual studies program at the University of Toronto (2005), Craig Leonard's recent projects include a retrieval of lost twentieth century Canadian literature, an excavation of "obsolete concepts" from the multi-volume Oxford English Dictionary and an investigation of the underground Independent Library Movement in Cuba.

Notes:

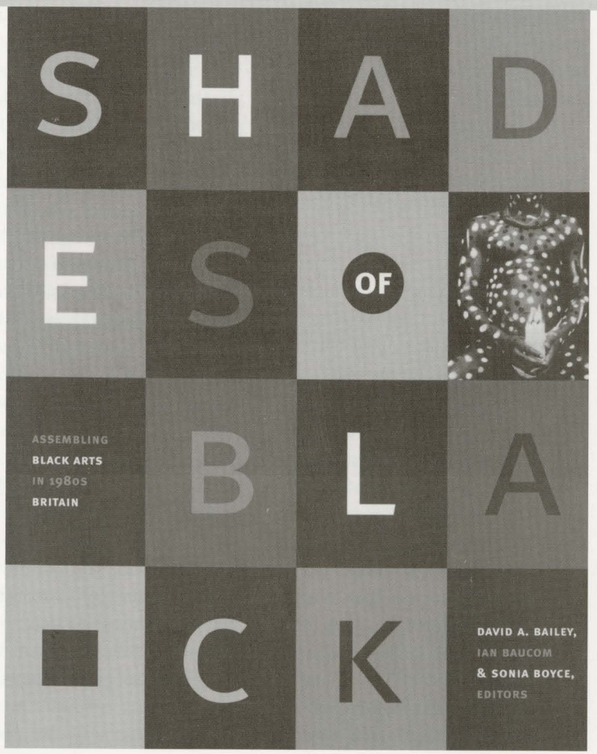
1. The collective Art & Language New York was a North American affiliate of the earlier-formed UK group consisting of Terry Atkinson, David Bainbridge, Michael Baldwin and Harold Hurrel, which published its own periodical *Art-Language*. Both AL/NY and AL/UK held the position that the idea of art had moved beyond the object to an area of philosophical investigation of its own essence.

Black Arts: An idea ahead of its time

Shades of Black: Assembling Black Arts in 1980s Britain.

Eds. David A. Bailey, Ian Baucom and Sonia Boyce, (London: Duke University Press, 2005).

review by Sunil Gupta



I was unable to attend the April 2001 Duke University conference that this book is based upon, so I am very pleased the conversations that took place are being made available in print. Together with the additional papers and bonuses of illustrations, timeline and extended bibliography, the book is a valuable and rare resource on a period that shaped many of our lives here in London. Its impact was felt far and wide at other urban centres in the UK as well as overseas, particularly in the English-speaking world. The book brings together artists, curators, art historians and critics — many of whom were actively involved in the Black Arts Movement. In thirteen original essays, contributors to *Shades of Black* examine the movement in relation to artistic practice, public funding and questions of success and failure.

It is also fitting that the impetus should come from two of the editors, David A. Bailey and Sonia Boyce, who at the time jointly managed the African and Asian Visual Arts Archive at the University of East London. The AAVAA is the repository of what used to be called Black Arts from a time when very little documentation existed or was saved — so there are few historical records available to researchers now. The AAVAA was originally the personal slide library of Eddie Chambers who went around photographing the various shows. Frequently, these were the only visual records of the events while the raucous meetings that preceded and accompanied many of these exhibitions and events went unrecorded.

I entered this world upon graduation from the Royal College of Art (RCA) in 1983. A bunch of us organized the first ever Black student show in a separate room given to

us by the college around the time the graduation shows were on. We were visited by representatives of the Greater London Council's Ethnic Minority Unit and they seemed very pleased to have found us. I think they were pleased to find a collection of articulate arts graduates who were willing to make a case for colour. The next thing I knew, I was diverted from my own brilliant art career into town hall politics. For me the relationship between local politics and cultural producers was key to the whole Black Arts idea, though my own experience of it was largely limited to the visual arts and particularly to photography as a medium.

Studying at very traditional British art schools where art was taught for art's sake alone was very good for the development of technique and self confidence in dealing with the material issues of making things, but also quite indifferent to the world outside. It is this world that we invited in on the day of our opening. Very shortly after, rather than doing the rounds of commercial art galleries, I was walking the hallowed halls of County Hall, now ironically the home of Saatchi's latest gallery space. But as I was beginning to acquire new skills and an understanding of cultural politics, Margaret Thatcher was busy closing down the Greater London Council. Having drawn together as a diverse group of visual artists and photographers, we suddenly saw the demise of our only institutional backer. There was an awkward pause before we realized we would have to target the major national funding body in the arts, the Arts Council of England (as it is now called.)

So, while the book gives voice to a number of key theorists, critics and practitioners of the period, I find it is a little short on the role of local government in fostering a movement that certainly wasn't happening in the colleges at the time. There weren't many Black students in the arts and definitely no teachers. My own teachers, I recall, viewed the British Raj as a good thing for India, my place of birth. Photography, as I studied it, seemed to have been born in Europe in the nineteenth century and then developed as a modern art form in America. There was never a mention of the work done elsewhere in the world over the five years of higher education I undertook in Britain at the time. In the end I had to invent my own cultural history.

Naseem Khan's chapter, "Choices for Black Arts in Britain over Thirty Years," is the only article that addresses the role of funders and policy-makers. She rightly points out that there was a lot of clamour at the time for new policies as artists were there doing things. Looking back, she asserts that policy-makers failed us because the situation has scarcely changed. However, the demographics have shifted a great deal. London is now around thirty percent non-white and this proportion is set to grow. In the face of this shift there is hardly any provision for the growing segment of the population. Yet as funders continue to churn out more policies and ring fence yet more money, one wonders where it is all going to as it seems to have hardly any effect at all.

Lubaina Himid's piece, "Inside the Invisible: For/Getting Strategy," is an entertaining and slightly tongue-in-cheek reflection on the inner workings of the period — who got the shows and how they went about it. It's not often that things that didn't happen in the glow of unanimity get said in public. There were very real and fought-over differences that were frequently covered-over in the face of the larger battle being waged against the mainstream arts sector and funding bodies. Women, however, did manage to break away on more than one occasion. They had shows of their own and Himid managed her own gallery space for a while. Like the rest of the activity there is little concrete to show for it now. Nearly all the Turner Prize nominees have been men so far; Isaac Julien, Chris Offli, Steve McQueen, Yinka Shonibare and, of course, Anish Kapoor. Kapoor is a sore point as he made a big issue of not wanting to be included in "The Other Story," Rasheed Araeen's groundbreaking Black Arts show at the Hayward Gallery and thus raised the issue of a certain divisiveness in the ranks. The Turner Prize could be read as his reward from the British art establishment. It's interesting that although several Black nominees for government merit awards like the OBE have turned these down, Black artists have never turned down the Turner prize on the grounds that it is administered by a racist institution.

Throughout the 1990s, during the meteoric rise of the YBA art stars, to raise the issue of Black became very unfashionable. The inclusion of a few Black artists in the Turner short lists seemed to be proof enough for many people that the art world was no longer racist. Of course that is not the case as we can see policy-makers once again floundering in the face of multiculturalism, now reborn as diversity. Take an institution like London's South Bank Centre as an example. Out of 2,000 employees, only about 200 might be Black or Indian, nearly all of them work in catering or security with only one Indian in management, working as an accountant.

I've been an arts manager for twenty years as a means of support. Although my training took place in a perfectly bona fide British institution, I can't get a job outside a Black Arts centre and am not allowed to have a curatorial opinion on white art history. Meanwhile, there are no Black Arts centres so there are no jobs for either myself or all the other Black Arts trainees that have been churned out by various failed multicultural policies. People often say it is difficult to pinpoint racism, but I always point out that in the end it's about jobs.

So did the Black Arts Movement in 1980s' Britain matter in the end? As a person with a vested interest I would like to think that it did. And the book is a timely reminder as our funders try and figure out the next step and our colleges grapple with the latest shifting trends. The book is also coming out at a time when finally there will be a concrete legacy, literally. Iniva and Autograph, the two organizations that sprang from roots in the 1980s, have come together to build a new space for housing their activity and showcasing the art. The building project is called Rivington Place, and as one of their ambassadors, I can say that it is looking very likely that it is going to happen this time. But what about theory? I had an encounter during the *Art After Modernism* conference in Toronto a couple of years back with Irit Rogoff who runs the new Visual Culture department at Goldsmiths College in London. In the new millennium and the new internationalism, race apparently doesn't matter any more. Work is somehow devoid of these peculiarities of cultural context. But I tend to agree with Rasheed Araeen in "Success and Failure of the Black Arts Movement" where he asks why white experience should stand in for the universal, the underlying assumption of the majority of theorists. He writes, "It goes against all logic to accept the experience of the white race alone as the expression of universal humanity. The achievement of the Black Arts Movement should therefore be seen in terms of its attempt to intervene and disrupt the established order of the avant-garde based exclusively on its white genealogy and its repercussions for the reconstruction of the history of modern art."

In "Assembling the 1980s: The Deluge—and After," Stuart Hall argues brilliantly that Black Arts unleashed a huge hidden potential. That this was not taken up by the art world to the extent that it took up the case of the YBAS that followed it is a troubling political question for Britain. As for me, I've had enough after twenty years of broken promises and false starts, and as I conferred with Hall in a private conversation last year, I have started a small process to repatriate myself to India — a place that has the largeness of culture to accommodate difference to a much greater degree than I have witnessed in the West. This seems to be a well-kept secret in the annals of art historical discourse over here.

Sunil Gupta, a 'person of Indian origin,' is a Canadian citizen who has worked in London as an artist and curator since 1983. His work is scheduled to be seen at the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography later this year. It can also be seen in "Faces in the Crowd," a Whitechapel Art Gallery exhibition at the Castello di Rivoli (Turin) between April and July. His co-curated project in collaboration with the Agnes Etherington Art Centre (Kingston), "Sarindar Dhaliwal: Record Keeping," will be on show at the Canada House Gallery (London) from 1 April – 20 May 2005.

A glowing intervention

Kelly Mark's *Glow House #3*

The Power Plant (off-site at 323 Palmerston Blvd)
curated by Reid Shier
7 April – 23 April 2005

review by Andrea Carson

I lived on Palmerston Boulevard, just above College Street in Toronto for a year and a half without a television. Cycling home in the evenings, I would notice the blue glow from everyone's living rooms. I often marveled at the pervasiveness of TV, of the way in which it consumes the viewer, of the amount of time spent involved in another, distant and entirely manufactured reality. I thought of McLuhan's notion of the Global Village, the push-pull of being simultaneously close to and distanced from everything.

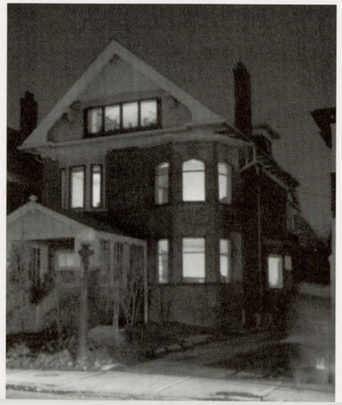
For three and a half weeks in April, a strange sprit seemed to have invaded one of the large, detached homes on Palmerston. It appeared perfectly common during the day, yet as night drew near, all the windows would begin to dance with the reflected glow of television, taking on a UFO-like appearance, as if an alien inner life had invaded and hijacked its soul. There was no explanation, just the absurd juxtaposition of this house against its neighbors. It was there, love it or loathe it.

Meant to be observed from the street, *Glow House* was a temporary installation by Toronto-based artist Kelly Mark. Fifty television sets had been tuned to the same channel and installed around the front rooms of the house, transforming it into a living sculpture. The piece was curated by Ried Shier of the Power Plant as part of this year's Off Screen program at the Images festival, a program of curated new media installations throughout the city that has been a part of the festival since 1995. This year, *Glow House* was the only "public" art installation to be part of the festival. Mark likes the idea of an artwork as a subtle intervention, so *Glow House* had only a small notice on the door, informing people of its status as an artwork.

The idea for *Glow House* evolved from an earlier piece called *Prime Time* (1999), a video of intermittently changing channels, played on a television set within a living room-style installation. From working with television, Mark became interested in trying to capture and isolate its glow. Throughout her practice, Mark deals with the peripheries, the empty space surrounding an object. She is adamant about her own working-class background, and is thus eager to avoid over-intellectualizing her work, intentionally relinquishing control to exterior circumstances, freeing up the audience's reactions; with *Glow House* she opted for City TV, a channel particularly "of the people," but not one that guaranteed constant visual drama, as Much Music might have.

The work, which had shown twice before (for one night in Winnipeg in 2001 and for just over a week at Birmingham's Ikon Gallery in 2003) elicited varying reactions. Winnipeg brought a small but dedicated group of art lovers, while the Birmingham installation, in a posh area of town, drew a large, enthusiastic response. At the "opening" in Toronto, on April 7th after dark, as a crowd gathered on the sidewalk opposite, both curator and artist had to endure some viewers' reservations about the artwork. Palmerston Boulevard in Toronto is a street of old mansions that have mostly been divided into apartments; locals responded with bemusement. Mark recalls a passer-by wondering aloud, "but they can't all be watching the same program?!"

From an aesthetic standpoint, *Glow House* seemed to encourage an instinctive response in the viewer. It tapped into the sublime in a way that can be compared to the feeling when one stands before the saturated paintings of Rothko or the grand simplicity of Barnett Newman. Like work by these painters, one could have sought to "understand" Mark's work, but it was enough to simply experience its effect. It was "just a bunch of televisions," like Rothko is "just a bunch of paint on a canvas," yet it was also truly odd and unexpected and gorgeous. An alternate reading might be one of loss; the house's unusual nocturnal lighting suggested that "real" life had been relinquished, showing up the unsettling solitude and potential danger of (sub)urban neighborhoods, represented in works like *Poltergeist* and *Twin Peaks*.



Kelly Mark, *Glow House*, 2005, Courtesy: The artist

Arguably the most successful aspect of *Glow House* was its site-specificity. There is a significant need for contemporary artistic urban interventions in public spaces, for bringing art out of the cloistered environment of the museum into a realm where it can be more relevant to the viewer. Temporary public installations generate immediate and heartfelt reactions, they encourage debate and challenge the public. One of the most proficient public art organizations is the UK-based Artangel, which commissioned the 1993 sculpture *House*, by British artist Rachel Whiteread. *Glow House* can be compared to *House*, an unfinished concrete cast of the interior space of an East London house; a temporary and controversial version of the sculptures for which Whiteread has become famous. Both *Glow House* and *House* use their incongruous locations to redirect an artwork's significance back to the viewer. By locating the artwork within a central Toronto neighborhood, the viewer thinks of the work as it pertains to his own living experience. Whiteread's *House* encouraged a reassessment of the *space* in which we navigate our daily lives, while *Glow House* did something similar with *time*. Much artwork increasingly relies on its environment to make these small, subtle changes in commonalities, as a way of heightening awareness of them. Another such project, also commissioned by Artangel, was Michael Landy's *Breakdown* in 2001 where the artist systematically destroyed every one of his possessions, save the clothes on his back, inside an unused department store on London's bustling Oxford Street. *Glow House*, by contrast, set on a dark, leafy neighborhood street, was both literally and figuratively quiet, yet, typically for Mark, rich with suggestion, recalling Henri Bergson's claim that "The merit of a work of art is not measured so much by the power with which the suggested feeling takes hold of us as by the richness of this feeling itself."[1]

The low-key aspect of the work is central to Kelly Mark's artistic practice. Her interest in Everyman, in the commonplace, reflects her eagerness for her work to be accessible, and for her it succeeds even if it gives pause outside of the categorization of "art." Although her ideas are strong and often initially inaccessible to laymen, her artwork speaks to everyone. Her public interventions, where she repeats the same, closely scripted actions at the same time over a number of days, likewise go mostly unnoticed, save for a few strangers who might experience a "deja-vu moment" in their daily routine. Through the use of repetition and negation, Mark's work, *Glow House* included, is about the nature of time. By allowing the viewer to observe his own use of time from an outside perspective, his realization becomes the core upon which this piece hinges. In this way, it is reminiscent of Cornelia Parker's work. Her *Tarnish Drawings* (1997–1999) are silver oxide markings on cotton, which come from having polished various historical silver objects. Mark uses repetitive markings, of graphite on paper, or gestures, like balls of paper in *25 Hundred* (1997) to suggest the time spent at a particular endeavor. Both artists make art from the traces of a thing — the act of polishing, the effect of television's light — in order to draw attention to the thing itself. Mark is less concerned with whether or not the viewer "gets" it, than she is with their experience of the work. This is illustrated in her 1999 work *I Really Should*, where she displayed a refrigerator, covered entirely in a list of 100 things that she ought to do, and filled its interior with white foods. She refused to label the work and left the interior as a "surprise" for any visitors who dared touch the artwork and open the door.

In *Glow House*, Mark presents a way of working with new media that uses the media itself as a sculptural material. In a tradition that dates back to new media and performance as practiced by video art pioneer Nam June Paik, Mark is essentially creating a performance wherein the viewer can disengage from the spectacle. As film writer and curator Bruce Jenkins once observed of Paik, he "instilled a performative aspect into the screening context and, in the process, liberated the viewer from the manipulations of…cinema."[2] The exterior perspective of *Glow House* allowed for a disengagement from our everyday experience, a sobering, enlightening sight to behold. I often think of it as I ride my bike down the street in the evening.

Andrea Carson is based in Toronto, where she writes on contemporary art, architecture and design.

Notes:

1. Henri Bergson. *Time and Free Will — An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*. Trans. F.L. Pogson (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1971).
2. Michael Rush. *New Media in Late 20th Century Art*. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999).

Blur

Andrew Forster/PUSH-Montreal

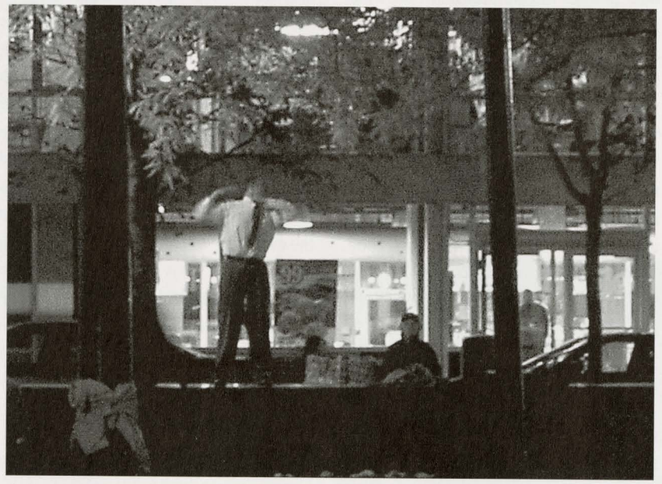
"Cinéma (O fim de Orfeu)"
Société des arts technologiques
12 October – 15 October 2004

review by Ellen Moffat

Andrew Forster's "Cinéma" was a collaborative multi-disciplinary performance/installation of theatre, dance, music and video with musician Rainer Wiens and performers Robert Schweitzer, Monique Romeiko and Michael Fernandes and texts by Forster and others. Its Portuguese subtitle, *O fim de Orfeu* (The End of Orpheus), references the classic Brazilian film "Orfeu Negro," which Forster uses along with the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice as a structuring device for his examination of "the very contemporary problem of the ability of art to influence the unfolding of events."[1]

The Characters

Five to seven performers.



All the images in this review are of Robert Schweitzer in *Cinéma*, Place de la paix, Montreal, 2004, Photo: Push-Montreal, Courtesy: Andrew Forster

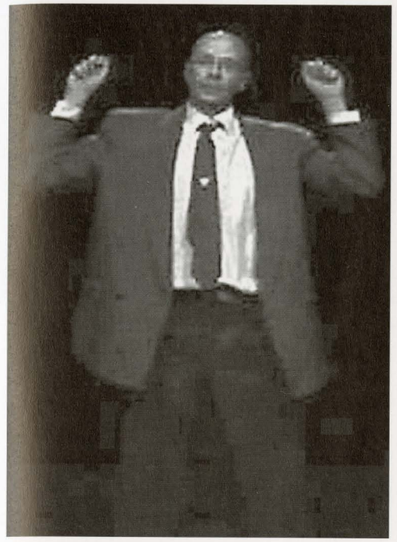
The Setting

The audience enters a dimly lit storefront gallery/theatre space and takes its place on rows of banked seating facing onto a downtown park, Place de la Paix. Gradually the interior lights are turned down and the audience is in darkness. The street scene is a flux of sex workers, movie goers, drug dealers, skateboarders, artist-performers and squeegee kids surrounded by an urban architecture of buildings, cars, signs and trees. A soundtrack of pre-recorded and live narrative and music plays inside the gallery.

The performance begins. A curtain of water runs down the window of the gallery, obscuring the view through the window for more than ten minutes. A video of a male character reciting a creation myth is projected inside the gallery. As the curtain dissipates the street scene comes into view.

Outside

A man exposes his belly. A cyclist passes in front of the window several times. A drug deal is completed. A male character dressed in business attire removes (and puts back on) his clothing in response to directives from a female character. This routine recurs repeatedly during the performance throughout the park. According to the program, this gestural dance movement references the incident of Hassam Mohammed Hufni Abdo, a fourteen-year old Palestinian suicide bomber that was directed by Israeli military at a border checkpoint to remove his clothing and the bomb strapped to his body. The actions of the man gather attention from passersby, including the police. Some stop to watch, others mimic or intervene in the man's action. A 1/2-tonne pick-up truck stops in front of the gallery window; a john negotiates with a sex worker. People on park benches get up, wander off and then return to where they were sitting. A man plays a thumb piano while moving through the park. A band of four police officers moves through the park in a huddle. A lone demonstrator carrying placards, "Oui" and "Non" walks along the far side of the park. People walk through the park independently and in groups. A man sweeps the park with a broom and dustpan.



Inside

A soundtrack plays live and pre-recorded sounds including a taxi dispatch radio and the voices of a man and woman (one French, one English) describing the systematic washing of a body. The video of the man reciting the creation myth is projected a second time, modified slightly from the first projection. A video monitor plays footage of the Abdo incident.

The hour-long performance ends and the house lights come up. Many members of the audience stay for informal discussions with one another or with Forster and the other performer-collaborators.

The interplay of performance and the actuality of street life within "Cinéma" engaged, disturbed and excited me. The blurred demarcation between artifice and the everyday made me attentive to the totality of the theatrics. Exactly what was included in the performance? When did it start? What was scripted? What was coincidental? The scene was a puzzle and I was often unsure of what and who were part of the official performance. As an audience member, my initial engagement was to try and differentiate performers from regular park users, to identify scripted from unscripted actions and to relate the parts to the whole.

"Cinéma" interwove the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice and its transitional space between worlds of the living and dead, notions of music and the place of culture or art in society and the Abdo incident with an interest, according to Forster, in exploring the intersection of terrorism, victimization, innocence and murder. In the program notes, Forster asks,

> … What is the use of art in the face of political and social conditions which appear to be beyond our control? Can art create a window onto invisible forces which seem to control our lives? Can art open a process which allows us to approach spiritual and existential questions without falling into romantic clichés? In short, what is the potential relevance of art beyond its contemporary relegation to the role of diversion and entertainment?

"Cinéma" raised these questions as a consequence of pushing the frame of artistic practice. The work was risky, experimental and controversial, revealing the assumptions and expectations about boundaries, transgression, complicity and responsibility of both the artist and audience members. The project had a currency and urgency in its subject matter, its engagement with the world and its position beyond the predictable vocabulary of contemporary art. At the same time, it maintained an ambiguity, humour, beauty and poetics.

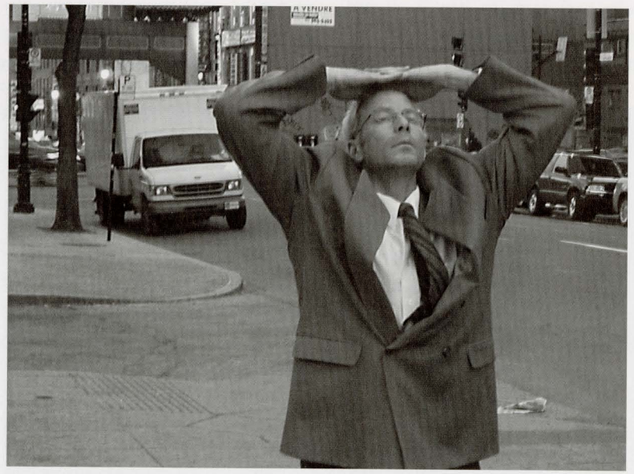
Sitting in a darkened room looking onto a lit park, the audience was invisible, our voyeuristic position intentionally integrated into the performance. From our privileged position as an "all seeing" cinematic eye, we experienced the interplay of scripted events, texts and sounds and chance occurrences within the public sphere, positing a reciprocal relationship of art and public space. Before the performance started (or was this part of the performance?), we witnessed negotiations for drug deals and sexual tricks. Was the artist testing our expectations and sense of values? What if a sex act had taken place, a drug deal had turned bad or violence occurred? What were our responsibilities? Were they different as members of an audience than they are as citizens?

Forster chose the transitional space of an inner city public park to consider the place of art and culture in the world and the

role and relationship of art/artist/audience/public space. Some members of the audience saw the performance as an interloper into the local scene and questioned whether community residents were being exploited. As a non-resident of Montreal, perhaps I neglected to pay adequate attention to the problem of the performance as an invasion into a local community, though the criticism that "Cinéma" was transgressive and exploitative because it failed to seek permission from local residents is unduly harsh. As an experienced organizer of public art events I know that effort is directed toward obtaining permission from appropriate bureaucratic departments rather than from community residents due to restrictions of limited time and resources.

Discussions around the voyeuristic position of the audience, discomfort at the actualities of street culture and a minor altercation between a resident and a performer attracted undue attention in post-performance dialogue and email correspondence. How these occurrences (and audience responses) may influence future projects is a moot question. Forster was not intentionally trying to confront street life. Nor did he intentionally put his colleagues into positions of danger. Rather, Forster proposed an important artistic project that may have exceeded his control. In my opinion, this is not a criticism. Control can be related inversely to taking risks. Too often risks occur within the sheltered environment(s) of art institutions where circumstances are friendly and variables are pre-determined. In gallery venues, audiences are versed and rehearsed in codes of conduct; transgression is contained within a comfort zone. "Cinéma" refused to conform to institutional(ized) risk-taking by inserting performance into a context where it didn't comfortably fit and couldn't be directly controlled. When public space is made into cultural space, assumptions as well as errors, chance occurrences and unscripted incidents are inevitable.

"Cinéma" raised unresolved (and perhaps unresolvable) questions about the interface of art and life, the cultural animation of public space, risk-taking, authorship, control, transgression and responsibility. By blurring the boundaries between art and (street) life, the performance generated dialogue and provoked intense discussions between audience members and participants over issues of cultural practices in public space and questions around ethics and complicity as well as the function of art as diversion, entertainment or as integration with life. Forster's inquiry into the relation of art to contemporary life is complex, difficult and urgent.



Notes:

1. Program notes.

Ellen Moffat is an artist and contract cultural worker/activist. She has organized and participated in numerous public art projects, off-site events and residencies with artist-run centres, public galleries and rural communities. Her work explores notions of place, locality and the interplay of subjectivity/collectivity. Her interest in the public space is as an arena for dialogue and social engagement. She is currently based in Saskatoon.

A Failure of Ideas: "Communism" in Dublin

Project Arts Centre, Dublin, Ireland
21 January – 27 February 2005
review by Gemma Tippin

Is it possible to separate a word from its popular meaning? That is what the "Communism" show at Dublin's Project Arts Centre asked artists to do. The result was an exhibition that seemed haunted by all the word conjures and all the curator and selected artists chose not to address. Works or projects dealing with issues of censorship were absent, as were investigations of the consequences of denying democracy within society. Equally, there was no assessment of the role, or even the form, of culture in a society structured to have no cultural elite. This issue is still worth addressing as the agendas of today's arts councils and politicians, who predicate funding on notions of accessibility and visitor numbers, do not seem to acknowledge that genuine access would alter the accepted aesthetics of art entirely.

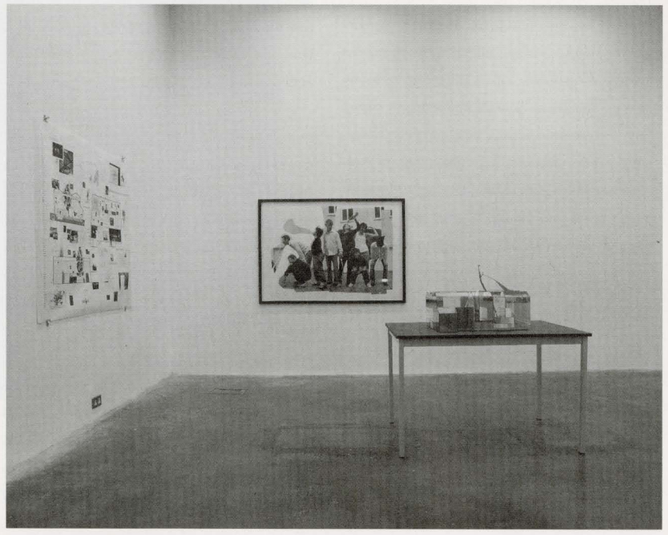
Like communism itself, the exhibition came from an exciting idea, loaded with potential, which ultimately failed to be fulfilled in execution. The distance in time since the brutal excesses of Stalinism and the present-day backlash against the ideologies and actions of communism's arch enemy, the United States, make this an appropriate time to reconsider the communist project in the worlds of both art and politics. With a widening gulf between rich and poor in market-driven capitalist societies, was it right to utterly discard a system that had as its initial goals equality for everyone? Was it the seductive ideologies of equality, collectivism and progress that opened the door to totalitarianism? Are all utopian projects doomed to failure? And what can be learned from communism's ideals and from its breakdown? These questions were conspicuously absent from the exhibition.

In the context of these questions, Veit Stratmann's *Chairs* seem rather a banal response to communism. Described rather grandiloquently as "sculpture," Stratmann's *Chairs* are groups of orange office chairs joined together and mounted on castors. Arranged in a circle, the point of this piece is that "they allow people to sit and move together around the building on the basis that they act collaboratively."[1] It is of course much simpler to move the chairs when no one else is there, so success through cooperation is perhaps not best exemplified by something it is far easier to achieve alone. If Stratmann's point is that operating alone is ultimately easier than cooperation, it was lost in the ideology of the accompanying text. The fact that the chairs are attached so that you cannot see your fellow collaborators does, however, make a deeper point about the need for trust and faith in the collective. Nonetheless, the feeling here is of a work borrowing greater depth from the highly articulate agenda of the exhibition's curatorial statement.

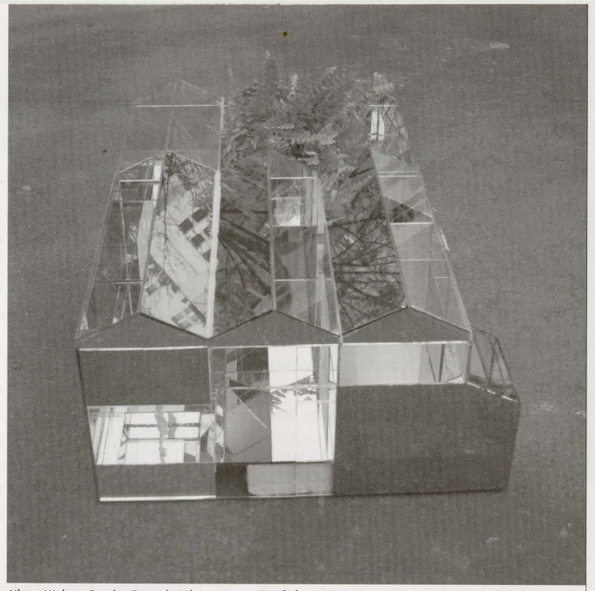
Communism, installation view, 2005, Courtesy: Gemma Tippin

"Communism" also begs the question: is all art with a political theme political art? Eva Berendes' *Communism* would suggest not. Berendes' contribution to the exhibition is a large translucent curtain, spray-painted with red and black shapes. It serves as a practical delineator of space and carries implications of the Iron Curtain, of division and separation, yet it does not demand anything of the viewer. More provocative is Susan Kelly's *What is to be done?* a title Lenin borrowed from his favourite author Nikolai Chernyshevsky, which was key to his thesis of thought necessitating action — thought or action being inadequate as separate activities. Kelly's work encourages visitors to respond to the question, with responses then displayed on reconstructions from Aleksandr Rodchenko's designs for a *Worker's Reading Room.* Neutralized here in the gallery, however, responses to *What is to be done?* demand exhibitionism rather than activism. What the piece best underlines is the failure of all idealistic revolutions as the responses bear witness to an endless and repetitious recycling of desires and concerns.

If contemporary history finds it difficult to engage with the positives of communism, the exhibition "Communism" fails to address its negatives. Was there something inherent in communism's ideals that meant despotism and repression would ultimately ensue? Are all idealistic movements doomed ultimately to corruption? What of the campaigns of propaganda and official rhetoric that made *Pravda* an oxymoron? The experience of living in a communist country and of being subjected to a sustained barrage of information that runs continually counter to one's own experience (wealth, plenty, happiness; as opposed to food shortages, queues and rumbling discontent) has been described as "dreamlike."[2] This state of mind is alluded to in the exhibition's most intellectually satisfying piece, Klaus Weber's *Psycho-Botanic-Mirror-House, Draft for Commune*, a scale model of an imagined building made from glass and mirrors. A nod to Russian Constructivism, the inclusion of a hallucinogenic plant at



Communism, installation view, 2005, Courtesy: Gemma Tippin



Klaus Weber, *Psycho-Botanic-Mirror-House, Draft for a Commune*, 2005, Courtesy: Gemma Tippin

the centre of the model, together with the twisted perspectives returned to the viewer as she attempts to see into the heart of the model, begin to address the distorted representations of "reality" promoted by communist regimes.

In many ways "Communism" fails to hold together because it is caught between works that attempt to recreate events specific to a particular place and time and works that address the meaning of the word in a contemporary way. The re-presentation of the Cabaret Voltaire with masks and costumes designed by Lali Chetwynd, and Goshka Macuga's Lenin impersonator delivering a speech in the original German, come across as relatively toothless indulgences. With Dada having been subsumed into the strategies of the contemporary mainstream, there is nothing left in the Cabaret Voltaire to shock. Instead, the audience is able to smile knowingly, comforted by an enhanced sense of sophistication. In this context, where Macuga's presentation does succeed is in its underlining of the separation between then and now, between the time Lenin was an activist about to change the course of history and his more contemporary role as an icon adorning the walls of a thousand student bed-sits.

Following on from this, and in a media-savvy move that would have made Soviet propagandists proud, the exhibition invitation and press release opened out into a poster of the even-more-iconographic red and black Che Guevara image (originally by Irish artist Jim Fitzpatrick, after a photograph by Korda). This poster, by Aleksandra Mir, superimposes a grainy image of a Concorde across Guevara's forehead. It is an image that instantly adorned the office walls of (somewhat less than) a thousand arts administrators who needed the post-modern irony of the Concorde to indulge, however briefly, their nostalgia for those student days when revolution seemed easy and consequences something for another day. The accompanying conversation between Mir and Fitzpatrick has its interesting moments, but seems to mainly allow Mir to stake out her territory of Guevara knowledge while Fitzpatrick reminisces about a chapter in his life. Perhaps this is the fate of all icons, revolutionary or otherwise: to become figures in our relentlessly competitive games of intellectual one-upmanship.

That said, Mir's poster is the only figurative element in the exhibition, which is an interesting imbalance when you consider that from 1934 onwards, Socialist Realism was the officially imposed aesthetic of the USSR, later adopted by other communist countries around the world. Over that time, communism implied realism, at least in art. Prior to this, artists from the Russian avant-garde had been active participants in the communist project, with figures such as Kazimir Malevich engaged in an in-depth conversation about what post-October Revolution art might be. The aesthetics and functions of art in a truly egalitarian society were explored. Ideas of art, its role in the new society, the role of the artist, the role and construction of the audience, the status of the tastes of "the masses," the status of bourgeois cultural traditions in a non-elitist society and the emerging role of agit-prop were all discussions that took place at high levels within the new Soviet State. The absence of these discussions in "Communism" is the major missed opportunity of the exhibition and the reason I feel more forceful in my criticisms of what are otherwise relatively interesting installations in a hit and miss show.

Gemma Tipton is a writer on art and architecture based in Dublin, and editor of Contexts Magazine.

Notes:

1. Details from exhibition press release.
2. See, for instance, Toby Clark, *Art and Propaganda.* (Abrams, New York, 1997).

Of Virgins in Blenders and Rats that Sing

by Alberto Gomez and Dot Tuer

In December 2004, as the Pope lay dying and cardinals whispered in the cloisters of the Vatican, a retrospective for artist León Ferrari was taking place in another kind of cloister, La Recoleta, a convent converted into a cultural centre in downtown Buenos Aires. Ferrari, one of Argentina's most important political artists, has long used Christian iconography to critique the complicity of the Catholic Church in a history of genocide and intolerance ranging from the conquest of the Americas and the Inquisition to the Nazi Holocaust and Argentina's Dirty War. From his emblematic 1960 artwork "Western Civilization and Christianity," in which he placed a metre-high Christ on the wing of a model American fighter plane, to his more recent sculptures of crucifixes popping out of toasters, virgins in blenders and saints sizzling in frying pans, Ferrari's acid humour inverts divine punishment for heresy into the torture and hell of Christian imagery on earth. While his retrospective brought together a selection of works that ranged widely in style from abstraction to agit-prop and spanned fifty years of artistic practice from 1954–2004, Ferrari's repudiation of the institutional hierarchy of the Catholic Church for its violent exorcism of difference and its ideological collaboration in crimes against humanity made the exhibition highly popular and immediately controversial.

In the opening weeks of the exhibition, as large crowds lined up around the block to witness Ferrari's iconoclasm, right-wing Christian fundamentalists gathered, rosaries in hand, to pray for their souls. As spectators entered the main salon of the exhibition and were confronted by Ferrari's 1960 crucified Christ — as relevant now (perhaps more so) in the context of Bush's Holy War as it was when it was made during America's crusade against communism in Vietnam — the fundamentalists kneeled and called for divine retribution. As viewers looked into a gilded cage where every few minutes the birds shit upon a reproduction of Michelangelo's "Last Judgement," the fundamentalists began to tremble with righteous indignation. Direct action followed upon rage, with Catholic agitators vandalizing Ferrari's artworks within days of the retrospective's opening.

As the performative elements of protest escalated and debate in the mass media intensified, "concerned" citizens went to court to seek an injunction to have the exhibition closed. It was not only the desecration of the great propagandists of the Church such as Michelangelo or the diabolical recasting of Christian suffering that troubled Argentina's bishops and their followers. Equally disturbing was Ferrari's use of agit-prop collage to remind an Argentine public of the entanglement of religion, ideology and repression that struck at the heart of their own nation. In a series of works produced for the newspaper *Pagina 12* in the style of John Heartfield, photographs of Argentine Generals from the military dictatorship of the Dirty War (1976–83) were juxtaposed with Nazi symbols; and Christian imaginaries of the inferno with the material hell of clandestine concentration camps used to disappear 30,000 Argentineans. In another series of recent works, George Bush Junior had become the Grim Reaper. A photographic collage repeated his image in the orifices of a cadaver. Twirling globes were swarmed by dozens of plastic cockroaches, used by Ferrari as symbols of the ubiquity of American forces. A small architectural model of the White House was overrun by cockroaches and rats. In essence, Ferrari had recast Bush's imperialist regime as a purgatory of doom and destruction.

Perhaps it is no surprise in a country where a neo-liberal pact with the devil in the 1990s produced the first meltdown casualty of globalization in December 2001, and a bishop can publicly condemn the Minister of Health's campaign to legalize abortion by calling for him to be thrown in the river with a stone around his neck, that the Catholic right-wing was successful in its campaign to close the exhibition. According to the judge (Liberatore, ironically enough, was her name) who issued the injunction, Ferarri's retrospective "had wounded the religious feelings of the vast majority of the city's inhabitants." It is also reassuring, and a sign of the shift in the political climate after the election of the left-leaning Kirchner as President in 2003, that the vast majority of Argentineans were more outraged by censorship than wounded by heretical images. City lawyers appealed the injunction, while Ferrari and the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (who had first marched the streets during the military dictatorship asking for their disappeared children) led daily protests of artists and writers through the city to the steps of the Recoleta. In this instance, the legal wrangling and ideological confrontation between church and state ended with the re-opening of the Ferrari exhibition.

Less reassuring, and more unsettling, is the turn of events taking place on the global stage. With the Grand Inquisitor of right-wing Catholicism now ensconced as Pope, the vermin that invaded Ferrari's mock White House have reached the inner sanctum of Rome. Pope Benedict II (an erstwhile rat who sang for his supper) recently received the Bishop of Argentina, who had so inopportunely called for the drowning death of the Minister of Health, with a warm embrace and urged him to continue the struggle for "the right to life." In the United States and beyond, fundamentalist evangelicalism is in ascendancy. George Bush has won a second term at the White House on an imperial war platform, cockroaches and Abu Ghraib notwithstanding. In Iraq, the violence increases unabated, while in Afghanistan rumours over the desecration of the Koran in American political prisons sparked deathly riots. In this light, Ferrari's half-century commitment to denouncing the complicity of church and state in regimes of terror can only serve to remind us of the importance of struggling against intolerance and for the right to critique and to repudiate all forms of ideological violence.

Leon Ferrari's work can be viewed at:
www.leonferrari.com.ar
www.arteuna.com/RRF/a-Ferrai.htm