

FUSE

MAGAZINE

AGW

Art Gallery of Windsor

401 Riverside Drive West
Windsor, Ontario N9A 7J1 Canada
Phone 519 977 0013 Fax 519 977 0776

INCOMING RECEIPT

This acknowledges receipt of the following object(s) from:

Parks Dept City Windsor / R Terada

for the purpose of _____

for the period of _____

ARTIST

TITLE & DESCRIPTION

VALU

R Terada

1 Sign



ARTEXTE
508-460 RUE STE-CATHERINE O
MONTREAL QC H3B 1A7

2 more issues after this one.

PM40022164 R8623

In this Issue

Viet Le grapples with representation, **Lee Rodney** signs off on Windsor and **Taryn Sirove** scopes out the Flashers.



CANADA'S ONLINE ARTS COMMUNITY

TERMINUS 1525.CA

Show your
ARTWORK
ONLINE

FREE

without ads

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX



NETWORK+
COLLABORATE
WITH YOUNG ARTISTS
FROM CANADA AND ABROAD



INSPIRE
change
MAKE THE WORLD
A BETTER PLACE
or something like that.

JOIN TODAY! TERMINUS1525.CA


aceartinc.

mentis prehensio
Sarah Crawley
march 10 - april 22

ace's high!
University of Manitoba
juried student show
may 5 - may 20

no one helped me
Daniel Barrow
june 9 - july 30

2nd floor, 280 McDermot Ave.
Winnipeg MB R3B 0T2
p: 204.944.9763
f: 204.944.9101
www.aceart.org



MIGUEL BERLANGA, LYNNE COHEN,
CHANTAL DAHAN, MAX DEAN,
JENNIFER DICKSON, EVERGON, JUAN GEUER,
LORRAINE GILBERT, GEOFFREY JAMES,
KATHERINE KNIGHT, CAROLINE LANGILL,
CHERYL PAGUREK, RAMONA RAMLOCHAND,
LESLIE REID, MICHAEL SCHREIER,
JASON ST-LAURENT, JEFFREY THOMAS

Heteropias

Work from the
Contemporary Collection
26 May to 13 August 2006

The Ottawa Art Gallery
2 Daly Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6E2
(613) 233-8699 info@ottawaartgallery.ca
www.ottawaartgallery.ca

oagao

JASON ST-LAURENT, HELSINKI / SIBELIUS MONUMENT (FROM THE CAMOUFLAGE SERIES) (DETAIL), 2004, DIGITAL PRINTS, COLLECTION OF THE OTTAWA ART GALLERY, PURCHASED WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF THE CANADA COUNCIL FOR THE ARTS AND OAG'S ART RENTAL AND SALES SERVICE VOLUNTEERS, 2005



Displace

March 29 to April 22, 2006
Opening: Thursday, March 30, 5 to 7 pm

Mina Arakawa, Danny Custodio, Angela Gulia, Jihee Min and Olga Zotova address themes of memory, home, nostalgia and identity through painting, photography, sound and video.

Semblance

April 27 to May 27, 2006
Opening: Thursday, April 27, 5 to 7 pm

Miles Collyer, Matthew Doherty, Stuart Sakai, and Paul Sergeant react to distinct themes of interest ranging from re-enacted scenes of momentary encounters, the shift from focus to unfocus, pop comic realism, and dissemination.

Held in conjunction with OCAD's Graduate Show, May 5 to 7, 2006 and CONTACT '06, Toronto Photography Festival.

OCAD Student Gallery

285 Dundas Street West, Toronto
416.977.6000 x262/263 cswiderski@ocad.on.ca
www.ocad.ca Wednesday to Saturday, 12 to 6 pm





www.openstudio.on.ca

April 6 - 29
Patrick Mahon
Three States: Suspension, Animation, Rest

May 4 - 27
Shary Boyle
Ben Reeves
Visiting Artists Exhibition

June 1 - 24
Nadine Bariteau
Visiting Artist Exhibition

Image: Patrick Mahon
from *Three States: Suspension, Animation, Rest*

Open Studio
401 Richmond Street W. Suite 104 Toronto M5V 3A8
tel/fax 416.504.8238 office@openstudio.on.ca



Lyn Carter **Incognito**

May 12 to June 25, 2006

TOM THOMSON MEMORIAL ART GALLERY

840 First Avenue West, Owen Sound, ON, N4K 4K4
www.tomthomson.org

Spring & Summer at Oakville Galleries



28 April to 4 June 2006 at Centennial Square and in Gairloch Gardens
Body: New Art from the UK
Curated by Bruce Grenville and Colin Ledwith

23 June to 27 August 2006 at Centennial Square
Isabelle Hayeur: Inhabiting
Curated by Serge Bérard

23 June to 27 August 2006 in Gairloch Gardens
Wall to Wall Warhol: from the private collection of Salah J. Bachir
Curated by Marnie Fleming

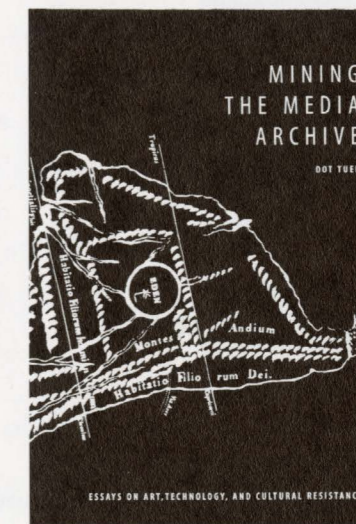
Og₂

Oakville galleries

at Centennial Square
120 Navy Street
in Gairloch Gardens
1306 Lakeshore Road East
Oakville, Ontario
tel 905.844.4402
fax 905.844.7968
<info@oakvillegalleries.com>
www.oakvillegalleries.com

New publication

Mining the Media Archive
Essays on Art, Technology and Cultural Resistance
by Dot Tuer



This collection of essays from one of Canada's leading critical thinkers is a brilliant amalgam of history, theory, personal experience, and some of the best art criticism ever written in Canada. The work is groundbreaking and unique for its cross-cultural reach, its multi-disciplinary manoeuvre, its political sophistication, as well as its scholarly depth.

- Susan Crean

0-920397-34-4
softcover
224 pages

\$21.95

www.yyzartistoutlet.org

401 Richmond St. West, Suite 140
Toronto, Ontario M5V 3A8
tel 416.598.4546 fax 416.598.2282
publish@yyzartistsoutlet.org

YYZBOOKS

Published with the generous support of the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario College of Art & Design and YYZ Artists' Outlet. Represented by the Literary Press Group.

BACK TALK

KC ADAMS
THIRZA CUTHAND
SHAWNA DEMPSEY
& LORRI MILLAN
MARY KAINER
BONNIE MARIN
AND OTHERS

Humour and Protest

9 JUNE TO
2 AUGUST, 2006

CURATED BY
ELIZABETH MATHESON
PRESENTED WITH THE FINANCIAL
ASSISTANCE OF THE SASKATCHEWAN
ARTS BOARD AND THE CANADA
COUNCIL FOR THE ARTS

D
DUNLOP ART GALLERY
TEL 306 1 777 6040
FAX 306 1 949 7264
WWW.DUNLOPARTGALLERY.ORG

McMaster Museum of Art
Alvin A. Lee Building, McMaster University
1280 Main St. W., Hamilton ON L8S 4L6
(905) 525-9140 x23081 www.mcmaster.ca/museum
Hours: Tues-Fri 11am-5pm, Sunday 12-5 pm

The Named and the Unnamed
Rebecca Belmore
March 16 - April 23, 2006
Public Talk by Rebecca Belmore: Thursday, April 6 at 7 pm

Prima Materia
Dianne Baker • Elaine Whittaker • Lynda Gammon
March 12 - April 23, 2006

Embodied Matter
Showcasing works from McMaster's collection by women artists including Betty Goodwin, Liz Magor and Clarissa Schmidt Inglis. Guest curated by Dr. Mary O'Connor and Dr. Janice Hladki.
March 5 - May 28, 2006

The Neue Frau: Representations of Women From Expressionism to the New Objectivity
Curated by Greg Rennick.
March 1 - April 16, 2006

Public Reception for all exhibitions
Thursday, March 16, 7-9 pm

McMaster University
MUSEUM OF ART

TERRITORY
june 10 - august 6

ARTSPEAK
233 Carrall Street
Vancouver BC V6B 2J2
604.688.0051
Tues to Sat 12 - 5pm
www.artspeak.ca

PRESENTATION HOUSE GALLERY
333 Chesterfield Avenue
North Vancouver BC V7M 3G9
604.986.1351
Wed to Sun 12 - 5pm, Th 12 - 9pm
www.presentationhousegall.com

City of Vancouver, Greater Vancouver Regional District, British Columbia Arts Council, City of Vancouver, The Banff Centre, Vancouver Foundation, City of Vancouver

WALTER PHILLIPS GALLERY

Comic Craze
May 4 - September 3, 2006
Curator: Sylvie Gilbert

PLAN B, a curatorial space
Conceptual Comics
April 27 - August 3, 2006
Guest Curators: AA Bronson and Max Schumann

New Publication
Lida Abdul
Edited by Anthony Kiendl

THE BANFF CENTRE

coming soon to the Fuse website ...

- online **forums**
- online **renewals**
- online **payment**

and

- **online issues!**

www.fusemagazine.org

FUSE MAGAZINE

Volume 29 Number 2 April 2006

Board of Directors

Janna Graham, Ayesha Hameed,
Adrian Blackwell, Janis Demkiw, Michelle Jacques,
Robinder Sehdev, Syrus Marcus Ware,
Natalie Kallio, Roberta Buiami, Firoza Elavia,
Swintak, Tony Hewer

Editorial Committee

Jessica Wyman, Gita Hashemi, Adrian Blackwell,
Sally McKay

Staff

Izida Zorde (associate editor)
Michael Maranda (associate publisher)
Suzanne Noga (design)
Liz Clayton (copy editor)

Contributing Editors

Joane Cardinal-Schubert (Calgary), Robin Curtis
(Berlin), Allan deSouza (Los Angeles),
Cliff Eyland (Winnipeg), Andrea Fatona
(Peterborough), Sylvie Fortin (Durham NC),
Richard Fung (Toronto), Tere Badia (Barcelona),
Ashok Mathur (Calgary), Ian Rashid (London),
Clive Robertson (Kingston), Nell Tenhaaf
(Toronto), Reggie Woolery (New York), Sharon
Rosenberg (Edmonton), Kirsten Forkert (New
York), tobias c. van veen (Montreal), Joseph
Rosen (Montreal), Trish Salah (Montreal) R
William Hill (London UK), Dot Tuer (Toronto
and Argentina), Randy Lee Cutler (Vancouver),
Janna Graham (London UK)

FUSE is published four times a year by Artons Cultural Affairs Society and Publishing Inc., a non-profit artists' organization. All inquiries and return of undeliverables to the following address:

Artons Cultural Affairs
454-401 Richmond St W
Toronto ON M5V 3A8 (Canada)
email: subscriptions@fusemagazine.org
tel: (416) 340-8026

Publications Mail agreement No. 1396609
Registration No. 8623
ISSN 0838-603X

Copyright © 2006 Artons Publishing Inc. All rights reserved under International Copyright Union. Any reproduction without permission is prohibited. Send permission requests to Access Copyright (1 800 893 5777). Artons Publishing purchases First North American Serial Rights and copyright reverts to the writer after publication. Artons Publishing assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. Manuscripts will not be returned. A copy of our Writers' Guidelines is available on our website. Publication of an advertisement in FUSE does not include endorsement of the advertiser by the magazine. Opinions expressed outside of specifically marked editorials are not necessarily held by members of the Editorial Board.

Subscription rates: \$20 per year; Institutions \$32 per year (in Canada only). Outside Canada \$24 U.S. per year; Institutions \$38 U.S. Decisions regarding who qualifies as an individual subscriber remain the right of the publisher.

Printed in Canada by Sonic Print Management.

FUSE is indexed in the Alternative Press Index and ARTbibliographies Modern, and is distributed by, and a member of Magazines Canada (416 504 0274). FUSE acknowledges the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Publications Assistance Program and the Canada Magazine Fund toward our mailing, editorial, production, and project costs. We also acknowledge financial assistance from the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council. Finally, we are grateful for the many hours of volunteer and partially paid labour that are provided by everyone listed on our masthead, and some not so listed.

Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts
du Canada

Canada

ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO

CENTRE DE DOCUMENTATION
ARTEXTE
DOCUMENTATION CENTRE

contents

29.2

- 6 Editorial
Framing Public Culture

- 8 Have you left the American Sector? Ron Terada's
Adventure in the "City of Roses"
by Lee Rodney

- 13 The Excursive Province of Macromedia Flash:
Internet art and industry
by Taryn Sirove

- 18 Aesthetics and Ethnics: Contemporary US curatorial
strategies and the "postethnic"
review by Viet Le

- 33 Representin': Black Artists Tell The Truth
review by Rinaldo Walcott

- 36 With Open Arms: Luis Jacob's *Habitat*
review by Ivan Jurakic

- 39 Read Handed: *Caught in the Act: an Anthology of
Performance Art by Canadian Women*
review by Leah Sandals

- 42 The Pull of Political Undercurrents: Janet Cardiff's
Words Drawn in Water
review by Adrienne Lai

- 45 On the horizon (casting shadows): Vancouver art,
economies and the pitfalls of success
review by Vanessa Kwan

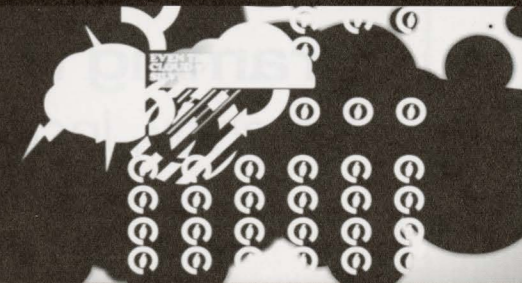
Short Fuse

- 48 Prophets of design-religion
by Rob Labossiere

Artist Project

- 29 A Few Small Barriers in Istanbul
by Ken Hayes

Columns



Features



Reviews



Short Fuse Artist Project

Framing Public Culture: Paradox, Incongruity and Canadian Virtue

In this issue, FUSE returns to two concerns we continuously grapple with: democracy, its mechanisms and breaches, and identity, a subject ironically deemed passé in this particularly pressing historical moment. Rife with paradoxes and incongruities, these concepts reference self-evident social facts (we live in a democracy, we each have identity) and are instructive in the ways they inform our understandings of how society works — both in terms of our expectations and rights and our responsibilities as citizens. Identity underpins Canada's policy of multiculturalism, most often expressed in classifications such as "minority" and "special interest" and, that most evil and insidious of all Canadian virtues, "tolerance." Democracy, in theory, is equated with freedom, equality and public debate (though in reality, it rarely plays out this way).

As framing devices for public culture, these concepts are tools with which we develop our shared understandings. Unfortunately, we regularly refer to them without questioning their meaning and they are so oft-used that they have assumed particularly fixed definitions

while losing any significant meaning (case-study of ideology, anyone?). With their lack of specificity, democracy and identity no longer seem to warrant continued questioning: ubiquitous and oblique, their meanings and histories have worn beyond recognition.

In our last issue, our shortFUSE aimed to bring the identity politics debate back to its roots in the politics of identity — reconnecting the language with a locatable history of political and social struggle so that the politics could less easily be dismissed as dated ideas of a gone-by era. In this issue, we continue to unpack these politics. Informing this conversation is Viet Le's "Aesthetics and Ethics: Contemporary US Curatorial Strategies and the 'Postethnic,'" which considers how critical discourses regarding the framing of identity, race, ethnicity and representation are forged and negotiated. Le examines insights and challenges as well as the machinations and consequences of defining race and ethnicity. In a related review, Rinaldo Walcott brings the conversation about the politics of identity back to a connecting thread that

is so often lost in current conversations — capitalism. In other words, how identity is branded and marketed, then sold back as a consumer item.

Capitalism and the interests of the business community feature prominently in Lee Rodney's "Have you left the American Sector? Ron Terada's Adventure in the 'City of Roses.'" Rodney reflects on the removal of Terada's You have left the American Sector sign from Windsor's Sculpture Garden — pointing to the ways in which city council and local media conflated business interests with public interest and manufactured the opinion of an "average joe" to stand in for public discussion and official public arts policy. While Rodney argues that a travesty such as this one could happen only in Windsor, "the bingo capital of Canada," future issues of FUSE will examine how the hand of business reaches into public art across the country ... for example, in our next issue, we will be looking to Calgary where the Epcor Centre recently decided that the passers-by needed protection from the art on display. Instead of censoring the work, they walled it in.



Thinking of contributing to FUSE? Well, you should.

Send your proposals to our editorial committee on anything that catches your fancy ... after checking our online contributor guidelines, of course. We'll get back to you.

www.fusemagazine.org/write.html

kamloops ART GALLERY



101-465 Victoria Street
Kamloops BC V2C 2A9
T 250 377-2400
F 250 828-0662
E kamloopsartgallery@kag.bc.ca
W www.kag.bc.ca

Tradition and Innovation in 20th Century Chinese Paintings

Curator: Barry Till, Curator of Asian Art, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria

June 11 to September 3, 2006

Sponsored by London Drugs Limited

Media sponsor Radio NL & 97.5 The River



Huang Yongyu
Autumn Interest
hanging scroll, ink and colours on paper
Courtesy Art Gallery of Greater Victoria



BRITISH COLUMBIA ARTS COUNCIL
The Canada Council
Canadian Heritage

with Final Cut Pro HD + AVID Xpress HD
+ Pro Tools + AirPort Extreme cards

rentable
offsite digital media stations
ideal for training, group projects and media exhibitions

CHARLES STREET VIDEO

satellite CSV

www.charlesstreetvideo.com

for more information contact us at:
416.603.6564
or csv@charlesstreetvideo.com

Have you left the American Sector?

Ron Terada's Adventure in the "City of Roses"

by Lee Rodney

Windsor is a city without definition. The approach from the Canadian side whether by plane, train or automobile is flat and dull: hazy in the summer and grey in the winter. Closer in, the streetscape is taken over by the density of billboards and signs. Directions to one of the two Canada-US border crossings compete with ads for plastic surgery, sex shops, and nightclubs. The endless signage indicates that Windsor is transitory affair, a quickie on the way to another place. What it lacks in terms of a distinguishing landscape or architectural intrigue, it makes up for in the visual noise along its major thoroughfares.

While its nickname is "The City of Roses," Windsor is more accurately a city of signs, both literally and symptomatically. Ron Terada isn't from Windsor, but he seems to intuitively understand what Windsor's penchant for signage means. It often takes a rank outsider to sense a community's insecurity, and Terada hit a sore spot with



Ron Terada. *You Have Left the American Sector*. Courtesy: Lee Rodney

his most recent public art project for the Art Gallery of Windsor last fall.

Terada seems to revel in presenting the obvious in his work. But often what's said to be obvious is anything but clear in terms of its implications. *You Have Left the*

American Sector (2005) was a road sign Terada had installed in Windsor's waterfront sculpture park on 23 September 2005. Even though the sign was standard in all its properties (kelly green, white text, both official Canadian languages) it looked slightly awkward though generally

innocuous. It was most likely only legible from the Windsor side of the Detroit River, which is also to say on Canadian territory.

Terada's sign was conceived as an allusion to the once infamous sign that stood in Berlin at Checkpoint Charlie. The Cold War

relic was worded in present tense — You Are Leaving The American Sector — in Russian, German, French and English, and now has taken on a second life as a museum object. Terada's sign, by contrast, was worded in past tense — You Have Left The American Sector — and lacks two of the four languages that constituted the political territory symbolized by Checkpoint Charlie.

By September 28 the sign was gone, removed by City of Windsor grounds and maintenance workers who were dispatched by City Council to dismantle it. This unilateral decision was made swiftly by Council, and thus excluded any consultation with the AGW, Bob McKaskell (the exhibition curator) and Terada himself. On Council's part, the decision seemed paranoid, desperate and illogical given the conditions under which all parties had been made aware of both the sign's content and its placement: it was tucked far away from the roadside, visible only to those strolling along Windsor's waterfront who were inclined to search it out. The project had been conceived and submitted to the city nine months prior; it was prepared in the City of Windsor sign shop by their own employees a month before the exhibition. Finally, it was erected on September 23 by the same grounds and maintenance workers who were sent out to dismantle it five days later.

While it is impossible to know precisely what motivated City Council's decision, there were a number of statements made by Mayor Francis and City Councillors in the *Windsor Star* prior to the removal of Terada's sign. Francis alluded to complaints from local area businessmen who anticipated that the sign might offend American tourists. Additionally, Councillors Alan Halberstadt and David Cassivi were exceptionally vocal in their condemnation

of Terada's piece, suggesting at one point that it should be relegated to a broom closet in the Art Gallery of Windsor. Councillor Halberstadt got his wish, as Terada's sign has remained in storage there since the end of September.

The suggestion that Terada's sign would offend Americans and hurt the local economy is, I think, an imaginative one. It is true that the local economy is almost entirely contingent upon what happens in Detroit and its environs. Windsor is many things to Detroit (its illegitimate child, its concubine); but the people sitting on City Council must know somewhere, deep down, that most Americans don't give a toss about a sign in Canada that says: "You have left the American Sector." It is a long stretch to the conclusion that a temporary (four month) art project would hurt the local economy.

This was a power play, a clear-cut case of censorship, and one obviously not without precedent in Canada. But what is most disturbing here is that Council took draconian measures to wipe out something that they didn't like, and that the interests of big business were construed by Mayor Francis and the *Windsor Star* as public opinion. Public opinion at the best of times is difficult to pin down, but in most cases it takes longer than five days to arrive at a conclusion that might accurately reflect something that could conceivably be called public.

Council's decision to take down Terada's sign rests on a number of presumptions about Americans that are hardly sustainable. The stereotype that Council holds onto is that Americans are by and large stupid and incapable of interpreting Terada's sign on a number of levels: as political irony, as historical comparison. Council failed to recognize any of these



distinct possibilities and the *Star* followed suit in drumming up predictable responses that positioned Terada as the obstinate charlatan, a shit disturber. In the second of a handful of articles that followed the controversy, Terada was quickly cast as irreverent: "Artist shrugs off critique" ran the headline for the article of 23 September.

The controversy was immediately pitched as a question of artistic merit in order to derail the issue of censorship. Within days, the Terada piece was lampooned as "bad art," an eyesore worthy of a lynch mob. As one might expect the *Star* had no trouble finding ready subjects to denounce its value as art. In one particularly comical moment worth quoting in full, the *Star's* Dalson Chen called upon the authority of a proverbial average Joe:

Out for a stroll in Riverside Park, 30-year-old Ron Mercer wasn't impressed by the sculpture garden's newest feature. "I don't see how it's a piece of art. It doesn't have any shape but the shape of a sign," said the baffled Hamilton native, "I just don't like the look of it to be honest."

Comments such as these are laughably familiar. The stupid-but-proud ethos that is coming to stand for public opinion is largely one manufactured and maintained by the interests of neo-conservatives everywhere. Arguments based on the logic of artistic merit are dubious at the best of times. For the sake of playing devil's advocate, I'll go out on a limb and say that Terada's piece does indeed lack creativity. It's an entirely predictable Vancouver school, neo-Conceptualist response to the conundrums of Canadian identity. We've seen a lot of it before. But even if we could conceivably establish that Terada's piece is bad art (there's plenty of bad art

City workers dismantling the sign. Courtesy: Lee Rodney

on the Windsor waterfront already), this doesn't justify its removal given that the City had fundamentally approved the project in advance of its installation.

If Terada's piece was a litmus test for the corporatization of the Canadian media, the tragedy is that he proved the extent to which CanWest Global has infiltrated the last bastion of the public sphere. The tiny amount of public space given over to art in the Windsor Sculpture Garden is at least symbolically linked to a tradition of public culture that includes debate as an integral part. I don't need to go through a lesson in the history of democracy to point out the inherent contradiction between the ideal of free speech and the way silence was imposed when the subject of national autonomy was raised.

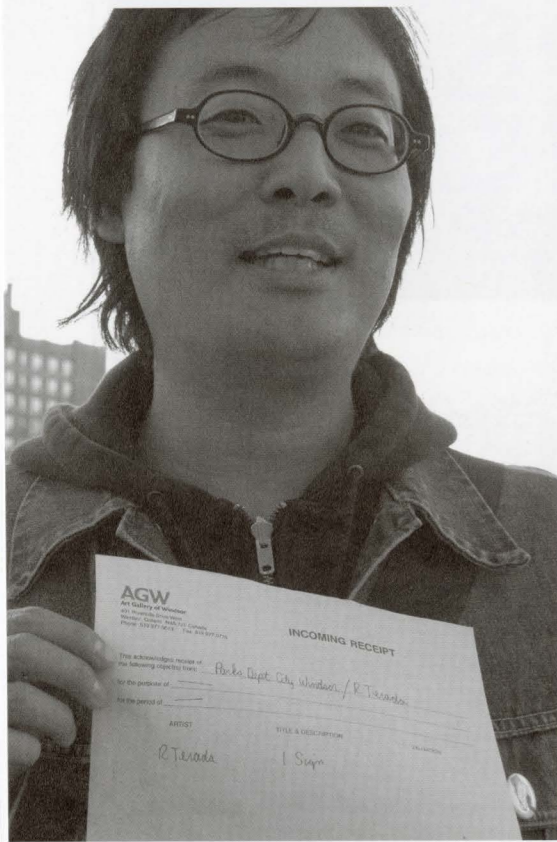
The controversy was carefully controlled by City Council and the *Windsor Star*. Together they seemed to claim majority shareholder status in the business of manufacturing public opinion. The voice of the average Joe has come to stand for something called public opinion, and the system works because everyone wants to agree with average Joe. Average Joe is pitched as honest, working-class and simple; he is both a victim of industrial capital and a subject who perpetuates its values. As a mascot for sensationalist politicians and the media entities that sustain them, average Joe works to muster consent because he drinks beer and loves hockey, and this alone makes him lovable. To disagree with him puts you in the camp of a mean-spirited freak, or even worse, an intellectual. But average Joe has become a tyrannical force when it comes to quickly sketching out the contours of public opinion because as a trope of familiarity he can be used in lieu of public opinion or as a catalyst to engineer consent.

The supreme irony in the events that took place last fall is that the dismantling of Terada's sign comes after Richard Florida's whirlwind tour through Detroit last winter. Florida is a sociologist-cum-urban planning guru whose best-selling book *The Rise of the Creative Class* had apparently inspired Mayors Francis (Windsor) and Kwame Kilpatrick (Detroit) to think about ways of reviving their fledgling industrial economies though making the inner cities of Detroit and Windsor more attractive places to live in. The immediate answer to the woes of urban blight came in the form of "Car-tunes on Parade," the Detroit-Windsor version of Toronto's painted moose and Chicago's cows, trinkets of community spirit and goodwill that have little to do with creativity or a sustainable commitment to the improvement of urban decay.

While Detroit has worked miracles over the past couple of years propping up its urban core in preparation for the 2006 Superbowl, Windsorites have been busy prepping their strip clubs for the hordes of football hooligans that will drift over the border in search of a party afterwards. Eddie Francis seems to have missed the point of Florida's creative cities paradigm. If you're serious about fostering a creative class, it doesn't make a lot of sense to start off by alienating the artistic communities that are already in place. Francis' horizon of creative industries seems to reach its limit at exotic dancing, perhaps the only creative economy that is actively promoted here.

Dark clouds are often silver-lined and the Terada affair has at least served to galvanize a fractured arts community. The intervening months have seen a well-attended forum on public art and the adoption of a public art policy that is officially recognized by City Council. The

For the moment, Council's decision stands as a portentous sign of the spread of a culture of fear and loathing that was once limited to the Fox network alone.



Ron Terada with a receipt from the City of Windsor. Courtesy: Lee Rodney

ture of fear and loathing that was once limited to the Fox network alone. It has been pointed out on a number of occasions that the response to Terada's sign is specific to Windsor: no other major Canadian city (or border town for that matter) would respond so anxiously to such an innocuous statement. I am certain that most people living in other parts of the country who caught wind of the Terada controversy will dismiss it as a local affair, yet one more point for Windsor as the bingo capital of Canada.

In order to point out just how unusual Terada's case is it seems instructive to look back to 1991 when Jamelie Hassan's billboard project, *Because there was & there wasn't ... (Baghdad Billboard)*, was installed near the Ambassador Bridge during the first Gulf War. While this project also drew controversy over anti-American content, the billboard remained up for the duration of the Artcote organized exhibition. The course of events that lead to the dismantling of Terada's sign last September was more a product of time rather than place: political climate rather than locale alone. However the strong reaction ensured that Terada's sign worked as a demonstration piece, a public performance to show up the climate of intolerance that has been steadily building in Canadian news media over the last decade. For a few short weeks there was at least something nominally interesting going on at home. But for the rest of the country and the world, Windsor, Ontario will go down on record as a conservative, reactionary place that shuts down debate before it can happen.

In many ways Canada still remains sandwiched between the two vast empires that dominated the political landscape of the previous two centuries. Canadians seem to be perpetually stuck in the state of being

neither/nor. Not really American, but certainly not British either. Indeed, Canadian culture is premised upon self-reflexive quests in the void of Canadian national identity, which is defined more by what it isn't rather than by what it is. In *Why I Hate Canadians*, Will Ferguson likens the search for a uniquely Canadian spirit as one akin to having a fine lantern without a resident genie. *You Have Left the American Sector* may baldly point out the obviousness of Canadian territory, but it also serves as a poignant reminder that there is increasingly little to distinguish it from that which lies across the river.

Windsor seems to be in the unenviable position of having to perform its Canadianness while never having wholly joined the quest for identity that so preoccupies other parts of the country. However in one small respect the players on Windsor City Council behaved in a uniquely Canadian manner in so far as they subscribed to the belief that we have the capacity to offend Americans. Canada is rarely on the American radar screen. Short of global terrorism, and the misguided idea that Canada is a gateway for terrorists to enter the US, they're not bothered one way or the other by their beige (dull) or pink (watered-down left) neighbours to the north. And it is this continual condition of ineffectuality that really disturbs those aspiring to whoop up a right-wing vision for Canada in the twenty-first century.

Lee Rodney is assistant professor of art history and visual culture in the School of Visual Arts, University of Windsor. She recently completed her Ph.D. on the temporality of media culture (Goldsmiths College, London, UK). Current research interests include de-urbanization processes in the Windsor/Detroit region as well as border culture in general.



The Excursive Province of Macromedia Flash: Internet Art and Industry

by Taryn Sirove

All images in article: lamstatic, *Cloud 9*, Quicktime Animation Stills, 2005. Courtesy: David Greene.

What I love about the industry is that you are introduced to a crazy world of visual production, even if that means selling cornflakes.

— David Greene; lamstatic¹

Walk downtown in Toronto and you'll inevitably pass an assortment of twenty-something men in dual-toned mesh hats, presenting cleaner, svelte versions of the skateboarder's silhouette. These are Flash designers.

Macromedia Flash is a multimedia program used mostly in the advertising industry. It began in the early 90s as a simple drawing tool developed by Jonathan Gay called SmartSketch.² Now Flash is ubiquitous on the internet.³ Both artists and designers have congregated around the program, and media theorist

Lev Manovich was moved to coin the term "Generation Flash" in 2002.⁴

Many Canadian designers learned Flash in art school and were later able to use their skills to survive in a commercial industry. Developer Randy Knott of the curatorial online body, lamstatic, recalls that at the end of his degree he said to himself, "I'm not going to make money doing sculpture."⁵ Many young artists, like the group who initiated lamstatic at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, are recruited by advertising companies who view their work online. Forums like the annual con-

ference Flash in the Can (FITC), or the monthly socials called Flash in T.O., are geared towards commercial networking and technical presentations. Creative alliances also occur in these contexts,⁶ however, and communications online sustain and develop the scene.

The Flash scene conducts a balancing act between art on the fringes of society, and commercially successful design industries at the centre. Characterizing the scene is a difficult project, especially in terms of art. Participants only sometimes designate their work as art. Flash work has a lot of

potential for radical social critique or intervention, but these goals are rarely explicit and seldom achieved. Flash is not really integral to the mainstream art scene in Canada, but its fringe, almost cult-like character makes it an interesting phenomenon to address in terms of larger discourses of technology and art.

Manovich calls the software artist the "new romantic." While earlier postmodern media artists manipulated existing commercial media to create politically oriented montage, Malevich claims that the new generation is "no longer interested in 'media critique' ... instead it is engaged in software critique. This generation writes its own software code to create their own cultural systems, instead of using samples of commercial media."⁷ Flash uses vector-based images derived from drawing tools that are programmed with code rather than indexical images montaged from outside sources.

Flash developers exploit all capabilities of the program including real time interac-

tivity, automaticity, randomness, collaboration, anonymity and appropriation. Some artists intentionally use Flash to foster "democratic" methods in the production of meaning such as reciprocity and de-centering of the author (or artist).⁸

Randomness in art is not unique to Flash productions; however, it is prevalent in the medium. Artists can program systems which perform differently each time they are accessed on the web. Artists also develop random systems that become tools for creating images and compositions. Joshua Davis presented such a system at FITC in 2004. Graphics appear in random patterns on the screen, which is repeatedly refreshed to create new patterns until the artist is satisfied.⁹

Flash also lends itself to collaboration since digital files can easily be exchanged online and manipulated by several contributors. With collaboration comes anonymity. Often, group credit is displayed only with a URL. This could be considered as a literal disintegration of

the author as sole producer of meaning, after Roland Barthes.¹⁰ For the members of lamstatic, anonymity also has to do with disembodiment. Credit may indeed be attributed to a name in cyberspace, but it is detached from the corresponding body.

Developers often share code and incorporate each others' formulas. In this way, artists can share much more than images. Code can translate kinetically, producing movement, and an artist can cause his or her own aesthetic creation to perform in an appropriated manner. This opens endless possibilities for exchange. If appropriation is a plagiarism, then the activist art collective Critical Art Ensemble (CAE) sees electronic media as a conduit for "Utopian Plagiarism," employing real time linking mechanisms of hypertextual or hypermedia networks. Interactivity, randomness, collaboration, anonymity and appropriation intersect to form a radical potential for a manifestly intertextual experience approaching egalitarian modes of reciprocal production.

Most Flash developers or designers, however, are not fully invested in this potential. For one thing, Flash is a proprietary software that does not allow users to access the source code. There is an alternative open source program called Processing¹¹ which allows users to access other authors' code at will, either to appropriate for their own work or, more importantly, to modify, changing the original software/artwork. Open-source allows communities of software builders to collaborate in non-corporate structural contexts, evolving projects on an ongoing basis.¹² Flash reflects a different socio-cultural orientation than Processing, as it cannot be altered from outside, nor can it be looked at "under the hood."¹³ It is popular, however, for communities of developers to volunteer their code.

The development of an alternative to Flash exemplifies the notion that technology does not necessarily determine its uses. YYZ's recent book on animation, *The Sharpest Point: animation at the end of emerging medias*, discusses the ways in which media users are revisiting medium-specificity in the context of the digital image. For example, Tess Takahashi finds that filmmakers are recouping film's aura, re-centering the author and the work of art. This is not just a nostalgic move, as Takahashi explains that "appeals to film's aura can be read as symptomatic of the ways in which the proliferation of the digital image is forcing artists and laymen alike to renegotiate the status of all images."¹⁴ Ironically, the buzz around anonymity, automaticity, and intertextuality of software art on the internet has caused a reinscription of Benjamin's aura in the very medium that initiated its loss.

The term "Flash Generation" has technocentric implications.¹⁵ David Clark,

Sundance award winner for his Flash piece, *A is for Apple*, reminds us that technological determinism overlooks the social needs that precede new technologies.¹⁶ Nevertheless, Clark also acknowledges that formal explorations of medium-specificity are a necessary part of learning about a new medium and developing its ontology.¹⁷ One characteristic that Clark sees as unique to digital animation programs is the relationship they have with conceptions of time. Conventional animation acts as an indexical record of moments in the past. Digital animation actually occurs in real time; each carrying-out of the code function causes the animated action.¹⁸ Randy Knott of lamstatic comments, "that's why I was drawn to Flash in the beginning — because I could make a random movie player by going to the weather network and coding, 'if it's minus 4 degrees then play the minus 4 movie.'"¹⁹ This demonstrates Clark's observation that, "in digital media, the progression of the images is not limited to the run/stop algorithm of the film projector but can now engage in the complex if/then logic of the computer code."²⁰

Developers are doing endless, arcane experiments with this logic, and FITC is a good place to find increments of innovation in code. The question is, when do experiments in medium-specificity no longer contribute to the development of a coherent practice? David Greene of lamstatic laughs, "although it usually becomes a case of 'look what I am doing...oooooh cool' and on to the next person, and I don't see much talk generated from showing art projects in Flash, I think it's still good for people to get together at conferences and share ideas and code."²¹

If there is a movement of people using

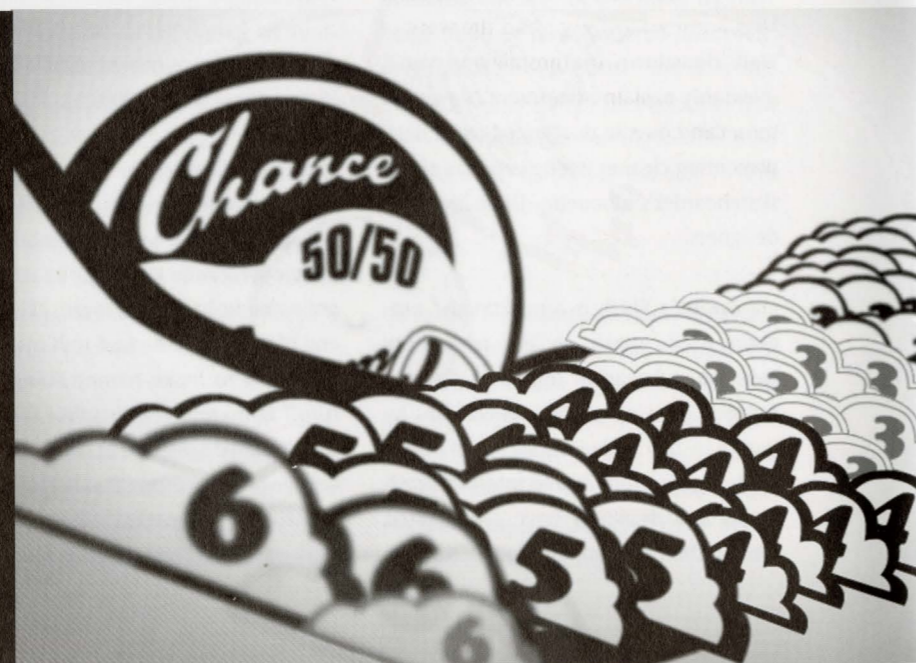
Flash for art, it is still undeveloped and its priorities under-articulated. FITC is a \$650 ticket, obviously an exclusive conference, and geared to the commercial end of new media industries, focusing on the creative, technical, and business categories.²² The creative category usually includes Flash presentations that launch innovations, and Flash in the Can 2004 even had a panel discussion moderated by curator Wayne Baerwaldt called "Is It Art Yet?" The mission for the panel was ambitious:

Technology-based media work often crosses conventional boundaries between art and design or art and commerce. Where is the real art and innovation of our time coming from, industry or the arts, new or traditional media? And to what extent do definitions of what is art and what is not, or not yet, depend on the audience? Leading creators debate the virtues of commercial and non-commercial motivators, their creative goals and the art and industry divide.²³

Unfortunately, the discussion degraded into the exhausted debate of defining art. Media artist David Rokeby, sitting on the panel, was visibly frustrated. According to Greene the forum is more suited to client networking than art theorizing, "Clients are looking at the personal art work of developers and designers as a means for getting what they want. For example a client looking at a James Patterson drawing or movie in a gallery (or online) would say 'can you make a tv spot for (product here) like that animation and drawing style?'"²⁴

Works that begin as non-commercial art projects become representative of a developer's corporate portfolio and the "look"

The Flash scene conducts a balancing act between art at the fringes of society, and commercially successful design industries at the centre.



gets recruited by advertising agencies. This "look" is associated with an individual's or group's URL. In this way, URLs become something like a brand, with an associated attitude or style. James Patterson, for example, is also known as Presstube, and the look offered at www.presstube.com has been sought out by diverse clients such as Bjork and Nike.

Anne-Marie Cheung, a Flash developer with a fine art background, suggested, "maybe it's trendy now to be thought of as artsy," as she described Coca-Cola's website showcasing the artwork of five cutting edge design companies on Coke's new bottle.²⁵ The indie status of non-commercial Flash work combined, arguably, with modern concept of originality, lends corporations a hipster cachet. The sound bite on Coca-Cola's website narrates, "An icon is transformed. A vision in aluminum honors art and science. With exclusive presence, the M5 series bottle appears only in the world's finest clubs and lounges."²⁶

In response to the uneven ratio of men to women who are cultivating Flash celebrity, Cheung founded a website called Flash Goddess.²⁷ Her mission is to discover the Flash Goddesses among all of the "great Flash Gods" that "you hear about all the time."²⁸ When asked about her experiences at the FITC conference, Cheung responded with:

I remember the first one having only one female speaker who appeared on a panel. The lack of female presence was quite noticeable and my colleagues and I really wanted to see some women in our field speaking who we could draw inspiration from. FITC has really grown since then and includes more female speakers than any other conference of its kind in the world!²⁹

Nonetheless, out of the 60 scheduled speakers for the 2006 FITC conference, only four are women.³⁰

Flash Goddess has a gallery section, and the site also showcases personal websites by commercial designers. In this context, words like "art" and "non-commercial" become interchangeable. Both the forum and the gallery, however, ultimately serve as a resource for professionals and clients, and, in this case, as promotion for female developers.

Referring to commercial designers producing non-commercial projects, David Clark explains, "there are people who work back and forth between spheres. Some people have a day job and then do whatever they want, but there are some people who open up a new space for themselves."³¹ Flash work does not straddle the conventional "art world" and the commercial design industry, as much as it has found its own scene with its own cross-over discourses. The term "creative" for example is used as a noun and replaces the term "artist." This usage, born out of advertising, has found its way into the

mission statement of the curatorial website, iamstatic.com. *Iamstatic* is a banner under which the group creates both their commercial and their non-commercial work. Gervais calls the URL a "duality of *iamstatic* and *Iamstatic studios*."³²

Iamstatic's most recent exhibition, "ZooRoom: A Room With a Zoo" moved offline into their new space called Resistor Gallery. As Randy Knott points out, it is more likely that the average person would drop in to an internet site than a gallery.³³ Yet *Iamstatic* initiated this gallery partly to lend the featured work the kind of authority that only a gallery space can appoint. Ironically, this art credibility also reduces the access to online exhibitions, as remote versions of the artwork are reserved for purchase in the form of a DVD, proceeds from which go to the World Wildlife Fund.

The questions I've asked of Flash work reveal my own underlying values and definitions of art. Flash work neither fully satisfies these definitions nor fully negates them. But since we don't want to get caught up in that old debate about what is and is not art, it is useful to think through the phenomena in alternative terms. Echoing Manovich who understands that "This [Flash] generation does not care if their work is called art or design," David Clark explains, "the internet has opened up to make art and artists irrelevant as a kind of category. It's just this place where people do things and whether it is nominated as art or you're an artist is kind of irrelevant."³⁴

Flash projects enact a hybrid status: potentially art and perpetually commercial. Artists, designers, producers and creatives have mobilized around this program/word/aesthetic/experimentation and enjoy the creative and commercial benefits of such a plastic and virtual com-

munity. Whatever we want to call it, here on the downside of the wave that is the Flash scene, there still exists a proliferation of beautiful, engaging and at the very least curious experimentation — sometimes accompanied by cornflakes.

Taryn Sirove is a Ph.D. candidate at Queen's University in Art History whose work focuses on histories of identity politics deployed via video art in Canada. She has researched discursive contests around film and video censorship in Canada and studies changing social formations of alternative video art practices as part of her broader interest in electronic and new media art.

Notes:

1. David Greene, email to author, 13 October 2005.
2. http://www.macromedia.com/macromedia/events/john_gay/.
3. David Clark, media artist and filmmaker, interview, 13 October 2005.
4. Lev Manovich, "Generation Flash," 2002, www.manovich.net/DOCS/generation_flash.doc, 20 October 2005.
5. Knott, roundtable discussion, 13 October 2005. I would like to thank David Clark (aisforapple.net), Randy Knott (iamstatic.com), Shelley Simmons and Peter Horvath (6168.org) for participating in this impromptu roundtable. In response to Knott's comment, David Clark quipped, "there's no sculpture industry! [in any way similar to the advertising industry.]"
6. For more information see www.fitc.com.
7. Manovich, "Generation Flash."
8. The term "automaticity" comes from Lev Manovich who uses it to refer to the computer's ability to automatically carry out functions inputted by the user. Quoted in Tess Takahashi, "Meticulously, Recklessly Worked Upon: Direct Animation, the Auratic and the Index," in Chris Gehman and Steve Reinke, *The Sharpest Point: Animation at the end of cinema* (Toronto: YYZbooks, 2005), p. 168.
9. An example of Davis' collage work can be seen online at <http://www.joshuadavis.com/pound.html>. Davis reminds us that random systems are not purely random in that they still consist of programmed numerical arrays with boundaries set by the author.
10. See Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text* (London: Flamingo, 1984).
11. <http://www.processing.org/>.
12. The definition of open source for the Open Source Initiative (OSI), a non-profit organization dedicated to monitoring and licensing open-source projects reads: "When programmers can read, redistribute, and modify the source code for a piece of software, the software evolves. People improve it, people adapt it, people fix bugs. And this can happen at a speed that, if one is used to the slow pace of conventional software development, seems astonishing. We in the open source community have learned that this rapid evolutionary process produces better software than the traditional closed model, in which only a very few programmers can see the source and everybody else must blindly use an opaque block of bits. Open Source Initiative exists to make

this case to the commercial world." <http://www.open-source.org/index.php>.

13. David Chant, electriccompany.com, personal interview, 3 November 2005.
14. Takahashi, p. 168. Takahashi's article focuses on contact animation on film and artists' claims of authenticity by way of the presence of the artist's body in contrast to traditional methods of mechanical reproduction in film.
15. Manovich does not limit his description of the Flash generation to Flash developers only. He includes work made with other computer applications like Shockwave, HTML [sic], Quicktime and other Web multimedia formats. Thus the qualities [he describes] as specific to 'Flash aesthetics' are not unique to Flash sites." Anne-Marie Cheung of Flash Goddess informed me that the Flash in the Can festival in Toronto is now called FITC. See <http://www.fitc.ca>. The conference has retained the acronym from the original title but is dropping the originating words which I can only assume means they would like to distance themselves from the limiting specificity of Flash while maintaining a good relationship with one of the major sponsors, Macromedia Flash. Ironically, Flash as a software among others is approaching Flash in the pan status. Since Flash aesthetics are not unique to Flash and since Flash in the Can is not unique to Flash, the question arises, why Flash? This article uses the word Flash to refer to Flash etcetera in terms of software, while maintaining Flash as an organizing principle.
16. *A is for Apple* is a project conceived of by David Clarke, developed in collaboration with media artists Ron Gervais (iamstatic.com), Rob Whynot (www.milli2nd.com), and Randy Knott (iamstatic.com). See www.aisforapple.net.
17. Clark, "The Discrete Charm of the Digital Image: Animation and New Media," in *The Sharpest Point*, p. 144.
18. Clark interview.
19. Knott, roundtable.
20. Clark, p. 143.
21. David Greene, email.
22. FITC 2006 Information Package.
23. <http://www.fitc.ca/2004/panel/>.
24. Greene, email.
25. Cheung, email to Taryn Sirove, "small interview," 10 October 2005.
26. <http://www.m5.icoke.com/bottle/index.html?goto=video4>.
27. www.flashgoddess.com.
28. <http://www.flashgoddess.com/html/about.html>. Examples on the site include: "Joshua Davis, Colin Moock, Robert Penner, the list goes on and on. FlashGoddess.com is an experimental attempt to discover where all the Flash Goddesses are hiding. Of course anyone up on their Flash would have heard of Jessica Spiegel: webstyles.net, We're Here Forums or Irene Chan: eneri.net but surely there must be more."
29. Cheung, email.
30. See http://www.fitc.ca/speaker_list.cfm?festival_id=5 for a list of speakers accompanied by photo portraits of each speaker. Consider the celebrity exposure of having your likeness featured on the playlist.
31. Clark, roundtable.
32. http://www.fitc.ca/presentation_detail.cfm?festival_id=5&presentation_id=251
33. Knott, roundtable.
34. Manovich, "Generation Flash" and Clark, roundtable.



If there is a movement of people using Flash in art, it is still underdeveloped and its priorities under-articulated.

Aesthetics and Ethnics:



Iona Rozeal Brown,
a3 blackface #3 (detail),
2002. Courtesy: Viet Le.

Contemporary US curatorial strategies and the “postethnic”

by Viet Le

The Crying Game

*On a chilly late afternoon in November, my partner Todd and I lay on the grass outside the Museum of Photography in Balboa Park, San Diego. Gold-tinged by dusky light, the ornate pastiche Spanish-Moroccan-Italianate buildings (originally built for the Panama-California Exposition of 1916 to house various cultural, technological and ethnographic exhibits) set amidst lush palm trees and verdant greenery provided a romantic, if surreal, photographic backdrop for several large wedding groups. We were taking a break before seeing the second half of *Only Skin Deep*. Todd was on his back and I rested my head on his chest, feeling the warmth of the sun, watching the passers-by. I am usually wary of PDA (Public Displays of Affection) and could feel imaginary eyes (conservative families?!) on us, queer graduate students — one Jewish American, the other Vietnamese American — flaunting our display of difference, our over-determined identities.*

Inside the museum, I was greeted with a similar image of us, rendered small, in black and white: two young men lying in an expanse of grass — one on his back, the other snuggled close to him, an idyllic scene (the wide sunny sky, the field of grass), except they were unnamed corpses in an unnamed theatre of war in an untitled photograph, origins unknown. They both appeared to be Asian, wearing “Western” military uniforms (I have tried looking for this image in the catalog, but in vain). A neighbouring image was of a lynched black body, also tiny, in black and white. Alone, I started crying uncontrollably in that corner, in front of the glass case which housed the aged images, under the soft glare of the gallery’s track lights.

Perhaps it was the shock of the images within a show which till then had only representations of implied, structural violence, and not “real”

violence — the raw ramifications of regimes of power, and categories of race rendered explicit, close-cropped. Perhaps I could identify with those young men, the ones in repose, the one hanging from a rope mid-air; they looked about my age. That is me in those images. The scenes are elegiac, haunted. I grew up with many personal verbal accounts and mental images of war. I thought of the thousands of documentary and fictionalised images of violence and destruction of the Vietnam War, Persian Gulf War, Iraq War, and many other contemporary wars I had become desensitised to. Numb. Some of these images were peopled (tragic, grasping expressions; corpses strewn randomly; body parts), many images from mainstream sources were barren of victims. Representations of the Other, markers of US imperial might. Why did I start crying now?

Museum exhibitions, like the individual work, artists and cultural artefacts they feature, can both shape and reflect public discourse. A “postethnic” framework — one that moves beyond racially-based identities in cultural production, as a subject position, and in political practice — makes a number of contributions to discussions of positionality and agency while at the same time being fraught with contradictions and limitations.¹ Post-ethnicity comes in various guises and names: “post-black,” as stated by Thelma Golden; “cosmopolitanism” as outlined by David Hollinger in *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism*; and “polycultural” as coined by Robin Kelly and elaborated upon by Vijay Prashad in *Everybody was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity*. As a curator, artist, and academic, I have been grappling with issues of positionality, representation and identitarian politics. This is another go at it.

I. The Granddaddy of them All Edward Steichen’s *The Family of Man* exhibit (MOMA, 1955)

Still highly influential, *The Family of Man* show curated by Edward Steichen was touted (actually subtitled in the catalogue) as “the greatest photographic exhibit of all time — 503 pictures from 68 countries.”² It was an ambitious venture, mired in universalist rhetoric,

seeking to represent the global family of man, with informal themes including marriage, labour, death, celebration, love and the like. By the 1960s, the exhibition toured internationally (twenty eight countries) and was seen by approximately 7 million viewers.³

American culture and art were covertly championed through these harmonious photographic images. Central to the narrative of the images were progress and universal affinity. The exhibition valorised the nuclear family, and attempted to extend this idealized vision across the globe. This heteronormative image of utopic bourgeois bliss privileged patriarchal might and consumption, affirming Western cultural dominance and economic hegemony. The nuclear family unit was naturalized, extended to the world as a metaphor, a model for a new world order — patriarchal authority (and by implication, American might and interest) is a benevolent force.⁴ Within the exhibit, the local and the universal were conflated. Or rather, the universal was manifest in the localized portrayals of love, labour and loss. Class struggles, economic inequities, and structural oppression were out of the representational frame. *The Family of Man* was America's Trojan horse presented to the rest of the world: western hegemony and economic imperialism cloaked in the guise of happy, smiling families embracing a brave new world.

II. The New Black *Freestyle* and the Politics of "Post-Black" (The Studio Museum In Harlem, 2001)

Featuring twenty-eight "emerging" African American artists, Thelma Golden's ambitious group show (although not as ambitious as *The Family of Man*) entitled *Freestyle* focused on "artists who did not put race and racial identity in the foreground."⁵ In the foreword to the catalog, Lowery Sims, director of The Studio Museum In Harlem, states that the show attempts to expand the parameters of artistic discourse that once encompassed "familiar" issues of identity and culture to a more broad investigation which spans — and questions — the binaries of 'first' and 'third' worlds, urban

and rural, national and transnational, narrative and disjuncture, high and low, global and local, and so on.⁶ The artists referenced a wide range of cultural and subcultural influences: alternative rock, hip-hop, the internet, cartoons, modernism; the list is dizzying. In short, they are as diverse in positionality as their divergent artistic practices and interests attest to (installation, painting, video, new media, sound, photography, etc).

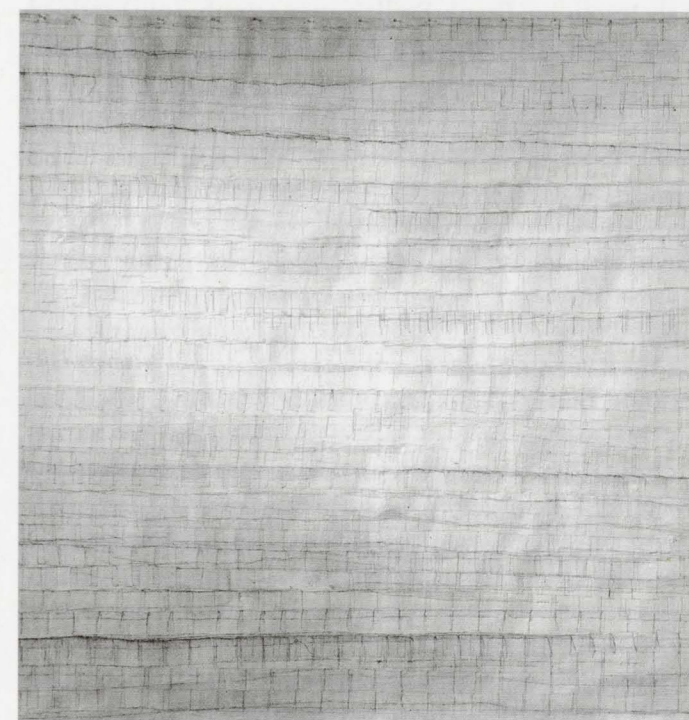
The name of the group exhibit refers to a musical practice that is improvisational, or a contest in which there are few, if any restrictions on the techniques contestants employ. According to Maria-Christina Villaseñor, freestyle "refers to a style of rapping that originated with the MCs and DJs of the 1970s but shares much with other pivotal strategies in African American oral and musical tradition, such as 'signifying' or 'playing the dozens,' 'trading twelves,' and 'jive scat' in jazz, and call-response formations."⁷ Keeping this in mind, the artists are similarly agile, spontaneous, and responsive in their artistic and conceptual strategies. Dynamic, the artists position themselves and their practice not along rigid codes but rather fluid and overlapping notions of self and culture, theory and praxis. There is no essentialized authentic identity and accompanying aesthetic to be claimed. In the curatorial statement, Golden describes "post-black" as a sort of shorthand for post-black art, spontaneously coined by her and an artist, Glen Ligon, in conversation years ago to grasp at the complexities of liminal and ambivalent subjectivity, a simultaneous embrace and rejection of the notion of "Black art." A desire for — and disavowal of — identity is at the dissonant heart of things. This is art in the shadow of multiculturalism, a moment in the late eighties and nineties which privileged a certain discourse and didacticism, if you will, concerning the previously neglected (and now over-represented?) interstices of race, class, and gender. Where do we go from here? Golden writes that the artists live in a moment and in a world "in which their particular cultural specificity is marketed to the planet and sold back to them"⁸ — an endless cycle, a hall of mirrors, the distinctions between "real" ("authentic," "original") and

simulacrum are forever blurred. The artists are part of an art market and art world in which their particular cultural subjectivity is celebrated and cursed. It is a way to achieve visibility as well as a pigeonhole. But this is not a call for universality. What is an artist to do? What a curatorial conundrum.

As a side note, Thelma Golden curated *Black Male* in 1994 at the Whitney Museum of American Art, a show exploring the range of black male images following the Civil Rights movement. The *Black Male* show squarely places the black male subject at the centre of discourse. Currently, Golden has co-organized *Frequency* with Christine Y. Kim, on view at the Studio Museum. This show is often referred to as the sequel to *Freestyle*. As the press statement notes, this exhibit features thirty-five "of the hottest, emerging black artists of 2005! Living and working in the United States and ranging in age from 25 to 42, their inspirations and influences range from hip-hop videos and folktales, to baseball stars and Abstract Expressionism, to tattoo design and non-western aesthetics." [emphasis added]. It is interesting to note that in the press and publicity for the *Freestyle* show four years earlier, Black identity and the geographic locale of individual artists was downplayed. Perhaps looking at the rhetorical shifts from *Black Male* to *Freestyle* and *Frequency* is telling of particular cultural moments, pendulum swings in the framing of cultural production.

Artist Case Study: Mark S. Bradford (Neo-Modernist with a Twist?)

Mark Bradford's abstract "paintings" have presence. They seem to breathe, engulf the viewer. Maybe it's a matter of size. Often six-by-seven-feet or larger, the textile pieces which resemble paintings seem to most directly reference Agnes Martin's muted, repetitive hand-painted or hand-drawn grids on canvas. One can also make linkages to other Modernist painters concerned *only* with formal qualities such as colour, shape, size without nodding to narrative, critique, or overt political content. For example, Piet Mondrian's colourfully symmetrical compositions, Sol Lewitt's geometric



Mark Bradford. *Enter and Exit the new Negro*, 2000. Courtesy: Viet Le

abstractions, Frank Stella's menacingly (pin) striped chevrons, are all artists Bradford is conversant with: there is a definite preoccupation with the surface and its qualities. Mark Rothko's expansive fields of undulating colour can also be a departure point for Bradford's often enveloping canvases.

Art critic Clement Greenberg set forth the artistic agenda for a whole generation of artists (as well as collectors and institutions) in his influential essay entitled "Modernist Painting." For Greenberg, avant-garde art (e.g., "high" art) had to break away from preoccupations with representation (the "illusion" of three-dimensional pictorial space) and narrative that has plagued the western artist since the Greeks. For Greenberg, pure abstraction was the highest form of artistic and cultural expression. He heralded Abstract Expressionists such as Jackson Pollock (progenitor of the "drip" painting) for embodying the ideal: painters only concerned with the painting's surface qualities without debasing their practice by expressing value judgements. This art was revolutionary, breaking away from tradition, as well as the constraints of capitalism (and the production and consumption of representational images). In hindsight, Greenberg's critical interventions enabled the shift of the artistic centre of the avant-garde from Paris to America. Following the second World War, America was an economic might, but was not viewed as a cultural force to be reckoned with. Greenberg's Modernist vision of pure aesthetics championed the autonomy of art and American artistic production, and soon this brand of "art for art's sake" spread internationally. In terms of contemporary production, there was "high" art which was pure abstraction and "low" cultural forms such as advertisements, film, representational images. The myth of the Modern (male) artist became a symbol of nationhood: creative, virile, singular. The Modernist canon — in terms of art and art historical inquiry — elides discussions (and representations) of sexuality and race, and privileges a masculinist, heterosexist, and western worldview.

Bradford's work appears to fit nicely into the world of Modernism and Modernist discourse. From a distance, Bradford's canvases have an uneven grid-like pattern. Occasionally, there are areas of concentrated colour. Upon closer inspection, the grid is created by overlapping, often translucent material placed directly on the canvas. What a wonderful aesthetic object. What a sublime viewing experience. That's when the subversive qualities of Bradford's work hits. Bradford also owns a hair salon that specializes in serving the needs of a predominantly black female clientele. The grids that make up his canvases are "tools of the trade" he uses as a hairstylist — hair perm endpaper. The pigment that appears on these pieces is from cellophane hair colour, beauty shop latex. Using deadpan humour and irony, his work questions the gaps between "high" and "low" art and cultural production, the distinctions between artist and service worker, between masculine aesthetic production and feminised consumption.

In his aptly titled article "Black Hair/Style Politics" cultural critic Kobena Mercer unpacks the politics and semiotics of black hair for black men and women, from "natural" to "processed" styles, including dreadlocks, afros, straightened and permed hair, and cornrows, among other options.⁹ The way one wears one's hair is not only a fashion statement, it is a political statement. The article also discusses the intersections of the beauty, fashion and culture industries that support and enable such aesthetic and political choices. With the politics of black hair in mind, Bradford's canvases take on a different resonance, beyond merely formal matters. Beauty and aesthetics are not just Modernist, hermetic concerns but an embodied and corporeal discourse that is framed along the lines of gender, race, and class affiliations. Bradford's two pieces included in the *Freestyle* exhibit have titles such as *Enter and Exit the new Negro*, 2000 (acrylic on perm endpapers on canvas, 275 x 250 cm) and *Dredlocks caint tell me shit*, 2000 (beauty shop green latex on perm endpapers on canvas, 250 x 275 cm), which make the artist's intervention of critical racial discourse explicit. The Black body politic is signified directly through Bradford's abstract canvases.

Mark Bradford's artwork, representative of the creative diversity within *Freestyle*, point at the difficulties of negotiating identity and aesthetics in a post-multicultural world. Written during the height of multiculturalism in the United States, e.g. the mid-nineties, David Hollinger's *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* argues for a "postethnic" vision of society, one in which ethnic differences are not crucial to identity, but still remain. Hollinger critiques multiculturalism and liberal pluralism for their tokenistic celebration of cultural diversity without an historical perspective of difference and deeper understanding of socio-economic structures of oppression.¹⁰ In short, multiculturalism embraces (or tolerates) difference (particularly "traditional" cultures) on a superficial level while simultaneously further delineating divisive categories along the lines of ethnicity and race (and also sexuality, gender and class). Race and racial identity are constructed through structural difference and inequities. Multiculturalism affirms the status quo.

Drawing a distinction between liberal pluralism (which champions multiculturalism) and cosmopolitanism, Hollinger notes that the former is more oriented toward the group, associating each individual with a single community whereas the latter focuses on the individual, recognizing that he or she belongs to a number of communities. Cosmopolitanism looks beyond the local (province/nation) yet is different from universalism in that it is still informed by — and accepts — diversity and difference. He notes Europeans' various histories of racialization in the United States, and their eventual mixing, resulting in an identity which does not foreground ethnicity — a possible future position for minorities. Perhaps this is an identity that disavows ethnicity entirely. Stressing voluntary affiliations, interdependency, and a global perspective, Hollinger's cosmopolitan vision, while utopic, offers a productive alternative to questions of framing ethnic identity. However, Hollinger's instructive model does not fully address class and socio-economic structural problems.

Viewing Hollinger's postethnic framework in light of *Freestyle*, one can see an overlapping dialogue. Both the exhibition and *Postethnic America* project a vision of cultural production in which there are many more choices available to an individual in terms of affiliation and identification. The "postethnic," "post-black" subject is unfettered by rigid hierarchies and classificatory systems. But that is where the overlap ends. Hollinger's "cosmopolitan" subject appears to occupy a privileged, de-racialized position, capable of freely associating and disidentifying with various groups. The artists in the *Freestyle* show also do share a similarly wide latitude of affiliations and range of interests in their work, but ultimately, upon closer scrutiny, the critical and creative discourse of the show is still constrained by the politics of ethnic identity and identification, no matter how seemingly fluid and unbounded.

III. *Black Belt's Polymorphous Polyculturalism* (Santa Monica Museum of Art, 2004)

Black Belt, a group visual art exhibit curated by Christine Y. Kim, is in some ways an extension of the "post-black" dialogue put forth by Thelma Golden in *Freestyle*.¹¹ Featuring nineteen visual artists working in a variety of media including video, mixed media, painting, drawing, and sound installation, the show perhaps is a realization of David Hollinger's call for cosmopolitanism: it challenges traditional networks of affiliations, drawing transcultural ties within a global frame. But do nods towards "post-black" and "post-yellow" imply/equal postethnic? Not necessarily. The show inadvertently affirms Asian/American and African/American identity in order to highlight Afro-Asian connections and (tired?) notions of hybridity and mixing. Of course, the overused analogy of "mixing" different beats and rhythms from DJ culture is apt (that is indeed a theme in the show). *Black Belt* draws upon mid-1970s popular and political culture, including spirituality, the civil rights movement, and Bruce Lee.¹² Ethnic identification is assumed as a given.

Is this show just multiculturalism repackaged and updated for the millennium? Simple ethnic categories are (re)affirmed, lauded, updated with the late-nineties valorisation of hybridity and multiplicity. Still all surface?

The celebratory discourse of two discrete “cultures” forming political coalitions and generating creative fusions is perhaps further complicated (or elaborated upon) by Robin Kelly’s notion of “polycultural” subjectivity. In Kelly’s article written for *ColorLines* magazine, the historian and cultural critic notes that racial categories and ethnic identification are a moot point: we are *all* mixed, multiethnic and “polycultural” from the “get-go.” Explaining the difference between “polycultural” and “multicultural,” Kelly states, “[multicultural and, by extension, multiculturalism] implies that cultures are fixed, discrete entities that exist side by side — a kind of zoological approach to culture. Such a view of multiculturalism not only obscures power relations, but often reifies race and gender differences.”¹³ Hence, Asian American and African American identity is in flux, dynamic, overlapping, and mutually constitutive.

Using the same cultural archive as the artists in the *Black Belt* show, including hip-hop, martial arts, and Bruce Lee, Vijay Prashad extends Kelly’s “polycultural” position further in his chapter entitled “Kung Fusion: Organize the Hood Under I-Ching Banners” from his book *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting*.¹⁴ This text is a concise yet expansive historical, transnational examination and polemic on the political and cultural interactions amongst Asians and Africans. Agreeing with Kelly (and Hollinger), Prashad notes that multiculturalism conflates difference (consisting of discrete cultures) with style: history is viewed as static. In contrast, within a polycultural framework, history is dynamic, boundaries (ethnic, national) are porous. There is an exchange of cultural forms. Prashad also critiques colour-blind rhetoric for producing inequality, and pitting ethnic minorities against one another (e.g., “model minority” Asians against Blacks, etc.); polycultural production is a



Iona Rozeal Brown, *a3 blackface #0.50*, 2001. Courtesy: Viet Le.

way to rethink this model. *Black Belt* is informed by Prashad’s proposal and critiques.

Artist Case Study: Iona Rozeal Brown Ghetto Fabulous Geishas

At first glance, Iona Rozeal Brown’s images appear to be visual and conceptual one-liners: Japanese prints of geishas, in blackface, striking superfly poses — Orientalia with a hip-hop twist. Upon further scrutiny, the “prints” are actually drawings or paintings parodying seventeenth-century *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints from Edo (Tokyo), known as “pictures of the floating world,” which often depicted sensual pleasures associated with urban life: courtesans, teahouses, theatres, restaurants, geishas. Brown’s striking and sharp-witted series, entitled *a3* (afro-asiatic allegory), reveals a keen eye for detail: geishas sport long painted acrylic nails; smoke rolled-up joints; wear copious “bling”; primp their corn rows or Afros (or “traditional” Japanese headdresses). These geishas consort with badass samurai, who are also invariably pimped out.

Brown’s anomalous images originated from the *ganguro* (literally, “black face”) fad in Japan and Korea in the late 1990s and early 2000s in which youth radically darkened their skin and permed their hair into Afros, and emulated the poses and attitudes of African Americans in rap and hip-hop culture.¹⁵ Another variation of *ganguro* featured Japanese girls sporting dark tans, bleached blonde hair, and platforms that mimed the California “beach bunny” aesthetic.¹⁶ Both are a form of ethnic drag. Ashley Carruthers notes that Japanese consumption of exoticized Other(s) is predicated on the evacuation of the Other’s embodied subjectivity¹⁷ — it’s all sign and surface: there’s no (real political) substance. Ideally, the Other is at a physical remove, mediated through transnational popular culture and commerce. I would argue that African American gangsta rappers and California beach blondes are exoticized (Occidental) Others refracted many times over. Brown’s work adds another facet to this transnational circuit of consumption and commodification. But what

is the allegory to be deciphered? Brown’s work, while deceptively simple, points at the complexities of issues such as authenticity, mimicry, cultural translations, and identification. The images speak of the criss-crossing exotification of Asian and Black (sub)cultures. Appropriated styles cross-permeable boundaries of nation, class and colour, forging new polycultural subjects and *polymorphous* subject positions.

IV. Deeper and Wider: *Only Skin Deep* and the Legacies of America’s Imperial Archive

In curating a photography show about the history of race and representation in the United States, a National Endowment for the Millennium project — whose aim was to “showcase the quality and richness of American art and culture,” co-curators Coco Fusco and Brian Wallis had many options.¹⁸ Coco Fusco knew what she didn’t want, among them four models I shall discuss briefly. First, Fusco did not want the “postethnic” model forwarded by artists, institutions and scholars (namely David Hollinger and the *Black Belt* show); she argues that post-identitarian positions obscure that fact that racially based categories and oppression still persists. Fusco also was not interested in “visualiz[ing] diversity as taxonomic display of recognizably distinct and attractive faces, which is the convention that now dominates corporate advertising.” This celebratory display of diversity was also the model of multiculturalism — a festive parade of difference without depth. Thirdly, she did not want to frame the exhibit as the “geographical dispersal of universal artforms,” a model favoured by international biennials and shows on global art. This also informs the universalist idealism of Steichen’s *The Family of Man* show. Lastly, Fusco was wary of valorising “authenticity” by showing work by non-white artists or groups and privileging this work as being “superior, or more self-reflective than what is generally identified as colonialist photography.” In contrast, she also did not seek to “unearth” minority artwork and showcase it based on a solely aesthetic set of (modernist) standards. To do so, she states, is to disavow cultural institutions’ past and present blind spots and accept dominant paradigms:

The presumption that museums are able to effectively dismantle the history of institutional racism by attributing “master” status to a handful of non-white photographers based on the “discovery” of quality in their work implies that the economic and cultural power of art institutions to designate value should replace a critical analysis of Western forms of racial thought and how those forms are manifest in our culture.¹⁹

How do the curators manage to avoid all of these land mines? The images featured in *Only Skin Deep* encompass historical images, vernacular photographs, images from popular culture, postcards and contemporary conceptual photographic practice. The archive ranges from a carte-de-visite from the 1860s to digitised images produced today. The exhibition is displayed in a post-modern manner, juxtaposing materials from different time periods and genres. In an effort not to reify racial categories, the show avoids presenting images along the lines of racial and ethnic groups (but nonetheless is informally arranged so that works pertaining to particular ethnic groups and their experiences are occasionally clustered). The exhibition does live up to American Studies scholar Amy Kaplan’s call for further investigations of empire and imperialism within United States history.²⁰ *Only Skin Deep* makes evident America’s vast and varied imperial archive. From images of slaves to internment camps and military involvement in Vietnam, the Philippines, Hawaii, among other locations, America’s rhetoric of exceptionalism is rendered ridiculous in light of the sheer visual evidence of domination, violence, and oppression.

The entire show is structured around five main binaries. “Looking Up/Looking Down” addresses work that embraces or subverts “objective” racial hierarchies (including racial science). “All for One/One for All” contrasts ethnic “types” with idealized American bodies and imagery. “Humanized/Fetishized” examines representations that either portray individual subjectivity or objectify and dehumanize the subject. “Assimilate/Impersonate” contrasts images of whites

taking on ethnic/racial personas with nonwhites “attempting to ‘look or act white’ ...” The final category, “Progress/Regress” explores conceptions of America’s past and future in relation to racial imagery.²¹ These thematic categories facilitate provocative juxtapositions and fresh perspectives. Images are recontextualised in a manner that allows for a renewed engagement with often familiar archives and archetypes.

Photographic Case Study: Love Me Tender

Laura Wexler’s *Tender Violence* examines how work by white American female photographers (Frances Benjamin Johnston, Gertrude Kasebier, Alice Austen, the Gerhard sisters, and Jessie Tarbox Beals) at the turn of the twentieth century, although disparate in technique and practice, reinforce white supremacy and imperialism; and how in their practice, gender is used to bind “race and class together.”²² These photographic images, often conceived and presented for a public audience, and their white female photographers’ subjectivity were part of a larger social project which reconciled discourses on the home and imperialism; ideas of the domestic were framed through a gendered lens which sought to place, placate and racialize the Other (Native Americans, Blacks, Filipinos) through the rubric of American civilization:

[C]ustomary ways of life needed protection and advancement at home; they also, apparently, needed conquest and continuing domination of foreign lands. At home, domestic policy was a potent concatenation of ideas of scientific racism, social Darwinism, and economic pragmatism that could be used to orchestrate consent for expansionist policies. In the colonies, and in the institutions and social agencies that dealt with subjugated peoples within the (constantly expanding) borders of the continental United States, such ideals of domestic life were also disciplinary structures of the state.²³

The violence and power of imperialism is domesticated, its brutal horrors invisible outside the frame of the

(white, upper middle class) lady’s gaze, only a “tender violence” is visible, one that speaks of American domesticity as “a benign or even benevolent force,” despite systems of “racialized terror” (postbellum period; foreign policies with Spain, Cuba and the Philippines; assimilation models championed by the Hampton school, a “finishing school” which socialized ethnic minorities in the ways and mores of dominant culture).²⁴

An example of this “tender violence” in *Only Skin Deep* is the strangely campy image entitled *Refrigerator*, ca. 1920 (modern print from original glass negative, 18 x 13 cm), taken by Osa and Martin Johnson. In this photograph, a middle-aged white woman with short hair sporting a wide-brimmed straw hat, short sleeved grid-patterned polo shirt, and sensible slacks stands in front of an open and full refrigerator, holding up (or perhaps offering?) a tray of ice to a Native American couple, who wear only feathers in their hair, arm bracelets, and fashioned loin cloths. Delighted by the ice in a tray, all parties smile. The entire scene takes place within a wooden structure, with shelves overhead fully stocked with bathroom tissue, and canned food (cherries, frankfurters, grape juice). Of course, the Native Americans are rendered exotic, their dark skin in stark contrast to the pallor of the white (missionary?) woman. She offers them hope, civilization, and perhaps salvation in the guise of domesticity. The white refrigerator appears to just be a part of the white woman’s radiant aura of technology, progress, and goodwill. The darker “natives” stand on the edge of the refrigerator, and tonally blend in with the darkened interior. Thus, the “benevolent” forces of dominant domesticity seek to displace the Native American’s traditional ways of living, and as history would reveal, ultimately seeks to displace them entirely.

As with any show with such an expansive archive, there are bound to be shortcomings. Although the five thematic binary categories are useful, quite thoughtful, and wide-ranging, the pastiche quality of the presentation artificially limits connections that can otherwise be drawn historically and culturally. The images are pre-



Osa and Martin Johnson, *Refrigerator*, ca. 1920. Courtesy: Viet Le

sented without any significant grounding text to help provide meaningful context as to the conditions in which they were created. For example, one does not learn anything more about the internment camps or Jim Crowe than the common knowledge the viewer brings to the images. The new insights one does glean from unexpected groupings of images lack historical specificity and depth, eliding sited discussions about the ways in which race has been utilized across time (the huge catalog attempts to make up for this lack through its theoretical essays). Furthermore, examinations of the intersections between race, class, and particularly sexuality and gender are not adequately explored.

Last Words (Conclusion)

Freestyle's "post-black" subjectivity, *Black Belt's* Afro-Asian connections, and *Only Skin Deep's* imperial excavations and postmodern recontextualizations all present compelling, worthwhile insights and challenges to understanding how critical discourses are forged and how creative identities are negotiated. They also underline how issues regarding the framing of identity, race, ethnicity, and representation continue to be vexing. The "post-ethnic" position in contemporary scholarship and cultural debate posits promising possibilities for envisioning political, aesthetic and ethical modes of change. Nonetheless, the machinations and consequences of race and ethnicity prevail, and the necessity to comprehend their historical, social, political and economic dimensions remains.

A few years ago, I had a crisis about why I make art, and why I write critically. I still wonder, sometimes — *to what end, and for whom?* Each time I step into a gallery or museum, I feel both open and vulnerable to the possibilities the flood of images brings. I still don't entirely understand why I was overwhelmed by that black and white image of the two young men lying side by side in the sunny field, dead. Why do images matter? Why does identity matter?

Because it still strikes so close to the bone.

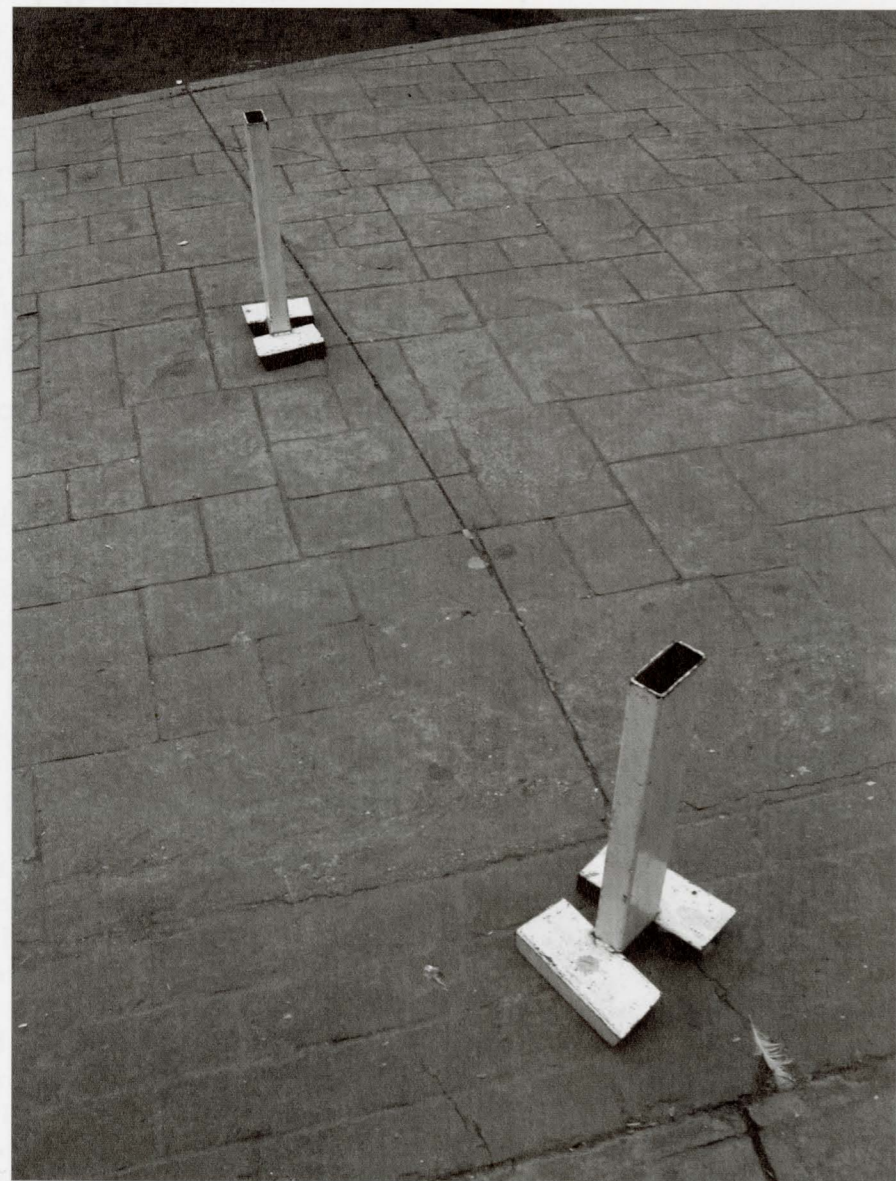
Viet Le is an artist, creative writer, and curator. He has received creative fellowships from the Banff Centre, the Fine Arts Work Center, and PEN Center USA. His work has been published in Amerasia Journal, Asia Pacific American Journal and Corpus, among others. Le obtained his MFA from the University of California, Irvine, where he has also taught, and is currently pursuing his doctoral studies at the University of Southern California.

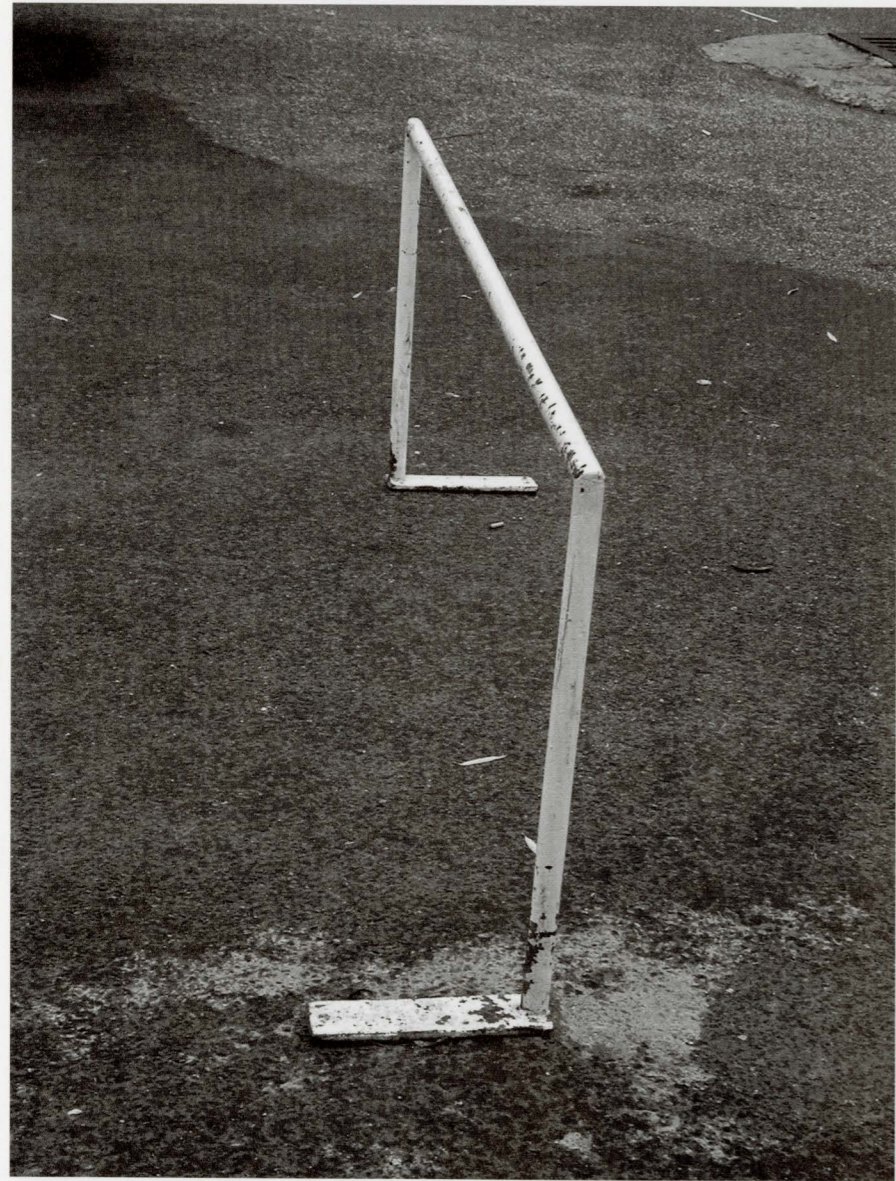
Notes:

1. Scholars such as Vijay Prashad, David Hollinger and Paul Gilroy, among others, examine the tensions of a racialized subjectivity and posit ways to move "beyond" racially based identities.
2. Edward Steichen, *The Family of Man* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1955).
3. For a critique of *The Family of Man*, see Allan Sekula, "The Traffic in Photographs," Coco Fusco and Brian Wallis, eds., *Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self* (New York: iCP and Abrams, 2004), pp. 79-110.
4. Ibid.
5. Press release for talk, Site Santa Fe: "Lecture by Thelma Golden: 'An Emerging Generation of African American Artists,'" 23 June 2002.
6. Lowery Sims, "Foreword and Acknowledgments," *Freestyle* (New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, 2001), p. 12.
7. Maria-Christina Villaseñor, "Rico Gatson," *Freestyle*, p. 31.
8. Thelma Golden, "Introduction," *Freestyle*, p. 14.
9. Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle* (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 97-128.
10. David Hollinger, *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), pp. 2-3.
11. *Black Belt* originated at the Studio Museum in Harlem and then travelled to Santa Monica Museum of Art.
12. Christine Y. Kim, "Afro as An..." *Black Belt* (New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, 2004), pp. 27.
13. Robin Kelly, "People in Me: 'So, What Are You?'" <http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?itemID=3865>.
14. Vijay Prashad, "Kung Fusion: Organize the Hood Under I-Ching Banners," *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), pp. 38-86. Essay also reproduced in *Black Belt* catalogue.
15. See Joe Wood, "The Yellow Negro," *Transition* 73 (1997).
16. "Ganguro" entry in Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ganguro>. 1 December 2005.
17. Ashley Carruthers, "Cute Logics of the Multicultural and the Consumption of the Vietnamese Exotic in Japan," *positions* 12:2 (Fall 2004), pp. 422-423.
18. Coco Fusco, "Racial Time, Racial Marks, Racial Metaphors," in *Only Skin Deep*, p. 24.
19. Ibid., p. 24.
20. See Amy Kaplan, "'Left Alone with America': The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture," Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, eds., *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).
21. Fusco, *Only Skin Deep*, p. 26.
22. Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), p. 47.
23. Ibid., p. 22.
24. Ibid., p. 53.

A FEW SMALL BARRIERS IN İSTANBUL







Representin': Black Artists Tell The Truth *I Represent*

A Space (Toronto)
curated by Natalie Wood
13 January – 11 February 2006
review by Rinaldo Walcott

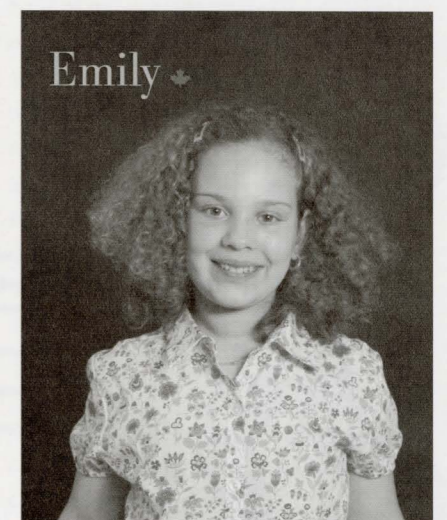
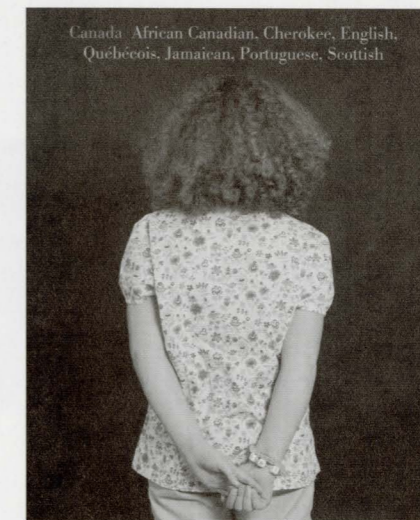
In the noise-filled 1980s and early 90s, the politics of representation was the urgent issue at hand in the art world and beyond. Debates concerning representation's promise, its burdens and its limits animated an art world conversation that engaged conceptual, political and cultural forces. The conversation about the politics of representation proceeded like it was the last chance for human expression to reach its final frontier. However, as soon as things were beginning to get interesting — in terms of a significant number of marginal and subaltern artists finding space in the art world to be more than special effects — a conversation about identity politics as opposed to the politics of identity stole the show. Narrow definitions of identity, identity politics and appropriation entered the conversation, sidetracking the important and crucial conversations about what representation might mean.

In the wake of this shift to identity politics, questions of voice, autonomy and power in the art world got lost in the acrimonious debate about negative appropriation. The first thing to fall victim to this shift was the truth. But despite this lost opportunity, numerous artists continue to engage the politics of representation as an important conceptual framework from which to provoke audiences to encounter that which we think we might already

know; engaging us in how we know, what we do not know, what we might like to know and what we might need to think and rethink.

I Represent, a multimedia group exhibition curated by Natalie Wood seeks to tell the truth of contemporary Black Canadian life, its complications and importantly its complexities. Six Black Canadian artists engaged the nuance politics of representation through a range of strategies, provoking viewers to encounter new truths about themselves. Working in a variety of mediums, these artists are grouped together in a coherent and articulate show that calls attention to both artistry and politics as art and politics intertwine to demand viewers engage in a reflective dia-

logue concerning the practices, politics and histories of representation. The artists "represent" by rejecting the too-trite dismissal of identity politics and the now long passed, but more urgently needed debate on the cultural politics of representation. Each honestly and boldly frames questions of identity front and centre in their representational practices as the means to uncovering a truth from which a dialogue or conversation might proceed. Natalie Wood chose artists whose works bleed into one another to foster a dialogue in the gallery about both the certainty and the unknowability of representation. But the nuances of these works do not take for granted that representational strategies are framed by identity concerns and their accompanying politics. To bring the politics



Michael Chambers, *The Sandbox*, detail from installation, 2005/2006. Courtesy: A Space

of representation and the politics of identity together in this avowedly post-race and post-identity moment is both to recall the past and to re-animate a present where the very practical and material concerns that helped spark the initial conversations are highlighted even as they are ignored or side-stepped.

Wood's curatorial intelligence in bringing Michael Chambers, Dionne Simpson, Dana Inkster, Stephen Fakiyesi, Camille Turner and Syrus Ware into dialogue should by all accounts aid in rekindling necessary debate in contemporary art and culture more widely. Since the multicultural wars of the 80s and early 90s the word and the work of representation in Black expressive culture has been muscularly taken over by hip-hop, and in particular, its commercial gangsters. That representation, as an idea, has become so central to the imagined realness of hip-hop is not surprising. What is surprising is that "representin'" in this new lexicon marks a type of Black (male) stereotype that refuses the nuance that earlier debates hoped to usher in. Instead, the proliferation of "representin'" has

resulted in a perverse search for "bling" by those who claim to perpetuate or represent a monologic Black realness. The latter's representin' is about capitalism.

Stephen Fakiyesi has something to say about capitalism and representation — both its history and its present. In *Canadian Souvenir*, Fakiyesi offers a series of cut-outs that complicate Black relationships with freedom, capitalism, colonialism and empire. The cut-outs encourage viewers to think about the relationship between histories of enslavement and contemporary bondage. As one enters the gallery, Fakiyesi's work invites viewers into a conversation about the ways in which the pursuit and desire of capital frames our lives and culture. The ambiguous relationship between the movement from being a commodity to acquiring and peddling commodities for Black peoples remains a thin veneer or position with regards to freedom. His reworking of the MasterCard symbol as a *MasaCard* raises questions of the ongoing forms of bondage that frame contemporary Black life.

Similarly, the mixed-media paintings of Dionne Simpson continue this dialogue through a conversation about the city and the place of the financial district within it. Simpson's works, which are simultaneously abstract and narratively representational, speak to the wider politics of representation as a practice that seeks to open and provoke conversations by bringing to life that which is often not said, or let's put it this way, aestheticized, in the art world. Blackness and the market, especially the art world market, is tricky business and there is something of the trickster at play in Simpson's work. The viewer struggles to enter her paintings and to find points of reference from which the story might unfold.

Camille Turner's video installation of her touring performance *The Petition* follows on from Simpson's contribution. The video is an interview with Turner as Miss Canadiana. It is accompanied by a petition that viewers are invited to sign, which Miss Canadiana will deliver to the Ministry of Social Exclusion. Turner's work positions the Black Miss Canadiana as both Canadian and something more and thus pushes at the limits of a too-easy multicultural perspective. In the video, the desire is to figure out the ways in which blackness might become central to the nation's imagined and articulated narratives of itself. The politics of both identity and representation are explicitly highlighted in this work, dependent on one another for reconciling the place of Black people in the nation.

Photographer Michael Chambers' *Box Project* takes Turner's questions in another direction. In highly polished posters of front and back portraits of young people with their multiple ethnic and/or national

Stephen Fakiyesi, *Canadian Souvenir*, detail of drawing from installation, 2006. Courtesy: A Space



Camille Turner, *The Petition*, video still, 2005. Courtesy: A Space

the gaze and thus encourages the viewer to think about the ways the eyes unveil and simultaneously inscribe knowledge and histories. But the video's focus on adoption speaks to a larger history of Black Diaspora unknowability, about its putative past and the requisite need to invent a past of some kind.

Syrus Ware's stunning and intelligent *Self Portrait #5 with Cotton Balls* mixed-media painting frames the un-speakable of Black identities as it makes trans-identity and trans-politics central to narratives of Black histories and promises of liberation. In the central panel of the work is a self-portrait of the artist holding a bouquet of cotton balls dripping with blood. In another panel is a cotton-gin machine and on the third are the internal organs of the uterus and other organs that supposedly signal biologically which sex and thus gender one becomes. The power of Ware's art lies in its mix of representation and politics as it both puts on display and exposes a "new Black self," while simultaneously locating that self in a history that speaks to imagined community as it expands its boundaries.

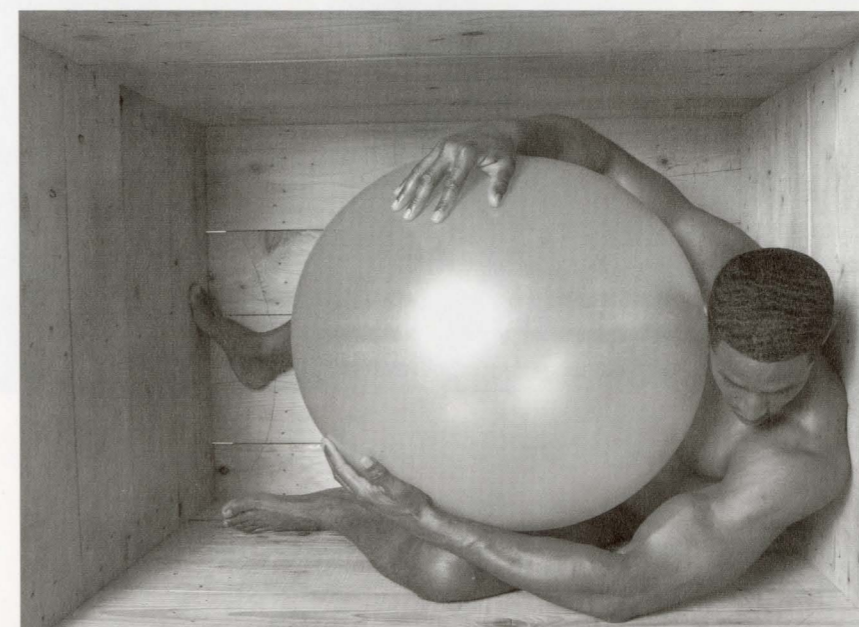
designations and their phenotypical differences listed, Chambers pushes and exhausts the limits of the markers of ethnicity, identity and blackness. The power of the work lies in its global reach as it demonstrates that such reach is historically located. The photographs of the crate with the Black male nude especially pinpoint the specificity and complexity of a Black Diasporic history. The box photos call to mind the historic and contemporary commodification of the Black male body. But the beauty of the photos and posters juxtaposed with a sandbox filled with small globes points to other concerns of dispersal and history meant to recapture those bodies that always seem to vacillate between human and non-human.

Dana Inkster's video installation takes us into the territory of unknowability and sexuality. *Art of Autobiography, Redux 1* calls to mind Frantz Fanon's concerns with

The intelligence of *I Represent* is found in the way that capitalism threads through it. Each of the works in the show brings us into some kind of encounter with capi-

talism as a framing device. This particular moment of the politics of representation highlights the history of trans-Atlantic slavery and its still unfolding consequences for black bodies in the Diaspora. Inkster's video gestures to the not-yet-clear circumstances through which North American space might become home to Black Diasporic peoples. Simpson's use of the African technique of pulling threads reconnects her and her art with Africa and global capital markets and echoes the continued victimization of Black bodies through structural adjustment programs. Ware's bleeding cotton balls reference the earlier and equally painful history of Black people's insertion into capitalism as both commodity and the production of the commodity; Chamber's crates or boxes call to mind the hold of the slave ship and the black male body as an object of capitalist exchange both past and present; while Turner's active campaign for selling blackness to the nation means that one of the central concerns of commodity capitalism comes into focus — the advertisement; and capital is cited in Fakiyesi's *MasaCard* located as consumption and bondage simultaneously. Taken together, the artists Wood has put into conversation offer a critique of the representational limits of capitalism as a source for telling the truth about blackness. But importantly as well, the show reveals another kind of truth: it reveals that the politics of representation and the politics of identity remain necessary if any ethical conversation about the social injustices that continue to plague contemporary human life, and in this instance Black life, are to be adequately addressed.

Rinaldo Walcott is an associate professor and Canada Research Chair of Social Justice and Cultural Studies at oise/ut.



Michael Chambers, *The Box*, 2005. Courtesy: A Space

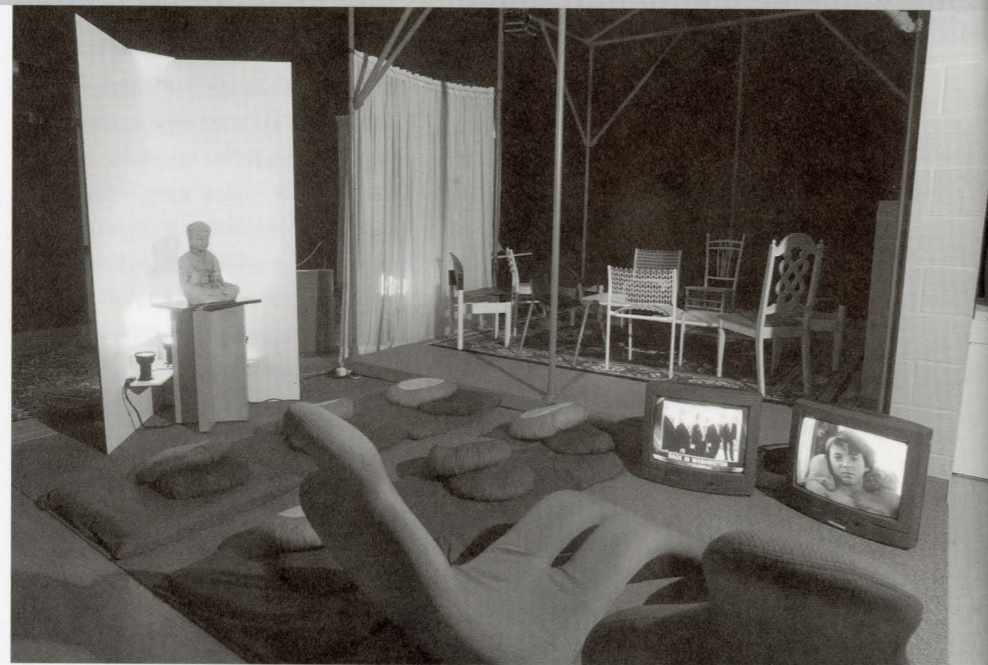
With Open Arms: Luis Jacob's *Habitat*

Swing Space, Art Gallery of Ontario
5 November – 26 February 2006

review by Ivan Jurakic

Luis Jacob's *Habitat* presents a seemingly utopian proposition — a participatory artwork that challenges the museum format of politely looking but not touching — by creating a user-friendly environment within the often stuffy confines of the institution. Jacob smartly takes advantage of the architectural indeterminacy of the AGO, which is undergoing a multimillion-dollar expansion featuring a new Frank Gehry-designed façade, to slyly intervene into the museum's programming infrastructure. The construction has caused the closure of almost all the contemporary galleries, and to take advantage of this the AGO has shrewdly invited a number of contemporary artists, including Jacob, to participate in *Swing Space*, an in-flux gallery program that promises "art in unexpected spaces." Although most of the site-specific artworks are quite ambitious, they remain well apart from the main exhibitions, with a number unfortunately tucked beside the temporary gift shop.

Jacob's installation has thankfully been spared this sort of well-intentioned ostracism. It is placed up front and centre in one of the exhibition halls on the main floor. Located in-between an educational display indebted to Arthur Lismer and a gallery featuring panoramic photos by Michael Awad, the *Habitat* installation has literally been placed right in the path of visitors, an opportunity Jacob seizes on



All images in review: Luis Jacob, *Habitat*, installation view, 2006. Courtesy: Art Gallery of Ontario

to engage the regular gallery-going public with an immersive environment that is an intelligent and ambitious follow up to his summer 2005 outdoor installation *Flashlight*.

The name *Habitat* conjures visions of Moshe Safdie's *Habitat '67*. Created as a showpiece for the World Expo in Montreal, it remains a significant example of Modern architectural design. While there is no discernable architectural link to this earlier habitat, Jacob makes intentional reference to the utopian spirit and design of the late 1960s, exhibiting a selection of furniture and atmospherics that share an

invitingly laid-back vibe. Without too much prompting, one can easily imagine Jacob's installation taking the form of a design kiosk on display at a contemporary equivalent of Expo. However, these first impressions are somewhat deceiving, as it becomes clear that Jacob's spin on utopias is fraught with unexpected tension.

Functioning as a conceptually self-contained world, *Habitat* has colonized the AGO. It features its own soundtrack and mood lighting suggesting a chill-out room within the lofty confines of this august institution. Set in one of the older galleries, where one might expect to see a

turn-of-the-century period painting, Jacob transforms the space into a conceptual drop-in centre.

Framed as a space within a space, and defined by an architectural framework made out of scaffolding that loosely mimics the footprint of a small house, the installation comes complete with a dining room, living room, table, chairs, carpets, pillows, televisions and a hearth. The trappings suggest a high-tech basement rec room circa 1975, but the conceit is inevitably less than homey, the black-painted walls proposing a function that is far more theatrical.

Two of the period chairs have been placed into a small back section of the installation and set behind stanchions. The implication being that these are part of a collection, a commodity that viewers are not allowed to sit on. This is not the case at all, though it is an assumption on the

part of the viewer that the artist has constructed and does little to alleviate. As gallery-goers, we are conditioned to obey the polite rules of museum etiquette: look but don't touch. Jacob uses the stanchions to play against the otherwise inviting and participatory nature of his installation. The stanchions effectively demonstrate how much of our public behaviour is conditioned and, more disturbingly, how often we are willing to give up agency to follow these unwritten rules of conduct.

Another red herring is presented in a pair of monitors placed at the base of a set of retro-loungers. Lying nearly prone in ergonomically designed comfort I have two viewing options; the monitor on the left plays a live feed of CNN, mediated vérité with up-to-the-minute updates of breaking news from around the world, while the monitor on the right plays a continuous loop of Hal Ashby's 1971 auteur classic *Harold and Maude*, the sort

of counterculture filmmaking rarely produced by mainstream entertainment anymore. This awkward mix of visuals — at random; the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina juxtaposed with the feigned suicide attempts of a morbid teen infatuated with an older woman — sits in sharp contrast to the relative comfort suggested by the physical set-up. There is no volume. We can't change the channel. Again, our agency is questioned.

There are many well-documented precedents for this sort of participatory art environment, ranging from the avant-garde theatre of Brecht to early Pop happenings, Fluxus actions and more recent works by Massimo Guerrera, Kika Thorne and Adrian Blackwell, for example. *Habitat* is not a simple riff on the breakdown of the fourth wall. It shares a distrust of institutional norms and the desire to transform the historically segregated relationship between viewer and art object. Jacob has



created a situation that critically punctuates the relative homogeneity of the art institution by recasting the conceptual white cube as a socially charged cultural generator that is powered by the many tensions it houses.

The installation welcomes visitors as participants, inhabitants even, with open arms — the artist himself is often present as an unscheduled and anonymous visitor. Yoga classes are regularly scheduled and apparently well attended. Younger patrons are likely to accept the invitation to relax or hang out for an evening. *Habitat* suggests a home, a safe place of retreat, but this is a dodge. The installation underscores our anxieties and discomforts, whether by triggering the innate awkwardness of being put on display in public or by punctuating televised events in the Middle East against a soundtrack of 70s funk. Despite the level of comfort suggested by the furnishings, we are disconnected, with visitors often circling the installation warily. *Habitat* aims to seduce

us with a refreshing open-endedness, but it never lets us off the hook. There are rules. There are invisible boundaries we need to acknowledge in order to fully participate. Jacob has constructed a theatrical stage set, a conceptual sleight-of-hand that reveals the truth by hiding it in plain sight. There is no escape, no haven from the struggle of the everyday.

Habitat attempts to engage a broader public by using the AGO as a vehicle to propose contingency, change, and yes, *transformation*, as a viable alternative for the ongoing operation of large public institutions. With the architectural revitalization of the Ontario College of Art and Design and the Royal Ontario Museum, the renovation of the AGO is yet another check mark for a city staking its claim as an important cultural destination. A commendable goal that comes with a caveat. Despite all of the hype surrounding this transformation, the AGO would do well to remember its roots in the community just outside its doors, a multicultural constituency of

shopkeepers, students and artists that comprise a lively and bustling urban neighbourhood. This is the public Jacob wants to invite inside.

Jacob's sly nod to the Catherine the Great exhibit upstairs — a set of kitschy ceramics placed under Plexiglas — underlines his approach. It proposes the AGO as a place of social interaction within the community, an institution that belongs to the public despite the regulations that govern its operation and its ambitious quest for international recognition. While *Habitat* does not aim to hit participants over the head with this, it underlines the difficult yet necessary task of negotiating agency within the often claustrophobic confines of public institutions that seem increasingly dependent on serving up blockbusters. Social democracy is not a static utopian ideology but a negotiation that relies on the constant push-and-pull of its inherent tensions; between the agency of the individual and the individual's role in society as a citizen. *Habitat* plays with our often blithe assumptions regarding agency and the freedoms we take for granted by putting us on the spot, by turning viewers into participants. As an artist who uses his art as social activism, Jacob is counting on *Habitat* to spark change, even if in the long run it is just a ripple.

Ivan Jurakic is a visual artist, writer and the curator of Cambridge Galleries. He received his MFA from SUNY- Buffalo in 2004 and has exhibited in artist-run spaces, public galleries and off-site venues across Ontario and the northeastern United States. His writing has been published in The Hamilton Spectator, Mix, C International, Lola, Espace and in numerous exhibition publications. He lives in Hamilton, Ontario.



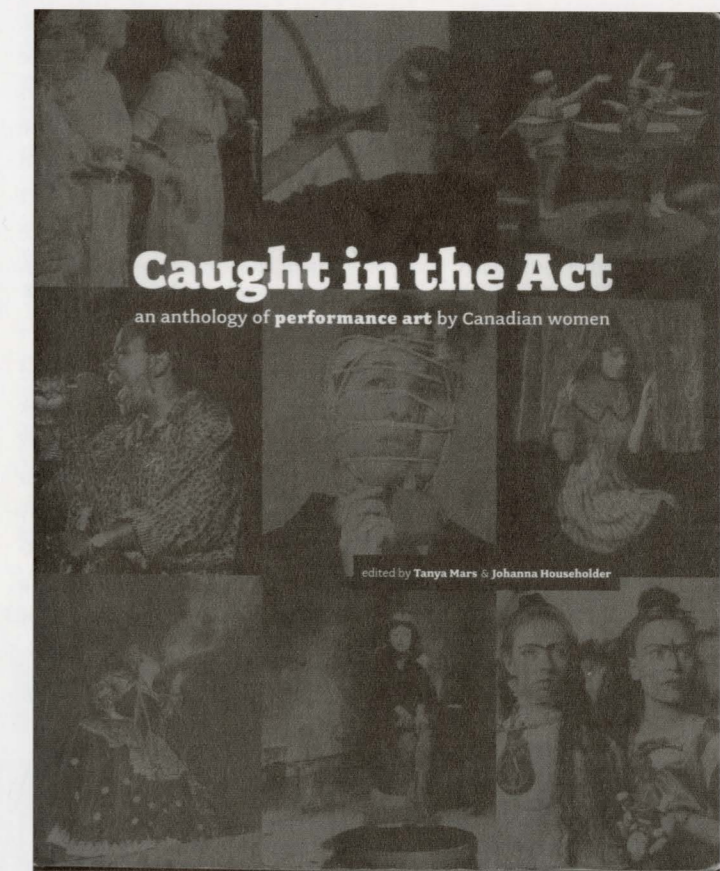
Read Handed: *Caught in the Act: an Anthology of Performance Art by Canadian Women*

Tanya Mars & Johanna Householder, eds.
(Toronto: YYZBOOKS, 2004)
review by Leah Sandals

Why on earth am I a performance artist? Sometimes this can seem a lonely question, a question that books can make seem less lonely. Personal issues aside, *Caught in the Act* is a welcome find. Given the lack of reference material on the topic of Canadian performance in general, and Canadian women's performance in particular, it is a very important tome. As one of the few books of its kind, *Caught* weighs heavy on the national bookshelf. Librarians beware! Alert your handypersons! *Caught in the Act* is a fantastic, weighty book and I couldn't recommend (or criticize) it more highly.

Poised in my research costume of freshly pressed labcoat and horn-rimmed safety glasses, with graph-paper clipboard at the ready, I was set to undertake my first angle of analysis. This grew easily out of the self-interest with which the article began. What contribution might this book make to practitioners of performance art? What are its inspiring functions and logarithms?

Fortunately, *Caught in the Act* has fuel to fire the practices of a diverse performer subspecies. Those with an interest in community arts will be inspired by examples of Robin Poitras' *Pelican Project*, an annual work in which the artist orchestrates a park-side parade and *Dragon Procession* in her home base of Regina. Tagny Duff's description of Evelyn Roth's videotape-cro-



cheting work is perfectly designed to prompt inspiration on the part of textile and object-oriented performers from coast to coast. And dancers from handicapped postmodern to burlesque revival will revel in the pirouetted and stripteased backgrounds, respectively, of Elizabeth Chitty and Margaret Dragu.

These, of course, are only a few examples of people whose work will likely prompt the young and young-at-heart to start thinking of their front sidewalks as theatrical sets. Personally, I very much enjoyed accounts of artists Sylvie Laliberté, Lily Eng, and Cheryl L'Hirondelle Waynohtew, among others. The Waynohtew essay was particularly

remarkable for the way Ahasiw Maskegon-Iskwew explored thorny issues of cultural bias and identity. (More on this later.)

Overall, however, the descriptions are most interesting when they adhere to the performative and writerly maxim “show, don’t tell.” Unfortunately, in forsaking description for theory, many of the essays come off simply as teasers — if you’ve seen the work, you’ll love the ensuing abstract conversation. But if you haven’t, well...you’re shit of out of luck.

Further frustrating the eager student of performance is the presence of spectacular images that are not described in the text, and spectacular texts unaccompanied by images. Though performances, particularly those of the nascent variety, can be rather poorly documented, this decision is disappointing. Even some stronger caption texts could have made these omissions more bearable — and scientifically sound.

Nibbling at the end of a freshly sharpened pencil and gazing into the mystic flame of my bunsen burner for guidance, I decided to take inspiration from Alex Trebek and pose my most difficult hypothesis in the form of a question.



Margaret Dragu and Jim Munro, *X's and O's*, Grunt Gallery (Vancouver), 1999. Courtesy: YZBOOKS

Question: What is often an inevitable, though paradoxical, result of writing histories of marginalized peoples?

Answer: The marginalization of yet other histories.

In her introduction, co-editor Johanna Householder writes that the intent of the book is to cast a wide net: artists of the 70s and 80s, working in a variety of performance and performance-like disciplines, ranging “from the exquisite to the extreme.” It’s a great ideal, but as Householder herself acknowledges, the result is not nearly as inclusive as it could have been. The editors “tried to select artists who have had a sustained practice in, or left an indelible mark upon, the discipline ... Regrettably, there are omissions.”

An overview of the book’s structure and content clarifies where some of the weak points are. The book is introduced by six general essays: the (well-termed) *apologia* by Householder, an essay on humour by Tanya Mars, an overview of women’s performance in Vancouver by Tagny Duff, a 1980s piece on performance in Toronto by Dot Tuer, a review of embodiment by Elizabeth Chitty and an analysis of costume by Jayne Wark. This introductory



Evelyn Roth in front of the Vancouver Art Gallery during the *Pacific Vibrations* show, 1973. Courtesy: YZBOOKS

section is followed by 34 profiles of Canadian women performance artists, including six Quebecois, one Caribbean Canadian, two Asian Canadians and three Native Canadians.

The presence of just one African Canadian artist — Lillian Allen — feels at once limiting and puzzling. First, representing just one out of 36 seems limiting and limited as an attitude towards African Canadian performers by virtue of numbers — was there really nobody else? If not, why not? Why not include other dub poets such as Afua Cooper and ahdri zhina mandiel? Is it simply because Allen was president of an artist-run centre (A Space) and teaches at an art college (OCAD) that her practice is deemed more art-oriented than those of her fellow dub poets? The list of questions could go on, and if author Clive Robertson could have explored these cultural tensions more thoroughly (as Ahasiw Maskegon-Iskwew notably does in his essay on Cheryl L’Hirondelle Waynohtew) rather than striving to assimilate a

common purpose between dub poetry and performance art, the overall picture could have been quite a bit richer. This line of questioning leads to a second more exploratory, and, I would argue, intriguing, issue in the book. Beyond issues of black and white, is performance art really, as represented in this book, a middle-class, central Canadian, urban practice? For this trope — middle-class, central Canadian, and urban — is treated as the numb, dumb substrate, the translucent agar, upon which the descriptions of all these artists are based. It is the unspoken given, the context that supposedly does not need to be acknowledged. Hence the detailed comments about May Chan’s upbringing in a specifically Chinese context and none on, say, Frances Leeming’s upbringing in a white, middle-class, colonial context. With Leeming’s range of work encompassing gender roles in middle-class marriages set in a landscape of lawn chairs and aluminum-sided houses, the critical oversight/bias is palpable — particularly in contrast to the

vivid descriptions of steamed bok choy and fried noodles as elements of both Chan’s childhood and her performances.

There are also problems with the regional treatment of many artists within Canada. I learned much, for example, about the performance scene in Toronto during the 1970s and 80s, and a decent smattering about Vancouver during the same period. But what about Winnipeg? And Calgary? And Regina? And Halifax? Granted, artists who’ve worked and continue to work in these areas are profiled — but they are profiled without acknowledgement of the performance scenes that prevailed in these smaller centres, an acknowledgement upon which many Toronto artist profiles are based. Yet Lorri Millan and Shawna Dempsey weren’t the only ones performing in (or attending) lesbian cabarets to warm the dead of prairie winters and Rita McKeough integrates other Atlantic performers from a diverse local musical and artistic tableau into her works. By ignoring these realities (however small) *Caught in*

the Act gets snagged in the spin cycle of Canadian cultural hype — that Toronto is the centre of all that really is cool.

Scenes can also exacerbate generational gaps. While the generational focus of the book isn’t in and of itself a bad thing (I once heard somewhere that the personal is political, so draw on it, m’ladies/suffragettes!), the nostalgic tunnel vision that seems to accompany it most certainly is. Lines like “the future Clichettes came together in the mid-70s in Toronto, during an extraordinarily rich period of collective creativity. Artists from different disciplines — dance and theatre in particular — began to work together on collaborative projects. These collaborations often fused elements of theatre, performance art, political satire, popular music, video art, dance — or used all of them at once,” simply serve to date both the book and its authors. Extraordinarily rich environments of this kind continue to exist from Halifax’s Granville Mall to Vancouver’s Granville Island.

Well, my snowy labcoat is now sullied with sulphur and my hornrims have been smashed under the mass spectrometer. So ends my latest publishing performance, *You Always Hurt The Ones You Love* (2006). If you’re still watching, I thank you. You are, like me, finally free to go.

Leah Sandals lives, writes, and deals with variously messy creative explosions in Toronto. Her art has been shown in Syracuse, Victoria, Halifax, Windsor and Toronto, and she has also written for Flash Art, Canadian Art, C Magazine, and Spacing.



Lillian Allen in *Unnatural Causes*, 1990. Courtesy: YZBOOKS

The Pull of Political Undercurrents: Janet Cardiff's *Words Drawn in Water*

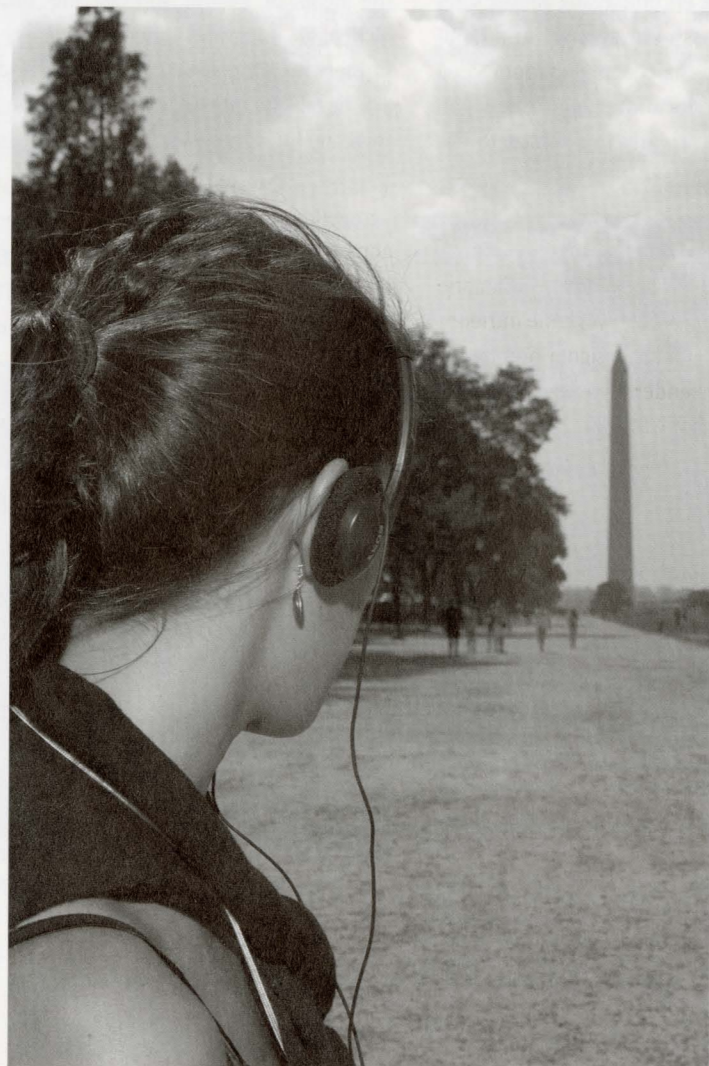
Hirschhorn Museum, Washington DC
3 August – 30 October 2005
review by Adrienne Lai

For artists who make site-specific work, the opportunity to engage with a well-known site can be a mixed blessing: a richly storied place may offer a wealth of historical material, but these histories are often accompanied by a considerable amount of cultural and political baggage. Janet Cardiff's latest audio walk project, *Words Drawn in Water*, commissioned by the Hirschhorn Museum, contends with this baggage as it takes on the iconic National Mall in Washington DC. With *Words Drawn in Water*, Cardiff must not only grapple with the National Mall's status as a revered symbol of US political identity and history, but she must do so as an outsider — a Canadian citizen — amidst a political climate in which American nationalism is a very contentious subject. It is not despite, but *because* of these difficult political negotiations that *Words Drawn in Water* succeeds, as the pervasiveness of the current socio-political situation invigorates Cardiff's signature audio tour format with renewed urgency and resonance.

Cardiff has been using the format of the audio guide for well over ten years, producing commissioned "tours" for various sites around the world. On one of these walks, participants check out a listening device¹ from the sponsoring institution and are then guided along a set route, oriented by Cardiff's recorded instructions. Cardiff

serves as the narrator for the journey, combining historical information about the site, personal musings, and, occasionally, a fictional storyline (such as a film noir scenario in which the listener finds him or herself embroiled). In addition to Cardiff's voice, the soundtrack includes sound effects (usually ambient noise such as flies buzzing, traffic, passing voices) and

extradiegetic sounds (samples from various media, such as films, pop songs, historical speeches). The use of binaural audio in the recordings makes it difficult to discern fictional recorded sounds from actual sounds in the immediate environment. This conflation of illusion and fact, the virtual and the real, is a characteristic element of Cardiff's walks. The effect interrogates the



A participant experiencing *Words drawn in water*, by Janet Cardiff, 2005. Photo: Chris Smith. Courtesy: Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden



ways "official" narratives and histories — such as the ones normally disseminated by museum audio guides — are produced and reproduced as given truths.

With *Words Drawn in Water*, the main subject of Cardiff's critique is not the Hirschhorn itself, but the ideological institution of American identity and history. The work begins at a kiosk in the museum lobby, where you must sign a number of forms and surrender a credit card or picture ID in exchange for an iPod. The 33-minute audio tour starts at a bench inside the museum, looking out at a fountain in the building's central courtyard. Pressing play, the first thing you hear is a deep voice singing *Old Man River*, which fades to Cardiff's recollection of a nineteenth century painting of the Thames River by James McNeill Whistler. She muses about how a drop of the water pictured there could have found its way, over a century later, into the cascade you currently

observe. In this work, water is a reoccurring motif, invoking notions of historical memory, impermanence, and the continuity of time.

As you are directed to exit the museum, these aquatic philosophical contemplations are interrupted by a warning that you are being watched from the museum's windows, which summons you into a heightened awareness of the surrounding space. The audio walk then takes you through the Hirschhorn's sculpture garden and onto the National Mall, a large, open pedestrian area flanked by the US Capitol Building on one side and the Washington Monument on the other. While the Mall has been the location of a number of notable historical occurrences and political protests, Cardiff refers to these events without conjuring up the patriotic rhetoric typically associated with this fabled site. *Words Drawn in Water's* narrative is interspersed with oral histories recounted by

locals, selections from iconic moments such as Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s *I Have a Dream* speech, sounds of warfare and references to the old *Daniel Boone* television show. Here, the personal, the monumental and the fictional are treated as parallel tracks that, brought together, tell the fragmented, subjective and incomplete stories of history. In treating these multiple accounts equally, Cardiff calls into question the idea of a single, official national history, the likes of which the National Mall and its surrounding museums and monuments purport to represent.

Words Drawn in Water's intervention into one of the most mythologized sites in US history and identity is particularly provocative in light of a global political climate in which American patriotism has often become equated with the Bush administration's "with us or with the terrorists" mentality. In an interview published by the Hirschhorn, Cardiff has noted the trickiness of negotiating this symbolically loaded site, remarking:

[D]oing a walk in the capital of America in this current political situation was antithetical to my creative process. I had to turn off my negative feelings about the Bush administration in order to produce the piece. It made me realize how difficult it is not to become political in Washington.²

However, she does not manage to turn off these negative sentiments entirely: *Words Drawn in Water* is laced with political criticisms that range from the subtle and metaphoric to the blatant. A reference to pipes running underneath the National Mall invites associations with more sinister

unseen, underground networks in Washington; later, you eavesdrop on a conversation in which someone claims to have overheard an admission that the US invasion of Afghanistan was motivated primarily by oil interests in the region. Cardiff carefully mines the site's controversial potential, blending her critique with a narrative that may or may not be fictional. Early in the walk, as the sound of helicopters buzzes overhead, Cardiff claims she's being followed, and then quickly dismisses this as a paranoid fantasy induced by the location. Yet, even though the helicopter sounds are imaginary, the threat of surveillance is real: security cameras and visibly armed officers are a matter of course in the post-9/11 US capital.

A number of motifs that recur in Cardiff's audio walks — most notably themes of paranoia, control and the blurring of fact and fiction — take on particular meaning in this incarnation, emphasizing "how difficult it is to not be political in Washington." What on the surface appears to be a simple critique of the representation and transmission of history extends beyond the bounded space of the past: the invocation of historical governmental abuses (the Vietnam War, the devastating treatment of Native peoples) invites questioning of the contemporary situation. In this literal and symbolic home of US politics, even the most basic aspects of the work take on special resonance. Although all of Cardiff's walks depend on the participant's obedience to a disembodied voice that dictates his or her movements, this device of bodily control takes on a sinister undertone when enacted in Washington after the legislation of the USA PATRIOT ACT.

Cardiff's work is at its most effective at these moments, where it highlights the

relationship between historical and contemporary conditions, creating a heightened engagement with a site. The weakest moments of *Words Drawn in Water* occur when this interplay is severed, and the particular context of the National Mall is replaced by a space of decontextualized theatricality. Unfortunately, this takes place at the end of the walk in the Peacock Room at the Freer Gallery, which houses Asian art and works by Whistler, the American painter invoked at the beginning of the tour. Whistler designed the Peacock Room, an expression of opulent Japoniserie, as the porcelain display/dining room of his patron's London house. The room was eventually purchased by the American industrialist Charles Lang Freer, transported to the US, and subsequently donated to the Smithsonian as part of Freer's art collection. Amidst the lavish gold and teal walls, Cardiff invites the listener to travel back in time to a Victorian-era London home, to imagine Whistler's world. This somewhat awkward re-invocation of Whistler at the end of the tour forces a circular connection to the beginning, complete with *Old Man River* as closing reprise. Compared to the experience on the Mall, this ending feels somewhat false and disconnected, and like the Peacock Room itself, a bit over-the-top in its staginess.

In choosing to end *Words Drawn in Water* in such an anachronistic location, perhaps

Cardiff intended to jolt the listener through a drastic shift in time and scope and to recall the long history of imperialism and power in the West. Or, perhaps she simply needed a way to bring the walk's narrative back to its point of origin, with the spectacle of the Peacock Room as a bonus grand finale. In either case, there is a suggestion here that history, like water, is constantly moving through stages and cycles. Political empires and the signifiers by which they construct their identities rise and fall, and, when taken in the long view of history, they may seem like distant trifles. The central message of *Words Drawn in Water* is, quite straightforwardly, that nothing is permanent. Time, like water, is the ultimate leveller, and no matter how vivid it may seem, no social or political situation lasts forever. What is less clear is whether this message is to be taken as a rebuke, a reassurance or a resignation.

Adrienne Lai is a visual artist, writer, independent curator, and educator. She has a BFA from Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design and an MFA from the University of California, Irvine. She is currently based in Vancouver with an occasional sojourn in Baltimore.

Notes:

1. The device's form has been technically streamlined over the years, from cassette players to cd players to the iPod shuffles used in this latest work.
2. Interview with Janet Cardiff and project curator Kelly Gordon, didactic pamphlet published by the Hirschhorn, July 2005. Available online at <<http://hirshhorn.si.edu/exhibitions/description.asp?Type=&ID=20>>



On the horizon (casting shadows): Vancouver art, economies and the pitfalls of success Vancouver art and economies forum

organised by Melanie O'Brian, Director/Curator of Artspeak
6 October – 3 November 2005
review by Vanessa Kwan

Vancouver, that once distant "Terminal City," is gearing up. Stirred in the past by Expo '86 and rejuvenated by the recent confirmation of a successful 2010 Olympics bid, narratives of growth and development now define Vancouver's face to the world. Long-time issues of alienation and isolation, once dominant, now take a back seat to the city's aspirations for "world class" distinction. The marks of change are omnipresent, and one gets the feeling that the landscape — physical, cultural, political — is shifting, for better or for worse. The arts community, ever attendant to larger cultural moments, runs parallel.

This is the backdrop to the recent series of lectures and an upcoming publication on art, politics and culture titled *Vancouver Art and Economies*. The talks, and the project as a whole, build on the highly influential *Vancouver Anthology: The Institutional Politics of Art*, produced in 1991 by the Or Gallery and edited by Vancouver luminary Stan Douglas. The current endeavour is a project of Artspeak Gallery and, more specifically, Director/Curator Melanie O'Brian. Spread over five nights last fall and presented to a packed auditorium at the Emily Carr Institute, the series featured papers by nine artists, critics, curators and art historians.

The Vancouver Anthology is a tough act to follow, but one that demands a successor.

Timely, expansive and ambitious, the text included papers by a variety of local writers, artists and critics, among them William Wood, Scott Watson, Nancy Shaw, Robert Linsley, Keith Wallace and Marcia Crosby. The book sought to record the histories, currents and conflicts that defined the 20 or so years of growth that saw the Vancouver contemporary arts community move from isolated outsider in the 60s to not-quite-comfortable contributor in the national and international scene during the 80s and 90s. Topics ranged from now-classic discussions around identity-based

politics (Crosby's essay "Construction of the Imaginary Indian" remains essential reading), to Wood's analysis of criticism by and about Vancouver artists, to the history of artist-run centres and a chronology of West Coast art and culture according to the disciplines of painting, video, film and sculpture. The question of regionality, and Vancouver's separation from seemingly far-flung contemporary arts centres, was widely considered both a blessing and a curse. As Nancy Shaw pointed out, the perceived isolation experienced by artists in Vancouver promoted a healthy taste for



Images of Vancouver Art and Economies Forum. Photos: Aina Rogstad. Courtesy: Artspeak.

collective organizing and a valuable critical distance. In reference to the N.E. Thing Company's varied methods of decentralizing power through the savvy use of communications and business models, she quotes co-founder Iain Baxter, "You can penetrate structures using communications. But that can only happen when you're somewhere else. Because if you're there, you don't penetrate... You're already in it."¹

This 'outsider' perspective — and the relative absence on the West Coast of heavy hitting critics, dealers and curators — proved integral to the formulation of a distinct community, had on many occasions acted as a catalyst for collective organizing (as in the case of Intermedia) and encouraged the need for self-contextualization (Jeff Wall, for example). Indeed, being distant from the art scene in New York or London prompted many Vancouver artists to write critically about their own work and to do the same for their peers. Ian Wallace's studio, or Roy

Arden's critical reviews, became the most legitimate way to see and understand art in the absence of anything more consistently industry-oriented. This relationship gave way, of course, to the now iconic Vancouver School. By the time Stan Douglas organized the anthology he was certainly seeing the effects of the widespread success of the small group of artists of which he was a central figure. Perhaps because of the steadily growing visibility of West Coast artists, Douglas made a point of questioning the concept of mainstream success, referring in his introduction to the "predicament of 'majority'" in the creation of art and culture. The relationship of institutions to artists had long been an uneasy one, and successes on the larger art market meant that artists, critics and historians had to be doubly diligent in evaluating the dominance of certain art forms over others, certain perspectives over less visible ones. The papers in the Vancouver Anthology were commissioned to preserve delicate histories, "as a way to reconsider past events that might poten-

tially devolve into myth, and those once self-conscious practices that all too often fall into habit."² It is these habits that become a focus now, as the arts community pauses to reflect once again.

If the original anthology was an indication that the Vancouver community was going places, then *Vancouver Art and Economies* affirms that we have, definitively, arrived. To quote O'Brian's introduction to the series:

The impetus behind this project has been in observing the substantial growth and visibility of Vancouver art ... in the last 15 years.... The professionalism encouraged by funders, universities, art schools ... galleries, publishers, etc., potentially marks new operations in the art world. In this post-Expo, pre-Olympics, technologized state, Vancouver is increasingly visible on an international stage, not only for its leisure potential, but for contemporary art. This project seeks to reveal the institutions and individuals that have made this so.³

Conceived in response to an observed professionalization in the art community, the series understands the West Coast counter-cultural position to be a thing of the past. Where once the community found both struggle and strength in this critical and geographical distance, we now must contend with the fact that "Vancouver art" is fully ensconced in the larger art market. And, while this has meant a great deal of opportunity for many local artists, curators and critics, it also brings with it a new challenge: to critically engage with our own institutions.

Vancouver Art and Economies was the first large scale project to attempt to shed light on the matter, and expectations were high. The community, eager to engage in the discussion, or at least to witness this next historical record in the making, turned out in droves. Speakers included Clint Burnham, Sharla Sava, Marina Roy, Tim Lee, Sadira Rodrigues, Randy Lee Cutler, Reid Shier, Shep Steiner and Michael Turner. The talks as a whole oscillated between attempts to broaden the scope of what is commonly considered "Vancouver art" (Cutler's discussion of "post-medium production," Rodrigues' charting of cultural diversity as a problematic concept in Vancouver's art scene) and close readings of already iconic artists and works (Steiner's hermeneutic homage to Jeff Wall, Lee's tribute to Ken Lum and Stan Douglas). Disturbingly, discussions of new or under-documented practices (the continued vitality of collective organizing, cross-disciplinary practices, or the evolution of politicised, identity-based art since the early 90s, to hint at a few) were overpowered by a dominant impulse to praise further the work of the Vancouver School and its proponents. Certainly alternative histories were mentioned; Marina Roy, Randy Lee Cutler and Sadira Rodrigues made attempts to plumb these varied histories, but these discussions were by and large dwarfed by the steady focus on already exhaustively documented practices. Throughout, the sense that all eyes were watching was pervasive, and the result were talks that either a) toed the line with respect to reiterating the lineages of the past, or b) made relatively hesitant claims in discussions of potential new directions for the community.

The question of power and majority — so crucial to any discussion of the various

economies circulating locally — took a back seat to a general acceptance of the marks of progress. Roy's discussion, enticingly called "Of Windfalls and Landfalls: New Social and Economic Landscapes," hinted at reasons behind this imbalance. In her discussion of the histories of artists/writers active in the Vancouver community, she asserted that "laudatory discourse" reigns, effectively "minimiz[ing] the instances of larger critical public debate around a diversity of local art."⁴ Reasons for this might be traced to both pressures from the international art market to present a neatly packaged regional identity (defined by the Vancouver School) and plenty of legitimising factors enforced within the community: "Much art today flirts a little too closely with the cool counter-culture, a kind of farcical return to bohemian rebellious roots, around which today rarely provides a true, constructive alternative to the mainstream."⁵

Reid Shier's talk illustrates this crisis of alternatives from another angle. His discussion, "Do Artists Need Artist-Run Centres?" focused primarily on the shifting structures of ARCS, which in the past were largely defined in opposition to the mainstream. He argues that outsider position has been largely dismantled, and the role of these independent galleries has shifted slightly in recent years (hence his provocative title). The subsequent movement of artist-run centres towards a more institutional structure is seen by Shier as a sign of maturity, and the prevalence of more top-down, industry-focused curatorial mandates is simply the natural product of progress. His talk ended with a reversal of his initial question, a kind of consolation prize for those in the audience still hoping for a future not wholly dominated by market concerns: his question shifted to

"Do artist-run centres need artists?" Yes, of course, was the definitive answer, rationalized by Shier's claim that any alternative models of artistic production would come from artists themselves, and that galleries would follow this, despite the homogenizing pressures of a global economy. The viability of this situation came under question, however, when Shier was pressed to explain how these alternative models might be financed in current funding structures. His answer: "I think money is a red herring."⁶

Communities, like people, are changed by success. Self-awareness, which in the past has been so sharp and articulate in Vancouver's artist communities, has in this instance been muddied with, I would venture to say, a crisis in our ability to envision viable alternatives to existing power structures. In the current climate, pressures are as intense within the community as outside to enforce the status quo. *Vancouver Art and Economies* has begun a potentially long process of re-evaluation and it remains to be seen what histories might come of it.

Vanessa Kwan is an artist and writer living in Vancouver BC.

Notes:

1. As quoted in Nancy Shaw, "Expanded Consciousness and Company Types: Collaboration Since Intermedia and the N.E. Thing Company," Stan Douglas, ed., *The Vancouver Anthology: The Institutional Politics of Art* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1991), p. 94.
2. Stan Douglas, "Introduction," *The Vancouver Anthology*.
3. Melanie O'Brian, lecture, Emily Carr Institute, 6 October 2005.
4. Marina Roy, "Of Windfalls and Landfalls: New Social and Economic Landscapes," lecture, Emily Carr Institute, 13 October 2005.
5. Ibid.
6. Reid Shier, "Do Artists Need Artist Run Centres?" lecture (question period), Emily Carr Institute, 27 October 2005.



Prophets of design-religion

by Robert Labossiere

The business of the "future" is largely based on faith. When experts in their field (whatever that may be) take to speaking about the future, they often don the prophet's mantle. They anticipate a moment, a "second coming," when the revolution will be at hand and the meaning of the signs they have been using for divination will come to the surface. It is often their skill in describing those signs, their ability to captivate, their eloquence, reasoning or evangelical zeal that convinces us of what they see.

Last December, panelists Bruce Mau and Dot Tuer addressed the issue of the future as part of Impulse Archaeology's "Designing a Better World" panel. Intended to speak to the current state of design philosophy — whether design has delivered us the promises of modernism or the illusion of a better world — they instead offered two diametrically opposed visions of how a better future comes to be.

While Mau's analysis focused on the present, Tuer looked to the past for indications of what is to come. Drawing heavily on facts, Mau predicted that with more people living longer and at a higher standard, it is possible to imagine a world of 10, 20 or even 100 billion souls living healthy, productive lives to the age of 150 with even less impact on the environment than we currently have. Sounds promising, though we know

there is no lack of experts who see the "facts" very differently.

Tuer expressed great interest in memory, specifically the glitches in history that come back to haunt, and thwart, progress. Presenting illustrations from the Peron-era master plan for Argentina, Tuer described how the Peronist agenda was subsequently dismantled along with pretty well everything that worked in Argentina, showing how politically fragile futures can be.

These were very different and potentially conflicting visions, one of relatively unmitigated optimism and another all about mitigation. Regrettably, the distance between them was not bridged in the follow-up conversation nor did the conflict come to a head. But it is hard to imagine how such a bridge might be designed or how an open conflict could be productive, for the divide is fundamentally an ideological one.

One span of the ideological bridge might involve looking closely at the personalities and processes that lie behind design innovation. In his recent book, *Collapse*, Jared Diamond describes how people in various ancient and modern civilizations failed, and sometimes succeeded, at adapting as their environments ceased to support them. One example in particular strikes about the ideological dilemma. Diamond talks about the progressive environmental measures developed by Dominican

Republic President Joaquim Balaguer, a dictator who ruled or significantly influenced that country for over 30 years. The Dominican Republic even today is remarkably healthy compared to neighbouring Haiti. Diamond leaves us to guess how Balaguer marshaled the power and legitimacy to stop landowners from despoiling the land for short-term profit.

It is not difficult to share Mau's enthusiasm for design when you are shown signs of progress all around. Yet these signs remain incomplete, like our understanding of Balaguer. We laud design without learning enough about the power that underlies it, left to accept its efficacy on faith. This would seem to be Tuer's point, that with great power comes great opportunity but also great vulnerability, suggesting that change, if it is to last, must be founded on more than design. It must be founded on politics that are sustainable. In today's political climate, where religious faith drives decision-making as much as science or aesthetics do, design prophesy, and the panels that occasion it, must do more than take a page from religion, telling richer, more complex stories about how better worlds come to be.

Robert Labossiere has worked with both Bruce Mau and Dot Tuer, as a project manager with Bruce Mau Design and as managing editor in the production of Tuer's new book Mining the Media Archive, published by VYZBOOKS.

17 March to 22 May, 2006

PAUL SISETSKI

Don't Shoot the Messenger

curated by Dan Ring

 Mendel Art Gallery

950 Spadina Crescent East
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
306.975.7610
www.mendel.ca



snap



THE SOCIETY OF NORTHERN ALBERTA PRINT ARTISTS

Florin Hategan, April 13 to May 27

Giorgia Volpe, June 1 to July 15

Print Arts Northwest group exhibition, July 20 - August 19

SNAP Gallery www.snapartists.com snap@snapartists.com (780) 423-1492 fax (780) 426-1177 10309-97 Street Edmonton AB T5J 0M1



latitude 53

May 19-28

visualeyez 2006...a 7th annual festival of performance art

June 15

fifty3 magazine issue 7.2

June 16-July 15

David Khang
Tammy Salzi

Latitude 53 Contemporary Visual Culture www.latitude53.org info@latitude53.org (780) 423.5353 10248 106 St. Edmonton AB T5J 1H5

April 20 - May 20, 2006 Marcia Huyer, Spaced Out
The Front Room: Scott Rogers, Shipping/Receiving

May 25 - June 17, 2006 Scott Sawtell and Matt Bahan, God and Country
And Taking Liberties featuring Kim Bruce, Elizabeth Clarke, Cecilia Gossen,
Isabelle Hunt-Johnson, Celia Meade and Louise Williamson

June 22 - July 22, 2006 The Works International Visual Arts Festival
14th Annual Naked Exhibition
18th Annual Member's Exhibition



harcourt house

Harcourt House Arts Centre www.harcourthouse.ab.ca harcourt@telusplanet.net T. [780] 426 - 4180 10215 112 St. Edmonton AB T5K 1M7



Canada Council for the Arts

Conseil des Arts du Canada

