fuse

art culture politics

Jeanne Randolph walks through a neon flood
Amber Landgraff eats with Conflict Kitchen
and Chris Gehman on faking political art

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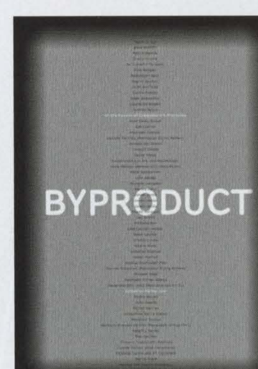

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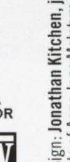

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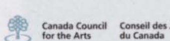

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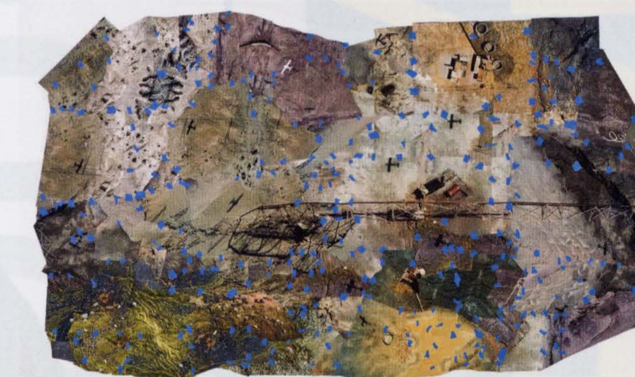

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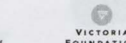

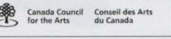

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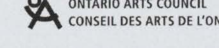

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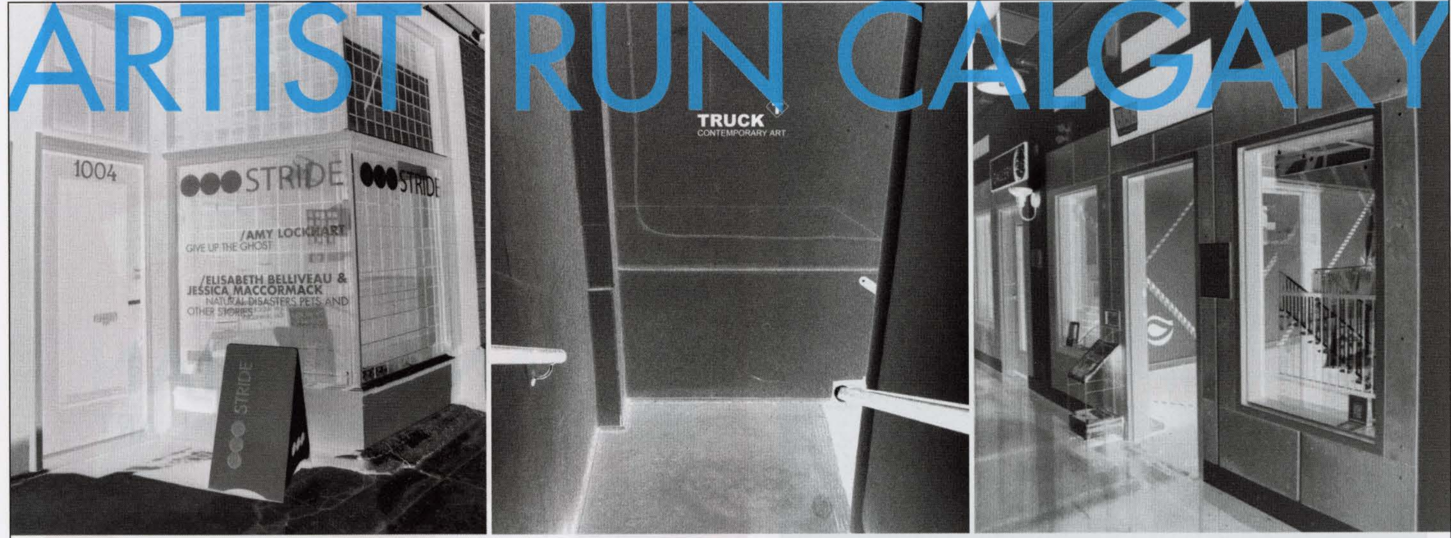

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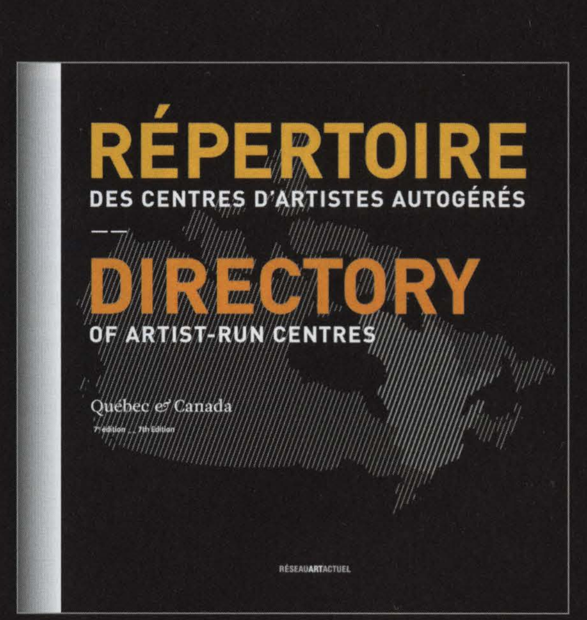

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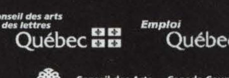

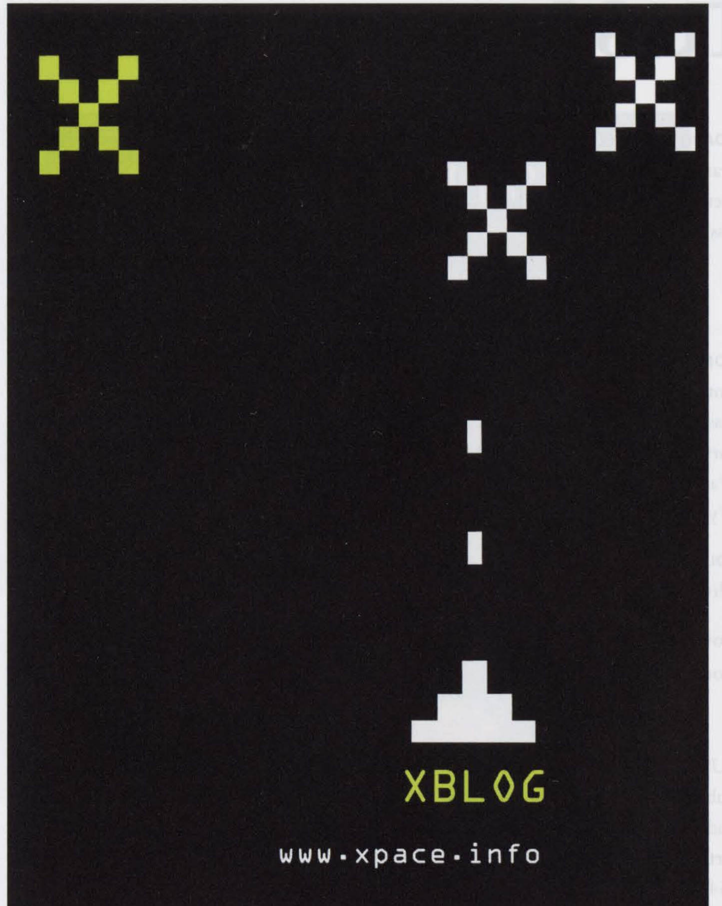

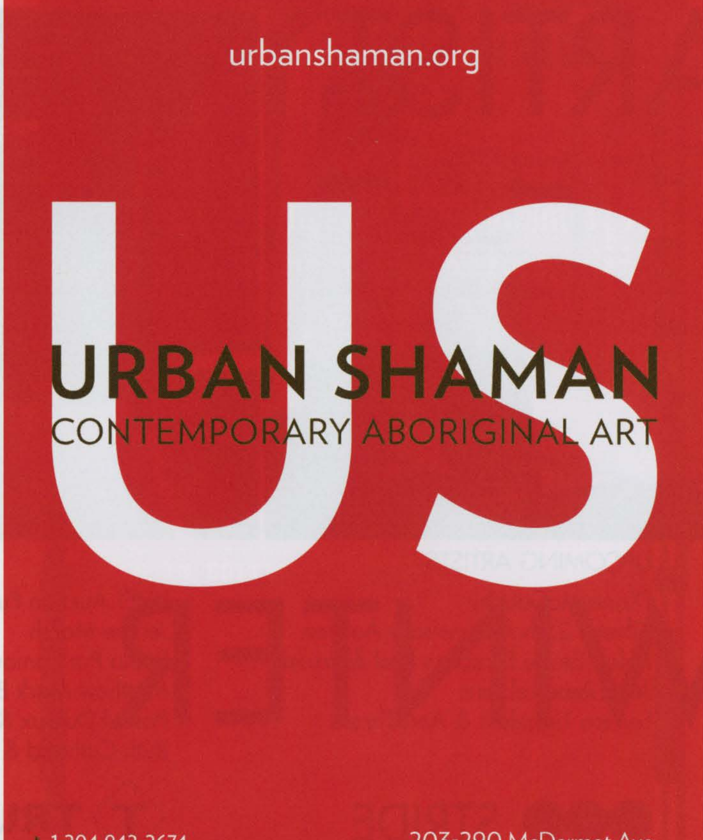

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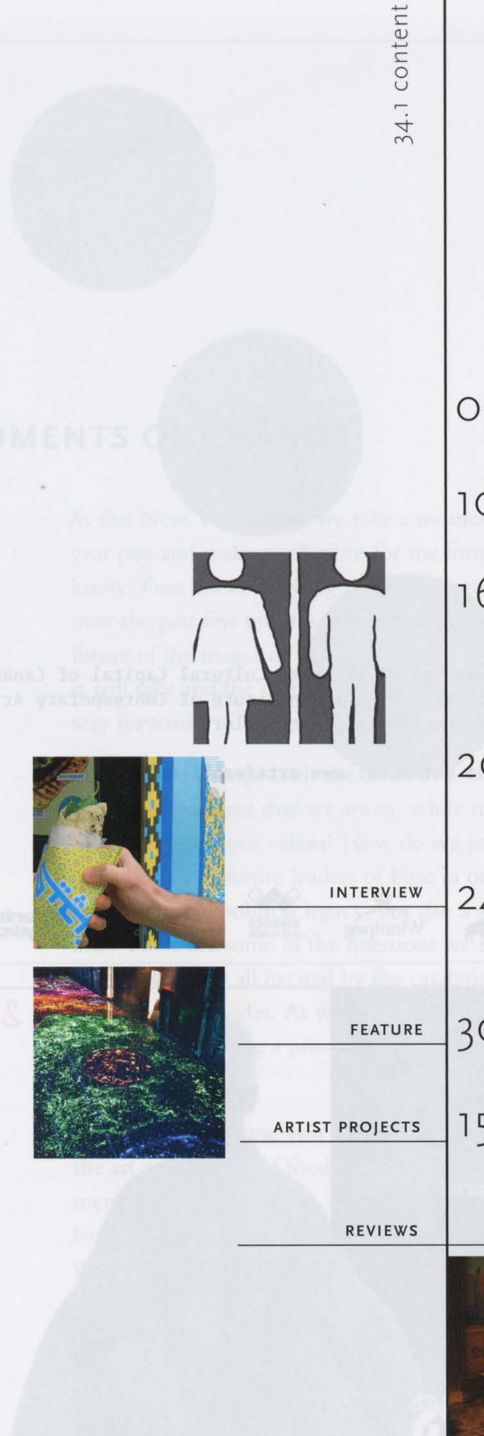

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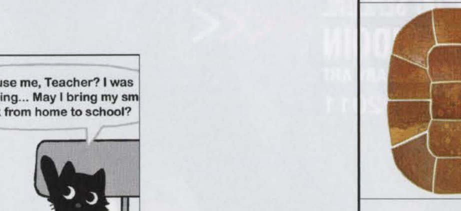
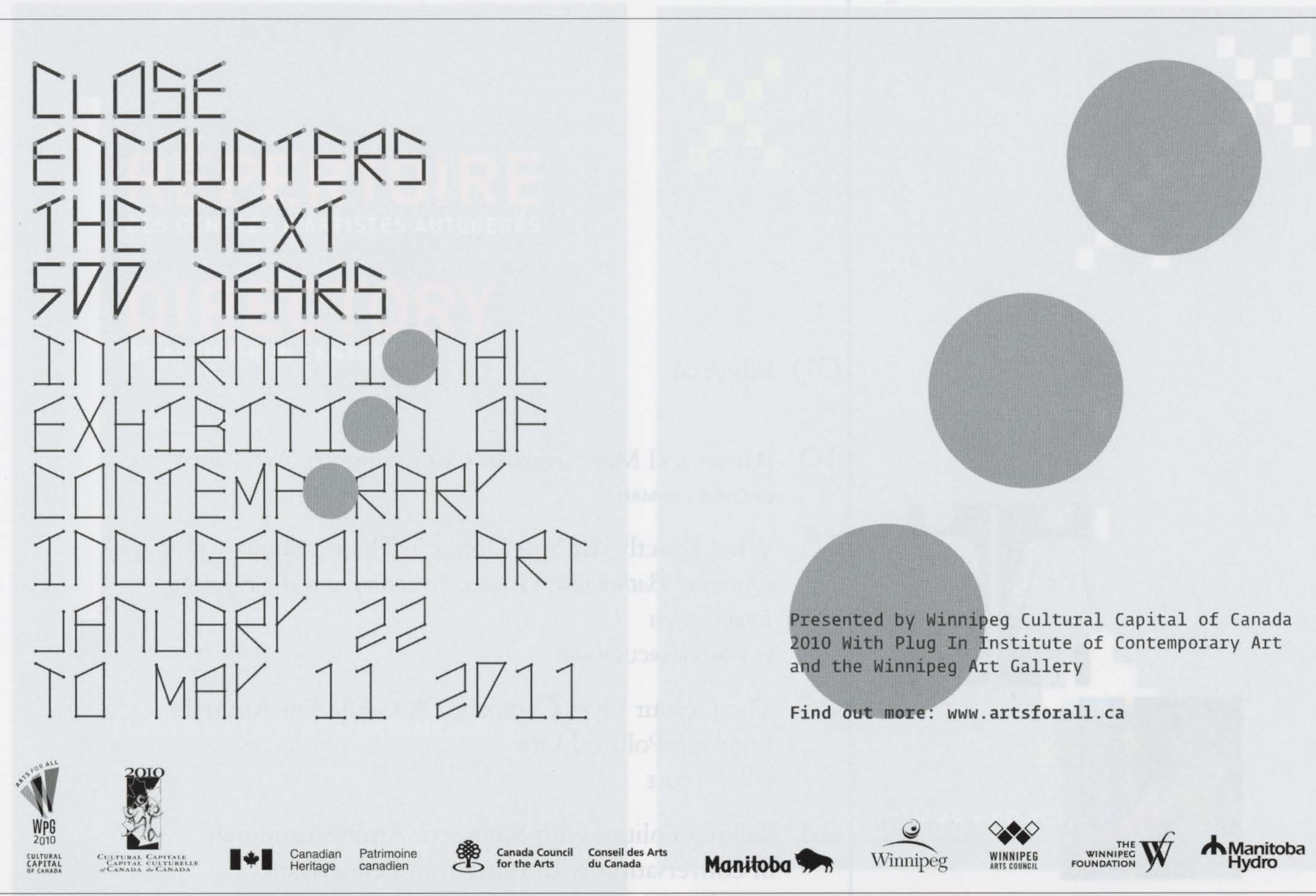




MOMENTS OF CHANGE

As this New Year begins we take a moment to reflect on the year past and make resolutions for the future. As many of you know, Fuse has been going through a significant transition over the past few months as we imagine what we want the future of the magazine to look like, the different forms that it will take and the partners who will join us as we chart our way forward.

How do we change with the times to be more reflective of the actual moment that we are in, while staying connected to our history and our values? How do we pass forward a healthy organization to future leaders of Fuse in order to facilitate not only a positive political legacy, but also a strong organizational one? These are some of the questions we have been grappling with and we are all excited by the catalytic opportunities that this change provides. As we move into 2011, we have, in addition to publishing a print copy of Fuse, begun posting all of our content online.

In this issue we bring you a number of features that explore the art and politics of food, the environment, civic engagement and critical writing. In our feature article, Winnipeg-based writer Jeanne Randolph recounts her road trip from Winnipeg, Manitoba to Shawinigan, Quebec as she makes her way to Richard Purdy's exhibition *L'echo/l'eau*. Given the environmental impact of the aluminum industry — the site of the exhibition is a retired smelter — Randolph considers the impact of this industrial legacy, models of engagement based on free association, and the pros and cons of wading barefoot through an exhibition that raises questions about toxicity.

In our feature interview, Amber Landgraff speaks with Pittsburgh's Conflict Kitchen, who use their take-out food window to get the local Pittsburgh community talking about politics. The project functions not only as a restaurant, but also as a research lab, a site for political dialogue and a performance space. All of this is built on a business model that intends for the restaurant to be regularly reinvented to reflect different countries that the US is in conflict with.

Chris Gehmans' article *Rhetorical Maneuvers in Contemporary Art* addresses the ways in which political reality, thought and language are bound together. He is critical of degree-granting programs in art, arguing that they homogenize thinking and writing and asks: Are art schools teaching students to inflate the political claims for their work, without actually making much of significance except an impressive sounding artist's statement?

Diving in with his Colour Flyer Campaign, Keith Cole reflects on his experience of tossing his hat into the political ring. Writing about his run for the 2010 Toronto mayoral race, Cole offers his advice for future mayoral candidates. In *What Exactly Are You Doing in There*, Syrus Marcus Ware reflects on barriers for trans, gender variant and queer people using public toilets in the context of Sheila Cavanagh's recently published book *Queering Bathrooms*. The issue is bound together by The Pinky Show, an artist project by Shannon Young and concludes with reviews of Suzanne Lacy's *Leaving Art*, Robert Houles' *Paris/Ojibwa* and Dipna Horra's *Avaaz*, and The Turtle/Television Island Project curated by Carolyn Eyler.

All of these articles are available on our website (www.fusemagazine.org). To keep our content free, we hope that you will make a small donation when you like what you have read, and subscribe to Fuse to help us pay writers and artists for producing this great work. A crisis caused by funding cuts and systemic obstacles endemic to small publications has created an incredible opportunity to invigorate and reimagine Fuse.We are eager to bring you more diverse voices, online content, podcasts, and special events, to complement our printed publication. Please contact us to find out how you can get involved. info@fusemagazine.org

Izida Zorde

Rhetorical Maneuvers

in Contemporary

Part 1

by Chris Gehman

George Orwell's famous 1946 essay "Politics and the English Language" is generally read and interpreted, in the North American context at least, as primarily concerned with matters of style, and particularly with vagueness, pretension and clichéd, "dead" phraseology. It is taught as a warning and a corrective for writers. However, a more thorough reading of the essay shows that Orwell was more concerned with the political sources of certain kinds of poor writing than he was about style alone — a fact confirmed by the final of his six general rules for better writing: "Break any of these rules sooner than say anything barbarous." [1] Writing just after the end of WWII Orwell had in mind, when he used the term barbarous, the kind of writing and speech-making produced by totalitarian regimes of the left and right alike; the language used by leaders, functionaries and apologists in regimes responsible for show trials, prison camps, political mass murder and genocide. "Political language — and with variations this is true of all political parties, from Conservatives to Anarchists — is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind." What Orwell describes is a language that is often designed to *conceal* rather than to communicate, to make horrific and morally repugnant realities acceptable, as a "mass of Latin words falls upon the facts like soft snow, blurring the outlines and covering up all the details."

In this essay, Orwell describes how political reality, thought and language are bound together. In the immediate postwar context, what was to be feared was the use of rhetoric to make the most enormous crimes acceptable or invisible, a process of rhetorical diminishment.

In the contemporary art world, the situation is in many respects entirely reversed. Whereas the surprisingly large numbers of people involved in art making, exhibition and criticism hold very little power in contemporary society — even within the field of culture, which is dominated by the mass-market products of international corporations — the political claims made for it are frequently extravagant. The anthropologist Marshall Sahlins was an early and acute critic of this kind of rhetorical inflation in the context of his own discipline:

Sylvie Smith, *Back it up Conceptually*, 2007. Courtesy: Sylvie Smith.

> The current Foucauldian-Gramscian-Nietzschean obsession with power is the latest incarnation of anthropology's incurable functionalism. Like its structural-functional and utilitarian predecessors, hegemonizing is homogenizing … "power" is the intellectual black hole into which all kinds of cultural contents get sucked … "A hyper-inflation of significance" would be another way of describing the new functionalism, translating the apparently trivial into the fatefully political … Of course the effect, rather than amplifying the significance of Neapolitan nicknames or Vietnamese pronouns, is to trivialize such terms as "domination," "resistance," colonization," even "violence" and "power." [2]

It's a short walk from the anthropology offices to the cultural studies department, shorter still from cultural studies to contemporary criticism and artistic practice, and the rhetorical maneuvers described by Sahlins are commonplace throughout writing on culture. It's a tendency that should be dismally familiar to anyone who has spent any time reading the kind of contemporary art criticism published in magazines, in catalogues and essays printed by galleries to accompany exhibitions, and in some academic forums, particularly in the field of cultural studies.

Examples of this rhetorical inflation are legion. Craft forms such as knitting and cross-stitch, when the products are exhibited in public spaces or art galleries, or contain political slogans, are routinely described as "radical" and "revolutionary" or "seditious" either by the artists themselves, or by critics (3). Cory Arcangel has become an art star mainly by hacking video game systems and presenting the results in a museum context. A public art project in which participants decorate sleeping masks and then nap in a public space slated to become a park is framed as a radical political gesture, "a project in art and social engagement that playfully, but critically, aims to destabilize public and private space… Increasingly, neoliberal economic and cultural policies have led Western cities to implement social strategies that prohibit loitering and consequently limit public sleeping." [4]

There's surely nothing wrong with these activities in themselves. But there is something wrong with the puffery that compulsively characterizes the most benign artistic activities as radical political acts. Legions of contemporary artists are obsessively focused on the trivial and the commonplace, but seem incapable of admitting the fact. Instead, in order to justify this obsession with minutiae and trivia, the culture offers up claims of its radical intentions. Here the facts are obscured not through a process of diminishment and concealment, but through the proliferation of self-aggrandizing claims that are not supported by the actual work. Art that lacks any concrete political content, or in which the political content is feeble or tepidly ironic, is transformed in the crucible of critical writing into radical gold.

What exactly is happening here? I think that in this peculiar combination of extremely modest art buoyed by extremely grandiose claims there are a number of contextual factors:

1. The deskilling of art, particularly in the context of the art schools.
2. The rhetorical legacy of the postwar avant-gardes, on the one hand, and politically engaged art on the other.
3. The movement towards degree-granting programs in art, which produce a concomitant homogenization of thinking and writing.

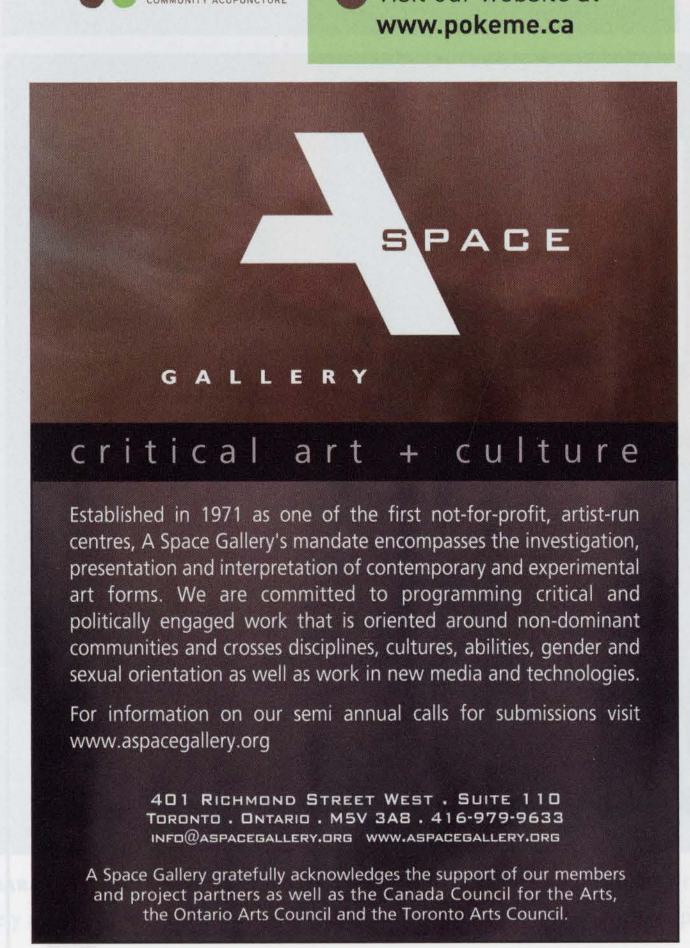
For many years, my experience in editing critical texts showed that artists were often better — clearer, more concrete, less pretentious — writers than many academics and professional critics and curators. For one anthology I laboured for many hours to clarify meanings, correct errors, and generally improve a few essays by scholars with PhD's, while the contributions of practicing artists, even if they were sometimes tendentious or obscure in some respects, were direct and to-the-point and required little editing. What I notice about writing coming from artists who have emerged more recently from the educational system, however, is that it has begun to look more and more like the writing produced by curators, critics and academics. It is increasingly homogeneous. This should not be a surprise: as more and more art schools become degree-granting institutions, students spend more and more of their time in academic courses and courses that deal with the professional world in which they are expected to function — i.e., courses on curating, critical writing, museology, etc. At the same time the cost of education has risen rapidly, so that many, probably most students need to hold down jobs during their years of post-secondary education as well. All of which must logically leave the student with less studio time, less time to devote to developing his or her own ideas and to the making of art, but well schooled in the thought patterns and linguistic habits of curators, critics and academics, hyper-aware of the art historical context in which they work, and with a pretty good understanding of the art system. The art-school graduate of 2010 may leave school without having *made* anything of much consequence, but set up to write a pretty impressive sounding artist's statement. We have moved as far as possible from the position expressed by Barnett Newman's famous quip that "Aesthetics is for the artist as ornithology is for the birds." (5)

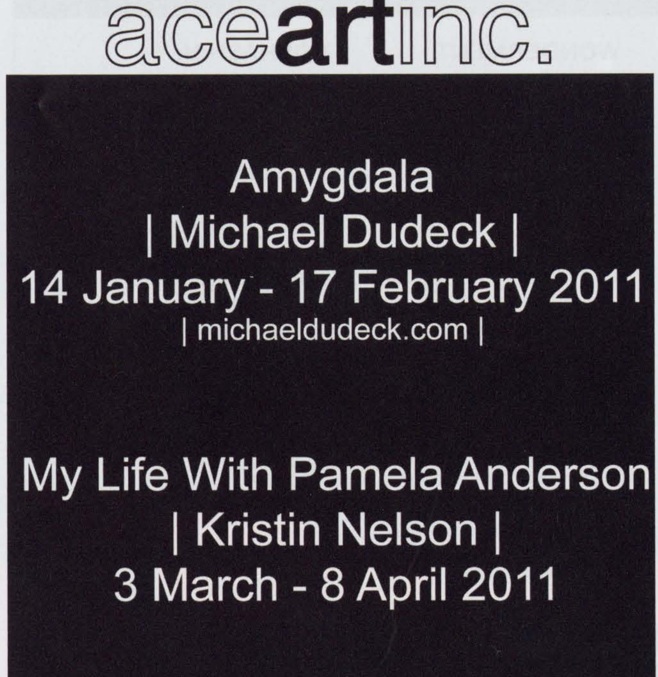
After minimalism, conceptual and performance art, the idea of the artist as someone in a skilled and thinking occupation, engaged with a particular set of materials and visual ideas, has been thoroughly suppressed in favour of the idea of art as mainly an intellectual activity. The artist as thinker, manager, intellectual rather than maker, worker, craftsperson. In other words, the artist as bourgeois — but apparently a *radical, critical* bourgeois. At the same time, there are other contradictory trends that move partly in a different direction, but are partly complementary in a way seldom acknowledged. For example, young artists are also aware of a legacy of political art, art emerging from "identity politics," from feminism, queer liberation and the utopian aspirations of postwar avant-garde movements like Fluxus and the Situationists. What the post-conceptual, post-minimalist high art strain and the politically engaged strain share is an emphasis on context, concepts and language. Minimalism and conceptualism established their importance by invoking ideas and philosophical questions in a condensed visual form, leaving art writers with plenty to say. The artist was allowed to provide less and less, while the significance of the gesture appeared to grow and grow under the lens of critical discourse. Politically engaged art, on the other hand, emphasized its connections to power struggles taking place in the larger social context, and intended to support progressive social change. But this kind of art tends to date quickly — it loses its currency as society changes, even when those changes are exactly the ones sought by the political artist. What is left of this today is an art that is seldom politically engaged, but carries a residue of expectation: the expectation that the artist is motivated by a critical politics, however removed artist and work may be from concrete political struggles.

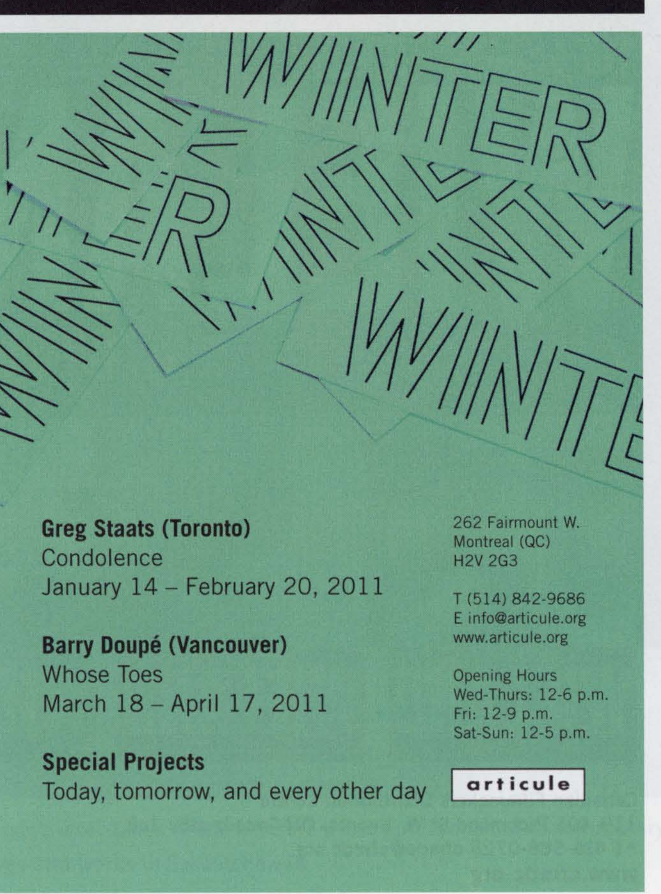
If I'm right in thinking that these strains form an important part of the context in which most contemporary artists are educated, and that the idea of the artist as engaged with a particular set of materials and processes is in abeyance, we can begin to see how we have arrived at this particular alliance of art and rhetoric. The artist has learned that to do less is to be credited with doing more. The artist has learned that to be engaged with physical materials and processes is to be a mere craftsperson, while to work with concepts is to be respected as an intellectual worker (now properly identified as a member of a creative *class* by the ubiquitous urbanist Richard Florida). The artist has learned that art should be able to claim a political subtext, but not a political subject *per se*, as the latter will often be derided as unsophisticated and unartistic. We are left with a situation in which the increasingly meager offerings of artists are accompanied by a kind of critical discourse that is both maddeningly academic in its style and often politically pretentious as well. It is the kind of bad faith that arises when a population with the highest ideals is marginalized to begin with, and is then further stripped of the tools it once possessed to assert its unique importance. The birds are now well up on their ornithology; but they may no longer know how to fly.

Notes:
1. George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language," in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, v. 4. Eds. Sonia Orwell & Ian Angus. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970). 169.
2. Marshall Sahlins, Waiting for Foucault. Second edition. (Cambridge, England: Prickly Pear Press, 1996). 16-17.
3. See, for example, http://radicalcrossstitch.com/craft-gallery/
4. http://theatrecentre.org/wordpress/?p=236 .
5. The Barnett Newman Foundation."Chronology of the artist's life" entry for 1953. http://barnettnewman.org/chronology.php .

Chris Gehman is a grouchy experimental filmmaker and occasional curator and critic. He was Artistic Director of the Images Festival from 2000 to 2004, and was co-editor (with Steve Reinke) of *The Sharpest Point: Animation at the End of Cinema* (YYZ Books).







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KOSHASHIN: The Hall Collection of 19th Century Photographs of Japan
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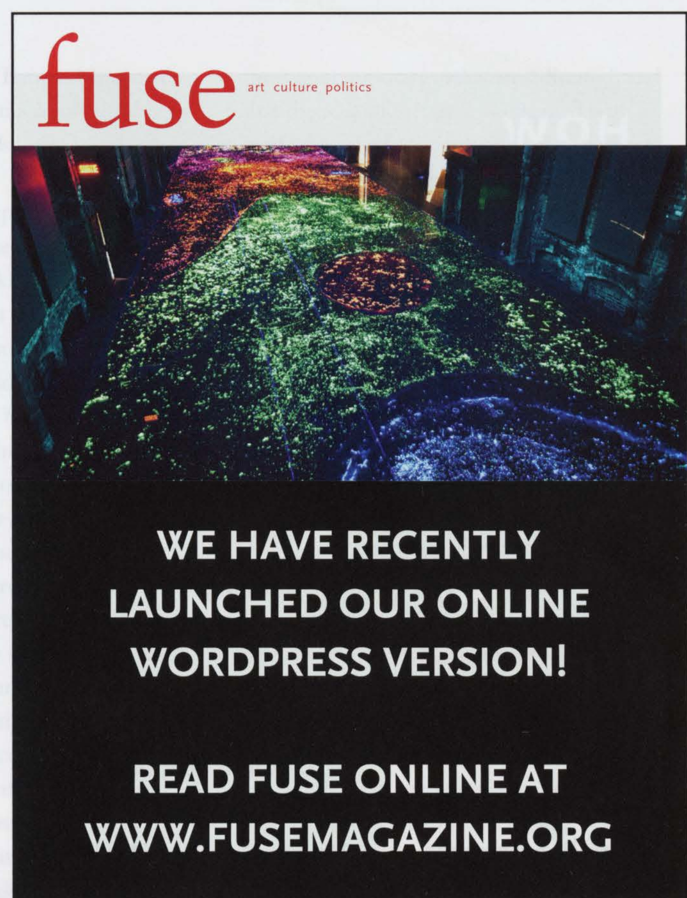
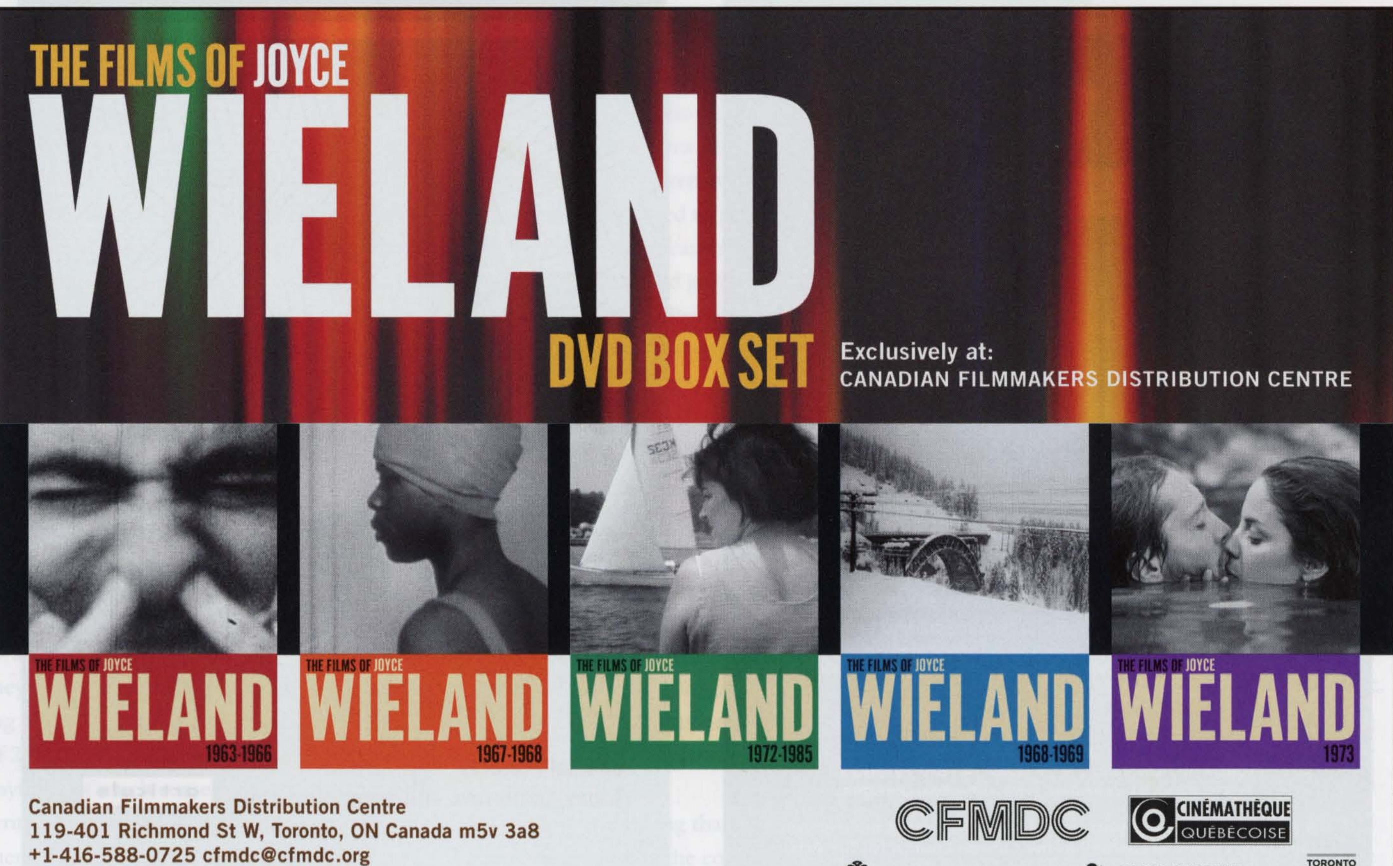




Barbara Meneley is a Canadian visual artist whose interdisciplinary site-responsive work takes shape in reference to landscapes of contemporary society and culture. She has exhibited across Canada and the US and happily lives and works in Saskatchewan.

Syrus Marcus Ware, *Puttin' on Lipstick*, 2010. Courtesy: Syrus Marcus Ware.

What Exactly Are You Doing in There?: Sheila Cavanagh's *Queering Bathrooms: Gender, Sexuality and the Hygienic Imagination*

by Syrus Marcus Ware

Six years ago I began a new job. As a transsexual man who only sometimes "passed" as male, the troubles I had in using the men's washroom started shortly after I began. One incident stands out as particularly unfortunate. It went something like this: I entered the men's staff washroom at the same time as another man. Right away things took a terrible turn. As I locked the stall door behind me to go pee, the other man in the bathroom began expressing concern about why I was using the men's facility.

For 15 minutes, he berated and screamed at me from outside the stall. The other man never identified himself, but he clearly identified his displeasure about me, a transsexual man, sharing his washroom. I huddled silently in the corner of the stall, fearful for my safety, as the man tried to peer inside the stall through the crack and even over the door. Eventually he left the bathroom, but not before yelling that I was "disgusting" and that I was "doing something wrong in there." Terrified and with any urge to pee completely gone, I cautiously left the bathroom. I vowed never to use the staff washroom again. Over the next three years, I went home during the day to pee (I lived close by). Unfortunately, my experience is in no way unique or rare.

Trans, gender variant and queer people face a lot of hassling when using public toilets. These experiences are the topic of Sheila Cavanagh's new book, *Queering Bathrooms: Gender, Sexuality and the Hygienic Imagination* (2010). Her research is based on 100 interviews with lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersexed (LGBTI) people across North America. Cavanagh uses information from these interviews to consider the ways that bathroom architecture, rooted in colonialism, heterosexism and sexism, joins forces with rigid social regulation of the use of public space to "other" LGBTI bodies. Cavanagh argues that "bathroom architectures are based upon vertical lines and a wish to straighten things out.[...] Toilet training is about the delineation of the body, its genitals, orifices, and capacities to eject body fluids in time, rhythm, and tempo with a modern capitalist, heteronormative, and cissexist body politic" (208).

Cavanagh is a sociologist and associate professor at York University whose research in gender and sexuality studies focuses on feminist, queer, cultural and psychoanalytic theories and body studies. These interests inform her research into the bodily implications of the public toilet in all of its manifestations and build upon earlier trans scholarship, particularly Viviane Namaste's concept of trans erasure. Namaste's seminal text *Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People* (2000) was one of the first scholarly texts to consider the lives of trans people and the ways in which trans experiences are taken up in popular culture. Namaste's text is divided into an analysis of theory, culture and research. She argues that trans people are systemically erased or made invisible in each of these areas. Namaste suggests a measurable impact of this erasure on the day-to-day lives of trans people and builds her research upon Judith Butler's theory of regulated or forced coherence (1993). Butler suggests that some bodies are made readable or understandable through a process of setting what is "normal" or expected. Bodies that do not fall within this limited definition of normal are not expected or anticipated and are thus unintelligible or incoherent. For example, male and female bodies without disabilities are expected, hence the plentiful access to male/female limited access washrooms. Trans or gender variant bodies and disabled bodies are less expected, something that is exemplified in the limited number of single stall or accessible washrooms.

Terrified and with any urge to pee completely gone, I cautiously left the bathroom. I vowed never to use the staff washroom again.

Nowhere is trans erasure more apparent than in the gender space of the bathroom. Trans bodies are not planned for, and as a result, trans and gender variant people become tacit users of public toilets. The construction of male and female segregated facilities and the implementation of policies governing who has a right to use each facility limit LGBTI ability to use the bathroom safely. Cavanagh's research provides important insight into the way public toilets impact our understanding of sex and gender.

SHEILA L. CAVANAGH
QUEERING BATHROOMS
GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND THE HYGIENIC IMAGINATION

Queering Bathrooms *fittingly* begins with a historical review of the origins of the public toilet, sharing a wealth of toilet trivia that reveals the sexist and classist origins of public washrooms. For example, when public toilets were first created, they were only for men, as women were not expected to be out of the home for any length of time. 18th-century London saw the creation of (somewhat impractical) portable glass, leather or ceramic "female urinettes" that allowed women to spend longer periods of time outside their homes as they did not have to rush back to use the bathroom. Of course, these urinettes would have been costly, bulky and designed for particular women (racialized women and poor women would have had less leisure time in 1700s London).

Cavanagh chronicles interesting moments in the history of the public toilet, which have shaped our contemporary understandings of public

facilities and who gets to use them. Stemming from an 18th-century worry about hygiene, public toilets are connected to a desire to clean away uncleanness and disease. Public toilets are places where bodily functions occur: people pee, people poo, people change their menstrual products in the bathroom. They are also places where people use drugs; they have sex; they experience their bodies in an acute way.

Public bathrooms are places of rigid dichotomies: male/female; clean/unclean; gay/straight and so forth. The gender-segregated bathroom results almost inevitably in gender misreadings, not only of trans and gender variant people, but also any body that is outside of a heteronormative, cissexist presentation. Public facilities essentially work to order some people into existence and render others incoherent. They exaggerate gender difference and they entrench a binary concept of gender through the creation of gender-segregated public facilities.

My presence in the washroom became a signifier of multiple gender and sexual differences in society, and was proof positive that gender is more complicated than male/female.

Cavanagh's research illustrates the ways in which particular bodies — women's bodies, disabled bodies, queer bodies and gender variant bodies — are unimagined and unanticipated in bathroom design. When these unexpected interlopers enter a public toilet to pee, have sex or otherwise, we set off alarm bells both metaphorically and in some cases quite literally. Cavanagh's research helps to clarify why I was perceived to be "doing something wrong" in the bathroom. I brought my trans, queer, racialized body into a space that wasn't intended for me. My presence in the washroom became a signifier of multiple gender and sexual differences in society, and was proof positive that gender is more complicated than male/female.

Syrus Marcus Ware, *Single Stall Washroom Sign*, 2010. Courtesy: Syrus Marcus Ware.

Bathrooms are an essential part of daily life, yet public toilets have been sorely under researched. There are even fewer examples of research about LGBTI people and public washrooms. One example is Tara Mateik's film *Toilet Training* (2004), which offers insight into the troubles facing trans people using public facilities in the United States. The film includes interviews with lawyers, advocates and activists and is produced in collaboration with the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, an organization dedicated to ending poverty and gender identity discrimination. The video shares stories of people who have faced harassment or violence for trying to use gender-segregated bathrooms in public space, in schools, and at work. Building upon this analysis of the problems related to gendered toilets, Cavanagh's *Queering Bathrooms* offers insight into the ways that toilets themselves are part of a larger structural problem in need of remedy. Addressing gaps in earlier trans research that positioned trans experience as one-dimensional and separate, Cavanagh makes links to experiences of class, racialization and disability. Cavanagh's work fills an important void in trans studies, queer studies and sociology by utilizing interlocking systems of oppression as part of its theoretical framework and by considering the intersections of disability, gender and critical race theories.

To return to my story, I eventually confessed to my boss that I had been going home every day to pee. I was offered the use of a family washroom as a stopgap to prevent any future incidents in the men's toilet. This was a good first step, but not really a long-term solution. Trans people should be able to use the washroom of their choosing, and every effort should be made to make these spaces user-friendly and harassment free. I kept using the men's room, but cautiously, and I worried that if any future harassment happened I would be seen as partly to blame because I was self-selecting to use an "unsafe" washroom. Instead of focusing on adapting the behaviour of the users who may be in danger in the bathroom, we need instead to change the way bathrooms are constructed and the way public toilets are understood. In short, bathrooms themselves need to be reconsidered and reimagined.

Syrus Marcus Ware, *Urinal (With Cake)*, 2010. Courtesy: Syrus Marcus Ware.

Cavanagh's book provides a strong argument for reconsidering the public toilet, making it a must-read for city and urban planners, policy makers, architects and designers. *Queering Bathrooms* offers important recommendations about the future of bathroom design, suggests areas for future research, and imagines a future in which public toilets are at once luxurious, accessible and welcoming to all human beings. Perhaps the biggest hurdle we face is changing social attitudes towards gender and gender-segregated facilities. The next time you are in a public bathroom, consider bringing Cavanagh's book as reading. You'll never look at a public bathroom the same way again.

Syrus Marcus Ware is a visual artist, community activist, researcher and educator. He is the Program Coordinator of the Teens Behind the Scenes program at the Art Gallery of Ontario. He recently co-edited the winter 2009 issue of the Journal of Museum Education entitled *Building Diversity in Museums* (Left Coast Press, 2009).

Keith Cole, *Election Poster*, 2010. Courtesy: the artist.

THE COLOUR FLYER CAMPAIGN: *A Guide For An Artist Entering Political Life.*

By Keith Cole

On February 12th, 2010, in front of a very large, unsuspecting crowd at Buddies In Bad Times Theatre, I announced that I would be a candidate for the top job in the City of Toronto. That's right, I was running to be the Mayor.

After my public announcement, and with $200.00 cash in my hand, on the 16 February 2010, I went to Toronto's City Hall and registered with the City Clerk. After signing a few forms, producing ID and receiving a small pep talk, I was in. I was officially on the ballot. People could put their X beside my name. Democracy in Action!

I am not the first performance artist to enter politics. There is a strong legacy of Canadian artists both intervening in political life in order to reflect its absurdity and genuinely engaging and making change. These of course are not mutually exclusive. Vancouver conceptual artist Vincent Trasov ran for Mayor of Vancouver in 1974 as Mr. Peanut. He received 2,685 votes. Not bad, really, for a man literally dressed up in a large peanut suit complete with top hat and cane. At all candidates meetings he was enormous, not only in size but in meaning. Mr. Peanut got his message across (*"elect a nut for mayor"*). Mr. Peanut realized that there was an art to politics, but politics doesn't pay a lot of attention to the arts — all the more reason to inject art into politics. For his efforts, he received coverage in magazines ranging from *Esquire* to *Interview*. He was also the cover boy for General Idea's *FILE* Magazine. If that wasn't enough endorsement, William Burroughs publically declared, "…it is now time for illusion to take over. And there can only be one logical candidate: Mr. Peanut".

Performance art trio The Hummer Sisters (Deanne Taylor, Janet Burke and Jenny Dean) tossed their name into Toronto's political ring in 1982 with a well-documented and well-executed campaign called "ART versus Art," and to everyone's surprise they came in second place in the 1982 municipal election with 12,000 votes. Their major competition was Art Eggleton who did become the Mayor of Toronto that year. The Hummer Sisters focused all of their attention on art, rallied and mobilized the artistic troops using a newly popular art form called "video art." Slowly becoming more accessible to the general public, video cameras and commercial grade technology were the media of choice for The Hummer Sisters, and they used them wisely and well. Political platform issues included live/work-zoned spaces for artists, political accountability to all citizens and a freeze on building development on Queen Street West. The Hummer Sisters made history with their ingenious campaign, which stirred the local zeitgeist with political cabarets that involved hundreds of actors, designers, musicians, artists and art lovers and supporters throughout Toronto. With their 2nd place, runner-up status, The Hummer Sisters paved the way for many artists and arts organizations to finally believe that they could actually be real players in the often unreal world of politics. Their slogan "ART versus Art: This is no Job for Politicians" became an instant hit with the growing population of artists living on Toronto's now infamous Queen Street West strip — an arts community that The Hummer Sisters put on the cultural map.

Many artists have indeed made a play for political office: Canadians Wendy Lill (playwright), Lenore Zann (actress) and Andrew Cash (musician) come to mind instantly — all three have had/are having various levels of success in federal and provincial politics and have championed issues that go far beyond the arts. In the United States, punk band The Dead Kennedys front man Jello Biafra ran for Mayor of San Francisco in 1979 and came in third place.

Flash forward to 2010. This mayoralty race contained a lot of talk about Toronto being in a slump but really we'd been making a lot of progress. Art was under attack, as were cyclists, communities and public health. These four major elements of my platform were both extremely personal and a politics by which I have chosen to live my life and engage with the broader community.

My initial goal was to enter the political process with performance and collaboration. I was lucky because in the early stages of the political race I had a monthly cabaret show at Buddies In Bad Times Theatre called "The Keith Cole Experience," and this became my soapbox for getting the word out to the voters. I was successful.

Vincent Trasov, *Mr. Peanut at Vancouver City Hall*, 1974. Photo by: Taki Bluesinger. Courtesy: Vincent Trasov.

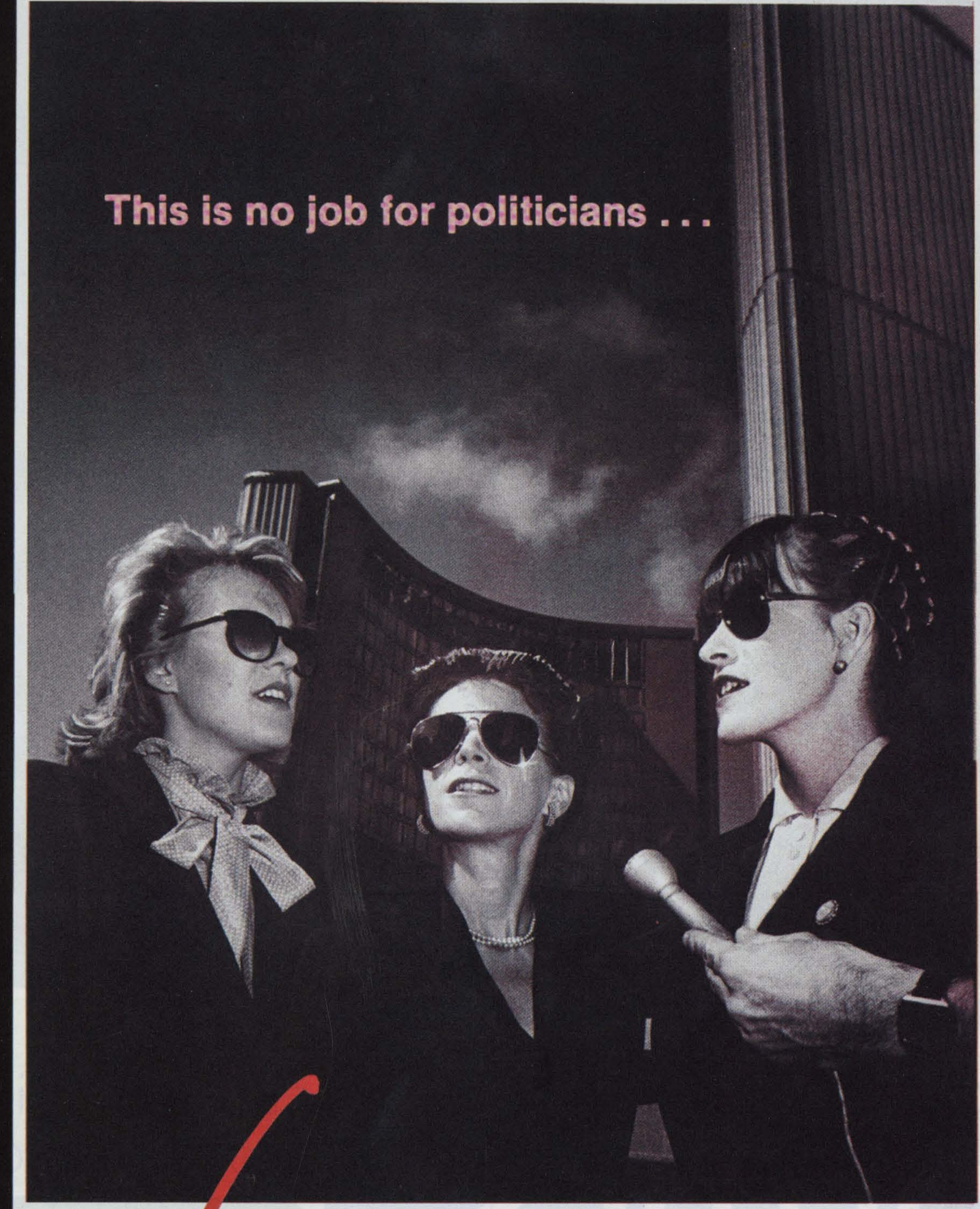
Using performance, irony, humour, drag, satire and YouTube, my message of art, bicycles, civic engagement within one's community and public health made it out to people and the media. The strength of the campaign (and listen closely here, future artist/politico types) was that I kept to the four priorities that were near and dear to me — issues that I could speak about with great passion and authority.

This performance art campaign was serious. My slogan was "Get Over It" and I used the idea/action of "tossing" as a way to encourage people to throw themselves into politics and get over whatever barrier was holding them or the city back from progressive social change. I held diaper tosses, meat tosses, salad tosses, shoe tosses and vote tosses to get my word out to the public. I engaged the public through activities that were fun and allowed people to be more open about asking me questions about my platform and political views.

I want to live in a compassionate city where there is room for everyone. Toronto has an incredibly vibrant artistic community that goes well beyond The National Ballet of Canada, the Toronto International Film Festival, Luminato and Soulpepper Theatre Company. Someone needs to speak for the 21-year-old modern dancer, the encaustic painter, the mid-career novelist, the Images, ReelAsian and Inside Out festivals. Toronto has more than enough room for cars, trucks, pedestrians and bikes — we can share the roads and sidewalks. We need to get involved in our own communities and neighbourhoods, taking care of each other around issues of safety, health, food and housing. Public Health is not a moral issue but a citywide social issue, and our municipal government must support people-centred social planning. The health of citizens is something we all need to take responsibility for and engage ourselves in. The NIMBY attitude has no place in a modern, growing city like Toronto that should be looking ahead and becoming an ideal for what a city of the future can be.

We need fewer politicians in politics. I am not a politician.
I am an artist.

Keith Cole is a graduate of York University's BFA program and he has been an active performer for over 20 years. He entered politics with no experience, money or political connections - he survived and enjoyed himself immensely. Currently, he is a MFA student at OCADU in Toronto.



The Hummer Sisters (left to right): Jenny Dean, Deanne Taylor, Janet Burke, *Hummer for Mayor: Art vs. Art*, 1982. Poster design: Rick Simon. Courtesy: Jim Lefrancois.

At the Conflict Kitchen. Courtesy: Jon Rubin.

TALKING POLITICS with Strangers:

Amber Landgraff in conversation with Pittsburgh Pennsylvania's Conflict Kitchen

Pittsburgh Pennsylvania is currently host to two restaurants that offer customers more than a simple meal. Part small business, part art project, these restaurants attempt to engage with the local Pittsburgh community using food as a hook to get people in the door. The Waffle Shop produces and broadcasts a live-streaming talk show with its customers and operates as an eatery, a classroom for students from Carnegie Mellon University, and a TV production studio. Customers are invited to come in, order waffles, watch the filming of the talk show, and, if they are interested, take part. The content of the show is determined by the customers and covers a variety of topics as they interview each other about their unique opinions and perspectives. Watching the highlight reel on the Waffle Shop website (www.waffleshop.org), I saw everything from a conversation about the ethnic diversity of Pittsburgh to an interview with a 13-year-old author, a poetry reading, and a conversation about monopoly etiquette.

Following the success of The Waffle Shop, its creators, Jon Rubin and Dawn Weleski, were interested in coming up with other ways to engage with the community that uses it. What they came up with was Conflict Kitchen, a take-out restaurant that serves food from places that the United States is currently engaged in conflict with. The Conflict Kitchen uses food as a way of starting a dialogue that goes beyond what people commonly see about countries in conflict with the US in the mainstream media. It functions as a take-out window, a research lab, a site for political dialogue, and a performance space. Still in its first iteration, Conflict Kitchen took on the conflict between the US and Iran, interviewing Iranian-Americans and Iranians living in Iran about everything from their daily lives to what the conflict looks like inside the country. I spoke with Dawn Weleski and Jon Rubin about their motivation for starting the take-out restaurant, the local community's response, their surprise over the sustainability of the project as an actual restaurant, and where they see the project growing from here.

Amber Landgraff: What was your motivation behind starting Conflict Kitchen? How did the two of you come together to work on the project?

Jon: Dawn and I run a space called The Waffle Shop that was actually created out of a class that I teach called the Storefront Project, which uses vacant spaces throughout the city as project sites for developing experimental public projects in the city. The Waffle Shop space is book ended by two different music venues and bars and initially we functioned by coaxing those patrons into becoming our very late night audience and participants. The shop itself is a working waffle restaurant that also produces a live streaming talk show with its customers. The food essentially functions as way of luring people in and keeping them there as we create our productions collaboratively with our audience. We stream it all live online and archive some of the best stuff on our website. The talk show functions as a platform for people of all walks of life to come together and engage in public conversation about pretty much anything. We often provide a host, who anyone can come up and talk to, but at this point we have people from throughout the city working with us to produce their own spin-off talk shows. It's like amateur dinner theatre meets amateur TV. We're always trying to look for new ways to engage the people who are coming to the shop or the surrounding businesses. The Waffle Shop's kitchen has a side door that faces a busy street and we often thought about how we might start another business out of this kitchen door, activating this available space.

Amber: How did that question lead to the creation of a take-out restaurant?

Dawn: Actually there was a guy that started selling hot dogs next to our kitchen door. It was good competitive stimulus for us to think about how we could use the kitchen door as a second business and a new form of social engagement. Being that the door was to our kitchen, we immediately thought of creating a to-go window. We didn't want to sell waffles because that would defeat the purpose of getting people to walk into The Waffle Shop, so we started naming the kinds of cuisine we would like to see in this city that don't currently exist. There are no restaurants that serve Afghan cuisine in Pittsburgh, no Persian restaurants, or Cuban cuisine. After we started naming some of these places, we realized that they happened to be countries that the US government is maintaining some sort of conflict with. And, since we wanted to try to create some sort of culinary diversity within Pittsburgh, we asked ourselves, what if our restaurant always went out of business so we could highlight and engage with a lot of different countries and cuisines?

Jon: It may not be a very smart business strategy, but we felt it was actually an important strategy to change the restaurant in order to hold lots of different conversations based on what people in Pittsburgh might not know, not only culinarily, but culturally and politically. We felt, much like in The Waffle Shop, the food could be an entry point into a conversation that people might not normally be comfortable having in public, this time though, it would be focused on the life, culture, and politics within each country we focused on for the take-out window.

Amber: How do you find the restaurant is functioning in terms of sharing food as a way of developing relationships, or acting as a source of information about different conflicts?

Dawn: We are most interested in using the restaurant to start a dialogue. Our initial interest was in a) how we can get beyond what the mainstream media is misfeeding us and feeding the rest of the world about these conflicts and about these cultures, and b) how we can get past the conflict that is actually going on between governments and introduce people to the everyday life and culture of these countries. There are several ways in which this conversation and engagement occurs. Take our Iranian version, Kubideh Kitchen, as an example. First, the food itself initiates a conversation between our customers and our take-out window employees about the daily life, geography and food of Iran. Second, our food is packaged in a custom-designed wrapper that includes interviews with Iranians, both in Pittsburgh and Iran, on subjects ranging from Iranian food and poetry to the current political turmoil. Third, each iteration is augmented by events, performances, and discussion about the culture, politics, and issues at stake with each country we focus on. Our first public event for Kubideh Kitchen was a meal held simultaneously in Pittsburgh and Tehran, where diners in both cities sat around long tables that were joined via live webcam: an international dinner party. Each city prepared the same exact recipes and shared food and conversation. Another event was coordinated with an artist-run space in Tehran called Sazmanab Project, and presented a live screening of videos curated directly from YouTube posts shot both in Tehran and Pittsburgh. This back and forth format utilized the vast and idiosyncratic resources of YouTube to present first-person video accounts that reflect on the daily life of each city. The 40-minute screening was followed by a live Skype conversation between attendees in Pittsburgh and Tehran.

Jon: Most recently, we worked with several local Iranian organizations to hold Pittsburgh's first-ever Persian cultural festival. It was amazing, we had over 200 people there and I'd say that at least 30% were non-Iranian. The other thing is that in some ways each version of the project is an opportunity to engage in a collaborative form of research. We see the project as a real-time research centre in which we're presenting what we discover in our conversations with Iranians, or Afghans, or Venezuelans, depending on the country we are presenting, and people are coming to us at the take-out window each day presenting what they know and we're sharing that too. The take-out window often becomes an impromptu platform for discussions on culture and politics. We like to feel that the project creates a space for people to ask questions that they might feel uncomfortable or afraid of asking. We wanted to create a much more nuanced, less polarized discussion about politics, culture and daily life, and humanize the people who live in these countries. Our employees who work the window play a vital role in stimulating and responding to dialogue.

Preparing a Kubideh Sandwich. Courtesy: Jon Rubin.

What we had learned from The Waffle Shop is that we could coax people in with food — people who ordinarily wouldn't participate in the arts, who wouldn't be performers or go into an art venue — and then they would actually do something slightly unusual and get on stage and be part of a talk show. One of the things about American culture is that people talk sports publicly with strangers but they don't talk politics. So we thought about how we could create a natural environment where people would get into a political discussion in a public space with people that they might not know and share their own viewpoints and cultural background. We've discovered that this project has started to do that, at the window itself and with the programming that we do.

Dawn: Right now we are interviewing a lot of Afghans through contacts we made locally, online, and through some of the Iranians we have been working with, about their daily life, about what it's like for American soldiers to be there, and about what they think about the conflict that's going on within their country. We're asking them the questions that a typical American might be afraid or embarrassed to ask because they worry they might not have the knowledge about the conflict that most people expect them to have. What we are trying to do is create a safe, engaging and comfortable space for a conversation to happen around these topics, and certainly through food we are able to do that.

Amber: The wrappers you use for the food include stories and information about the source country (in this case Iran) that answer some of these questions. Can you talk a bit about how the wrapper was designed? What is the content of the wrapper?

Dawn: For the different iterations of the restaurant we interview people that are from the focus country and culture, people currently living in that country, and those who have immigrated to America. The idea is that the entry point for the discussion about this culture doesn't come from second-hand research, it comes from first-person conversation. I can read the New York Times every day and understand one perspective of what is happening in Afghanistan, I can read a book about the history of Afghanistan, or I could ask a person in Afghanistan what's going on there.

Jon: What's important to us about speaking directly to Afghans is you get a real mix of thoughts and opinions, sometimes contradictory, of what it means to be Afghan and what daily life in Afghanistan is like. Obviously there is no single story or identity being presented, but as it comes directly through lived experience, and all lives are different, this is to be expected. For our Iranian wrapper there are comments about tea, women's rights, Israel, perceptions of the US, and more. The section on Israel includes several quotes from Iranians who are critical of the state of Israel but not of the Jewish people. The section on women's rights presents one Iranian speaking of how women are leaders in government and industry, and another pointing out that they are still considered second-class citizens subject to unfair restrictions, and another

BREAD
Many Iranians like to eat bread hot. Seeing long lines of people in front of bakeries at 7 in the morning before work or around 6–7 in the afternoon just before dinner is not uncommon. • We have a saying in Farsi, "Nuun Juun-eh" which means bread is life, or bread is soul. Most Persians are really averse to ever wasting or throwing away bread—if all else fails, the parents ask the children to take the stale bread outside and break it into little bits and sprinkle it for the birds. Even at the civic level bread is heavily subsidized by the government. Not having enough bread is considered a horrible way to live and so the whole country makes sure everyone has enough bread for every meal.

FASHION
The whole appearance of young urban Tehranis is just like a big mockery of the regime's dress code. The government can't stop this age group from dressing in the way it likes. And to be fair, I have to admit that at least in Tehran, the government has become much more tolerant towards people's appearances in the last decade. In Tehran's markets these days, even "chador," the regime-preferred dress for women—which is supposed to cover the body and hide its curves—has now found its own sexy design in see-through, tight-at-hips styles.

PERSIANS
Ethnically, Persians are Indo-European, descending from European tribes who trekked from Europe, around the Caspian Sea, and down onto the Iranian plateau, several thousands of years ago. Iranians pride themselves on their nation's historical achievements, having been a highly developed civilization even before the Greeks came onto the world stage. • Persian is now synonymous with Iranian, even though there are other ethnicities in Iran besides Persian.

TEA
Iran is an Islamic country so Iranians are not allowed to consume alcohol. Therefore, tea has a social role similar to that of alcoholic beverages in the U.S. • An interesting expression when someone tries to befriend you prematurely is "chayi nakhorde mikhad ba ma nushabe bokhore" meaning "we haven't even had tea together yet, and he wants us to drink a Coke?!" • When guests visit your home, you immediately offer them tea. It is part of the ritual of welcoming a visitor. In fact, tea is always ready to serve—piping hot in a samovar—all day long. The boiling water adds humidity to the air and the smell of the tea permanently resides in the home. Maybe if Iran had a climate to grow coffee, we would be a coffee culture. It's a tea climate. The best Persian tea is a good black darjeeling which is brewed for about 45 minutes, and served with a spoon of honey.

NOWRUZ (NEW YEAR)
We always receive new shoes on Nowruz, and we also put them on immediately and run to the bathroom with the new shoes on. The tradition goes that if you wear your new shoes in the house, to the bathroom, then you will get even more new shoes soon. We don't ever wear shoes in a house ordinarily, as in a Japanese household, so wearing these brand-new shoes and walking on the Persian carpets feels illegal and intoxicating in a fun way. • Every family grows greens in advance of the new year in preparation. During the last days of the new year, you make a wish and tie greens together, and there is a song that comes with it that I can't remember. Green is symbol of life out of earth. During the new year, you say, "My greenness (spring) to you, my yellowness (fall) to me," which means "I wish the best for you."

POETRY
My personal favorite line is perhaps from Iranian poet Molana ("Rumi" in West): "Blessed is the gambler who has lost everything/except the desire to gamble once more." The rhythm and alliteration are a marvel in Persian. This is used to describe a person who gives whatever they have to reach their goals despite all the hardships and failures. • All Persians are poets. They memorize poetry and quote it often. They consult Hafez every day to see what their fortune is. Poetic fragments are so highly valued that they are often written in exchange for money. • Many poems have turned into idioms, so every day an Iranian uses a number of them even if they are not aware.

U.S. PERCEPTIONS
Unfortunately, since a big part of the Americans are ignorant in global political matters and since they get most of their news from the mainstream media, their opinions about Iran and Iranians are distorted by the media. Most Americans who I have encountered think that Iranians are ugly, aggressive, violent, terrorists, Islamists, and uncivilized. • Iranians like Americans but they hate American government. So far, what I have experienced suggests that Americans like Iranians too, but they dislike the Islamic republic establishment.

GOVERNMENT
There is a Supreme Leader who heads the government and is selected by a guardian consul, a group of religious elite. A president is voted to the office every four years and can serve up to two terms. President's decisions must be approved by the Supreme Leader. Generally speaking, theocracy has the most important role in Iranian government. Iranians, in general, and young and educated people, in particular, are highly skeptical of their government. • In reality, it is a dictatorship with a minimal room for some democracy (i.e. elections, local councils, etc.). I think most people don't like the way the government works, however, I can imagine that there is a significant part of the population that benefits from the current system and doesn't like it to be changed.

THE GREEN MOVEMENT
I think the current Green Movement actually started not last year but at least 15 years ago, which is now in its final stages. It is a movement consisting of workers, women, students, and middle class fractions that intend to bring change in Iran. Of course, everybody's idea of and some may want to change the whole Islamic system. I don't know who the leaders and some may want to change the whole Islamic system. I don't know who the leaders are. I don't think Moussavi or Karroubi are considered true leaders who would organize the movement's actions. • I appreciate Mr. Mousavi's efforts to democratize Iran and reform within the frameworks of Islamic Republic government. Western governments who frequently proved their hostility towards the Iranian people had better not invest in people like Mr. Mousavi who, I'm sure, would retreat from all of their claims and pledges if elected. • Average people who are fed up with theocracy and oppressions of the past 31 years of Islamic regime are fighting alongside the green movement, but their goal is for democracy. Under a climate of conflict, people came out to show their anger and discontent about the regime and all theocratic followers, including the green movement leaders. People chanted their own slogans and shook the pillars of the Islamic regime.

ISRAEL
Generally speaking, Iranian people have no issues with the Jewish people. Jews have been living in Iran for thousands of years. They enjoy the same rights as other citizens and have been free to practice their religion publicly. There are even religious schools funded by the government and public money. The issue that Iranians take to heart and resent the most is the creation of the state of Israel which they think was a stab to the heart of history because of the disaster that it created for millions of Palestinians who were forced to leave the land where they lived for thousands of years. To this day, Israel refuses to recognize the United Nation's resolutions for Israel to leave the occupied lands. The dismal conditions created by Israel have profoundly affected Palestinian societies for many generations. They don't see any hope for their future and that's one reason why so many young children can be easily persuaded to take radical actions, while people in Israel enjoy all the amenities and freedom that people in the west enjoy. • In my experience, Iranians are fairly hostile towards Israel. It has a lot to do with the recent political past than with religion. • I have found little hostility towards Jews. Religions of all sorts tend to be thoroughly respected by Iranians. Israel and the U.S. have been a hinderance to the region's aspirations to rule themselves and their oil. However, the same hostility that Iranians have for Israel does not extend to the U.S. Many envy what Americans have, but not necessarily the American way of life. • Iran still has the largest concentration of Jews outside Israel in the Middle East—a neat fact to point out.

KUBIDEH KITCHEN

is an Iranian take-out restaurant that sells a favorite Persian sandwich incorporating ground beef and fresh herbs on homemade barbari bread. Kubideh Kitchen is the first iteration of Conflict Kitchen, a public art project in the form of a take-out restaurant that only serves cuisine from countries that the United States is in conflict with. The restaurant will rotate identities every four months to highlight another country. The text on this wrapper is culled from interviews with Iranians both in Pittsburgh and Iran. www.kubidehkitchen.com

NUCLEAR POWER
I don't think a nuclear capable Iran is a threat to the U.S. or any country in the world. This is how the events are presented in the mainstream media as a scare tactic to make Americans live in fear and to justify any action against Iran for the American people. I don't know whether Iran is developing nuclear power for weapons or for energy. I am very concerned that the U.S. may go to war with Iran, which would be beneficial for both governments. The U.S. would benefit from the war profit and the Iranian government would benefit by stabilizing its position among its own dissatisfied population. • Along with a number of Western countries whose atomic warheads are independently enough to evaporate the whole population of the world in a single moment, Iran should equally have the right to develop nuclear weapons, as well as nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. Finally, I believe that the U.S. would never bargain its international reputation and popularity by attacking a country which is home to the most ancient civilization of the world.

FILM
Films for Iran have strict rules, which makes them all the more artistic and beautiful. The opposite sex cannot touch each other, violence is not allowed, and you cannot make fun of any religion. My favorite movie is "Time for Drunken Horse." It takes place along the Iran/Iraq border. The terrain is quite mountainous and the weather cold and harsh during the winter. It's beautiful right now in the spring. Two young orphans are goods smugglers. Horses are their only means of transport. To keep the horses working through the rough winter, they feed them alcohol. I think that it talks about what happens when life is hard, when and how you push yourself through, and the consequences of this life.

YOUTH
The younger generations are defying what the government wants them to believe. In fact, they are directly opposing the regime. In their basements they play Persian and Western musics banned in public. They read banned books and pass them on. Defying the regime's propaganda is an honor for Iranian baby-boomers. • 70 percent of Iranians are under 30. Religious leaders encouraged high birth rates after the revolution, in hope of training a loyal group and instilling in them the "values" of the revolution. The government has tried to indoctrinate this new population from a very early age. However, with the advent of technology, the youth of Iran have not accepted the government's ideology and are increasingly opposing it—a trend that I think will continue.

REVOLUTION
The Iranian Revolution was a popular upheaval in response to the growing influence of foreign states on the domestic policies of Iran's former U.S.-backed Shah, increasing poverty, gradual disappearance of religious fundamentals from the society, and social discrimination. After the revolution, the U.S. encouraged the late dictator Saddam Hussein to wage a lethal war against Iran in which at least 350,000 Iranians (including my uncle) lost their lives. • I can definitely say the Iranian Revolution was a reactionary step backward in our history. People went crazy and at the end and put all their trust on a theocratic fascist regime based on guardianship of the Islamic Jurists. • The Iranian revolution was the result of most people's strong disapproval of the then Shah (king) of Iran and his way of leading the country, kowtowing to foreign powers, lavishly spending state money on himself and his family and seemingly forgetting about the "ordinary" Iranian. As a result, a host of different political factions banded together with the objective of ousting the Shah. This demand for change, spearheaded by Ayatollah Khomeini, however ended up bringing something completely different than what most people expected their future government to be.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS
Iranian women have made some progress in the last 30 years. Their number is higher among university students. There are female parliament members and cabinet ministers. There are female CEOs and directors. However, women in large are still considered second-class citizens with no equal rights to men. But there is a big women's movement in Iran that is trying to change the situation and this movement and its members are being harassed by the government all the time. • Women are a critical part of the work force, just as in America. The difference probably is that Iranian women have to do more than American women because they are, to some extent, still expected to cook and clean and manage the home's well being. Hence, they almost always fulfill a double role in Iranian culture. • Many laws and regulations are enforced in the United States, which the legal regime of Iran considers to be illegitimate and unlawful. No single individual except the military can carry personal guns. Also, mothers are not allowed to abort their infant baby, even under the most perilous and crucial situations and even if it becomes evident that the child may be born with disabilities.

Conflict Kitchen is a project by John Peña, Jon Rubin, and Dawn Weleski and is funded by The Sprout Fund and Waffle Shop. Graphic design by Brett Yasko. Architectural design by Pablo Garcia of POiNT. Special thanks to Illah Nourbakhsh and Marti Louw; Conflict Kitchen interns Harrison Apple, Sara Faradji, and Courtney Wittekind; and all of those from the Iranian community who supplied us with their opinions and perceptions.

The Kubideh Sandwich wrapper. Courtesy: Jon Rubin.

pointing out how they have difficult dual roles in society as workers and homekeepers.

Amber: What has the response to the project been like? Do you find that people are asking questions and starting conversations?

Jon: With any kind of enterprise that is not announcing itself as either a political work or an artwork, or anything more than just a restaurant, some people are going to just eat the food. But there is also bit of a bait and switch going on where, much like The Waffle Shop, we are able to capture the attention and participation of a lot of folks who might not normally participate in discussions about foreign culture and politics. Conversations tend to happen very organically once a customer is introduced to the basic premise of the restaurant.

Dawn: And that's probably one of the reasons that the project is as successful as it is, because we provide multiple levels of engagement and the public can choose at which level they would like to engage. Just passing by and seeing the Farsi on the sign (in the Iranian version), that in itself adds a level of diversity to the daily life of the neighborhood. And of course people can choose to eat the food and read the wrapper, talk with our staff or with other customers assembled at the take-out window. Some of the best conversations actually happen between customers without our participation. Many of our customers seek out their own information about daily life and politics in Iran and come back and tell us about it. And then, other customers come to our programming and events, which hopefully allows them a different entry point into life and culture in Iran.

Amber: Can you describe what a typical day at the Conflict Kitchen is like?

Dawn: The window is the performative forum for the project and that's really where everything happens. We partner with the Waffle Shop to recruit students as well as Conflict Kitchen interns who have done a great deal of the research and worked with us throughout the project to actually staff the take-out window. We have a lot of people coming in and out, participating in different ways, doing everything from research, making and serving the food, and facilitating conversation at the take-out window. The interns start each day by setting up, prepping and making the Barbari bread. I usually drop by to give them basil and mint from my garden. Every couple of weeks Illah (our Iranian friend in Pittsburgh) drops off fresh beef and fresh flour. Interns set up the George Foreman Grills — that we were using this very American tool for grilling so pleased Illah. Basically they stand at the window, prepping food, and waiting for people to come. Believe it or not, we are now open for a couple of hours each day of the week and have anywhere from 40-70 people coming per day . We have one staff member cooking and another at the window discussing and facilitating conversation. When customers arrive they tell them about the premise of the restaurant and ask if they are familiar with contemporary Iran. The person at the window has to facilitate the discussion between themselves and the person that has come to get the food but also facilitate discussion between strangers who are waiting outside at the window. And that's a fairly typical day.

Amber: The fact that you have people coming back as regulars is kind of fantastic.

Jon: Yeah, it's great. There are some office workers in the area who come and buy 10 kubideh and take them back to the office. Or there is a church across the street and we'll get people who come every Sunday after the service.

Dawn: It's also funny to see Pittsburghers being very proud to bring their Iranian friends with them to the window. One of the most interesting things for me is when people are openly identifying themselves by their heritage or ethnicity or the country that they were born in, which is something that you don't find people doing every day. And I'm not just talking about people saying that they're Iranian, but people saying that they are Indian or Greek, or talking about how their food is similar or different from what we are serving.

Amber: You are also organizing events to go along with the day-to-day running of the kitchen. You organized a Skype dinner between Pittsburgh and Tehran with a shared menu served in both places. Can you tell us a bit about how that was organized, what the turnout was like, and what kind of conversation was provoked?

Dawn: It actually was an idea that one of our interns had. We were talking about how we could share an actual meal live with someone in Tehran, instead of just having a removed discussion with an Iranian through the wrapper on the kubideh. It sort of became this transcontinental dinner party. What was really interesting was when, towards the end of the event, the young people started talking in both places — 70% of the Iranian population is under 30, and we had quite a young crowd in Pittsburgh — commiserating about their experiences of finishing university, not being able to find a job in the field that they had studied, dating, rock concerts. I think at that moment we knew we wanted to find a way for that sort of immediate conversation to happen at the takeout window as well. So we've also been speaking with a hotel owner in Kabul about setting up a live feed so that anyone who was at the hotel would be able to speak to someone at the Conflict Kitchen window, to have that immediate connection.

Amber: There has been a lot of positive response to the Conflict Kitchen. Where do you see the project going in the future? Do you think that this is a model that could be put into place in other locations and with other conflicts?

Jon: We've received a lot of interest, from a family doing their own version of the project at home, where each week they cook a meal from a different country that the United States is in conflict with and they do research on it, to individuals who want to create projects of a similar nature, to people we are actively seeking collaboration with. There are lots of possibilities.

Amber: Would you consider "franchising" the kitchen and bringing it to other cities?

Jon: We just had a conversation with some folks in San Francisco about doing some sort of iteration of the project there. But San Francisco is a very different city, they do have Persian restaurants, they do have Afghan restaurants. One of the things we were thinking about was the possibility of maybe doing something mobile, whether its like a meals on wheels or a food truck model, and that it would focus on international border conflicts, like Pakistan and India, or northern and southern Sudan and present how food, culture and politics collide, mix and separate in these regions. Obviously there are a whole series of rifts that are developed through geographical border conflicts. One of the other things that we are interested in is developing a business model so that someone could take this over and run it as their own business. It would be an interesting next step. It's intriguing for us to imagine something that starts as public art and becomes an ongoing business.

Amber Landgraff is a writer and curator based in Toronto. She completed her MFA in Criticism and Curatorial Practices at OCAD University, and is currently thinking a lot about on-the-ground possibilities for change.

Interpreting Water

by Jeanne Randolph

Richard Purdy, *Unrestored*, 2010. Courtesy: Richard Purdy.

Riding for thousands of miles as a passenger in a car is analogous to the phenomenon that Freud termed "free association"; the landscapes and townscapes stream through consciousness only to be interpreted much later. I had waited for months before leaving on my July road trip from Winnipeg, Manitoba to Shawinigan, Québec to visit Richard Purdy's exhibition at L'espace Shawinigan. But as soon as I had decided to make the trip, I began anticipating how days and days of a traveller's version of free association would set me up for the same effect from this ambitious installation.

The vulnerability of water, which is to say our own vulnerability, has become more and more alarming on a global scale, but *EcH2O/l'echo-l'eau* also had a specific context. So I expended many hours alternately inflaming then dousing my anxiety regarding toxic effluvia in the Shawinigan region.

L'espace Shawinigan is the site of the old Northern Aluminum Company, the first aluminum smelter in the history of the world (21 October, 1901). Aluminum production requires a great deal of hydroelectric power, which had been available since 1898, when the Shawinigan Water and Power Company was established (and where the largest electric motor in the world at the time was built in 1904). Until then, Shawinigan had primarily been the site of a water slide built so that log booms could be sent downstream to Trois-Rivières.

In 2003 L'espace Shawinigan was established as a national historical site and an art exhibition venue. Twenty-five thousand square feet of one of the original Northern Aluminium Company (which became Alcan, now Rio Tinto) buildings remain and have been restored. As one might expect of a factory built late in the Industrial Revolution L'espace Shawinigan was constructed primarily of wood, cement, glass and brick, with riveted steel truss work.

Belgo Division Shawinigan (est. 1900), Canadian Division Shawinigan Alcan Smelters and Chemicals Ltd. (est. 1901 as Northern Aluminum), and Norton Advanced Ceramics (est. 1852) were all founded along the banks of Rivière St. Maurice even before Shawinigan became a city there. Anyone would be uneasy reading the list of water-seeking toxins that are emitted by the factories in the region:

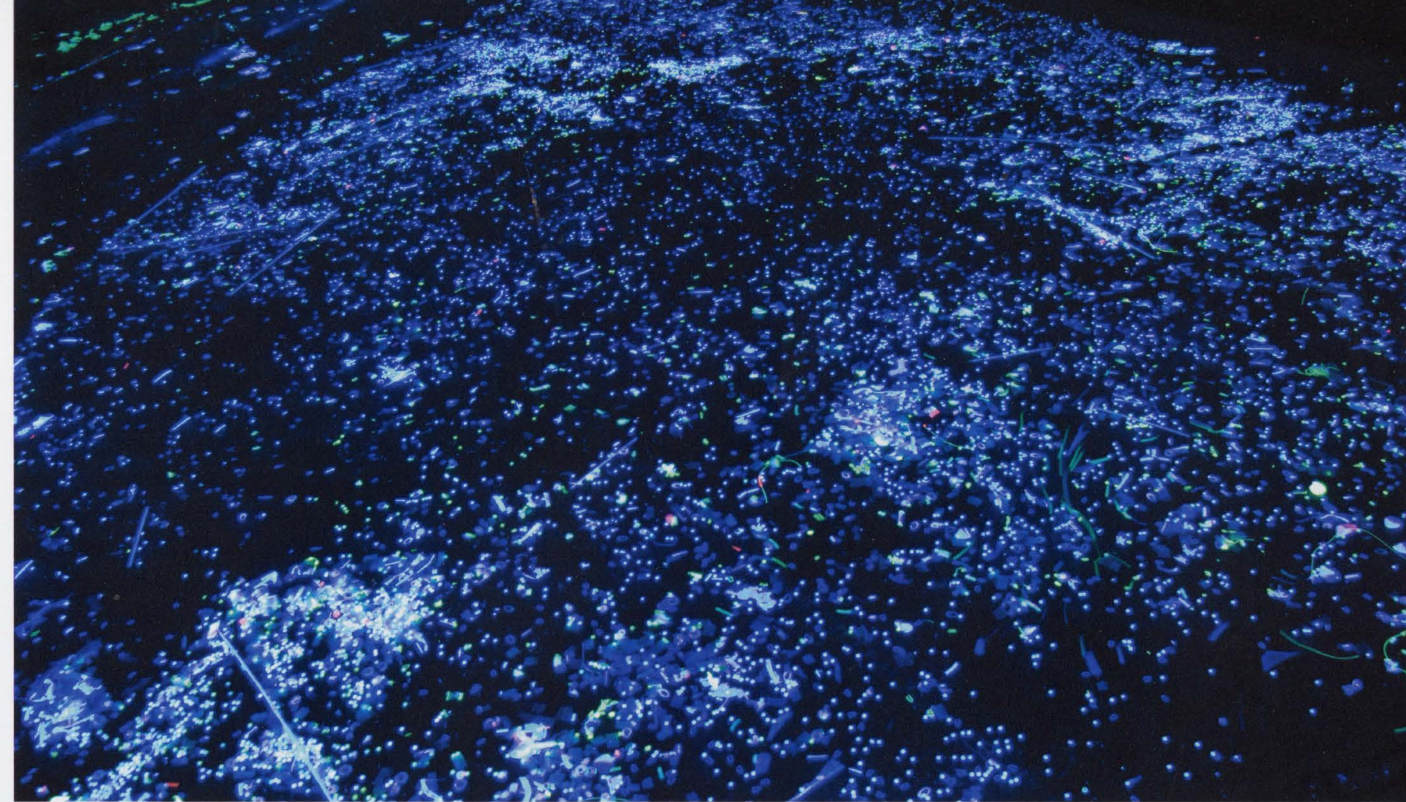
aluminum
oil and grease
Benzo(b+k)fluoranthene
Dibenzo(a,h)anthracene
Benzo(a)pyrene
1, 2, 3-Benzo(a)anthracene
indeno(cd)pyrene and
anthracene, also known as
"green oil."

All of which are designated "probable human carcinogens."

And I was overcome when I saw the lists of lab-dwelling creatures who were compelled to ingest, inhale or get bald patches painted with the aforesaid toxins:

Mice
Hamsters
Chickens
Fruit flies and
e. Coli.

In 2000, The Ministère de l'Environnement du Québec and Environnement Canada had awarded certificates to Belgo, Alcan ("Rio Tinto Alcan" since 2007) and Norton for achieving an overall reduction of 96% in their release of such toxic effluents to the St. Lawrence River.



Richard Purdy, *Bindu: Big Bang*, 2010. Courtesy: Richard Purdy.

There's a lot of water between Winnipeg and Shawinigan. To me the deep conifer-lined lakes and blue-black pools of the boreal shield in Ontario are pretty well sacred. Of course Lake Superior is an astonishing vista no matter how many times beheld. But antecedent, way west of these beauties, are the waters of home: Winnipeg itself is huddled in the basin of a former Pleistocene glacial lake. The Red River and the Assiniboine River converge downtown. Along the eastern perimeter of the city there's also "Duff's Ditch," the Red River Floodway. That first July morning I crossed over the ditch it was dry; 60,000 cubic feet of water per second gushing through it was a calculation not an occurrence that I witnessed. After that, I was ready to engage the many forms of H2O. And my camera was set to portray puddles, ponds and lakes previously passed without scrutiny year after year.

After nine days of driving across the country I checked into *Hotel Le Gouverneur* on the banks of the St. Maurice. It was a sunny day. The sparkling river hosted a motor boat or two and I thanked Richard Purdy for arranging a room with a charming view of the riverside park. He responded graciously and then joked, "Don't go jumping into the river." Did this mean that the 4% effluvia that continues leaking into the St. Maurice will still kill flies?

The next afternoon I stood at the entrance to L'espace exhibition galleries looking into a large room set up for historical displays, receptions and lectures. In the back of this reception room is the first of the four displays: *The Inversion of the World* is presented on a large table.

The presentation is a seemingly professional mapping display in traditional map colours. The colours correspond to elevations from dark brown lowland to cloud-coloured mountain ranges. But this map's cartography is based on a vision of the Earth's continents and oceans as if all the water was land and all the land was water. On this map, what appears as continents or even islands is based on the geography of the actual ocean floor. The mountains and valleys depicted are actually the unseen terrain beneath present-day oceans. Midwest plains may look as flat as our prairies, but there would be fish where eagles should be. Forest green beneath a sea does not connote trees. Equally unsettling, the shape of continents, Australia or South America for instance, is recognizable, but designated by flat blue. The grandest ocean is the Asiatic and the most imposing continent is Pacifica. A born worrier, my first question was "could humans possibly adapt to such a reversal? And if we tried, how fast?" Or, over the millennia, have we already adapted to a planet that was topsy-turvy in another era?

No one just walks straight into the next exhibition, *Unrestored*. Not unless you want to get your shoes and socks wet. The vast room of *Unrestored* has been flooded. To view this section of you had best remove your footwear and enjoy moving barefoot in about an inch of water. If anyone felt squeamish about sharing the shallows with everybody else's feet they were given the choice of pink, green or white crocs to borrow, or rubber boots if necessary. Germs as well as toxins will be invisible of course, regardless of how limpid the water appears, and the transparency of the water was indeed magical. This crystalline effect was heightened by the material in which the floors of all three installation rooms had been lined, smooth black EPDM rubber. I wondered whether anyone preferred boots because they were uneasy about toxins leeching from the rubber. In an obscure spot, however, I spied the phrase "FISH SAFE" stamped on the rubber. If it won't make fish sick, then of course humans would be safe too, wouldn't they?

Seven hundred and nine oil paintings were hung salon-style on long, slightly converging bright scarlet walls. Displayed in elegantly antique frames, the paintings were all hung upside down. Moments after I recovered from the stunning effect of the blood-red walls, the multiplicity of colours, sizes and texture of the paintings and the voluminous

interior itself, I was curious to see what the paintings revealed. There are two ways to accomplish this. One way is to stand still so the water stops moving and you can see the walls' reflection in it. Reflected, the paintings are turned right-side-up. If, however, you don't concentrate on what is in a particular painting, you will experience yourself suspended midway between ultra-high ceiling and reflection of ultra-high ceiling, which creates the illusion of a deep bottomless nowhere. This dizzying weightlessness is as hypnotic as looking up at the Milky Way. To interrupt this inversion, the other way to comprehend the paintings is to go up close to them and turn them right side up by force of mind.

> If you don't concentrate on what is in a particular painting, you will experience yourself suspended midway between ultra-high ceiling and reflection of ultra-high ceiling, which creates the illusion of a deep bottomless nowhere.

At first, 709 paintings seems like a huge number. Yet the imagery of the paintings amasses in the mind as if the installation were a monumental tome depicting everything that the idea of water could possibly evoke. This, when actually standing in water, leads to a visceral apprehension as well. The effect was a moment's recognition that only an infinity of images could ever catalogue the influence of water on this planet. Seven hundred and nine becomes a palpable symbol for "infinity." Contemplating this I succumbed to that state of consciousness Freud called "an oceanic feeling," so I blinked a few times and resumed closer focus on individual paintings.

Every painting invokes how, so to speak, we live in water and water lives in us. Painted in pre-modern, academic style, these paintings considered all together are a visual essay on their overt subject (literally or connotatively water) but also on the differing value of historical versus contemporary and fake versus authentic. The paintings and the frames looked like they had been lying around neglected and deteriorating for at least 100 years, but that would be impossible. Richard Purdy painted every last one of them only a year ago at the most. And already, the previous day, I had visited the local flea market where plain and fancy frames could be bought by the dozens. It was a pleasing contradiction to perceive all these frames and paintings as venerable, yet to know their age had been faked. The pretence of antiquity would become obvious soon enough anyway, upon discovering faded, puckered portraits of Popeye and Olive Oyl. My imagination had been permanently skewed by the toxicity research, so the possibility emerged that maybe airborne chemicals had rumpled the painted surfaces and soon might affect my face in the same way. Richard countered this with the information that to produce this effect the surfaces of the paintings had been slathered with a thin film of now-curdling yoghurt.

The sumptuous Venetian-Palace aura of *Unrestored*, like so many aspects of the entire exhibition, is anachronistic: the paintings depict scenes and characters that have been revealed to ordinary North Americans not in the 18th century but now — in books (art history books included), in newspapers and magazines, in movies, on TV, the internet, billboards, and on clothing, sofa cushions, rugs and coffee mugs — everywhere, including in dreams. There are paintings of seascapes and ships, and paintings of aquatic beasts and bathing beauties. There are paintings of ruins in the rain and sailor tattoos. There are paintings of sea captains and seacows, Madonnas and fishes. There are paintings of flowers, vegetables and trees, so dependent on water. Everything is dependent on water. This we know already. The exhibition doesn't lead to facts. The effect of the innumerable conjunctions is neither surrealistic nor chaotic either. The myriad of portrayals and symbols juxtaposed, surprisingly leads to free association.

To say that the plenitude of imagery leads to free association is a way of alluding to the audience as contributor, not consumer. This entire exhibition does not illustrate a formula or political position; its effects are founded on visual and tactile abundance. The abundance counters intellectual reductivism. But free association is only possible when there is unselfconscious latitude and time, rather than pressure, to come to an understanding. For that matter free association is possible if an unambiguous message is not staring you in the face. *Unrestored* is so profuse and visually complex that there is no readily available conclusion as to what it all means, yet visual pleasure completely protects a viewer from feeling bewildered or overwhelmed.

Here the topic of water is obvious, but the interpretation of water's relevance or significance depends (as it always does) on audience participation imaginatively for certain, intellectually if it so pleases them. The simple and direct contact with water adds another, completely unexpected, sensory participation.

An emphasis on the fragility of water (the fragility of life on Earth because of dependence on water) could potentially kindle fear. Ever since Rachel Carson's Silent Spring was published in 1962, fear has been used to motivate ecological activism. It isn't that we are not justified in having fear for our future. But visual art needn't rely on fear — or guilt or anger for that matter — to stir audiences from complacency. When free association is not inhibited, each member of the audience unselfconsciously attaches knowledge, memories and values, and makes their own commitment ("shallow or deep") to creating a link between life and water. *Unrestored* demonstrates how this could be so: the relationship *Unrestored* establishes between the audience and water is one of awe perhaps, but more significantly the relationship is one of affection. This is a fascinating, and hardly unnatural premise, upon which to base concern and activism.

The floor of the cavernous room entered from a small rectangular opening in the back wall of the *Unrestored* room is also covered in shallow water — and by far most of the floor is also covered in logs. The installation in this 4,555-square-foot room is titled *Aquidia: La Drave/Aquidia*: The Log Run. The vista is dramatic; this glorious hall is suffused with sunlight. The water's reflection off tall window glass accentuates the rough magnificence of the logs. These logs appear to be floating, but again, illusions of many sorts are a constant prospect with *EcH20/l'echo-l'eau*.

Having been informed ahead of time that an astonishing number of logs had been acquired for *EcH20/l'echo-'leau*, I had veered off course on my drive to Québec from the Trans-Canada Highway northward at North Bay into Marten River Provincial Park. The forests there were rich in virgin red and white pine, ripe for logging since 1914/1915. A replica of a typical camp has been built in the Park.

What I had wanted to understand, too poetically perhaps, was the connection between men, logs and water, but the context of Marten River comprises cabins, cooks, homemade packsacks (called "turkeys"), horses, the "crazy wheel," tobacco (more valuable than cash), ice and many more fascinating features. The implications of water saturated every detail.

To be useful, the very best of pine trees would be felled and then squared with a broadaxe. The squared-off log, the "sawlog," was the prized commodity. The 1800s had been the apogee of logging, decades before the St. Marten camps. In the 1800s, in four months, a busy camp could cut down enough trees to produce 50,000 to 60,000 of these sawlogs. When winter came, huge Belgians and Percherons would haul sleighs full of sawlogs until all 50,000 logs were pulled to and piled up at the water's edge. There they waited by a frozen lake until the spring melt. Once, enough of these sawlogs floated down to Quebec City to load 50 ships at a time.

Richard Purdy, *Bindu: Big Bang*, 2010. Courtesy: Richard Purdy.

This was when the British needed masts for the warships that vanquished Napoleon.

The Park brochure stated that:

> **Many men liked this rugged, healthy life with its straightforward values. What mattered most was what you could do. Skill and strength were the mark of a man, not social standing.**

Humans get their pride where they can find it, but for working conditions, then as now, there is the matter of what society means by the word "healthy." For instance, saw mill workers in the 1800s soon found out they faced the threat of "wood-trimmers' disease" — way before scientists discovered the fungus that causes it. The word "pentachlorophenol" (PCP) never came up.

At L'espace Shawinigan *Aquidia: La Drave/The Log Run* includes 302 logs. These logs are quite long, still adorned with bits of bark, knotholes and scars. They have been carbon-dated back to the year 1864, which offered plenty of time in which to get weathered, scuffed and manhandled. They appear to me to be the remains after the first (and the final) cut that results in valuable saw logs. The flat underside of these woody giants accounts for their stability, most welcome, since stepping

Richard Purdy, *Aquidia*, 2010. Courtesy: Richard Purdy.

from one log onto the next one is the only way to get from the front end of the room to the back. Maintaining equilibrium on the way to the far end of the room would remind everyone of the old-timey loggers' dangerous dance. The contrast between now and then is inescapable, especially the contrast in danger.

Even if a visitor to *Aquidia* falls, the result is most likely embarrassment, not death by drowning. The movement involved in traversing the installation is metaphorical for the logger's lot in life. There's nothing stopping you from referring to manual workers' circumstances now as well. There's nothing stopping you from referring to the lot of humans on a planet made more precarious by environmental unbalance, though only if you want to think about it that way. There is not a didactic panel anywhere that would force this awareness. Didactic panels would be an impediment to free association, pushing the gallery visitor into the role of visual greenhorn. If a viewer walks in a greenhorn and walks out a greenhorn nobody is going to die. Yet, for the viewer to enjoy even a moment of responsibility for their own values and opinions, the viewer has to have lots of leeway to change their state of consciousness from consumer to producer. This is why the concept of free association is pertinent. Without considerable mental latitude, the imagery, materials and methods of the artwork remain facts, remain just things. When the focus of an exhibition is nonverbal — and is this not the point of creating instead of talking? — the audience has the opportunity, welcome or not, to be left alone, to be abandoned to their own devices. It seems to me a lack of trust or a lack of respect to assume the audience cannot be relied upon to bring something imaginative (or informed) to an exhibition.

At the far end of the *Aquidia* room a discreet apparatus has been rigged to produce a light rainfall. People can stand listening to the raindrops on the umbrellas provided and watch glistening droplets induce tiny concentric ripples along the surface of the floor. Or someone watching from the far entrance can enjoy how movements of these red umbrellas suggest an unpredictable dance.

The last of the exhibition halls is as dark as midnight. The eerie glow of black light illuminates not only strangely bright blue lines along the ceiling but also reveals millions of tiny glimmering shapes floating in the water amid the reflection of these lines. The squiggles are trembling, glowing orange, green, purple, yellow and blue. Some areas of the floor are pooled and confined separately, shining monochrome algae-green or vermillion. Although it is not vital to an interpretation of the bright wiggly smidgens, Richard divulged the source of all those swirling, glistening particles: 40,000 teeny glow-in-the-dark toys from dollar stores. Many of them actually were gummy plastic fish, worms, or looked like anemones and eels. They were sliced to bits and thrown into the waters of this installation, which is titled *Bindu: Big Bang*. The only way to describe this spectacle is by analogy: it is as if you were an atomic particle caught in a Technicolor cloud chamber; it is as if you were viewing Manhattan from 10,000 feet up; it is as if you ingested the finest peyote in the world and the sparkles of heaven itself were revealed; it is, more to the point, as if you happened to witness the birth of the universe when every molecule of the cosmos burst into being or maybe the birth of water itself.

The impression of *Bindu: Big Bang* is psychedelic. Except for the title, there is nothing inherently rational about being there. Being there is plenty. Overtly, it doesn't need psychoanalysis any more than it needed a didactic panel, but in retrospect *Bindu: Big Bang* conjured a state of mind that could very well be labelled "free association." The light, volume, colours and identifiable forms (lines and squiggles) are suggestive, not at all illustrative.

The media coverage that was available to me emphasized the visual excitement of *EcH20/l'echo-'leau*. The intelligence, humour and virtuosity of the artwork were justifiably extolled. There was another dimension to the exhibition that is worth considering: by what methods can an artwork induce a range of unselfconscious — but intentional — interpretations. Artists usually learn to contend with the dualism inherent to free association. This dualism is inevitable while developing ideas, accumulating images, even tinkering with materials in unconventional ways. In contrast, advertising a product — selling the wholesomeness of a workplace, a situation or an idea — too often requires techniques that eliminate alarming connotations as well as hiding any unsavoury facts. Free association by definition entails the risk that alarming ideas will emerge just as readily as intriguing ones; fears swim alongside gratitude. This ambivalence is relevant to any contemplation of water, the waters of Rivière St. Maurice, the St. Lawrence, the Atlantic, and on and on.

EcH20/l'echo-'leau would by no means be categorized as a public art project, but in retrospect, considering how literally thousands of people spread the word that it was worth a drive to Shawinigan, a discussion of public art seems fitting. Public art must at times seem, like advertising, more likely to succeed if it is not susceptible to free association and its risks, risks presumed to be unwelcome or unfair. This exhibition, in contrast, stimulated the viewer's readiness to elaborate subjectively, to free associate upon the elements encountered. Not only someone who waded into it on a whim, but also even an artist, or someone educated in art history, was entirely free to decline the invitation to free associate. To decline that invitation is the viewer's choice, not the curator's, not the administrators', not the artist's. In that way, it was generous as well as astonishing.

Jeanne Randolph is an intellectual who lives, reads and writes in Winnipeg. Her most recent book is *Ethics of Luxury: materialism and imagination*, published by YYZ Books.

Robert Houle, *Paris/Ojibwa*, 2010 Courtesy: Wanda Nanibush

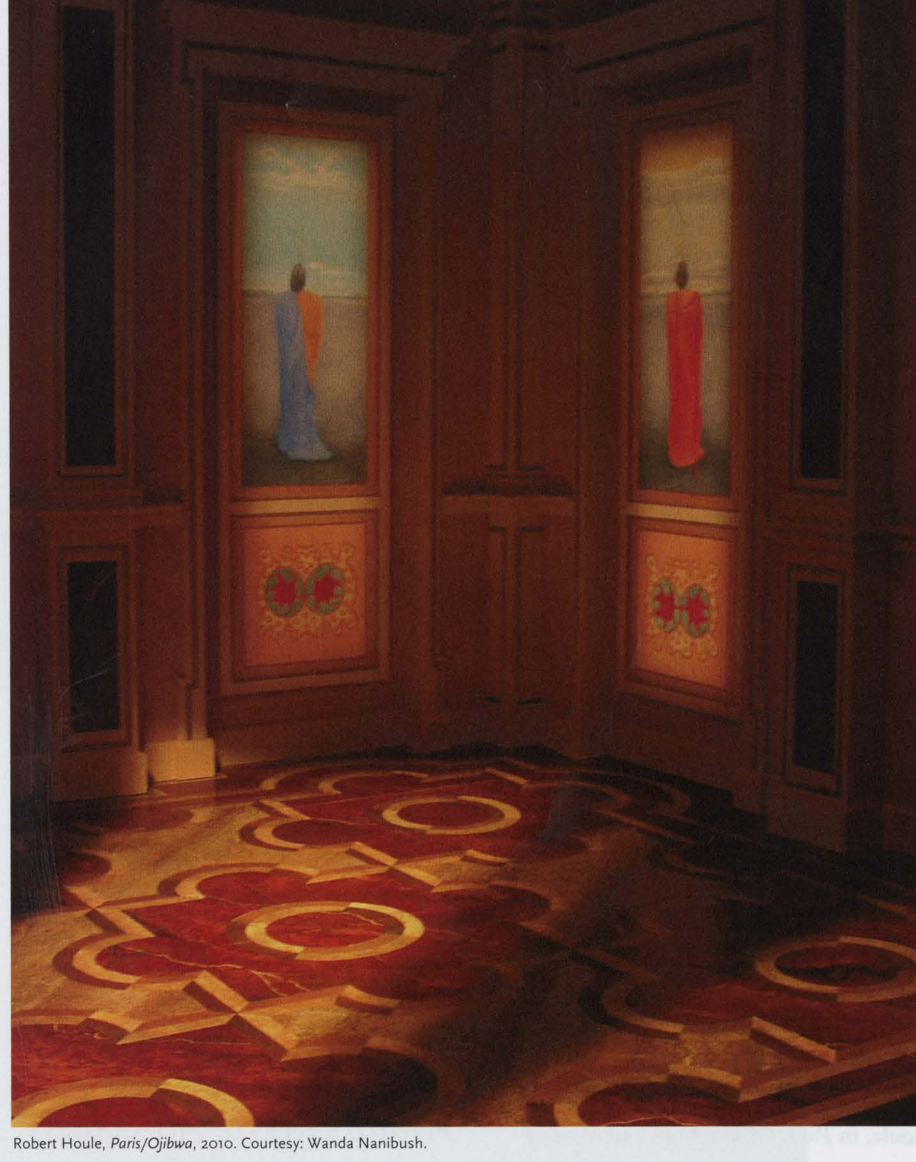
Contamination and Reclamation: Robert Houle's *Paris/Ojibwa* Canadian Cultural Centre, Paris 13 April – 10 September, 2010

REVIEW BY Wanda Nanibush

Paris/Ojibwa is the latest multimedia installation by world-renowned Anishinabeg (Ojibwa) [1] artist Robert Houle. The installation is a time portal to 1845, when a troupe of Ojibwa dancers led by a man named Maungwudaus travelled to Paris to dance for King Louis-Phillipe of France and a public of 4,000 French ladies and gentlemen. They were part of American painter George Catlin's "Indian Museum," [2] presented as living exhibits of an ancient culture.

Houle's installation consists of a reconstructed 19th-century Paris salon with a marble floor and two walls formed from four individual panels that were built and painted at his studio in Toronto. On the top third of each panel is a painting of a human figure with its back to the viewer. Each panel is also lined at the top with the names of Maungwudaus' troupe and an abstract painting of smallpox on the bottom third. Behind one of the Salon walls is a projection of an animated video. The sound of water, which changes to drums and finally an honour song, fills the entire space.

As soon as we entered the exhibition, we were in awe of a glowing light emanating from Houle's panel paintings, which represent the figures of a dancer, a shaman, a warrior, and a healer, all in Greco-Roman style robes. The style of dress repeats the ennobling romanticism of Eugène Delacroix, whose 1845 pen and ink drawings of Maungwudaus' troupe influenced Houle's work. The idea that Indigenous Peoples could be compared to Greco-Roman cultures was part of the 19th-century French imagination. Representing Indigenous Peoples as if they were Roman or Greek was a way of saying that they were human, with noble traits, while still locating them in the past and not in the modern world of the 1840s. The Ojibwa of the 19th-century French imagination were only authentic in their pre-contact state. The dancers of Maungwudaus's time performed what the French wanted to believe the Ojibwa were. Houle's installation deconstructs the romanticism of Delacroix by collapsing the time between 2010 and 1845. He highlights Ojibwa contemporaneity, being an Ojibwa in Paris himself, with an Indigenous antiquity. The Ojibwa of the past become part of a contemporary Anishinabeg (Ojibwa) culture and art. Houle subtly overturns the discourse of Indigenous Peoples as disappearing or disappeared by returning the 1845 performers to contemporary Paris in his Paris Salon.



Robert Houle, *Paris/Ojibwa*, 2010. Courtesy: Wanda Nanibush.

The painted figures have their backs to the viewers as they face a grassy western horizon line. The landscape in which the figures float faces Lake Manitoba. Behind them, unrepresented and unseen, is a graveyard from Houle's homeland of Sandy Bay First Nation, Manitoba. One would have to go there and stand in the landscape to know that they are walking out of the graveyard and returning home. The symbolic space of the installation is empty in order to connect, as Houle states, "the cold marble and granite floor to a flashpoint of cultural clash and shock." The floor is pristine with shadows cast on it when the light hits the paintings. It seems as if the light is the spirits of the dancers. The floor glows with their presence — a symbolic return — which also serves to highlight the absence of the history of the Ojibwa in Paris from our collective imagination. Houle reclaims this history.

As part of his artistic process, Houle travelled around Paris in 2006 trying to place himself inside the minds of the 1845 Ojibwa who were experiencing Paris for the first time. "I felt their presence, facing east located under the morning star, they dance away perhaps from the hard marble floors like those at the Salon de la Paix, Chateaux de Versailles. Their elaborate woodland regalia disappear, giving way to impressions of time shaped by colour and line," writes Houle in his artist statement. Part of the experience Houle represents is the deaths of Maungwaudus's wife and children from smallpox. The smallpox image is taken from a Louis XIV-style buffalo robe, c. mid 18th-century, which he saw at le Musée du quai Branly. Smallpox represents the deadly, contaminating side of the story of contact between Indigenous and Western cultures.

In the installation's title, Houle places a slash between Paris and Ojibwa, articulating a choice between two things where the choice has not yet been made. This slash is used in the place of the word "or," to articulate a desire not to choose either Paris or Ojibwa but someplace in between. Houle's work asks that the place of the Ojibwa in Paris be recognized as much as Paris's place in Ojib-

wa history. One does not have to choose between Paris or Ojibwa — meaning one does not have to choose between assimilation to a mainstream western culture and a culturally specific one. As Houle writes, "It was so ironic that I should find myself in one of the most Eurocentric cultural capitals in the old world and still find solace in the very specificity of being Anishnabe." [3]

Houle invited Odawa artist Barry Ace to perform at the opening on April 13. In his beautiful black velvet and red silk regalia, Ace stepped out of the Louvre, turned on an iPod speaker system, and with blaring pow wow music, danced men's traditional to a surprised crowd. With grace and power, Ace honoured the Ojibwa (Anishinabeg) dancers who had travelled to Paris in 1845. Groups of onlookers followed, grew and changed as he danced in the Tuileries Garden, at Cleopatra's Finger and finally in front of the cultural centre at the Place des Invalides.

Parisian artist and animator Hervé Dagois was commissioned by Houle to create a video called *Uhnemekéka*. In the video, jingle dress dancers float in a colour field. The jingle dress dance is a healing dance. Having a French artist make a work about healing reflects how colonialism has joined Indigenous and Western histories together. The jingle dress joins Ace's dance in a loop of healing.

Houle, in *Paris/Ojibwa*, finds a new visual language to allow those "others," exoticized in the French mind and misnamed as "Indians," to occupy the space of Paris on their own terms. This is part of the genius of the installation. It does not provide a didactic education on a historical moment; instead it reframes the "performances" of the Ojibwa in terms of Indigenous history and visually invokes their symbolic return, placing Paris within an Ojibwa history and artistic lineage.

Just as Houle preserves Anishinabeg being in the act of abstraction and painting, Maungwudaus chose to perform in a colonial spectacle as an "Indian curiosity" in order to preserve his sense of being Anishinabeg. *Paris/Ojibwa* visualizes time in colour and light where, as Houle suggests, "The viewer is at the intersection of Indigenous spirituality and Judeo-Christian modernity," where the intersection marks a space of artistry where memory can create and where colonial contact is both contamination and reclamation.

Notes:

1. Ojibwa is the colonial name for a group of North American Indigenous Peoples who call themselves Anishinabeg.
2. "Indian" is a colonial term used to describe many Indigenous Peoples of Canada and the United States. The term is enshrined in the Canadian Indian Act. The Indian Act was enacted in 1876 by the Parliament of Canada under the provisions of Section 91(24) of the Constitution Act, 1867, which provides Canada's federal government exclusive authority to legislate in relation to "Indians and Lands Reserved for Indians".
3. Robert Houle. "An Ojibwa in Paris," in Witness. ed. Bonnie Devine. (Aboriginal Curatorial Collective and Witness, 2009), 87. www.aboriginalcuratorial-collective.org/PDF/ACC-witness-small.pdf

Wanda Nanibush is an independent Anishinabe-kwe curator, writer and media artist living and working in Toronto.

The Migrating Sound Scape: Dipna Horra's *Avaaz* Ottawa Art Gallery 13 August – 24 October 2010

Curated by Andrea Fatona

Review by Jenny McMaster

Sound artist Dipna Horra uses field and voice recordings to create aural environments that simultaneously present a sense of location and dislocation. With *Avaaz*, Horra recounts a narrative of migration from India to Africa and then Canada, a narrative that undergoes translation and transposition. Horra's sound installation consists of a central table set for tea, a wheeled tea trolley in the corner, a suspended window pane on the left of the gallery space and an unobtrusive air vent at our feet. Simple furniture, understated architectural features and fine china are the conduits through which the sound artefacts, that tell the artist's story are emitted. Horra's kitchen installation is a theatrical space in which the continuity of ancestral memory both reassures and unsettles.

Each of the sounds Horra uses adds to the installation's atmosphere, but also subtly personalizes it. The recordings were collected with a binaural microphone, a device designed to mimic the receptors of human ears. *Dipna's Ears*, fashioned by hand in silicone, are stationed outside the installation for the viewer to appraise before entering the room. They are the artist's particular sound filters, which implicate her body's "sensorial geography" in each recording. Like shards of double sided mirror, the voices and atmospheric noise she recorded reflect both subject and environment.

As we enter the dimly lit room of the OGA, we notice the table is set for tea. The vacant chairs invite visitors to sit down and become implicated in the family ritual. Horra's father's voice issues from the teapot as he tells the story of his father's journey from Punjab down the coast of Africa to build a railway. He also recounts her granduncle's founding of the news daily *Colonial Times*. The sugar bowl emits a recording of the artist as child, as she teaches herself songs in English and French. From an air vent by our feet we hear the clanking of steel and the clatter of kitchenware, along with the voices of Horra's family and Croatian friends singing the Swahili song "Malaika."

The effort to balance the maintenance of one's mother tongue with the necessity of acquiring a new language is a story common to most immigrants. Linguistic adaptation is urgent, the artist explains: "Language is integral to allowing us to immediately feel placed or misplaced in an environment." Just as the artist was able to construct a setting with little more than sound, the use of language calls a social reality into being. The

Dipna Horra, *Avazz*, 2010. Photo: David Barbour. Courtesy: OAG.

Dipna Horra, *Avazz*, 2010. Both photos: Ken Campbell. Courtesy: OAG.

use of an immigrant's mother tongue in the home bespeaks both the need to maintain connections with a distant territory and the desire to build a space that incorporates both old and new cultural traditions.

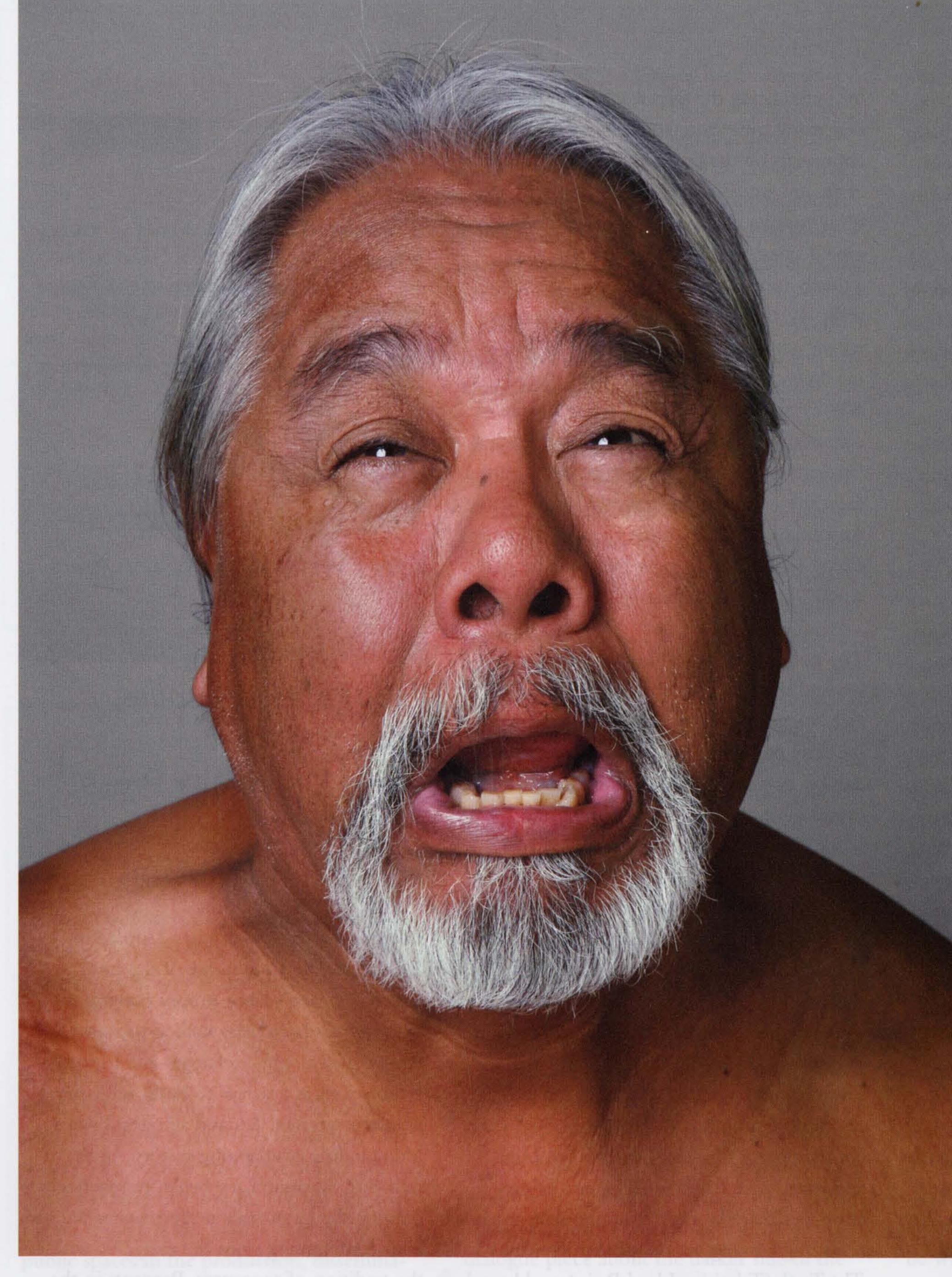
As moments pass in the dim room one is struck by the tension between the warmth of the familial setting and the disconcerting effect of hearing voices without bodies. The sound of environmental disturbances within the domestic space is unsettling. The cups and saucers on the tea trolley in the corner periodically rattle with the reverberation of thunder and rain but also the whisper of human breath. Before we are able to locate the source of the storm, we are left to guess at the unseen disturbances at play. Perhaps it is the rumble of a train on the very track laid by the artist's grandfather in the early part of the last century. While fine china bespeaks creature comforts and the yearning for prosperity and security, the truth of the long transitional periods of Horra's family's history could very well disturb these emblems of hearth and home.

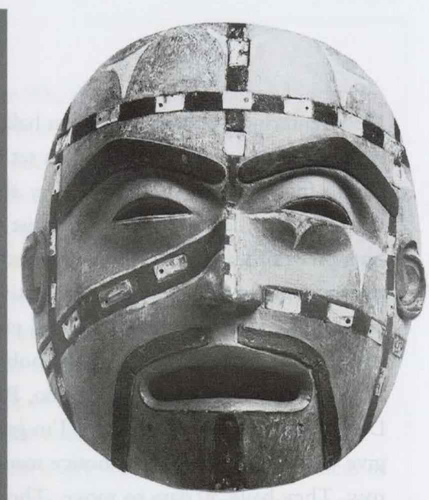
This sense of the uncanny is also caused by the rift between conventional and self-written nationalist narratives. Inhabitants of any country are both objects of a reified nationalist story, sanctioned by central authorities, and active subjects in their own tale. Articles published in the *Colonial Times*, a paper that gave voice to critics of British rule in Kenya, are examples of minority discourses that rattled colonial renditions of national identity. A storm is brewing along with the tea.

This being said, the artist states that teatime, a ritual that is both British and Indian, is an opportunity for discussion and reconciliation. But the participant must be willing to really listen. In a similar manner, one must spend some time with *Avaaz* in order to take in the multiple voices emerging from multiple channels. During the opening, chatty visitors crowded out the sound installation, filling the kitchen table with their own conversations and failing to recognize those installed by the artist. While *Avaaz* brings immigrant stories to the forefront, it's possible for them to be overlooked, rather than overheard.

Horra uses conceptual and physical responses to the dislocation of sound as experiential metaphors for exile, migration and "deterritorialization." During her efforts to copy and recreate the dislocated cultural landscapes where such events unfold, Horra identified two languages. The first is "societal pattern language," which describes speech in its conventional sense, as well as auditory artefacts of cultural and social contexts. The second is "personal language," which encompasses the physical terrain of Horra's own aural receptors, but also the autobiographical details she has brought to the work. Linguist Charles Taylor describes language as a "way of being in the world." Horra asks what happens when that "way of being" is transposed onto a new setting. An uncanny doubling occurs as the past and present, the domestic and political reverberate within the same space.

Jenny McMaster is a freelance curator and writer based in Ottawa. She is fascinated with subjects such as language, ritual, custom and the phenomenology of space.





<*above*> James Luna, *Crying Man*, 2010. Photo: Mark Velasquez. <*left*> James Luna, *Crying Man*, 2010. Both courtesy of: Carolyn Eyler.

In the Face of a National Myth: *The Turtle/Television Island Project* University of Southern Maine Art Gallery 24 September – 10 November, 2010.

CURATED BY Carolyn Eyler

REVIEW BY Wahsontiio Cross

The Turtle/Television Island Project features the work of two contemporary aboriginal artists: James Luna, of the Puyoukitchum (Luiseño) nation, who is based in La Jolla, California; and ssipsis, of the Penobscot nation of Indian Island, Maine. Both of these artists use contemporary media to critically reflect on and repair the often static ways in which Native Americans are portrayed by the white/Western world.

Upon entering a gallery divided in half, you immediately encounter a television set that plays a film of ssipsis recalling a story about the "Eviction Letter," which the artist wrote on a piece of leather in 1970, addressed to the residents of Old Town, a non-native community that was on an [expired] piece of leased land that belonged to the Penobscot First Nation. The letter says, "Hello, Bangor Daily News. My name is ssipsis. I'm going to give Old Town an eviction notice tomorrow. They have 30 days to move. The lease is up." This opens up the context for ssipsis' work and shows us the culture and land she had been fighting for.

Containers, a top hat and replica canoes made of birch bark are juxtaposed with old photographs of Penobscot women wearing hats, including Molly Molasses, a 19th-century woman whom ssipsis considers a source of inspiration. ssipsis' writing (including her book *Molly Molasses & Me: a collection of living adventures*, 1988) and documentation of activist interventions in the form of newspaper clippings are also included. The most powerful piece on display is *Turtle Shield*, which is comprised of 13 birch bark panels arranged to form a large turtle shell. Each panel is hemmed with fragrant sweetgrass and carefully etched with images of local practices such as hunting, fishing, dancing, ceremony, wigwam construction, and the forests and rivers of Maine. The exhibit display is multisensory: we are confronted by the smell of the healing sweetgrass, the sound of ssipsis making a moose call, and a section of a birch bark wigwam wall, which all recreate the environment that the artist seeks to protect. These objects enrich the video, where we can hear the stories from ssipsis herself, and make a strong statement about survival, resilience and resistance.

A video documenting installation and performance artist James Luna's 2007 *Eiteljorg* performance is projected on the opposite side of the wall against which ssipsis' wigwam section rests. He also included objects from various installations, such as *Wet Dream Catcher* (1990) and *High-Tech Peace Pipe* (2004). In the latter, referencing the sacred tobacco offerings that many tribes partake in, he humorously comments on the commodification of Native crafts and sacred objects by playing with the term "smoke signals," placing a galvanized pipe decorated with beaded designs atop a touch-tone telephone. On an adjacent wall, *We Become Them* (2010), Luna's most recent work, is a series of photographs using diptychs of color self-portraits placed side-by-side with black and white images of ceremonial masks. This idea of experiencing "Indianness" is meant to disrupt the distorted view the white/Western world has of Native Americans: "When all that changes, I'll be out of work. But for now I've got a lot of work," Luna comments.

The political aspect of this exhibition goes beyond these two artists and their work. According to curator Carolyn Eyler, this is the only contemporary Native American art exhibit ever mounted in southern Maine. It began not only as an investigation into the work of these two artists, but as part of a state initiative (the Wabanaki Studies Law or LD 291), which rules that children in grades K-12 must learn about Wabanaki [1] culture in their schools. What better way to educate than to show the work of living Natives and the objects of their cultural production? Exposing viewers not only to the visual, spiritual and linguistic culture of the people of Turtle Island, but also to the realities that contemporary "Indians" face today. Luna and ssipsis mix "traditional" forms of creation and material with contemporary media, reflecting a living contemporary identity. *The Turtle/Television Island Project* could work at other galleries across Turtle Island, even abroad. The gesture of this exhibition being shown in a smaller gallery, not a large metropolitan center like New York or Toronto, shows that we are making progress towards bringing Native perspectives to the centre. By allowing us to tell our own stories, and assert our history and identity, this show has left a positive and lasting impression.

Notes:
"Wabanaki" is the collective term that refers to the 4 tribes of Maine: Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, Penobscot and Passamaquoddy.

WAHSONTIIO CROSS is a Mohawk artist and an M.A. candidate in Art History at Concordia University in Montréal. She recently produced essays for the Virtual Museum of Canada's *Canada's Got Treasures!*, and also had an essay published as part of Concordia's *Palimpsest* project on architectural history, available online.

The Present Nature of Things: Suzanne Lacy's *Leaving Art: Writings on Performance, Politics, and Publics, 1974-2007* Duke University Press, 2010

REVIEW BY Haig Aivazian

In a conversation with Lucy Lippard in 1985, Suzanne Lacy spoke of the history of women's labor unions making use of communal activities such as pageants, dinner parties, gift exchanges and birthday celebrations as a means to build solidarity amongst women. Art and activism have a longstanding overlapping history. In the mid-80s, Suzanne Lacy began retroactively framing the large-scale performances she had been undertaking since the early 70s within the tradition of pageantry. Pageants in the early part of the 20th century were a deeply community-oriented and non-commercial form of entertainment: they were often massive productions involving a cast of hundreds of volunteers in performances of theatre, dance and music.

Leaving Art: Writing on Performance, Politics, and Publics, 1974-2007 is a collection of writings by one of the foremost and most ambitious practitioners in western feminist art of the past 50 years. Arranged by decade beginning from the 70s, Lacy's entries map out a wide array of topics in contemporary art and function like the journal of a constantly self-questioning artist, as she works through challenges in and around her work.

Suzanne Lacy, *Leaving Art: Writings on Performance, Politics, and Publics 1974 – 2007*. Duke University Press, 2010.

The book consists of research for, or writings emerging from, Lacy's artwork. Through the interconnected articles in the collection, the reader is able to track the evolution of Lacy's theories on the role and definition of art and its relationship to activism, politics and organizing, as well as the role of mass media and public spaces in the production, dissemination and consumption of art.

Throughout the wide array of topics covered in the book, the female body continually functions as a warp zone of sorts, a vessel that for Lacy links all female experience: "I wondered who they were, these women whose lives were such powerful icons for my gender. How did I carry their condition inside my own head?" (5).

It is this portal that lead to Lacy's *Prostitution Notes* project in 1974, an arrangement of journal entries and diagrams documenting a series of stakeouts and meetings with sex workers in Los Angeles. The diagrams end up forming a complex mapping of the locations, movements and transactions of the sex trade on the streets of the city. Lacy's annotations also delineate a complex psychological terrain around female sexuality as it is negotiated in the shadows of prostitution.

These sorts of problematic interchangeabilities and other liberties that Lacy takes within her practice facilitate the formulation of a complex sense of solidarity. They also, however, cause a number of cringe-worthy moments, such as one where she speaks of the Church of Naturalism, an organization that she approaches during the course of her research for *Prostitution Notes*: "they hasten to assure me they are interested in helping not only hookers" she says, "but old people and blacks and poor people and the mentally ill among others." (6)

This kind of tokenism had many of Lacy's collaborators and subjects approach her with skepticism: she recounts that during her research for Bag Lady a poor street woman yelled at her to "leave the street people alone." (55) This, however, did not prevent Lacy from continuing the work that resulted in a performance where she collected trash from around the city dressed as a homeless person. In another awkward instance, while working on *The Life and Times of Donaldina Cameron*, a large scale performance and dialogue piece about the darker side of the history of Asian immigration to the United States, Lacy came to the realization, "in one of many hard lessons around race," that despite her best intentions she embodied racism to the Chinese women whose help she had looked to co-opt. (63)

Despite these early slips across lines of race and class, Lacy still managed to come away with observations far exceeding in complexity the more essentialist and simplistic artistic approaches of her time. Throughout the 80s and the 90s, she tirelessly organized intricate and ambitious collaborative, interdisciplinary, immersive and public performances with large groups of artists, activists and community members.

The writings end up forming a number of important notions, not least of which is the fact that feminist endeavors are at the heart of some of the most important shifts in the ways that contemporary art is viewed and discussed today. Now-commonplace ideas of public, social and relational practices, as well as notions of art and the everyday, all stem from a feminist line of inquiry.

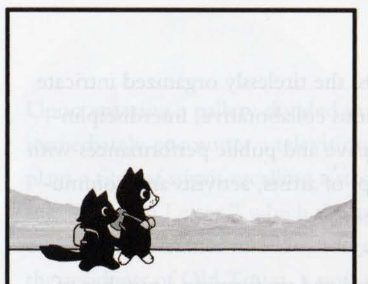
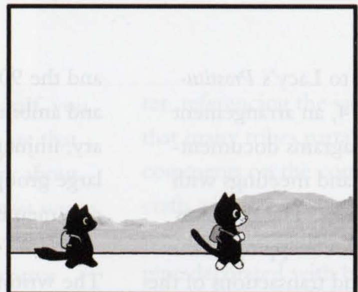
It is, however, worth wondering about the timing of such a publication in light of recent international interest in feminists of Lacy's generation (she even makes note of this in the introduction to the 2000s section of the book), peaking in exhibitions such as the 2007 WACK! show at the MOCA. The retrospective accumulation of texts is perhaps an attempt by Lacy to concretize her legacy, or perhaps she feels the need to maintain a varied and nuanced dialogue in a movement that is increasingly being talked about and curated in monolithic ways.

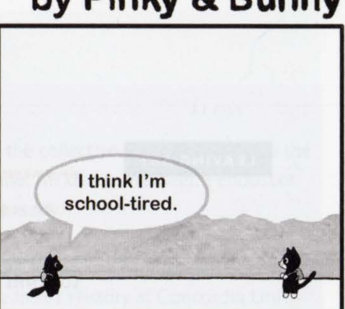
Ultimately readers come away from the book with a clear sense of Lacy's sizeable contribution to art as well as the various communities she has sought to engage. The texts paint an honest portrait of an artist going through considerable trial and error and ultimately posing important and productive core questions, most lingering of which may be whether art can actually be a platform for real social change and engagement.

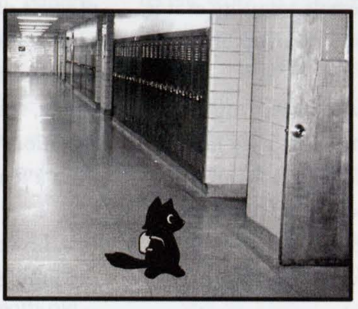
HAIG AIVAZIAN is an artist, writer and curator currently based in Chicago. He makes work examining the circulation of consumer goods, ideologies and human beings.

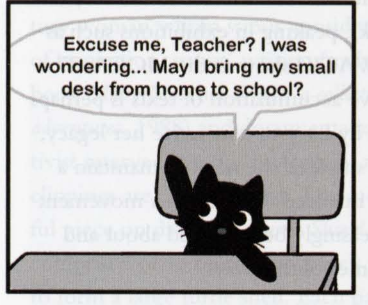
THE PINKY SHOW

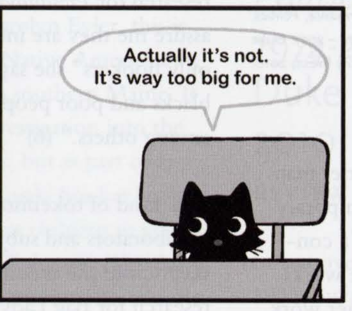
by Pinky & Bunny

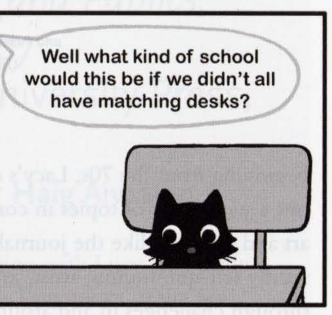



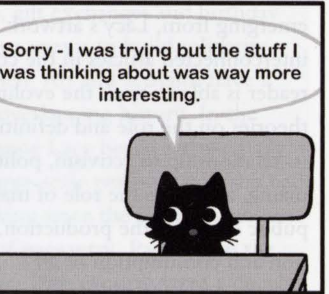


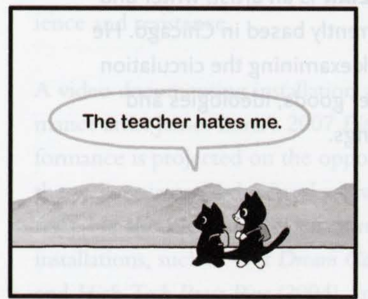


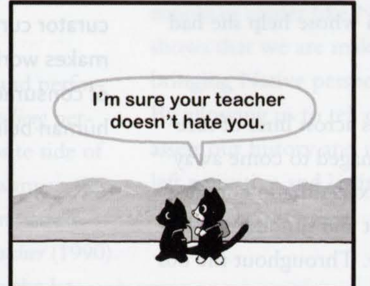


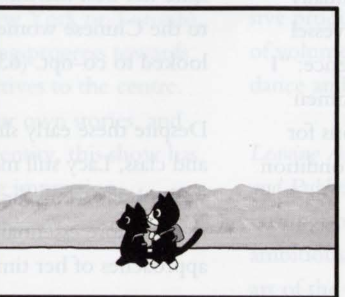


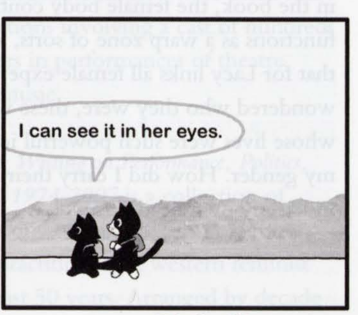












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LATITUDE53
CONTEMPORARY VISUAL CULTURE
LATITUDE53.ORG

BRANDON DALMER
Too Drunk to Fuck
Jan 14 - Feb 12, 2011 / Latitude 53 ProjEx Room

53 WAYS TO LEAVE YOUR LOVER
February 19, 2011
Latitude 53's annual anti-Valentine's Day fundraiser

MATHIEU VALADE
Cubic Units
Mar 04 - April 02, 2011 / Latitude 53 Main Space

LISA REZANSOFF
Mar 04 - April 02, 2011 / Latitude 53 ProjEx Room

FAVA.CA

WINTER CLASSES
MAIN COURSE: an intermediate film class
DOC SHOP: an introductory class to documentary method
SCREENWRITING: crafting the concept and structure of your story
VIDEO KITCHEN: the basics of digital filmmaking

INTER/TRANCE MULTIMEDIA FESTIVAL
MARCH 11 & 12, 2011 / LEDCOR THEATRE (Art Gallery of Alberta, 2 Sir Winston Churchill Square)
Edmonton's media artists and composers unite in this event for the new Inter/Trance Multimedia Festival. FAVA filmmakers will be paired with a Tonus Vivus composer who will create a new, original soundtrack to their work.

HARCOURTHOUSE.AB.CA

JAN 6 – FEB 12
Opening reception Thursday, Jan 6, 7 - 10 pm
MAIN GALLERY: Sherri Chaba (local artist)
FRONT ROOM GALLERY: Cynthia Fuhrer (local artist), I make my own friends

FEB 24 – MARCH 26
Opening reception Thursday, February 24, 7 - 10 pm
Marie-Eve Martel, Agricultural Eclipse

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS
2011/2012 ARTIST IN RESIDENCE: Deadline May 31, 2011

REGISTRATION FOR WINTER ART CLASSES BEGINS JANUARY 2011.

Visit www.harcourthouse.ab.ca for details on exhibitions, calls for submission, and art classes

TO EDMONTON'S ARTIST-RUN CENTRES THIS WINTER

Carol Wainio
The Book

10 February, 2011 to 1 May, 2011
Organized and circulated by CUAG

Kai Chan: *A Spider's Logic*
Until January 30, 2011

Upcoming Programming
Thursday 13 January 2011, 7 to 9 pm
Kai Chan in Poetry and Music

Sunday 16 and 23 January 2011, 1 to 5 pm
Workshop: Textile Design and Techniques

Sunday 23 January 2011, 12 to 1 pm
Lecture by Dorie Milerson

Varley Art Gallery of Markham
www.varleygallery.ca 905.477.9511