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# FUSE



## AUTONOMOUS ZONES

Featuring:

Cheryl L'Hirondelle, Richard Kamler, Wanda Nanibush,  
Archer Pechawis, Kirsty Robertson, Tamara Toledo

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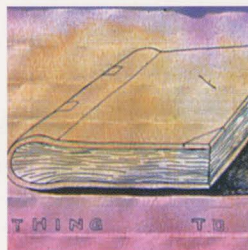
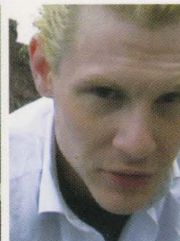
COLUMNS



FEATURE

REVIEWS

The role of the artist run centre is to bring down the government



ARTIST PROJECT

SHORT FUSE

05 Editorial

06 Battlegrounds and Carpet Bombing

BY KIRSTY ROBERTSON

14 Now(here) Represented

BY TAMARA TOLEDO

24 Pirates of Performance:

Wanda Nanibush in conversation with Cree performance artists Cheryl L'Hirondelle and Archer Pechawis

35 More Business as Unusual: *decentre: concerning artist-run culture / à propos de centres d'artistes*

REVIEW BY PETER CONLIN

38 Activism in the Archive?: *Theory of Survival*

REVIEW BY TIRZA LATIMER

42 Hustling the Wholesome Way:

Peter Kingstone's *100 Stories About My Grandmother*

REVIEW BY MARTIN OTÁROLA

22 Imagine Peace

BY RICHARD KAMLER

46 Election 2008

BY DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE

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## NEO-LIBERALISM IS OVER (IF WE WANT IT)

Barack Obama's victory in the United States, the forced bailout packages doled out by governments around the world in response to the economic crisis, and what at this writing looks like an ousting of the Harper Conservatives just six weeks after their election, clearly indicate that the tides are turning against the rule of the free market. The crisis we are in has beyond a doubt proven that the ideologues who insisted that the markets would regulate themselves were mistaken. The markets and the free-marketeers who ran them, have proven themselves to be both greedy and reckless. While a crisis in the economy has many fearing for their jobs, savings and well-being, it also presents an opportunity to re-vision the ways in which our society is governed – including the place of the market in social and economic planning. Nothing has been more indicative of this opportunity than the election of Barack Obama and the fight over the Harper government's proposed budgetary cuts this fall.



Photo: Lisa Kannakko

With this crisis, we have hit on a critical moment for citizens to mobilize and push governments around the world to institutionalize progressive alternatives to the neo-liberal economic model that has jeopardized our present and future prosperity. Quoting Milton Friedman, author and political economist Naomi Klein notes that great crisis presents great opportunities. Of course, she is referring to the history of Chicago School neo-liberal economists deploying this idea, swooping in to reorder countries in crisis, making broad sweeping changes to open up economies to foreign ownership and currency and creating societies governed by the marketplace. But she is also speaking to a condition of openness; a moment where change becomes possible because the existing system has failed and people are scrambling for an alternative. It is at these times of crisis, she notes, that we grab hold of ideas that are already floating in the public consciousness. And it is precisely here that the opportunity arises. At this moment of transition, as we see a window

opening that looks outside the neo-liberal model for social and economic planning, we can both re-imagine and reconstruct the societies we are living in.

The political transitions this fall have been groundbreaking on a number of fronts, shifting the frame of possibility and creating momentum amongst grassroots organizations all over the world. Electing Obama president of the United States by record numbers at the polls, demonstrates an openness amongst the American people to see major changes implemented in their society. Elected on a platform of broad and sweeping reforms, with promises of wealth redistribution, market reform, investment in education, health-care and the environment, the direction for this change has been laid. Now, as many have been arguing, the key will be to push forward to ensure these reforms take place. This holds true on this side of the border as well, with many standing up to the different levels of government seeking to impose budgetary cuts as a means for fighting recession.

As we formulate solutions within our communities to a crisis created by corporate greed and rampant deregulation, we need to also talk back to politicians who believe slashing essential services such as healthcare and daycare is a way out of this recession. The City of Ottawa's November proposed budget eliminated 700 daycare spaces, cut \$4M from cultural organizations and undermined public transit and long-term health care services. This is a short-sighted response that ignores the forces that have brought the world economy to a halt. Now is the time for governments to recognize the responsibility they have to protect and invest in their citizens. While the turmoil that we are experiencing during a global economic crisis does not indicate that change has arrived, it is a signal that for the first time in many years it is possible and a great many people are ready for it.

– Izida Zorde



Battleground: War Rugs from Afghanistan, Installation view, 2008. Photo: Jill Kitchener. All images courtesy: The Textile Museum of Canada.

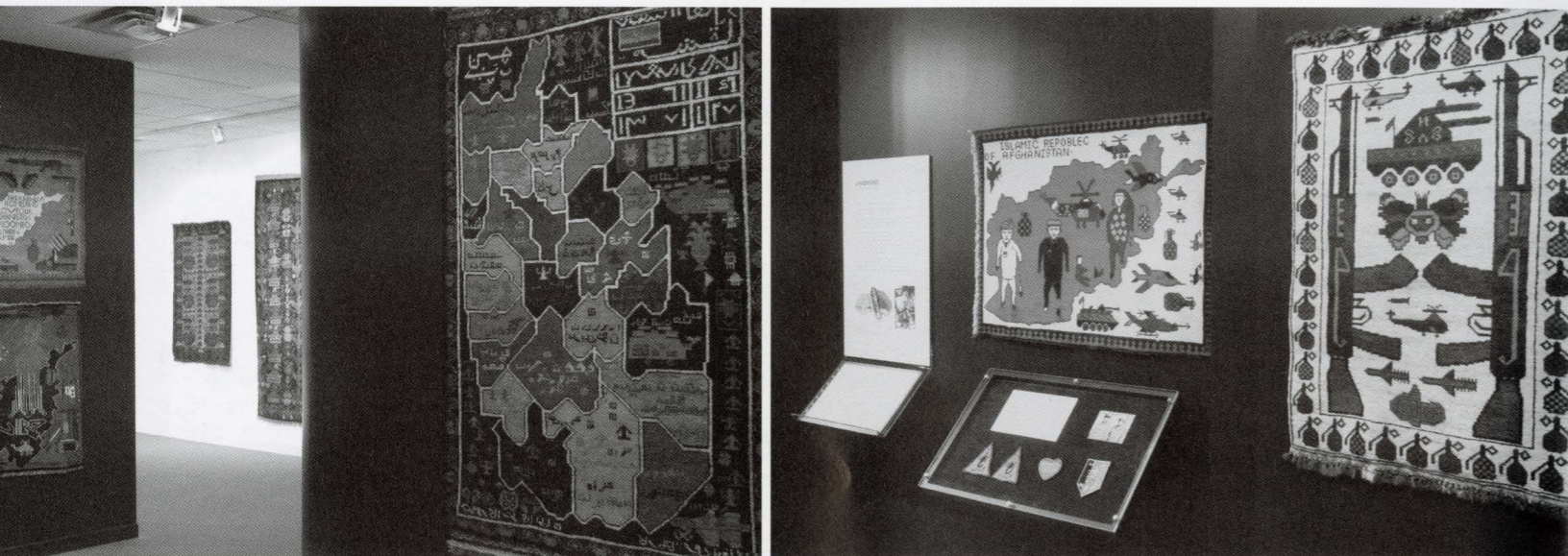
# BATTLEGROUND and CARPET BOMBING



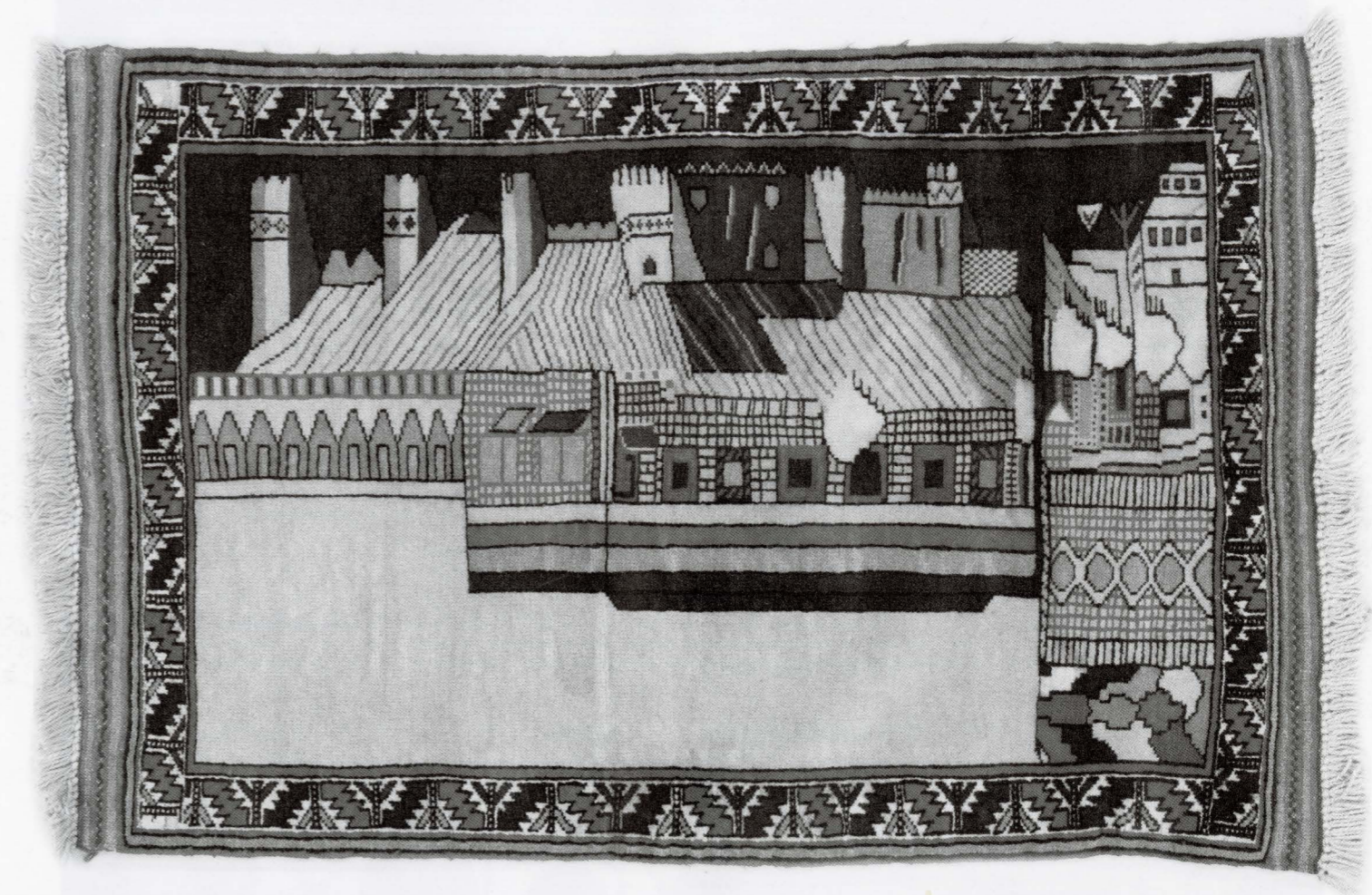
*Kirsty Robertson*

Recently, the well-known journal *October* dedicated an entire issue to the academic response to the American-led invasion of Iraq.<sup>1</sup> More precisely, the issue was largely dedicated to why there had been, until recently, a surprising *lack* of response from most artists and academics. Shortly thereafter, on the five-year anniversary of the invasion, *Modern Painters* dedicated an entire issue to the anti-war work of artists and curators.<sup>2</sup> As in *October*, many of the writers described the general absence of creative response, drawing on the few well-known examples (most notably Steve McQueen's series of stamps made from the portraits of British soldiers killed in action) to draw a contrast with the deafening silence of most cultural workers. Writers in both journals pointed to, on the one hand, the growing negative public opinion in the United States toward the war, and, on the other, the apparent disorganization of the left that has led to the inability to mount the kind of mass anti-war movement that had been organized against the invasion of Vietnam. Writers spoke of an unwillingness to organize, of apathy, and occasionally of a deep-seated fear of retribution.

*continued...*



<this page> Installation view, 2008. Photo: Jill Kitchener.  
 <opposite page> War Rug, 2001 – 2007. Photo: Jill Kitchener.



...the exhibition material refuses to position the rugs within the conflict, leaving open the questions, “are the war rugs pro-war or anti-war? Whose side are they on?”

Though US artists and academics might be accused of being a bit late in their engagement (Why wait for the five-year anniversary to respond? Why wait for Bush’s popularity to decline before organizing concerted responses to war? Why allow the Patriot Act to pass almost without complaint before arguing on behalf of arrested Critical Art Ensemble member Steve Kurtz?), the response is, nevertheless, far different from that in Canada. While both of the above-mentioned journals might have been late on the uptake, there was plenty of material to fill the pages of both *October* and *Modern Painters*. In Canada, one would be hard pressed to find any artistic anti-war movement at all. For the most part, it’s easy to forget there’s a war on. In contrast to the caustic anti-war art now coming out of the United States and Europe, Canadian production around the war in Afghanistan tends towards well-produced radio documentaries from the CBC,

embedded reporters befriend tired soldiers trying to do their best in a hot climate, and earnest war artists recording a well-led and seemingly uncontroversial foray into Afghanistan. Somehow, in spite of increasing unrest and growing numbers of road-side bombs and suicide attacks, not to mention the recent organized Taliban-executed prison break that emptied the Kandahar prison of fighters and criminals, Afghanistan remains distant, dusty, far away — another world disconnected from the everyday operations of the majority of the Canadian population and apparently in no way linked to other global events (including, one might add, the war in Iraq, to which it is directly and obviously connected).

Not so, of course, for the people in Afghanistan. And in one of the very few exhibitions that has dealt with the Canadian presence in Afghanistan (and here only obliquely), it is

the way that war has invaded all aspects of life that fundamentally comes through.

*Battleground: War Rugs from Afghanistan*, now on display at the Canadian Textile Museum, clearly presents the incorporation of war into the most mundane of objects.<sup>3</sup> This exhibition, the website tells us, presents catastrophe turned into art. And indeed, the new large gallery at the Textile Museum does showcase a profoundly moving artistic account of the effects of war on Afghan citizens. Filled to the brim with carpets that at first glance appear to be covered in the typical flowered patterns associated with Persian rugs, on closer inspection they reveal repeated patterns of bombs, tanks and bullets, and depictions of scenes of conflict. These scenes stretch from portraits of landmine victims to war-torn cityscapes, and from the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 through to the present. But in spite of the apparent omnipresence of conflict that

would lead to the making of such objects, the exhibition material refuses to position the rugs within the conflict, leaving open the questions, “are the war rugs pro-war or anti-war? Whose side are they on?”

In the contemporary world, write Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in *Multitude*, the follow-up to their now infamous book *Empire*, “war takes on a generalized character, strangling all social life and posing its own political order.”<sup>4</sup> No longer a “state of exception,” war becomes perpetual, inevitable, interminable and global — it connects more profoundly than it separates. Certainly this can be seen in the case of Afghanistan, where, as Tariq Ali pointed out in a recent editorial in the *New Left Review*, rarely has an incursion been greeted with such enthusiasm as was the 2001 invasion. It was, as Ali writes, not only revenge for 9/11, but also “a war for the liberation of the women of Afghanistan. For the White House, a fight

for civilization. For Iran, the impending defeat of the Wahhabi enemy.” Backed by NATO and the UN, it was a clean war, in contrast with the illegitimate conflict to come in Iraq.<sup>5</sup> It was in fact, so clean that it was barely a war at all. Instead, the people of Afghanistan were being liberated from a tyrannical political order. What occurred was that the “generalized character of war” brought with it no clearly categorizable “national” enemy, and instead an amorphous entity of Al-Qaeda and the Taliban mixing with the “good” citizens of Afghanistan, with appropriate labelling being the only distinction between enemy and friend.

In the exhibition, the inability to name those producing the rugs speaks fundamentally not only to the traditional underestimation of those working with craft and textiles, but also to the way that naming is a dangerous business. Here, in spite of the reluctance to label the rugs themselves as being on one



War Rug, 2001 – 2007. Photo: Jill Kitchener.

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side or the other, weavers are ultimately constructed as friends, passively recording what is happening to them, rather than actively participating in a conflict that threatens to encompass all aspects of life. It is hard to tell what a particular rug is supposed to mean when “its history is hidden and its maker is unknown.” The rugs, curator Max Allen points out, cannot even be traced to any specific place, as the markers of ethnicity or geographic location used to categorize rugs have been lost through almost three decades of war and the migration and movement of people that conflict brings about.

The display of the rugs in this moment speaks to interest in Afghanistan, even if that interest tends towards a belief in the justness of this conflict. In 2005, RETORT, a collective made up of such well-known scholars as Iain Boal, T.J. Clark, Joseph Matthews and Michael Watts, published *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War*, which was based on the argument that because the attacks on 11 September 2001 were played out over television, the moment constituted an “image defeat” for the United States.<sup>6</sup> All actions since constitute attempts to regain an image supremacy, which has in turn proved disastrous for those political artists who have tended to rely on images in order to question

power. Thus, Benjamin Buchloh and Rachel Churner, in the introduction to the aforementioned issue of *October*, similarly note a paralyzing privilege amongst academics and artists, resulting in depoliticization and “the elimination of a sense of socio-political responsibility from what was once defined as the role of the public intellectual.”<sup>7</sup>

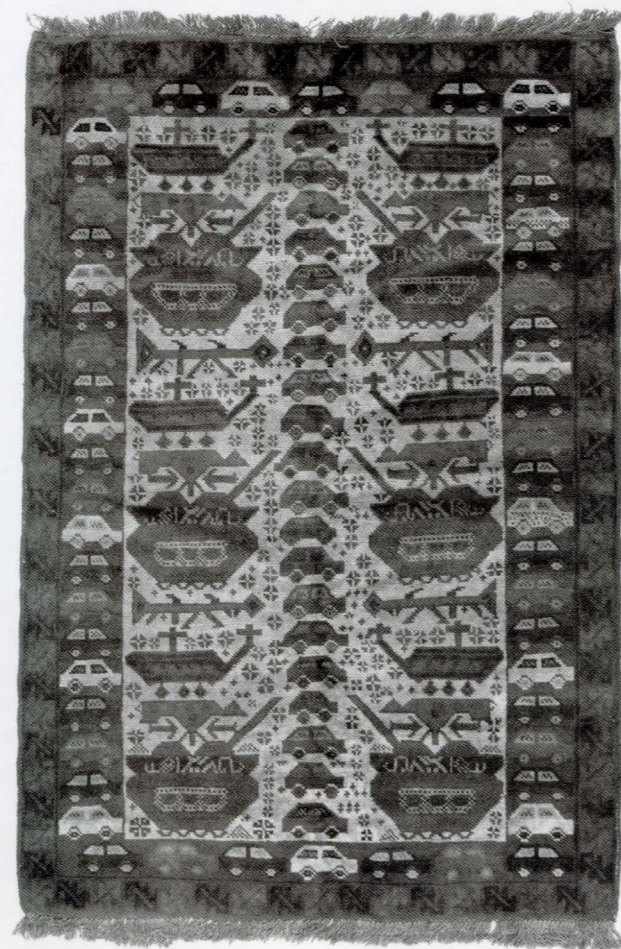
Indeed, the same argument could be made with regard to Canada. In terms of imagery, the invasion of Afghanistan has been beautifully managed. Although it is NATO forces in Afghanistan, the Canadian mission maintains overtones of peacekeeping, in large part because Afghanistan was always portrayed as the legitimate alternative to Canadian participation in Iraq. In Canada, public protests against the invasion of Iraq were largely successful but Afghanistan is rarely seen as part of the same “war against terrorism.” Through omission, a gulf between the “mission” in Afghanistan and the “war” in Iraq is maintained despite Canada’s role in supplying arms to the US for Iraq. It also obfuscates the fact that Canada is not in Afghanistan alone, but as part of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force that consists of troops from countries as far flung as Sri Lanka, the United Kingdom, Germany, New Zealand, Azerbaijan and the United States and that the presence of American troops in Afghanistan

far outweighs that of the Canadians. Closer to home, despite the RCMP’s apparent role in the deportation and subsequent torture of Maher Arar and reports of torture from Afghan prisoners handed over to Afghan authorities by Canadian soldiers, the complicity of Canada in an increasingly uncontrollable conflict is consistently displaced. Americans were responsible for Arar’s deportation and Afghan soldiers did the torturing of which Canadians were apparently unaware, notwithstanding formal agreements that no torture would take place. Thus, despite well-organized resistance from the neo-Taliban and Al-Qaeda, an increase in the opium trade and soaring unemployment in Afghanistan, tens of thousands of civilian casualties, an increasing number of reports of rape and rough treatment at the hands of ISAF soldiers, there is an unquestioning assumption that the rugs might be anti-war rather than, say, pro-Jihadist or pro-Taliban.

What the rugs don’t show is perhaps as important as what they do. Largely missing is the confusion of Afghanistan, a country now split between warlords, divided again by ethnic and religious loyalties and growing government corruption, then cut across by a trade in opium. Missing are the deep and confusing political divisions that have left Hamad Karzai’s leadership largely ineffective and intimately associated with NATO



War Rugs, 1980s – 2007.  
Photo: Jill Kitchener.



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power, connected to the gentrification that inevitably comes along with NGOs accustomed to protection and better living conditions. It is these complex divisions that, according to Ali, have led many to side with the Taliban not in support of religious and social restrictions, but as an anti-government and anti-imperial gesture.<sup>8</sup> As Ali concludes, "Afghanistan has become a central theatre for reconstituting, and extending, the West's power-political grip on the world order," with Afghanistan as an important military site between the rising power of China and the former enemy and current fickle friend of Russia.<sup>9</sup> Such divisions are largely lacking in these rugs, leading to a further question — are the rugs purposely ambiguous yet simplistic so as to appeal to a growing war tourism market?

Also missing is any idea of Canadians as peacekeepers. In fact, only one rug appears to even mention the Canadian presence, and even there it is merely one name in a list of countries occupying Afghanistan. This exhibition reveals the profound disconnect between Canada and Afghanistan, between those making the rugs (whatever their reasons might be) and those buying them in a Western market, or viewing them in a gallery. What is lost are the connections

— the connections that leave rug makers nameless, that bring war rugs to a Western market and art gallery, that would wrap the experience of war in layers of assurance that war is very far away. This, then, is an exhibition that works very much on two levels. On the first, it is a profoundly interesting collection of rugs from a war-torn country. But on a second level, the exhibition of rugs clearly demonstrates an ambiguity to the conflict in Afghanistan where, unlike the apathy that is repeatedly pointed to in the issues of *October* and *Modern Painters*, here it is not an unwillingness or fear of protest — it is not that there is no point in protesting, but that there is apparently nothing to protest. This, it would seem to me, is the ultimate image victory, the ultimate play at controlling information. □

KIRSTY ROBERTSON is a Professor of Contemporary Art and Museum Studies in the Department of Visual Art at the University of Western Ontario. She is currently working on a book titled *Tear-Gas Epiphanies: New Economies of Vision, Culture and Protest in Canada*.

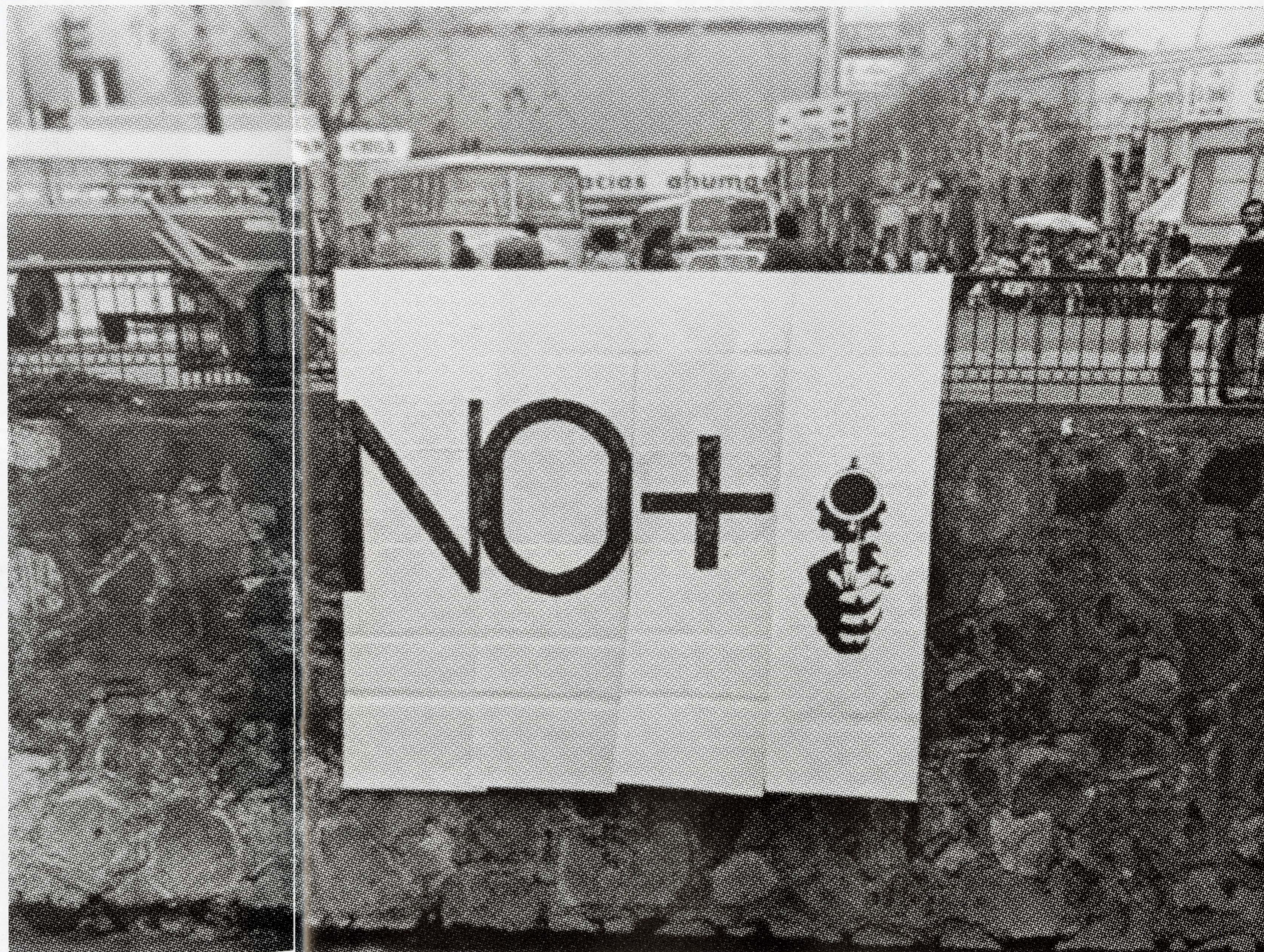
Notes:

1. *October: Art/Theory/Criticism/Politics*, Number 123, Winter 2008.
2. *Modern Painters*, Number 17, April 2008.
3. *Battleground: War Rugs from Afghanistan* is on display at the Canadian Textile Museum from April 23, 2008 to January 27, 2009.
4. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, New York: Penguin Press, 2004, p. xii.
5. Tariq Ali, "Afghanistan: Mirage of the Good War." *New Left Review*, Number 50, March – April 2008, np.
6. Retort, *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War* (London and New York: Verso: 2006).
7. Benjamin Buchloh and Rachel Churner, "Introduction." *October* 123 (Winter 2008), p. 4.
8. Ali, np.
9. *Ibid.*

# NOW (HERE) REPRESENTED

by Tamara Toledo

*Arte ≠ Vida: Actions by Artists of the Americas, 1960 – 2000* was a breathtaking archival exhibition presented at El Museo del Barrio from 30 January to 18 May 2008, showcasing a vast array of performative actions by Latin American artists in the United States, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Mexico, Central America and South America. Organized and curated by the museum's Director of Curatorial Programs Deborah Cullen, *Arte ≠ Vida* (Art ≠ Life) has been acclaimed as a unique landmark in the documentation of Latin American action art for featuring over 100 Latino/a and Latin American artists and collectives. Accompanied by a 300-page bilingual publication, related articles range from avant-garde performance art in Brazil during the 1960s to 80s to actions by Puerto Rican artists working in New York and Chicano or Mexican-American artists working along the West coast. *continued...*



CADA (Colectivo Acciones de Arte / Art Actions Collective), NO+, Chile, 1983. Courtesy: Lotty Rosenfeld





<left>  
Lotty Rosenfeld. *Una milla de cruces sobre el pavimento* (A Mile of Crosses on the Pavement), video still from *Acciones de arte* (Art Actions), 1979-1980. Courtesy: the artist.  
<right>  
Papo Colo. *Superman 51*, gelatin silver print, 1977. Courtesy: the artist and El Museo del Barrio.

According to the curator, “the exhibition title challenges the commonplace idea that art is equivalent to life and life to art. What is proposed through these many works is that while art affirms and celebrates life with a regenerative force, and sharpens and provokes our critical senses, artistic actions that address inequalities and conflict are not equivalent to real life endured under actual repression.” The exhibition was arranged thematically by decade. 1960 – 1970 looks at select precursors, signaling, destructivism and neoconcretismo; 1970 – 1980 refers to political protest, class struggle, happenings, land/body relationships and border crossing; 1980 – 1990 focuses on anti-dictatorship protest; and 1990 – 2000 references multiculturalism, postmodernism and endurance. The final section highlights interventions that artists have carried out on television over the past 20 years.

With its multiplicity of themes, artists and represented decades, the exhibition was a spectacle complete with descriptive narratives impossible to engage with in only one visit. But beyond this scene of multiplicity and inclusion, as a Chilean-Canadian visitor, I could not help but wonder where Latin American Canadians were. While there was an entire room dedicated to Chilean artists who created political artworks and interventions in public spaces during repres-

sive years under military dictatorship, contemporary Latin American-Canadian artists were nowhere represented. It is ironic that within international spheres, my Canadianness seemed less significant in comparison to a precedential relevance of my Chileanness, which I usually neither identify with nor benefit from in Canada (my Latin-Americanness always predominates within our multicultural Canadian tendencies and preferences). In writing this piece, I am not only interested in considering the exhibition but also the problematic of exclusion within representation, in the context of the exhibition itself and also within a Canadian framework.

*Arte ≠ Vida* included ephemeral performances and interventions that were documented and captured through film, video, photography and text. A few of the original artworks were on exhibit, live performances were scheduled, and public programs and tours were offered to an endlessly enthusiastic audience. Overwhelmed by its ambitious scope, and amazed by artists such as Marta Minujín, Raphael Montañez-Ortiz, Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica, Alfredo Jaar, Papo Colo, Félix González-Torres, Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña, I speculated why it had taken so long to finally recognize the significance and relevance of such an exhibition within international contemporary spheres. Furthermore, why was

**While there was an entire room dedicated to Chilean artists who created political artworks and interventions in public spaces during repressive years under military dictatorship, contemporary Latin American Canadian artists were nowhere represented.**

the exhibit held at a “Latino” museum on the outskirts of Harlem and not at another contemporary museum in Manhattan? And finally, why isn’t Canada included? Aren’t we also on the map of the so-called “Americas?” These questions are pertinent and pressing in an era in which “diversity” is invoked in mainstream discourses, yet rarely exemplified in daily realities, and globalization has local amorphous identities negotiating in order to continue role-playing within international expectations. Ironically, the publication was printed and bound in Canada, yet we remain on the periphery of this comprehensive archival project, excluded from discourse and oblivious to our lack of representation. Indeed, to consider that even within Canada we rarely engage with Latin America — its culture, history, art and politics — answers why Latin American-Canadians wouldn’t be represented in *Arte ≠ Vida* and reflects Deborah Cullen’s response to my inquiries: she was unaware of any internationally well-known Latin American Canadian artists. Lack of representation in our own home translates into internationally projected ignorance.

Why the lack of awareness? There have been massive waves of Latin American immigration to Canada since the early 1970s. Latin American artists are a growing community within Canada and repeatedly need to negotiate with a label, which is both imposed on and used by them to navigate mainstream concepts of identity. Art theorists insist that trying to define “Latin American art” is an exercise in futility, and yet some of the elements that unite a Latin American diaspora are the challenges faced by a relatively young, divided and economically deprived community, coming from a young, divided and supra-dependant colonized continent. The supposition that Latin Americans living in Canada can have or achieve an ethno-cultural common identity is problematic; nevertheless, the label provides access to resources and establishes networks. So where do our local identities, indeed intertwined, leave us, besides outside the sphere of international representation? While *Arte ≠ Vida* may be perceived as reinforcing cohesion and commonality, the exhibition also addressed vast differences and multiplicities of people, culture, land, social customs and politics — but again without mentioning the growing diaspora in Canada.

Needless to say, the Latin American population in the United States is vastly larger than the one in Canada, but both sets of demographics reflect a low-income working class and/or illegal immigrants who possess little or no power within society. El Museo del Barrio is a reflection of an institutionalized segregation and tokenism that continues to prevail in North America, an ambiguous sense of accomplishment masqueraded by the corroboration of the institu-

tion, which in turn does not bear the name of the frequently attended and highly discussed contemporary museums of New York. The fact that Canada has no token institution for Latin Americans prolongs a state of marginalization and disengagement. Although there has been an expressed interest by museums like New York’s MoMA, which have acquired pieces for their permanent collections and formed their own Latin American art departments in the past decade, Latin American performance art remains on the periphery of such exposure. Mainstream Canadian institutions such as the AGO have very poor permanent collections of Latin American art and no expressed signs of interest in introducing performance art from Latin America into future programming. “Negotiation” is the key word in questions of representation, as in the case of El Museo’s efforts and success; they need to replace tokenism with conceptual ventures and resource development in order to gain legitimacy and inspire agency.

Inspiration and agency were on my mind as I walked along the *¡Junta! ¡No!* section of the exhibit, which consisted of performance and intervention art from Latin American countries under military dictatorships. The work was eerily familiar to me since my parents arrived in Canada as political exiles and left in the 1980s as soon as their names appeared on the lists of those granted permission to return to dictatorial Chile. During that period of time, merely looking at something in public or actively engaging in protest meant absolute repression. Disappearances, curfews, censorship, torture and exile were part of our daily vocabulary and the art produced at the time had to be camouflaged. Many artists left in exile and others opted to live under self-imposed censorship in Chile. Many were disappeared and assassinated by the military.

*¡Junta! ¡No!* contained a prominent collection of work by the Collective of Art Actions (CADA), which formed in 1979 at the height of the Pinochet regime. Chilean artists Lotty Rosenfeld, Juan Castillo, Fernando Balcells, Diamela Eltit and Raúl Zurita founded the group to intervene in the everyday space of Santiago with unusual images that would interrogate the conditions that had become habitual in the repressed environment.<sup>1</sup> The exhibition documented actions such as *¡Ay Sudamerica! (Oh, South America!)*, 1981, in which six small engine planes flying in military formation dropped 400,000 leaflets over the streets of Santiago<sup>2</sup> with the permission of military authorities. The context in which the intervention was executed is crucial to understanding its implications. Under the military dictatorship, people feared for their lives and did not dare speak against the regime or express dissent. CADA created a “visual/poetic language that challenged the citizens of Santiago

**“life is more important than art, that’s what makes art important”**

to question the normality of life under this dictatorship.”<sup>33</sup> Another CADA action from 1983 was to write “No +” on the walls of Santiago at night while the country was under military siege. Both actions were on display as video documentations in the room, and as I sat staring at the adjacent monitors I remembered the dismay and confusion they created amongst an apprehensive and skeptical population in the 1980s. Oblivious as to where these actions were coming from at the time, the general Chilean population witnessed art as social change not only affecting internal politics but also raising awareness at an international level.

James Baldwin talks about the idea that “life is more important than art, that’s what makes art important” and in the context of *Arte ≠ Vida* and specifically *¡Junta! ¡No!* it could not be more true to the artists’ discourse and intention. While CADA notoriously claimed space and disrupted the streets of Santiago, so did individual artists such as Lotty Rosenfeld with *Una milla de cruces sobre el pavimento* (*A Mile of Crosses on the Pavement*) (1979 – 1980) and Alfredo Jaar with *Chile 1981, Antes de partir* (*Before Leaving*). Rosenfeld’s intervention consisted of turning transit lines into mathematical symbols: + signs, which looked like crosses when viewed from the air by travelers who arrived to Chilean territory. This gesture referred to the many killings and burials under Pinochet’s regime. Alfredo Jaar’s *Before Leaving* consisted of 1,000 small Chilean flags placed in sequence along the mountains and shores of Chile. Twenty photographic prints displayed in a grid documented his emblematic farewell prior to migrating to New York. The artwork was an extremely brave act of defiance and commemoration in the context of a brutal dictatorship. Thousands of exiles left Chile after suffering incarceration, torture and fearing for their lives. Many others were not as lucky and disappeared into the ocean after being thrown from military aircraft. Alfredo Jaar alludes to the remnants of a civil war, to a political and class division within the population, to the disappeared buried in the sea and to the exiles who suffered great loss longing to return home. Furthermore, Jaar’s use of the Chilean flag signifies disrespect and disobedience; after all, its patriotic symbolism had to be displayed under strict codices of the fascist regime.

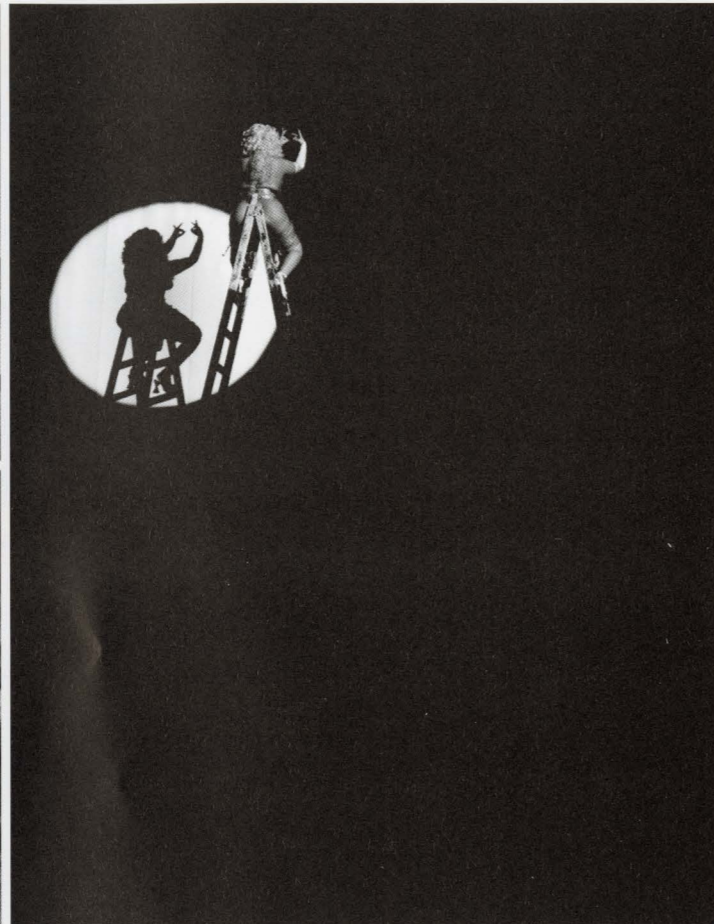
I was originally motivated to write this piece in response to Deborah Cullen’s instigator accomplishment, an inspiration to my own objectives as a “Latin American” curator. At the same time, I felt provoked to fill the void with the prolific Canadian voices omitted from the project. Many Canadian voices that need to be included in this conversation come to mind, but for lack of space I will only mention a couple: Claudia Bernal and Naufus Ramirez-Figueroa. The performances of Nao Bustamante, an acclaimed contemporary performance and video artist based in the United States, was one of

the highlights of *Arte ≠ Vida*. At the time of the exhibition at El Museo del Barrio, Bustamante traveled to Toronto to perform for an exhibit entitled *Grotesques* — a group show curated by Lissette Olivares. The audience indulged in Bustamante’s decadent and disturbing world, witness to the realm of mutative symbolic and viscerally seductive constructions of aesthetics. Instead of continuing to highlight her work, I will instead offer the work of a similarly extraordinary artist who shares Bustamante’s compelling potency: Claudia Bernal. Bernal is an interdisciplinary contemporary artist who emigrated to Québec from Colombia in 1991. *Monument to Ciudad Juarez: Only Women Who Die a Violent Death Go Directly to a Paradise* is a video/installation/performance Bernal created while living in Mexico City in 2002. Dedicated to and inspired by the horrific misogynist genocide — labeled a “femicide” by activists — of over 300 women in the city of Juarez, Mexico, Bernal’s installation consists of 300 ceramic bowls placed in a spiral formation, each containing the name of a woman murdered in the city and an offering of a corn tortilla. Bernal mournfully sets a burial site for these women, most of whose bodies remain missing, by slowly pacing and setting the formation of the bowls, in black attire, denouncing the horrific massacre and giving tribute to the victims and their families. A white sheet hanging from a clothesline displays video projection of a barbed wire, a close-up of an eye searching for the missing bodies and the shadow of a desert surrounded by crosses that bear witness to press reports read by the naively sweet, tender voice of a child. Her performance epitomizes the impact of trauma through a ritualized homage. Throughout her career, Bernal has portrayed social issues that bind her to Latin America and hence, within the context of Canada, segregate her work from mainstream discourses.

Internationally acclaimed Guatemalan artist Regina José Galindo, included at El Museo’s exhibit as representative of contemporary practitioners, addresses the atrocities and remnants of war. Guatemalan-born Canadian Naufus Ramirez-Figueroa — a performance and visual artist based in Vancouver — also deals with issues of trauma through works such as *The Sun is Crooked in the Sky; My Father is Thrown over my Shoulders* is a visceral continuous 100-hour performance. For the past 10 years, Ramirez-Figueroa has performed and exhibited at various artist-run centres, galleries and museums in Latin and North America. He explains: “The artist’s family, like many other Guatemalan — and Latin American — families, has dealt with common, though taboo issues of class and race differences that have affected the family dynamic. There is a history of indigenous women having the children of whiter men, men who become fathers unwilling to recognize the children as their own.” In Ramirez-Figueroa’s performance, powdered milk — widely consumed by children in Central and South America — is sniffed



Naufus Ramirez-Figueroa. *The Sun is Crooked in the Sky; My Father is Thrown over my Shoulders*, performance, 2005. Courtesy: the artist.



<left> Claudia Bernal. *Monument to Ciudad Juarez: Only Women Who Die a Violent Death go Directly to Paradise*, video-installation and performance, 2002. Courtesy: the artist.  
<right> Nao Bustamante. *America the Beautiful*, c-print, 2002. Photo: Lorie Novak. Courtesy: El Museo del Barrio.

and consumed strenuously on the floor by a half-clothed artist who, through a violently sexual act, addresses both childhood memories and a past of colonization and trauma in Latin America, instinctively placing the responsibility upon North America's shoulders as he shares the aftermaths of war and terror with his audience. Ramirez-Figueroa's determination in having an international impact through various group and solo performances in both hemispheres unfortunately does not translate additively to Deborah Cullen's curatorial project or publication.

In comparison to most Latin American countries, Canada has a long and enviable tradition of supporting its artists in various disciplines through artist run centres, government art councils and artist associations. Mostly absent from art history, and as Dot Tuer argues in writing on Vera Frenkel *The Secret Life of a Performance Artist* "performance has never been the darling of the art establishment, nor evinced much interest from galleries and museums."<sup>4</sup> Tuer's statement makes perfect sense in a context where artists who delve into an ephemeral world, untangling perceptions of truth in intangible, unmarketable ways — similar to many Latin American artists who are submerged in a culturally, linguistically and, in many cases,

politically different spheres — cannot find the spaces in which to intervene, making agency even less penetrable. Representation, unity, and agency are permanently relevant to the growth of a young and divided Latin American community. To have no international representation in *Arte ≠ Vida* in the year 2008 suggests that we need not only to strive for those token resources granted to a few in Canada but to actively respond by writing our own history here and abroad. □

TAMARA TOLEDO is a visual artist and independent curator. Toledo completed an MFA at York University and is a graduate of the Ontario College of Art & Design. She is co-founder and Visual Arts Director of the Salvador Allende Arts Festival.

Notes:

1. Deborah Cullen, *Arte ≠ Vida: Actions by Artists of the Americas, 1960–2000*, NY: El Museo del Barrio, p. 165.
2. Leaflets read: "Each individual who works for the expansion of the space of his or her life (even if mental) is an artist."
3. Cullen, p. 171.
4. Dot Tuer, "Vera Frenkel: The Secret Life of a Performance Artist," *Caught in the Act: an anthology of performance art by Canadian women*, Tanya Mars and Johanna Householder, eds. YYZBooks, 2004, p. 232.

# Fresh Art

## IN EDMONTON

**LATITUDE 53**  
CONTEMPORARY VISUAL CULTURE

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harcourthouse

**SNAP**  
from

**Peter Kingstone**  
"100 Stories About My Grandmother"  
JANUARY 9<sup>th</sup> TO  
FEBRUARY 14<sup>th</sup>  
OPENING RECEPTION:  
Friday, January 9<sup>th</sup> at 8 pm

**Sean Montgomery**  
JANUARY 9<sup>th</sup> TO  
FEBRUARY 14<sup>th</sup>  
OPENING RECEPTION:  
Friday, January 9<sup>th</sup> at 8 pm

**53 Ways to Leave Your Lover**  
Anti-Valentine's Day Fundraiser  
FEBRUARY 21<sup>st</sup> AT 8pm

**Robyn Cumming**  
MARCH 6<sup>th</sup> TO  
APRIL 4<sup>th</sup>  
OPENING RECEPTION:  
Friday, March 6<sup>th</sup> at 8pm

[www.latitude53.org](http://www.latitude53.org)  
t 780.423.5353 10248 106 St. Edmonton, AB

**Spyder Yardley-Jones**  
JANUARY 8<sup>th</sup> TO  
FEBRUARY 14<sup>th</sup>  
OPENING RECEPTION:  
Thursday, January 8<sup>th</sup>, 7-10 pm  
ARTIST TALK: Saturday, Jan. 10<sup>th</sup>, 1pm

**Nate Larson**  
JANUARY 8<sup>th</sup> TO  
FEBRUARY 14<sup>th</sup>  
OPENING RECEPTION:  
Thursday, January 8<sup>th</sup>, 7-10 pm

**Allen Ball**  
FEBRUARY 19<sup>th</sup> TO MARCH 21<sup>st</sup>  
OPENING RECEPTION:  
Thursday, February 26<sup>th</sup>, 7-10pm  
ARTIST TALK: Saturday, February 28<sup>th</sup>, 1pm

**Karen Hibbard**  
FEBRUARY 19<sup>th</sup> TO MARCH 21<sup>st</sup>  
OPENING RECEPTION:  
Thursday, February 26<sup>th</sup>, 7-10pm

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**Print Affair**  
Christmas Print Sale Fundraiser  
SATURDAY DECEMBER 6<sup>th</sup>  
AT 7pm-10pm  
EXHIBIT/FUNdraiser CONTINUES:  
December 6<sup>th</sup> - December 20<sup>th</sup>

**Joscelyn Gardner**  
"Creole Portraits"  
JANUARY 8<sup>th</sup> TO  
FEBRUARY 21<sup>st</sup>  
OPENING RECEPTION:  
Thursday, January 9<sup>th</sup>, 7-9pm

**Guy Langevin**  
"Scent of Memory"  
FEBRUARY 26<sup>th</sup> TO  
APRIL 11<sup>th</sup>  
OPENING RECEPTION:  
Thursday, February 26<sup>th</sup>, 7-9pm

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## Seeing Peace.

Our intention with the BILLBOARD PROJECT of *Seeing Peace* was to bring together visual artists from South Africa, Japan, Israel, U.S., Puerto Rico, Cuba, Ukraine, El Salvador, Tibet and Iran, member states of the United Nations, to imagine a dialogue of international peace through the creation of culturally construed images. We asked what peace looks like from their cultural and global perspectives. The public installation of the 10 images was intended to press members of our community to reflect on peace and challenge their own vision of what peace might look like. Ask yourself, "what does peace look like to me?" I am convinced that if we do not have a vision, a complex, layered multi-national vision, of what peace looks like, we might never get there. There will be no map!

— Richard Kamler



<top left> Igor Gusev. <bottom left> Tonel. <this page> Uzi Broshi. *Seeing Peace*, billboards, 2008. Courtesy: Richard Kamler.

The Temporary Autonomous Zone is like an uprising which does not engage directly with the State, a guerilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere/elsewhen, before the State can crush it.

— HAKIM BEY

# PIRATES OF PERFORMANCE:

## Wanda Nanibush

IN CONVERSATION  
WITH CREE  
PERFORMANCE  
ARTISTS Cheryl L'Hirondelle  
AND Archer Pechawis

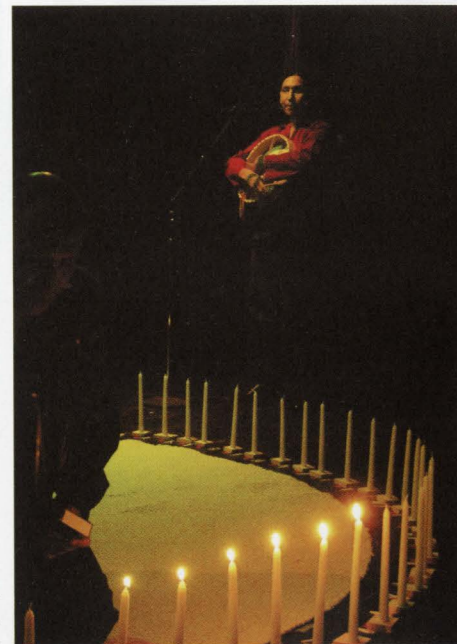


<this page> Archer Pechawis. *Shoot the Indian*, 2008. Photo: Merle Addison. Courtesy: the artist.  
<opposite page> Cheryl L'Hirondelle. *ekayapahkaci (the beauty within)*, 2008. Photo: Scott Stephens.

In mid-May 2008, I find myself at the Belgo building in Montréal peering precariously down the space between the stairs where the banisters form an amazing rectangle. My line of sight ends at a tiny red bag sitting beside the last stair. Cheryl L'Hirondelle climbs up over the banister, looking like a rogue animal freed from her cage. She smiles through the physically strenuous act of climbing while audience members randomly join her. L'Hirondelle carries the equipment that she will need to set up a pirate radio station on her back, making several climbs up and down the banister. The performance we are witnessing is called *awa ka-âmacivêt pîwâpisko (waciya/climbing the iron mountains)*. Curator Joanne Bristol, having learned just the day before, assists Cheryl in setting up the pirate radio station on the roof. The radio broadcasts for 5 miles — pirating 89.9 FM for downtown Montréal. As corporations and countries claim the air, Cheryl quietly infiltrates these spaces and reclaims them for the birds.

One month later, I am in Vancouver with L'Hirondelle, lined up to "Shoot the Indian" at the Magnetic North Festival HIVE2 event. The Indian in this case is Archer Pechawis, standing in a white painter's suit in front of a white 30-foot screen with a projection of remixed scenes from the "Cowboys and Indians" film genre. The most disturbing part of the performance is that Archer is wearing a Tsimshian mask





Archer Pechawis. *Elegy*, 2006.  
Photos: Leonard Fisher.  
Courtesy: the artist.



carved by Simon Reese, which is being pelted with paint. People are paying \$5 for five shots at Pechawis with a semi-automatic paintball gun. Some folks seem interested, some are fairly uncomfortable, others relish the act with a chilling lack of restraint. One man makes me worry for Indians everywhere.

These two Cree artists blur the boundaries between art and activism, between memory and forgetting, mind and body, artist and broader community. The lines are blurred in their practice not because they are working against a western enlightenment tradition but because they are working from within an ever-changing Cree conception of the world. Each artist interrogates their Cree-ness and brings Cree-ness into view in their performances. I met with L'Hirondelle and Pechawis in the back garden of Vancouver's Western Front Gallery to talk about the social, political and cultural implications of the way they engage people, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, and how their art is informed by a new (read: Old Indian) ways of being political that starts with one's own life, body and relations.

**Wanda Nanibush:** Isn't the first question we always ask: Where are you from?

**Archer Pechawis:** I am Plains Cree on my mother's side. She is from Mistawasis First Nation, Saskatchewan. I am status through Bill C-31. Growing up as a non-status Indian until I was in my mid-20s had a profound effect on my identity. I was born in Alert Bay, B.C. in Kwakwaka'wakw territory on the coast. I am adopted into my uncle's clan which is Quolus. And that has affected me profoundly as well. We moved to Vancouver when

I was a teenager, Vancouver is my home. In short I am a West Coast Cree.

**Cheryl L'Hirondelle:** [in Cree] It is one of the pivotal questions — *tânîtê ohci kiya*, the one that lets you know how we are related. It lets you know who you can take to your tent (ha ha) and what your blood line is. I am from Northern Alberta. My mom is a mixed-blood Cree woman from Lac La Biche in northern Alberta, Kikino and Pahpahstayo. The latter is a band surrendered by the Canadian government during the Louis Riel resistance to make way for the railway expansion. They wanted to build the railway through from Calgary, so they could send the Gatlin guns to the river and float them up to Northern Saskatchewan to squash the uprising. The band was surrendered when it was hunting season so the government could say no one was living there. That was quite common. My dad is German and Polish and came over after the second world war, so in Cree you'd say he was *mistik-osiw iyiniw* (a wooden boat being), an old way to say European.

**WN:** How does where you come from influence your artistic practice?

**AP:** It influences everything about me. Thinking of my practice — it has really been varied. I started out as a street

performer, a street juggler. Now I am a performance and media artist. It has been a journey through all those places. Like many Native artists, my primary motive was social change via art for the Cree people. When I came to the arts I realized this was where I could effect social change.

**CL:** I have never been just one thing. No Native artist I know is just one thing. Some of my early love of what performance art could do versus theatre was that you don't have the hierarchy of the gaze of what you have to witness. You could gaze at what you want. There is a beauty to that openness. It reminds me of family gatherings where you can look at uncle's tapping feet and no one will say to you that you should be looking at Aunt Celeste singing. That translated for me later in performance art.

The other thing is that I grew up without the language. I think I have always thought that making performance art is like building a language or a lexicon — a way to recreate something that got lost at some point.

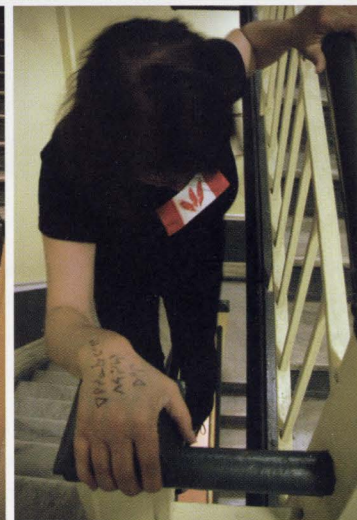
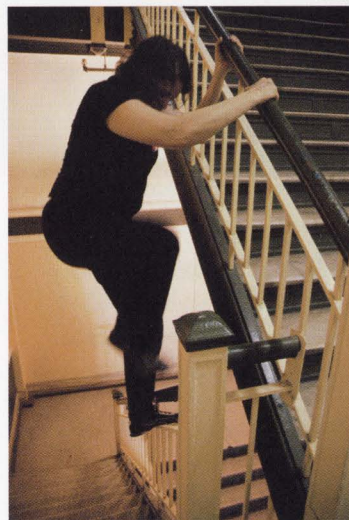
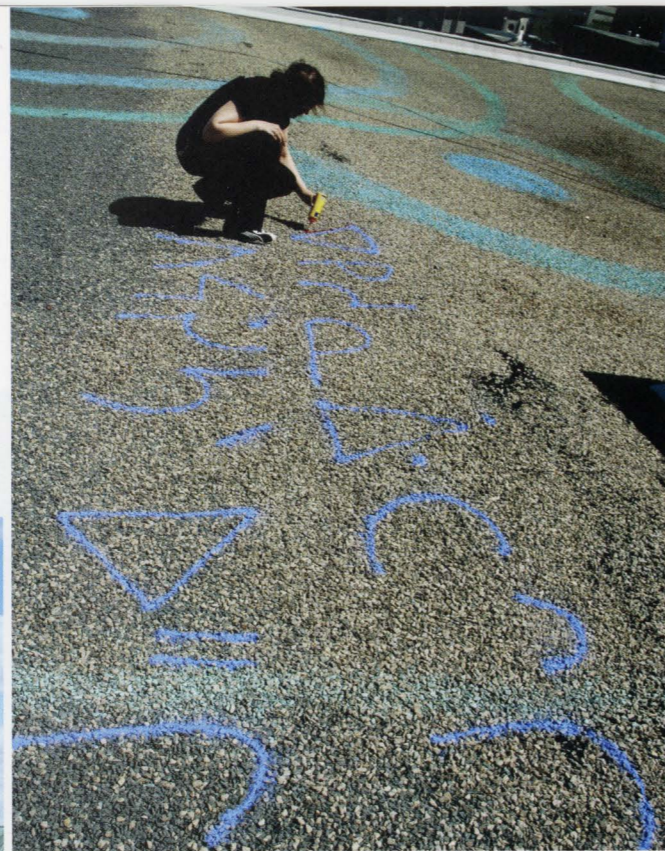
**AP:** The whole language thing is critical. If you look at the work that I do versus the work that Floyd Favel does, he is fluent in Cree, there is always a sense of journey and home. My French is better than my Cree so there is a gap there. I cannot teach my daughter Cree so it becomes

generational. That is part of the legacy of residential schools. I love this idea that Cheryl is talking about, performance is about creating a lexicon and it's a space of freedom. Even experimental theatre is regimented. In performance anything goes and anything should, that way it is constantly pushing boundaries.

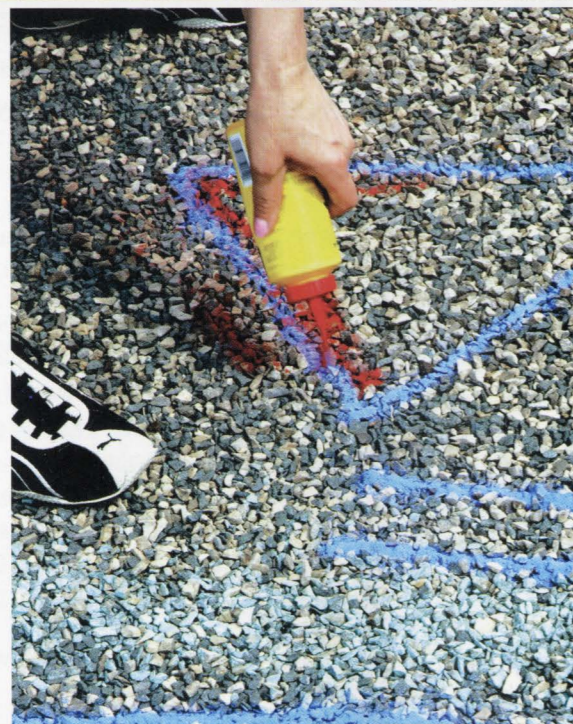
**The other thing is that I grew up without the language. I think I have always thought that making performance art is like building a language or a lexicon — a way to recreate something that got lost at some point.**

**WN:** You're seriously political, but you have a playfulness or an openness to what happens in your work. What role does play have in your work?

**CL:** I like to play. Looking at some of my old performance work, it is so serious. I look like a robot. I would have this dialogue with myself and say it's a sense of ritual. But then I started going to ceremony and realized that there is a lot of play and jokes going on and so I realized I could assume a more natural position and not be so stiff. I started working with the notion of play to challenge the way I had been socialized to think this is serious business, serious art making, and have a bit more fun with it.



Cheryl L'Hirondelle.  
Awa ka-amaciwet piwapisko waciya  
(Climbing the Iron Mountains), 2008.  
Courtesy: La Centrale Galerie Powerhouse.



One of the things I wanted to do especially with *climbing the iron mountains* is to de-socialize myself in space. I also wanted to decentralize myself as the performer. Like Raphaele [an audience member who climbed with Cheryl in Montréal] said she might upstage me because she is fit and climbs like a monkey. I said, there is no upstaging in this piece. It's part of decolonizing oneself in space and time.

I am trying to impart something like tools for survival. *Tools for Survival* was an old piece I did where I went around yelling at everyone "have you got your tools for survival?" Setting up pirate radio is instructional, letting people know how to do it.

**We are in a state of being a vidience.  
Audience comes from Shakespearian  
times when people would go to hear  
a text, but now we are a vidience  
because we go to see or to witness.**

**WN:** Cheryl, you constitute accidental audiences or audiences by chance. How does this type of audience differ from a captive audience when you are on stage? Does it affect the content of the performance?

**CL:** Well, I had a captive audience this week at Pine Grove Women's Correctional Centre. One of the nicest weeks I have had in a long time. We did a songwriting workshop and a recording session.

It was a combination of working in theatre and not wanting to prescribe to people where they should sit and what they should witness, and as I began to question that more, I began to realize that most people are not audiences anymore. We are in a state of being a vidience. Audience comes from Shakespearian times when people would go to hear a text, but now we are a vidience because we go to see or to witness.

I wanted to open the experience up because random things are more meaningful. We know as Indian people that when we see something random — we wonder what they mean, we may not think about that when we are forced in front of something. We don't think of synthesizing it, cataloguing it.

**WN:** Archer, you usually have a more classical audience. How do you interact with it?

**AP:** First thing I do is think about who I think will be there, which is not how a lot of artists work. If I think it will be primarily a Native audience then that's going to have a big influence on the work I do. Context is a big factor for my work. I have been working very much with a watching audience. Tomorrow's *Shoot the Indian* performance is more random. I came out of street performance where the audience is more random... you have to make the audience stay, so the performance shifts and changes constantly. I made a conscious choice a few years ago to make work for a Native audience. I would be working here at the Front or at Grunt, and a lot of Native people would come because I was Native. But galleries are so intimidating... they are unknown locations... lots of people won't come to them. There is very much a sense of privilege in people who go to galleries. Very different than performing at Talking Stick festival, where it's a broad-based audience of Native people. For a Native audience, I can do work like *Elegy*, where I conducted a service — a religious type service, a mourning — a memorial for the women of downtown east side Vancouver who had been murdered. It was about humanizing these women. I was pissed off about the coverage that pegged them as prostitutes and drug addicts. I wanted to connect us to them. There is a gaping wound in us because we have all experienced violence in some way, so even if the people did not have a direct connection to the women, they had one in their experience as Native People.

**WN:** Is there a difference in the meaning of your work in the context of an Aboriginal audience? We rarely get to travel our art to our own people. Have you found this to be true?

**AP:** I have a history of making pieces for my family and taking them back to the rez to perform them for my family and whoever else happens to be around.

**CL:** I was learning Cree and traveling around to different reserves. Many colleagues thought I had moved to the Bush and become a kohkom (grandmother). So they say the best way to learn a language is between the sheets, you know, so there was funny banter that would go back and forth between Joseph and I when I was learning Cree. It turned into a performance piece. You know the *When Harry Met Sally* scene where she fakes an orgasm? Well, we'd go over to an old lady's house and Joseph would say, "You should hear her Cree. It's getting a lot better." I would be saying everyday words in Cree but sounding orgasmic. The old ladies would be just about pissing themselves laughing. They knew exactly what I was doing. That gave me an idea of how you could do work on reserves and how it would be received.

I got invited to a Development of Performance gathering organized by Tanya Mars and Johanna Householder, and I was moved by the interventionist work I saw, but some of it was kind of like an inside joke. If you did not get the joke, it was meant to be an abrasive piece, meant to irritate the audience. I just have so much love for people that I do not want to irritate people in that community. You do not want to irritate people who have been traumatized or who have been left on the outside. So I wanted to subvert that in some way. I asked instead how you could go onto a reserve and do work that just

embraced people. That's where *cistêmâw iyiniw ohci* came from. I wanted to start doing these homages. The run was 21 km and began on Crown land, where Big Bear fought the North West Mounted Police during the North West Resistance, and ended at the residence of an Elder at Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation. I did it as an homage to honour the community's ceremonial runner, Cistêmâw Iyiniw. The old ladies on the reserve were phoning each other, saying "she's running for our ancestors." People would drive by and yell out their truck windows, "âhkameyimêw" (keep going).

**WN:** They are so used to being ignored that when you pay enough attention to run for their ancestors it is such a big deal.

**CL:** Yeah, it is a huge deal — especially for me. I remember one of the most poignant moments for me happened at the Tribe Inc. sponsored artist talk the day before the run. We held it at the school. When you are working with youth, if they do not leave the room that's a standing ovation. The standing "O" on a reserve is when everyone comes up afterwards and shakes hands with you. At the end of my talk, this youth who was at the back looking disinterested, legs stretched out, asked a question. I had been talking about how I would stop at people's houses who tagged their doors. I would know I could go there for water on my run. This youth asked what he would have to write on his house to get me to stop and visit the next day. I almost wept.

**AP:** What Cheryl's talking about has become my *modus operandi* in the last decade. I call myself a performance artist out of convenience more than anything else. A lot of performance art seems like you need to understand the history of performance art to get what is going on. Its not very accessible work. Native performance art seems a lot more accessible generally. Now, I ask myself: "What would my mom and aunties and uncles think of this?" If they cannot get meaning from what I do, then I am not really interested in doing it. I do not just want to speak to people who know the history of performance art. I am rejoining my populist roots. One of the most populist forms being street performance. If everyone doesn't get it you don't eat.

**A lot of performance art seems like you need to understand the history of performance art to get what is going on. Its not very accessible work.**

**WN:** I have noticed that people have been using performance art-like tactics and street performance in political protest — cultural jamming, clowning, juggling. And if I look at the history of both of your performance work, it's linked to protest. You talk about infiltration and social change and de-socialization, these are all terms that come out of political activism. There is a strong connection between performance art and political activism.

**CL:** Many forms of political activism come out of the Indian underground. We have been a part of that subversive style of activism for a really long time. Infiltration — that's basically the sneak-up. This stuff gets recycled and



repurposed over and over, and at some point the Indigenous roots get forgotten or left out. Part of my work is tagging in Cree syllabics. I used tagging because of the history of hobo tagging and youth graffiti. Hobos used to tag dumpsters and buildings, etc. But this really originates with Indians when they were first being let off reserves — Connie Dieter Buffalo told me this story. The men were let off reserves, and they were using syllabics and images to tag places as Indian-friendly or as sources of water and food — very old school and new school mixed. When thinking about tagging — I am definitely old school, using syllabics instead of roman orthography or images.

**AP:** Traditions change. In the old days there was always someone in the camp who would be the camp crier. Well, that's our job — we are the Native News Network (ha ha). Our job as performance artists is to contextualize what is going on around us. The most significant event of my adult life was Oka, 1990 and the incredible effect it had on the arts, not just Native People as a whole but in the arts. It precipitated the inclusion of Aboriginal artists



Cheryl L'Hirondelle. *wapahta oma iskonikan askiy (URONNDNLAND)*, 2004. Photo: Janna Graham. Courtesy: the artist.

in the contemporary arts scene and the wave of activism that happened here in Vancouver. The Duffy Lake Road blockade happened the day after the shootout at Oka and lasted much longer. It did not have the kind of press Oka did. Oka reinforced the split in the country.

**WN:** I was talking to Cheryl in Montréal about Hakim Bey, whom she happens to love. It seems to me that you create a temporary autonomous zone in your performances. They are subversive because they help us reconsider our relationship to society and one another.

**CL:** I moved from abrasion to embrace in my work because one of the things Hakim Bey talks about in his work is that the point of anarchy is radical inclusivity. The idea of radical inclusivity is significant in a Cree worldview, we can say us all of us, it means humans, rocks, birds — all animate things. It's nice to meditate on how to make work that is radically inclusive. It is temporary and autonomous because once the piece ends it's over.

**WN:** If we think about tradition, western art has us caught between being traditional and contemporary. If tradition changes over time, and this includes Indigenous cultures, how do you characterize the more "traditional" in your work?

**AP:** "Tradition in relation to what?" is the question. Everything becomes tradition eventually. I did an Aboriginal thing in a school for grade fours last week. The school had originally put me in the tipi because I was dubbed an Aboriginal storyteller. I had to break it to them that I had a laptop and a data projector so I could not use the tipi. So I took over the staff room. I asked them, what is traditional? One kid answered: "whatever you do in your culture that's traditional." "Oh snap," I said. "Good answer." "If I stand up here in front of you guys, sing some songs and drum, is that traditional?" Everyone goes "yes." "So if I stuffed a laptop in my drum that was showing a video while I sang songs and told stories, is that traditional?" Everyone paused and then said "no." I said: "Does a drum grow on trees?" They said "no." I said: "At some point some guy stretched a skin over a log and tapped on it. Some people thought that was great and others thought it was weird and freaky." I asked them if they had relatives who are freaked out by computers. They all said. "yes."



You know, no one questions the drum now. I think everything I do is traditional. I took a laptop and jammed it inside a drum and coupled that with storytelling. The piece was called *Horse*. To me that is traditional. I was saying this is what time it is — like a camp crier.

**CL:** I love hearing people like you and Candice Hopkins saying “traditional” really means things that are changing. Someone told me this story once — think it may have been Lynn Acoose. There was this old man doing a ceremony, and he said “I am doing this ceremony exactly as my ancestors have done it for hundreds of years.” Someone said to him, “How can that be, Mushum (grandfather), because you’re wearing jeans, you have cowboy boots and are using a cast iron pot for the smudge.” He said, “I am doing what our people have always done, adapted.” So I think it’s that definition of traditional that I work with. I have moved into cyberspace and new media to present these concepts. One of the things about internet is that it is an alchemy of so many different elements. If tradition is change, then adaptability is a cornerstone for survival and *miyo-pimatisiwin* (a good healthy life).

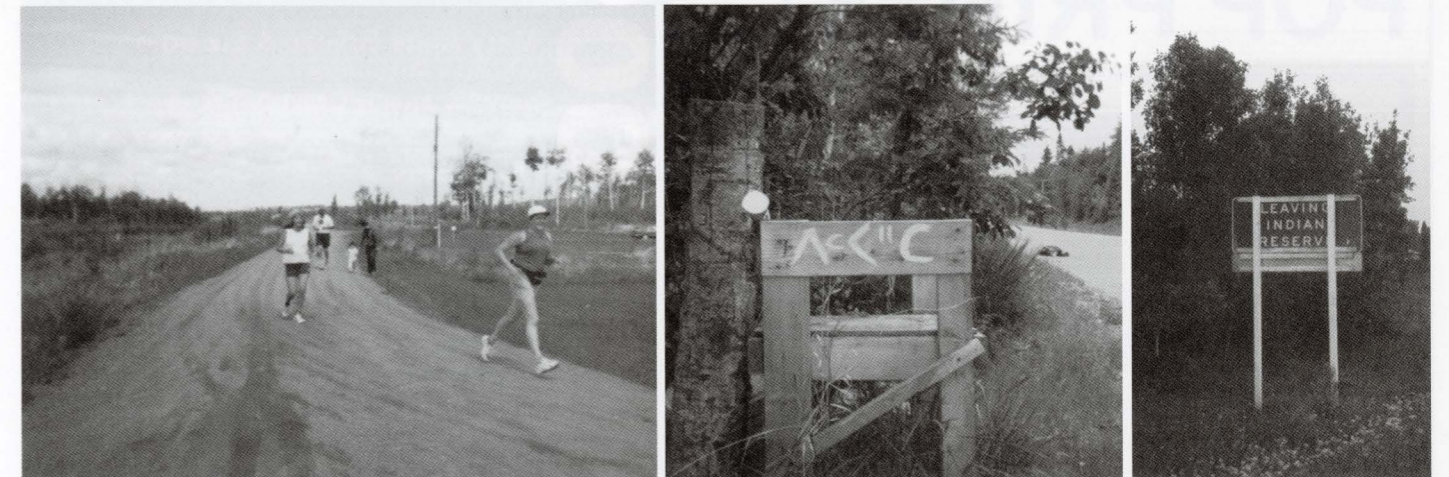
**AP:** Cyber powwow was our big land claim in cyberspace. In terms of my practice, wherever my laptop happens to be is my territory.

**WN:** I think it is related to democratizing knowledge, because previous to the internet and new communicative technologies, certain people controlled knowledge and controlled histories, and that’s why we were not part of it, because we were not in power. And now we are able to take that power for ourselves, and that has always been a part of art practice in general. A lot of your work, Cheryl, asserts little known histories or relations of space. Like when you did *wâpahta ôma iskonikan askiy* (*Look at this leftover piece of land*) for Banff Centre. You placed those words in syllabics across the side of the highway heading towards the reserve near Banff. You used rocks to form the syllabics. A lot of our histories are getting told in performance art.

**CL:** Sometimes when you are in the process of making work (like *wâpahta ôma iskonikan askiy*) the elements come together and you understand it as you are making it. I thought to myself, I have been commissioned to make work, but who am I as a halfbreed, and it’s not my territory. I was making a commentary on this “leftover strip of land,” which is the translation of “reserve” in Cree. But it is also me. I am on the road allowance which is my strip of land theoretically as Métis. The piece also had a nice random audience/vidience of mostly truckers driving



Archer Pechawis. *Horse*, video stills, 2008. Courtesy: the artist.



Cheryl L'Hirondelle. *cistemaw iyiniw ohci* (for the tobacco being). Photos: <left to right> Cheli Nighthtraveller, Joseph Naytowhow and Louise Halfe. Courtesy: the artist.

by — honking on their way by while I was working hard placing down those heavy stones. I kept the audio of their participation and mixed it together with my toil. It documents what I heard from what they saw.

**WN:** In performance art, one cannot deny the bodily existence of Indigenous People or our contemporariness. Does your body as “racialized” or “colonized” come into the dynamics of your performances?

**AP:** How can it not? When we discuss these traumatizing conditions it’s as if we’re pretending we have some option on how it affects us. I’m not suggesting that being conscious about this isn’t part of the solution, far from it, but colonization and de-colonization is a day by day process: you have your good days and your bad days. For me Yuxweluptun nailed it with his quote, “I’m having a bad colonial day.”

**CL:** Yeah, except in my work, because I am fair skinned and blue-eyed, identity is usually presented as an inversion or posed as a question.

**WN:** Do you feel you have to deal with the desiring (exoticizing) gaze, the classifying gaze or the objectifying gaze that is a part of how legal, political, colonial, medical, historical and academic institutions have looked at us?

**AP:** Yes. But as a relatively fair-skinned halfbreed man I also have tremendous privilege when compared to, say, my mom. And I am keenly aware of how that privilege has functioned in my life. So gaze on, motherfuckers.

**CL:** My net.art projects *treatycard*, *slang claims* and *world indigenous register* were commentaries on that. My new

project *Ekayapahkaci* is also a commentary on this phenomenon — but again as an inversion. ([www.ndnnrkey.net](http://www.ndnnrkey.net))

**WN:** Archer, you have said that performance art is where “Indians stand up and claim space.” I understand this within a logic of colonial geography where we have been positioned out of view, in the margins, on reserves, at the edges of the city. In this logic, the only way we are visible is when we have offended someone or committed a crime... it is often our abject poverty that leads us into view. The fact that poverty is a colonial legacy is often erased. Performance art claims a positive visibility. Is this what you meant?

**AP:** Sure, and I also meant it in the sense of performance, contemporary performance being an echo, commentary and mirror of our lives in the modern era. It’s the camp crier thing again. For me, performance is a big part of the moccasin telegraph. It’s the funny pages, horoscopes and page 2 editorials, all in one.

**WN:** Is the Cree “way of being” a relational “way of being” and if so, how does that relate to performance as a relationship between artist and audience, person and situation or society and transformation?

**CL:** As I have been learning and living Nehiyawin (a Cree worldview) — I have been impressed by how it is more relational than proprietary, and process-oriented rather than object-based. To say nitotem (my friend) — one is saying the-friend-I-am-relational-to, and in that there are roles and responsibilities encoded. To approach and see from that point of view, then, everything is shifted and transformed so it’s not a dissolution of what is but a shift in perspective — a window to what has always been. □

WANDA NANIBUSH is a curator, word and image “warrior” currently completing her masters in Film Studies at Carleton University. She also fosters arts policy and planning through her consulting practice Nanibush Innovations. She has held positions at the Ontario Arts Council, Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto and imagineNative film & media arts Festival. Nanibush is an Anishnawbe-kwe from Beausoleil First Nation.

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Michael Snow, Carla Bley, 1965, lithograph, relief print on paper, Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, McLean Foundation Fund



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## MORE BUSINESS AS UNUSUAL:

*decentre: concerning artist-run culture / à propos de centres d'artistes*

YYZBOOKS: 2008

EDITED BY Elaine Chang, Andrea Lalonde, Chris Lloyd, Steve Loft, Jonathan Middleton, Daniel Roy, Haema Sivanesan

REVIEW BY Peter Conlin

The editors of *decentre* make a concerted effort to explore Artist-Run Centres (ARCs) in their current form, inviting artists and organizers to reflect on where "the real strength of artist-run culture" lies and whether the concept of ARCs has in fact "outlived its usefulness." The book is timely because the tensions and possibilities in artist-led projects, closely linked to forces that mark our historical moment, need to be collectively addressed. They have resulted, as Sadira Rodrigues writes, in an identity crisis in ARCs. Will it become, or should it to be pushed into, a full-blown crisis beyond the usual miasma?

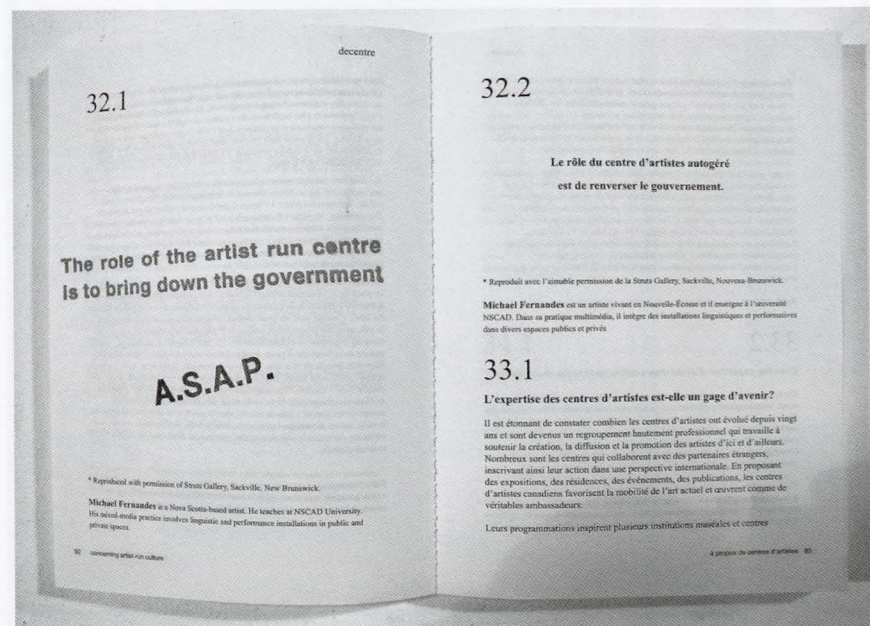
The book is comprised of 103 different assessments, a large and deliberately arbitrary number. It has the feel of a Conceptual printed matter work in that its intention lies in an organizing process, where the content is left to play out its particularities. In this way, *decentre* presents itself as inclusionary rather than imposing. But how meaningful is this plurality, and does it mask editorial intention and an implicit consensus on the part of its contributors? Is it an egalitarian gesture, coming out of a tradition of co-ordinating a community of respondents? Or does the editorial approach obscure structural pressures and disperse what might otherwise focus a critical response to the formidable questions now facing artist-run networks. The

## decentre

concerning artist-run culture | à propos de centres d'artistes

real question for *decentre* is whether the circumstances and interests that determine what art is, and for whom it is made and shown, are still contested and publicly debated, or whether they have been replaced by the pragmatics of how to excel within existing terms. The book is successful in that it invokes these fundamental tensions. But it does so because they are endemic, and with the exception of a few astute contributions, it fails to assess the consequences of this reorientation and propose a way forward.

*decentre* is comprised of short contributions that draw primarily on writers' personal experiences with particular ARCs rather than theoretical or historical analysis. Most of it is Canadian, but with a significant number of texts from around the world — enough of a mix to make it explicitly about Canada (purposefully diverse and nationally representative), yet with enough global dimension that the book takes on a more general reflection of artist spaces. The book intentionally cruises the generations, though it is weighted towards veterans such as Vera Frenkel, Bruce Barber, Jeanne Randolph and Clive Robertson and Gen-Xers (Kathleen Ritter, Jonathan Middleton, Tobias c. van Veen); it also mixes true believers in ARCs (Lori Millan and Shawna Dempsey, SKOL) with some



Michael Fernandes. *The role of the artist run centre is to bring down the government*, rubber stamp, 1996.  
Tim Westbury. *A.S.A.P.*, rubber stamp, 2008. Courtesy: the artist, Struts Gallery and YYZBOOKS.

sceptics (Andrew James Paterson) and a self-styled ARC heretic (Tommy Lacroix).

The book is organized alphabetically. Correspondingly and cleverly, Hans Abbing's entry, excerpted from his book *Why Are Artists Poor?* functions as an editorial preface that examines the denial of economics in art. The editors understandably see this as underscoring artist-run culture; however, the inclusion of Abbing is unusual because the prescription of his book, not mentioned in *decentre*, is to end all public funding. Is this unmentioned conclusion *decentre's* guilty conscience and/or fatalism?

*decentre* can sometimes feel like a blog, despite its austere, elemental design. From the apparent multitude of entries, certain groupings of familiar perspectives emerge. One group (that includes writers such as Heather Anderson, Patrice Loubier and Anne-Marie Ninacs) subscribes to the classic belief in ARCs as locations for "social/critically-engaged practice" (p. 17), risk-taking and experimentation. If there is an overt consensus

in the book, this is it. The question of what is meant by "risk" remains, especially as this emphasis seems to contradict another common position in the book (upheld by writers such as Barr Gilmore, Michelle Jacques and Geoffrey James) that the purpose of ARCs is to export personnel, either as a training facility/minor league, or more subversively, by infiltrating larger institutions. There are also various calls for a fusion of artist-run culture with the market, such as those by Sylvie Cotton and Paul Butler, who argue for ARCs to take on a direct "artist-agent-of-artists" (p. 68) role; or Jean-Pierre Caissie's call for a more deferred market integration in order to more effectively develop careers.

With a few exceptions, namely Paul Wong's untitled contribution and Brett Bloom's "Radical Spaces for Art in a Time of Forced Privatization," collectivity and self-organization are rarely championed. The call for artistic experimentation is more common, distinct from self-determination. Non-hier-

archical, anti-authoritarian aspirations don't appear to be a serious concern for artist-run culture in *decentre*. Robert Labossière broaches the topic and identifies an ambient and ambivalent notion of non-hierarchy that floats around ARCs, but, desiring the kind of leadership of hospital administrators and men of the cloth, finds it counterproductive.

Ian Carr-Harris and AA Bronson, two old ARC heavies, act as opposing exterminating angels, staking out more or less pro- and anti-institutional positions. Bronson's "bite the hand that feeds" stance is expressed in cautionary, portentous observations such as "watch for collaborations that remain unfunded" and "ARC culture that smells squeaky clean is shit" (p. 36). Elaine Chang's text, "Poking the Eye that Sees Us," looks at institutional ambivalence from the perspective of artists of colour who seek mainstream recognition (in which case ARCs are merely marginal and compensatory) while working with ARCs as a place to question the terms of recognition. Jens Hoffmann's "Unleash the Beast" moves beyond ambivalence to a full-fledged "fuck you to museums" (p. 121) anti-institutionalism that comes close to reinventing an avant-gardism defined by what it opposes. Hoffmann makes the case that the greatest challenge facing ARCs is not funding cuts but the redefinition of the relation between art and the public. The intensification of commercial and bureaucratic pressures on art has created a considerable void, and Hoffman thinks that ARCs should seize this as an opportunity to develop

## The role of the artist run centre is to bring down the government

Michael Fernandes. *The role of the artist run centre is to bring down the government*, rubber stamp, 1996. Courtesy: the artist, Struts Gallery and YYZBOOKS.

radical alternatives and mount a "full frontal attack on the art establishment." (p. 122)

Carr-Harris points out the supposedly fatal contradiction of artists questioning their own institutionalization. "As artists, in their role as artists, they must work — whether they like it or not — only through the institution" (p. 50). This little turn flattens many questions and necessary contradictions, including the paradox that the institutionalized artist (in the material, artworld sense) is at odds with the overall social role of the artist (to question the norms and predetermination of institutionalized culture).

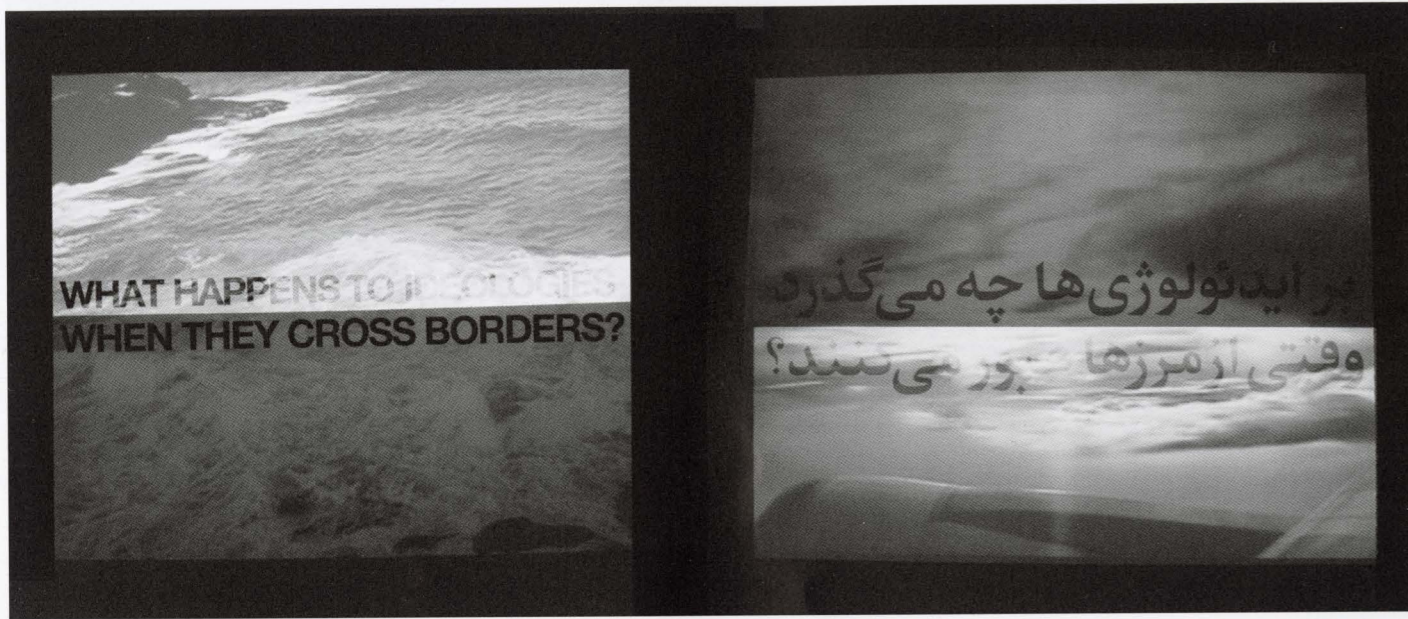
But maybe these contradictions are no longer generative, and the real questioning of one's institutionalization is tied to moving beyond the art field as such. However, this needn't result in an idealist paralysis, but

means shifting from art to culture and to hybrid forms of organization. Aside from Clive Robertson and a few others, this seems against the grain of *decentre*. The idea of culture in Canadian ARCs is generally assumed to be visual art, especially as it is stipulated by funding criteria. A vital inter- or non-disciplinary was certainly part of the beginnings of ARC cultures, and its present and future would seem to lie in transversal methods, to use Félix Guattari's term that refers to not only crossing disciplinary and institutional boundaries, but disrupting hierarchical structures and enclosing logics of all kinds.

As the book begins with an acknowledgement, verging on supplication, to the Canada Council of the Arts' leadership, it is hard to imagine it becoming a ringing testa-

ment to self-organization. ARC culture is not sustained by the air and light of political freedom and autonomous collectivity, but by a supportive external presence. The book's title evokes an orientation towards centralized power, while attempting to destabilize the very categories of centre and periphery in favour of infiltration and implicatedness, forgetting that corporations and neoliberal states are similarly decentred; thus, *decentre* is closer to reproducing a logic than challenging it, and relies overly on the critical potential of a vague poststructural politics at a time when this theory is losing its relevance. □

PETER CONLIN is a Ph.D. candidate in the Humanities Doctoral Program at Concordia University. He currently resides in London (UK), where he is researching how self-organization relates to dissent and success.



Leila Pazooki. *What Happens To Ideologies When They Cross Borders*, 2008. Courtesy: the artist.

## ACTIVISM IN THE ARCHIVE?: THEORY OF SURVIVAL

### Reza Aramesh, Gita Hashemi and Leda Pazook

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts • 19 July – 24 August, 2008

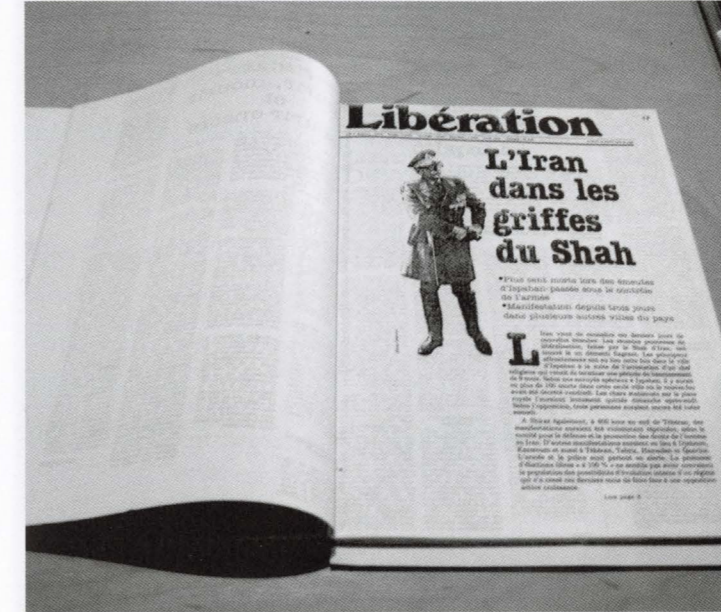
CURATED BY Taraneh Hemami      REVIEW BY Tirza Latimer

Although Taraneh Hemami and I teach at the same school, California College of the Arts, we never crossed paths. This spring, however, she and her work seemed to be all over San Francisco. She participated in the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts exhibition, *The Way That We Rhyme: Women, Art, and Politics*; served a residency at The Lab; co-organized, with Anuradha Vikram, the SomArts Cultural Center exhibition *East of the West*; and, most recently, she invited three fellow artists of the Iranian Diaspora to join her in creating *Theory of Survival* at YBCA.

My own sketchy and highly mediated knowledge of Iran — particularly concerning the 1979 Islamic Revolution that drove millions of Iranians to Europe and North America (with the largest US concentration ending up in California) — did not prepare me for either the intellectual thrust or the emotional impact of Hemami's cultural initiative. What little knowledge I could dredge up of Iran's tumultuous political history comes back to me in French.

I remember headlines from my student days in the 1970s exclaiming, "Le Chah vit son Mai 68!" Although I retain a mental image of the Ayatollah on the cover of *Time* magazine during the Carter administration hostage crisis, I recall no substantial US media coverage of the Iranian leftist opposition. This is not an excuse for my lack of historical knowledge in this area, just an explanation. Fortunately, the aesthetic rigor of Hemami's work disarms defensive reflexes triggered by the exposure of such ignorance. It sets in motion, instead, perceptual mechanisms that labour to make sense of visual cues, replicating the cognitive grappling of exiles in foreign lands. One day at YBCA, I introduced myself to this artist whose work both touched and disturbed me.

She had just given an artist's talk about a project that mirrors the key concepts and methods that recur throughout her oeuvre. *Hall of Reflections*, she explained, draws on personal photographs and stories gathered from over 100 Iranian immigrants in Northern California.



<left> Detail of publication belonging to the Iranian Student Association of Northern California, 1964–84.

Photo: Taraneh Hemami.

<top right> Leila Pazooki.

*What Happens To Ideologies*

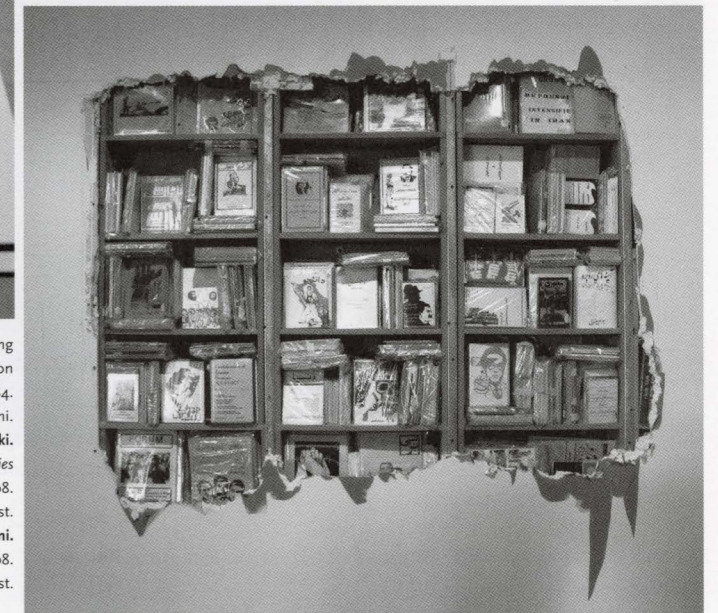
*When They Cross Borders*, 2008.

Courtesy: the artist.

<bottom right> Taraneh Hemami.

*Theory of Survival*, 2008.

Courtesy: the artist.



The artist prints these materials on transparencies and preserves them between layers of silk-screened glass and mirrors. Whether installed in mosaic-like patterns on the wall of the exhibition space or shattered and composed to resemble a pile of rubble on the gallery floor, the tiles, evoking the mirrored *tarar* found in many historic buildings in Iran, materialize cultural contradictions and tensions specific to Diaspora: continuity and rupture, identification and alienation, convention and invention.

In the context of her recent exhibition, *Theory of Survival*, three artists of Iranian descent living in different North American and European cities joined Hemami to engage with an archive of posters, publications and documents belonging to the Iranian Students Association of Northern California. Hamami's collaboration with London-based Reza Aramesh, Toronto-based Gita Hashemi and Berlin-based Leila Pazooki embroidered on her residency at The Lab. In that earlier context, she took the measure of a collection of

underground literature documenting the history of Iranian immigration and secular opposition during 24 politically critical years, from 1960 – 1984.

*Theory of Survival* featured this material centrally. Pamphlets, books and tracts were displayed in cases and on shelves. Bundles prepared for delivery to the Library of Congress were exposed in the cavities of the partially demolished wall that divided the gallery. Although visitors who do not share Hemami's heritage, or have not studied Iranian culture, had virtually no literary access to these publications, the agitprop graphics that animated the covers related visually to tracts generated by a range of contemporaneous activist organizations: the Students for a Democratic Society, the Black Panthers, the National Farm Workers Association, the Women's Liberation Movement, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Revolutionary Communist Party and the Progressive Labor Party, to name just a few. The title of the show derives from a central



*Theory of Survival*. Installation view, 2008. Photo: Taraneh Hemami.

Iranian liberationist text refuting strategies of survival in favour of revolutionary self-sacrifice.

Leila Pazooki responded to this archive with a video installation that used two monitors mounted side by side. Each visual field is divided horizontally into a zone of relative obscurity and a zone of illumination. Running parallel to the seam where light and dark meet, “What Happens to Ideologies When They Cross Borders?” spells itself out in English (left to right) and Persian (right to left). In the background, video footage of the ocean shot from the porthole of a plane, on one screen, and waves breaking against a rocky coastline shot from the shore, on the other, evoke transience, transition, recurring waves of departure and arrival. The placement of the installation prompts visitors to turn their backs on the archive itself and contemplate the questions that Pazooki raises from a bench placed just close enough to the video installation for it to fill the field of vision. The impeccable production values of Pazooki’s piece distance it from the messy remnants of Iranian secular resistance spilling out of the partition that delimits this space. This distance speaks of the artist’s relationship to historical material that is intimately hers (she was raised in Iran in the 1970s and 1980s) yet not

directly available to her personal memory (she was only two years old at the time of the revolution).

On the opposite wall of the gallery, Gita Hashemi, who moved from the US to Canada in protest to the first Iraq war of 1991, formulated a more confrontational response to the ISANC archive. Here, video documentation shows the artist standing at a chalkboard, back to the viewer, back to Hemami’s archival display, writing, erasing and rewriting selections from texts penned by generations of opponents to the Pahlavi Monarchy. “I use these materials and embodied processes to construct a ritual for re-inhabiting a past that is intimately mine.” “Yet,” Hashemi’s *Ephemeral Monument* teaches, “this is also your past, your future,” whoever you are, under whatever oppressive yoke you labor. The sound of chalk transcribing citations in Persian or English on the slate and then wiping it clean, the bench placed about the same distance from the installation as the front row of seats in a classroom, contribute to the pedagogical ethos of this piece. The artist has mounted the flatscreen monitor nearly flush with an expansive blackboard, providing chalk, and inviting all comers to “write comments and dedications on the wall, to remember, to revisit and to reconcile.”



Taraneh Hemami. *Transcendence*, site specific installation, 2008. Photo: Sibila Savage. Courtesy: the artist.

This installation stages a striking performance of misrecognition and miscommunication. The artist’s probing transcriptions — “150 questions from a guerilla,” for instance — stand out in stark contrast to the graffiti deposited by gallery visitors, evidently at a near total loss when faced with the artist’s challenge. The blackboard retains “Let’s go Mets,” “Life is how you make it,” “Yo, Adrienne!” interspersed with the occasional profanity.

On reflection, miscommunication emerges as an important subtext of this show. The contribution of Reza Aramesh dramatizes this theme overtly. Titled *The Twilight of World Capitalism* (by William Z. Foster) — for a premature account of Capitalism’s decline and Socialism’s ascent during the lifetime of its author, once General Secretary of the Communist Party USA — this quixotic live performance piece transpired at YBCA during the show’s opening night. In this inevitably chaotic context, volunteers recited short revolutionary manifestos at intervals throughout the evening. The galleries brimmed over with crowds that turned out to celebrate not only Hemami’s show but also the larger event in which it nested, YBCA’s triennial “Bay Area Now” survey of regional talent. Here, the recitation of Iranian revolutionary tracts fell on deaf ears.

*Theory of Survival*, like much of Hemami’s work, reconstructs the history and affirms the experience of Iranian exiles and their offspring. It evokes, too, the necessarily improvised character of cultural transmission within Diaspora. The didacticism of the archival material that forms the core of this exhibition attests to the artist’s pedagogical commitments. While Iranian communities may review and reflect on histories already deeply imprinted on their psyches, those for whom these revelations are neither a birthright nor a reward for study have something different to learn. The show confronts us with the isolationism that limits the intellectual and affective horizons of most Americans, even those who make their homes in relatively diverse metropolises such as San Francisco. □

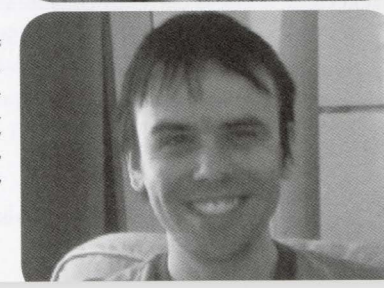
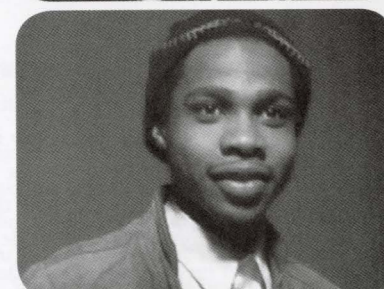
TIRZA TRUE LATIMER is Associate Professor and Chair of Visual and Critical Studies at California College of the Arts. Her research and publications explore intersections of social subjectivity and visual culture. She is currently collaborating on a major exhibition about the life and afterlife of Gertrude Stein, organized by the Contemporary Jewish Museum, SF.



## HUSTLING THE WHOLESOME WAY: PETER KINGSTONE'S *100 Stories About My Grandmother*

Gallery TPW • 9 May – 14 June, 2008

REVIEW BY Martin Otárola



Peter Kingstone. *100 Stories About My Grandmother*, video stills, 2007. Courtesy: Gallery TPW. <top to bottom> "Dillon," "Darcy," "Greg," "Richard," "Andreas," and "Jarrett."

Having traveled to London, Toronto, Montréal, Vancouver and Miami to interview 100 male sex trade workers,<sup>1</sup> Toronto artist Peter Kingstone gave his interviewees the opportunity to speak openly about their grandmothers. Presented on four television sets at Gallery TPW, *100 Stories About My Grandmother* draws a vast array of grandmotherly portraits from the personal memoirs of the sex workers on screen. With over 600 minutes of video-recordings to attend to, one is sure to draw even greater conclusions about the intimacy and heterogeneity of these stories, as well as the recurring narratives that connect them together.

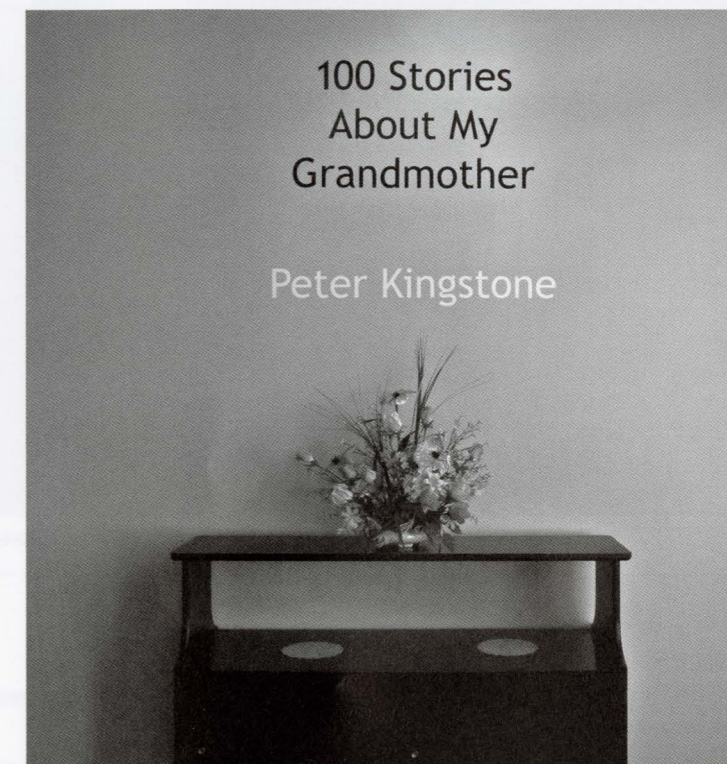
These stories have incredible personal value, both for Kingstone and the men he documents. Kingstone uses their experiences to construct an image of his own grandmother, a woman he has never met in person because she abandoned Kingstone's mother when his mother was 18. Kingstone's current work seeks to use the stories retold by sex workers to provide a clearer sense of what it feels like to have a grandmother, picking and choosing from their stories at will. The catch, of course, is that Kingstone's grandmother was herself a sex worker who would notoriously leave her daughters in the care of indiscriminate men while she worked. The cities he visited for the project were, in turn, the same cities she was known to have visited throughout her life.

*100 Stories* is as much about the fetishization of the Grandmother as it is about the humanization of male sex workers. Kingstone aspires to imagine a grandmother he never knew, while at the same time

highlighting the personal histories of male sex workers, which are rarely, if ever, publicly disclosed. Kingstone facilitates his participants' reflections on their family lives and childhood memories in order to present them as personable and respectable individuals. But is such a dichotomy between the domesticity/love of their grandmothers and the professionalism/sex of their trade really the most effective way to voice the experiences of male sex workers? Is positioning the sex worker to speak within the frameworks of a prescribed topic in a gallery space all that effective in creating change where change needs to happen most: in Canadian homes and legislatures? And, how effectively does Kingstone grant his sex workers inclusion "in a society frequently all too eager to reject them," as Gallery TPW writes in their press release?

Toronto artist Sholem Krishtalka writes in *Xtra!* that this work is a "giant familiarization process" where sympathy with Kingstone's sex workers lies in the common denominator of the Grandmother.<sup>2</sup> This is a given. The issue arises, however, in the presentation of the work through the four mock living rooms — each with its unique arrangement of oversized flowered sofas, antique coffee tables and, of course, bowls of candy. The coziness of these grandmotherly settings in a gallery space seems to truncate the truly political possibilities.

Certainly, throughout the project Kingstone attempts to consciously move away from the fetishization of his interviewees, averting typical discussions around the marginalization and moral-judicial attack of sex workers. He counteracts precisely what film historian



Peter Kingstone. *100 Stories About My Grandmother*, installation at Gallery TPW, 2007. Photo: Gale Allen. Courtesy: Gallery TPW.

Thomas Waugh identifies as the "Oprah-fication" of marginalized individuals,<sup>3</sup> when they are presented in mainstream media through a titillating combination of guest confessionals and public pity. Kingstone proposes a more self-directed recounting of personal histories. With his hands-off and muted interview approach, he attaches faces and voices to the people behind the profession, carefully highlighting the individuality of each man not only through the heterogeneity of the stories but also in the personalities and methods of storytelling.

Granted, in doing so, Kingstone cleverly suggests that sex workers are "just like you and me," which is a great message to put forward (assuming that you and I actually have something personally in common that we don't have in common with a sex worker). However, in making the sex worker more familiar to his audiences — and with the

work's emphasis on grandmothers, more familial as well — Kingstone assimilates the role of the sex worker into the workplace majority's presumed position as family-oriented. This is a slippery slope, particularly in attempts to reconfigure notions of the sex trade.

While people in "respectable" professions are expected to keep their sex lives separate from their workplaces — especially where information about sex is concerned — it is absolutely acceptable to tell personal stories about one's family life and childhood. This is not necessarily the case for sex workers, whose anonymity and confidentiality are often essential to their trade. What Kingstone seems to be presenting with *100 Stories*, then, is a paradox where he interviews sex workers outside of work while still requiring them to tell their stories as sex workers.



Peter Kingstone. *100 Stories About My Grandmother*, installation at Gallery TPW, 2007. Photo: Gale Allen. Courtesy: Gallery TPW.



What really needs to change, then, is not necessarily the perception of sex workers themselves but the conceptualization of the sex trade as a whole. What needs to change are the limiting frameworks within which the sex trade is envisioned in order to provide visions of sex work that are not fixed exclusively on the worker. Sex work should be seen for its benefits to the client, encompassing a broader and more diverse definition that works outside stereotypical associations. It would have to be a move towards what Paul Bellini identifies in his review of *100 Stories* as an association with recognized and regulated health professions like psychotherapy or massage therapy.<sup>4</sup>

In light of this, there's one critical component in *100 Stories* that critics Krishtalka, Bellini and Waugh have overlooked. In *The Logic of the Lure*, art historian John Paul Ricco shares an encounter, as told by Roland Barthes, between the famed semiotician and a Parisian hustler.<sup>5</sup> Plagued with writer's block one evening, Barthes sets out for a walk along the Rue de Rennes, where he encounters a strange face belonging to a new hustler by the name of François. After agree-

ing to terms, both men head to the local hotel, which, to Barthes' dismay, has no vacant rooms. Barthes makes plans to meet with the hustler at the same hotel an hour later, paying the lad in advance. Surely enough, an hour passes and the hustler doesn't return.

The moral of the story is not that one should never pay a hustler in advance for his services. Rather, Barthes realizes that the act of hustling, when paid for, need not be sexual at all. As long as money is exchanged — however unfinished the business may be — a sex worker's job will always be done. As such, hustling may involve anything from sexual intercourse to an eroticized exchange of words, as was the case for Barthes. Or, for Peter Kingstone: a de-eroticized interview with the sex worker about his grandmother. □

MARTIN OTÁROLA is an M.A. candidate in Art History at York University. He is interested in queer readings of visual culture, and is currently researching the activist use of photography during the 1981 Toronto bathhouse raids.

Notes:

1. A conversation with Peter Kingstone reveals that nomenclature was a key discussion with many of the interviewees. While the more correct term is "men who do sex work," each interviewee referred to himself as he saw fit. Kingstone notes that the majority used "sex trade worker" in decidedly political overtones, as with "hustlers" and "pros," among others.
2. Sholem Krishtalka, "From cocks to cookies: Everyone has a grandmother, even sex workers," *Xtra!* Number 613, May 8, 2008, p. 31.
3. Thomas Waugh, "Soliciting for the Purpose." Gallery TPW – Publications: Online Essays. May 9 – June 14, 2008.
4. Paul Bellini, "Midnight Grandma" in *Fab: The Gay Scene Magazine*, Number 345, May 1-14, 2008, p. 27.
5. John Paul Ricco, *The Logic of the Lure*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002, p. 103.

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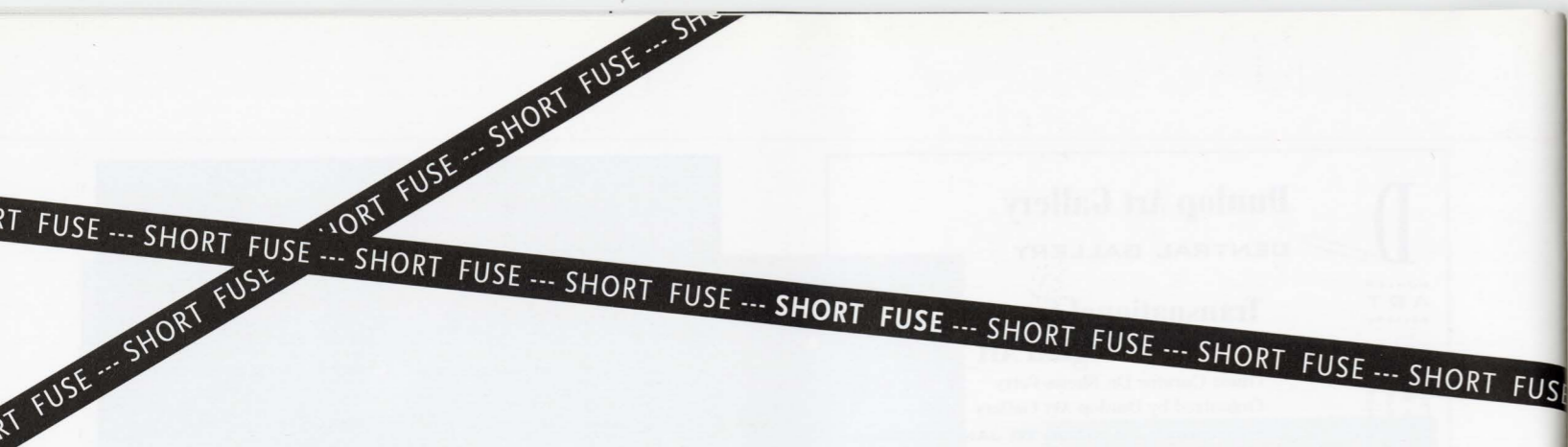
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## ELECTION 2008 BY Department of Culture

The Canadian federal election of 2008 distinguished itself on a number of fronts. First of all, it was called prematurely by a Harper Conservative government confident enough of winning to violate electoral legislation they themselves had enacted after coming to power in 2006. Six weeks and \$350 million wasted dollars later, the Conservatives have returned to power with a second minority government. Given an economy in crisis, thousands of people in the manufacturing sector out of work and a listeriosis outbreak that has Canadians questioning the safety of their food and water, the October reinstatement of the Harper Conservatives seems to have more to do with a failed electoral process than faith in the incumbent government.

### What Happened?

Despite the lowest voter turnout in our history, communities and individuals mobilized with a force that set a new precedent for participation. Undermining Harper's efforts to make an artificial division between artists and "ordinary" Canadians, the cultural community rallied against the government's regressive policies in powerful ways, capturing the imaginations of people across the country and providing myriad opportunities (both real and virtual) to focus organizing efforts.

The Department of Culture initially formed in response to a series of arts cuts announced by the Conservative government only days before calling the election. The group galvanized around issues that affect the civil liberties and safety of all Canadians, regardless of their profession. For the Department of Culture, the Harper government's ideologically driven cuts to cultural programs were symptomatic of a larger impulse to dismantle the social fabric of the country.

Since the Mulroney government, Canada has increasingly been subjected to the deregulation and market logic endemic to neo-liberalism, with successive governments removing, reducing and simplifying restrictions on private business interests in order to encourage the "freedom" of markets. Globally, neoliberal deregulation has resulted in crises — such as the American sub-prime mortgage meltdown and the resultant recession — as well as slow but steady erosion of the civil rights, environmental integrity and social safety nets that Canadians have entrusted their government to protect. The flaw, of course, of a society driven by market values is that governments and financial markets have contradictory priorities

and agendas. While governments are elected to serve the best interests of their citizenry, markets and businesses are created to ensure maximum profits for their owners and shareholders.

In five short weeks hundreds of ad hoc groups sprang up across the country. Weary of the Conservative agenda and fearful for the future, these groups opposed the Harper government, ultimately preventing his party from forming a majority. We demonstrated that grassroots political organizing is not only effective and possible, but crucial to the democratic process. A key factor that worked for the Department of Culture and other similar groups, was the presentation of a unified front. Across the country, people demonstrated that we are not willing to be divided into "special-interest groups;" artists pitted against athletes, French Canadians against English-speaking Canadians, recent immigrants against First Nations, "visible minorities" against invisible ones.

As we all regroup and consider the repercussions of this election, the Department of Culture would like to propose ways we can continue to engage this nascent movement's energy and use our democratic rights to create a society that is generous towards its citizens:

- Open up the Proportional Representation Debate; let's educate each other about what this really means, and help people recognize what a difference a new electoral system could make.
- Continue using the internet as a tool for democracy: use social networking sites for organizing; create groups, websites and blogs; link to the sites that excite and inspire you.
- Talk to people about the issues that concern you; we can change the conversation if we instigate the change ourselves.
- Get to know your local media and facilitate media training workshops.
- Create art — live and virtual — that addresses and challenges the political realities of our time.
- Think about the nation but prioritize your neighborhood.

The Department of Culture is Franco Boni, Izida Zorde, Heather Haynes, Michael Wheeler, Naomi Campbell, Greg Elstrand, Anthea Foyer, Sara Graham, Rob Labossiere, Graham F Scott, Darren O'Donnell, Erica Hennebury, Rebecca Campbell.

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