

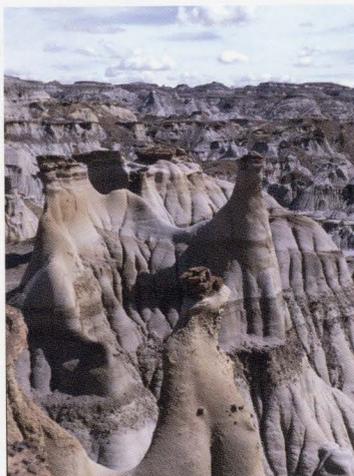
FUSE



In Pursuit of the Textbook
Authentic p.26



Embracing Complexity p.37



Crude Culture
p.12



The Holocaust Visited
p.41

> FUSE MAGAZINE
>> Art
>>> Media
>>>> Politics

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Creative Cities? >> Clive Robertson assesses the state of Canadian art >> Kirsty Robertson considers the implications of Crude Culture >> Terrance Houle talks with Erin Morton about using humour to subvert colonialist narratives >>>

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decentre is a book about artist-run culture; the effluence of projects, spaces, events spawned by artists at their own initiation. We asked artists and others working in the artist-run spaces to write short texts addressing the issues we face in this milieu, distilling down the essence of the concept "artist-run" and looking into the future.

decentre has over 100 contributors from across Canada and internationally whose texts begin a renewed dialogue about the role of the artist as creator, provocateur, critic, organizer and producer, contributing to greater public awareness of and appreciation for the enormous contribution artists make to our visual arts culture.

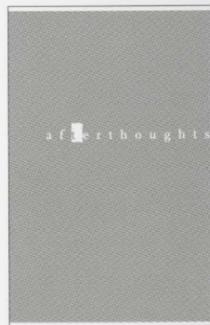
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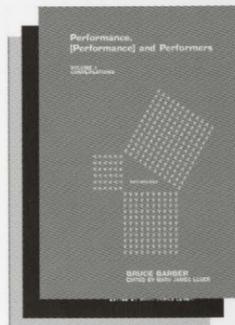


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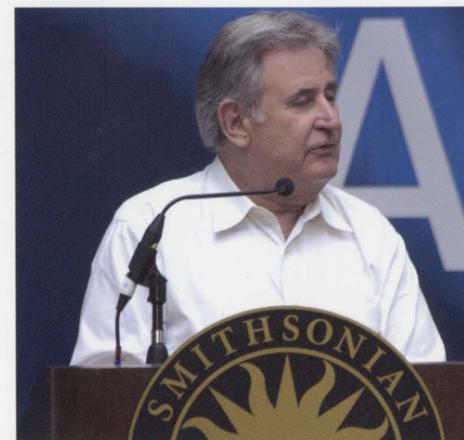


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FUSE MAGAZINE

Art, Media, Politics
Volume 31 Number 2 April 2008

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EDITORIAL

CREATIVE CITIES?

The invention of the creative city as a global phenomenon intended to attract financial capital with cultural capital followed hot on the heels of the spread of neo-liberal economic policies in the mid-1980s. In Canada, as the social welfare state model began to be slowly phased out to make room for the needs of the market oriented "global economy," so was a great deal of the public funding that served as a staple to the work of artists, researchers, not-for-profits, community groups and universities.

Although Canada has not been as quick to take up the creative branding projects spearheaded in countries such as Britain, whose Young British Artists were a significant part of their national re-branding campaign, in cities across this country we increasingly see signs of Canada's race to keep up to this global trend. Starchitect designed edifices are erected in urban centers to signal that Canadian cosmopolitanism is ripe for investment, while communities suffer the cutbacks and reorientation of public institutions from the Canada Council to the Art Gallery of Alberta.

This accelerated era of branding and social change is explored in Kirsty Robertson's *Crude Culture*, an article that begins at the site of the 2006 Alberta exhibit at Washington's Smithsonian Institute Folklife Festival where, along with pancake breakfasts and displays of crafts, Stetson hats, native and line (cowboy) dancing, Alberta was represented by a giant Caterpillar oil sands truck. This exhibit coincided with Alberta Premier Ralph Klein's controversial visit to Washington

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to discuss energy policy, a concurrence that Robertson describes as having a certain tongue in cheek inevitability. In her article, Robertson examines why the economization of culture is the next logical step to the extension of the knowledge economies and finance capitalism. She argues, however, that the tensions and ambiguities around national identity specific to Canada serve to slow down and allow for more resistance to the mobilization of creative industries models.

Tensions around identity are further examined in this issue's interview *In Pursuit of the Textbook Authentic*, a conversation between Terrance Houle and Erin Morton. In reflecting on his practice of using humour to disrupt and overturn constructions of indigenous identity, Houle considers the continued prevalence of cowboy (government) versus Indian scenarios, the presentation of indigenous identity as frozen in time and the work of subverting colonialist narratives. This issue's artist project by Brendan Tang examines some similar trajectories. In *Kit Bash*, Tang explores his hybrid cultural identity by creating a visual autobiography that uses the aesthetic of robot model toy instructional pamphlets.

Clive Robertson takes up the mobilization of culture in his column, which asks whether we're *Feeling Good about Canadian Art?* Connecting the making of "art stars," the discord between big institutions and small artist run spaces and arts funding, Robertson reports back on last November's Visual Arts Summit and evaluates the direction

visual arts policy is heading. In relation to the funding of communities and individual artists he muses, "an ongoing topic of interest for me is how and in what directions the promotion and production of Canadian art are currently being leveraged and to what degree the paradigm of more for more is being replaced with more for less."

Finally, in the shortFuse, *Waiting for the Dust to Settle*, recent OCAD graduate and emerging artist Laura Paolini wonders what will happen if she falls while standing alone inside the Sharp Centre for Design. Will anybody hear her or will the sound of her call simply bounce off the walls and echo back at her? Her message is an important one. Paolini asks her readers to consider the connections and curricular implications of adding an institute for "strategic creativity" (which markets student ideas to business) to OCAD and downloading the costs of starchitect designed buildings (through prohibitive entrance fees) on the very same public that these big institutions are supposed to serve.

"The ROM for example," Paolini points out with concern, "next to the Friday night specials, is only free during rush hour (45 minutes before closing at 5:30 pm.)" These 45 minutes do not, of course, include the special ticketed exhibits. Those who may not be free at rush hour will have to pony up the 20 dollars that it costs to get in. The market economy in the creative city, must, after all, charge market rates.

— Izida Zorde

FEELING GOOD ABOUT CANADIAN ART?

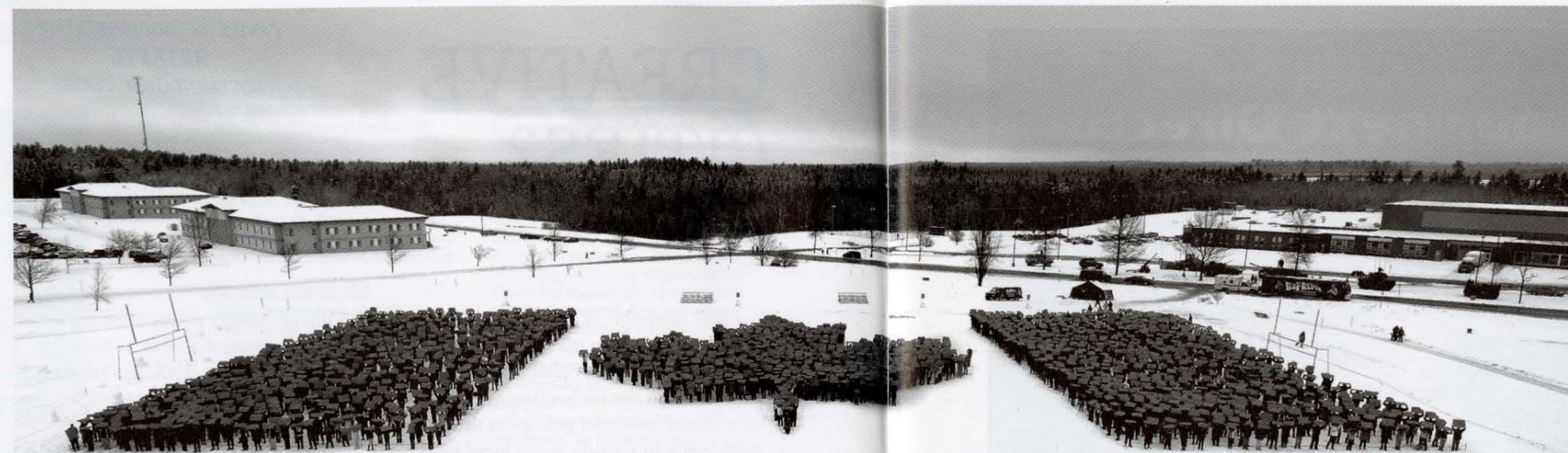
BY CLIVE ROBERTSON

CHANGES AND MOOD SWINGS

In a recent Globe and Mail column titled, "Change? More like a mood swing," Mail columnist Rick Salutin wrote about the presidential primaries currently occupying our neighbours to the south. Finding a simpler route to get to what cultural theorist Raymond Williams has importantly identified as "structures of feeling," Salutin suggested that there can be meaningful real change in feeling without corresponding changes in the world at large.

After a period of serious dissatisfaction, while real world changes may be the ultimate goal, improved changes in feeling are not so "shabby" — and therefore should not perfunctorily be dismissed. Salutin asks:

Does this mean Americans would rather have changed feelings than a changed world? Not necessarily. They may have lost track of the difference: between real and symbolic change, real and symbolic politics, real-world change v. feel-good change. Both are real, but one is real feeling and one is real world. The confusion is widespread: Canadians are not immune.



3,000 military personnel, civilian employees and community members form a human flag at CFB Gagetown, New Brunswick. Photo: Corporal Shilo Adamson, Canadian Forces Imagery Technician.

The notion of a confusion between real world and real feeling change sheds some interesting light on how we participate in and view our own visual and media arts sector.

Analytically attempting to figure out what helps define any one period in the production of art through structures of feeling includes paying attention to material life, to general social organization and to dominant ideas. As Williams wrote, conventions as means of expression that find tacit consent play a significant role. Conventions also imply accepted standards. Older conventions come to appear "empty and artificial" while newer ones appear "valid and fruitful." In the accepted standards of an artworld that operates within and between non-profit and profit-making values and aspirations it is noticeable when old conventions leapfrog newer ones. It is a process that is more about mood swing than about defining or occupying a new space.

It is about here that I find myself asking: to what extent do I really care about the swirling issues and positionings that in recent months have been in play

in events like the Visual Arts Summit; or the artist and art writer promoting efforts of Canadian Art; or who is to become the next Director of the National Gallery; or what will or will not happen with the AGO; or the feel good/doing good negotiations that are achieving small but significant improvements to when and how and to what extent artists will be paid for their work?

What is it about the advocacy model of the visual and media arts sector that resists collective bargaining, that can adhere to those legislated protections that helped usher in structural funding changes around access to and matters of cultural equity, but balks when pressured or finally "told what to do" when it comes to fee payments for artists? Beyond any obscured premise that "supply exceeds demand," would the message about fair payment to artists in Canada be better received if every arts council director and officer, every gallery and museum director or curator, every salaried arts journalist and arts magazine editor found themselves with one-year contracts with maximum three year re-appointments? As severe as this sounds, it

still doesn't match the livelihood experiences that most artists face or are going to be faced with under a present day funding scheme where unnecessary financial insecurity is the norm.

As I wrote in *Policy Matters*, relative to corporate executive and even to senior university administrative salaries, few if any senior arts administrators are overpaid. But if the combined direct and tax-forgiving publicly funded art economy in Canada is so strapped, then why does the AGO's Director receive taxable benefits and a salary larger than what is allocated to the Prime Minister of Canada or the Premier of Ontario, an amount that is twice what the Mayor of Toronto receives? Which is the tougher administrative responsibility: running Metropolitan Toronto or running the AGO?

And the so-called "sector" hardly has uniform rewards. An artist friend in Québec, who has administrated an artist-run centre since the mid-80s and has complete control over the budget, chooses to pay himself a small salary (about \$27,000) so that he can employ more part-timers to grow the revenue

for the organization. This self-generated revenue allows the organization to better its programming. However, how this is done within a shared economy of artist-run culture bares little resemblance to the operations of a conventional art museum.

LOVE HURTS

For more than a number of decades and with much justification, artists working in Canada have felt good about what they make and do. This applies to both their individual and collective work of art-making and to the local "scenes" and "communities" they help bring into being and maintain. An ongoing topic of interest for me is how and in what directions the promotion and production of Canadian art are currently being leveraged and to what degree the paradigm of "more for more" is being replaced with a model of "more for less." And this implicates support for individual artists and support for what we generically call "presentation spaces."

In December, The Guardian reported that despite recent and projected rises of

arts funding levels in England, 220 out of 990 arts organization were about to lose their funding. The newspaper leader read, "The real question is how best the Art Council's portfolio of support for the arts can be bravely refreshed?" Attempts at "brave refreshment" in Canada have produced the question of whether we should be allocating more resources to fewer artists and fewer institutions. Given the apparent mood of re-centralization in British arts funding policy, we might wonder what has been happening to the funding support of our own geographically-diverse "critical mass?"

De-centralization cultural policies of the 1970s and beyond had a range of promises, some later in tune with the emerging recognition of the *glocal*. The welcomed suggestion of a post avant-garde recognized that metropolitan art centers would no longer have a stranglehold on where art could or should be made. Within our own policy borders, by definition, "national" programs could not and still cannot be sustainable if juried to over-privilege the needs of art populations in Vancouver, Toronto or Montréal — plus Calgary, Winnipeg and Québec City — if you'd like a longer list.

Despite recognition of regional realities and needs it was more recently decided at The Canada Council that the production of art in Canada would be better served if placed in the hands of newly-appointed "key institutions" and residual "flagships." Somewhere in here we can observe a renewed cross-institutional obsession with the finding and/or grooming of "biennial bait" (to borrow and adapt a phrase used by Vanity Fair in its identification of Oscar hopefuls).

(This is a better world's nomination that is not officially endorsed by the candidate)

Gerald McMaster as our next Director of the National Gallery of Canada

Top Twelve Reasons Why:

12. Dr. Gerald McMaster knows history when he sees it.
11. The NGC needs a little less WOW and a little more POW.
10. It is time that an expansive Plains perspective ran the NGC.
9. As an artist Gerald has had the experience of being fêted and ignored.
8. With Lee Ann Martin, McMaster produced the ground-breaking exhibition, *Indigena* for the Museum of Civilization.
7. He worked well as Edward Poitras' assistant when Poitras was featured in the Canadian Pavillion at Venice.
6. He won't bully fellow NGC curators like the last guy did.
5. He's given speeches on behalf of the Smithsonian on the steps of the White House.
4. He builds international museums.
3. He can understand why the removal of the Video and Media Arts room at the NGC was such a bad idea.
2. He can kiss babies and collectors and cabinet ministers as easily in Ottawa as in Toronto.
1. We deserve, and the NGC needs, an internationally-recognised scholar and aboriginal art specialist as Director.



Web-circulated nomination for new National Gallery Director proposed by Clive Robertson.

The presumption that artists could not succeed without career managers and fixers was laughed at a mere 20 years ago.

MOMMY'S BEING FAMOUS NOW

Who then, in the name of a national status-seeking project and a desire for an international curatorial boost is claiming to “discover” or “make” the careers of a Kent Monkman, a David Altmejd, a Rebecca Belmore, a Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller? The presumption that artists could not succeed without career managers and fixers was laughed at a mere 20 years ago. Mid-20th Century practices that were organized around the “accepted standards” set by critics, curators and dealers had been augmented if not entirely substituted by self-managed networks of mutual support and exchange. So if one of the general goals is to expand the exportation of Canadian visual and media art, to help facilitate international conversations, collaborations and exchanges, then the most cost-effective approach is to increase available monies in artist travel grant programs.

For some agents who appear to think more of artists as vehicles that can attract collectors and prestige, there is inspiration to be had in seeing Canadians, Jeff and Jeanette Wall posing in the

December 2007 issue of *Vanity Fair*. The Annie Liebovitz “Tate-a-Tête” group photo-portrait of “art stars” (famous artists and rich collectors) celebrates the 20th Anniversary of American Friends of Tate. Since 1987 the group has raised \$100 million to buy examples of mostly North and some South American art for the Tate, primarily from art dealers. On what levels of philanthropic purpose does this extend Serge Guilbaut's thesis found in his book, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art?* According to *Art Newspaper*, the Tate's focus and its social rewards are causing problems for the Guggenheim's director, whose board members also want to be American Friends of the Tate, or the Centre Pompidou or the State Hermitage. Getting to keep a photo by Liebovitz in which you are a cast member and lunching with Tony Blair is apparently a big deal.

SAYING “CHEESE” TO CANADIAN ART

Here at home, are the reported anxieties of not being featured in *Canadian Art*'s recent photo spread of who's who

in the Toronto art community. In this particular issue of *Canadian Art*, the *Vanity Fair* aesthetic is replaced by static mug shots and a corporate annual report school of photography (File achieved superior glamour on newsprint). Where are the cell phones, participant head-turnings and other social details that *Vanity Fair* does so well? Where are the wind machines when you most need them and why is everyone looking into the camera? Despite the fact that Toronto has the largest artist population in the country, some of the photos look under-populated. That is the case with the page featuring Michael Snow and colleagues. Would this isolated group have been happier standing or sitting together with 30 of their equally valued peers?

When they were not overreaching, the photo spread's category captions were coy: the featured group of newspaper and magazine art journalists were labeled “Voices.” The featured page of painters is accompanied by a captioned dirge proclaiming that, “There's nothing like paint ... it has been the foundation of art and art history since the 15th



Five of seven panels from *Vanity Fair*, Tate-a-Tete feature, November 2007. Photos: Annie Leibowicz. Courtesy: Clive Robertson.

Gerald McMas
of the Nation



Top: Visual Arts Summit 2007, Discussion 5: Sculpting the Future. (Susan Gibson Garvey, Shawna Dempsey, Gerald Beaulieu, Hank Bull, Tony Luppino). Courtesy: CARFAC.

Bottom: Visual Arts Summit 2007, Jamelie Hassan. Courtesy: CARFAC.

Century." And there, highlighted, is a problem with the troubled category "visual art." Though visual art champions are finally feeling good about the dominant practices of transdisciplinary and post-media specific contemporary art, they still weep uncontrollably at the sight or smell of paint. Get over it. Buy a few cans of latex from Rona and refresh those flat or textured walls of the office or home. The art-making painters are fine. At least they're not as confused about the determining or irrelevant stipulations of art history.

THE BIG TENT THEORY OF THE VISUAL ARTS SUMMIT

Last November the Canadian Museums Association, with a posse of partners including national artist and arts professional representational organizations, mounted a national Visual Arts Summit in Ottawa attended by 450 delegates. As a forum for social and professional networking and place where curators, administrators and artists could engage in professional development exchanges it was deemed a success.

Nestled in the opening of the proceedings was a surprise announcement that, as artist representative bargaining agents, CARFAC and RAAV had reached a mediated settlement over elements of their increased fees schedule with the CMA and CAMDO — the Canadian Museum Directors' Organization. The immediate outcome of this agreement (effective 1 January 2008) — there are more negotiations to follow — is that for an estimated 35 – 40 galleries and museums with budgets over \$500,000 there is now a 50 per-

cent increase in exhibition fees. The idea for a future Exhibitions Rights Fund — similar to Public Lending Rights payments for writers — came from the CMA. There was no immediate call from the Summit floor for the federal and provincial arts councils to re-adjust their spending to accommodate what Heritage Canada in 2000 saw as a failure in practices that did not serve exhibition rights.

The pressure to reach a timely settlement, as Gerald Beaulieu, CARFAC's President and National Spokesperson

told me recently, was not just a result of the clock-ticking mediation process and a desire by some to clear the issue off the table before the Summit convened. It was also because CMA-CAMDO were far down the road in adopting and recommending fee payments based upon CARFAC's less costly 2004 schedule.

Relatedly, for the last four years the National Gallery of Canada, which has to abide by federal status of the artist and copyright legislation, has been dragging its feet in similar negotiations with CARFAC and RAAV. While all levels of

Organizations had every reason to complain about the CMA's choice of summit topics and the hasty, and at times desperate, search for a representational set of speakers.

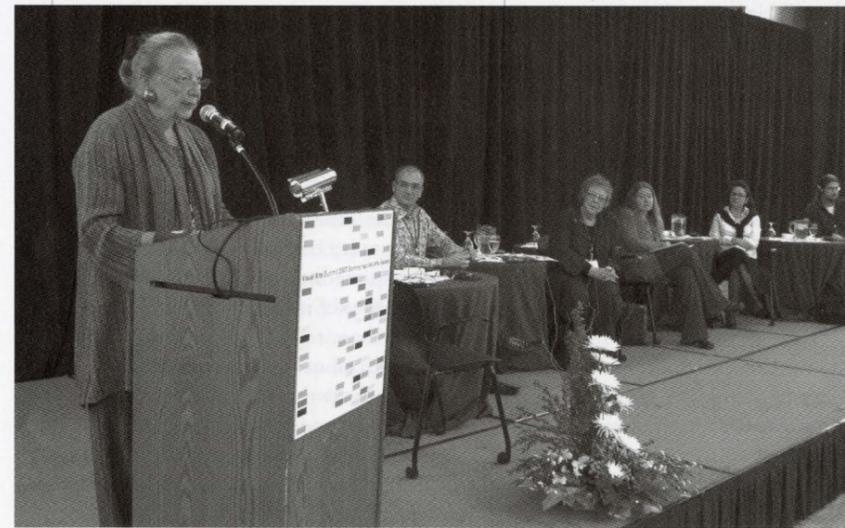
presentation spaces, including artist-run centres, have cited artist fee increases as "a burden," in the National Gallery's 2005 budget of \$50 million, it was estimated that only \$42,000 was paid out in artists fees.

The Summit came into being through the efforts of former Head of the Visual Arts Section of the Canada Council François Lachapelle, who contracted the CMA to organize it. The artist representational organization

partners for the Summit included the Artist-Run Centres and Collectives Conference, the Independent Media Arts Alliance, Canadian Artists Representation, the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective and the Royal Canadian Art Academy. Together with other invited artists, curators and critics these organizations had every reason to complain about the CMA's choice of summit topics and the hasty, and at times desperate, search for a representa-

tional set of speakers. The artist organization partners should have better assessed what "partnership" under a CMA umbrella meant before they eagerly signed on.

A better pointer towards visual and media arts sector cohesion was provided at the Summit by Australia's National Association of the Visual Arts (NAVA). Australia has a comprehensive set of national protocol agreements based on national codes of best practices. These include codes for Australian commercial galleries, the commercialization of indigenous work, and very detailed attentions paid to artist incomes as outlined in their 2004 publication, *Code of Practice for the Australian Visual Arts and Craft Sector* and now being updated.¹ Chapter 5 of their handbook covering sectoral fees and wages includes minimum, standard and senior practitioner rates for studio, public and media artists. The wage contract rates are tied to common Australia cultural industry employment standards and include rates for independent curators and arts administrators, freelance rates for writers, broadcasters and photographers along with casual university and public school teaching wages. The NAVA model changes some horizons of what could be developed here within our own "big tent" of best practices.



Visual Arts Summit 2007, Discussion 3: Treasures and Treasuries. (Shirley Thomson, Joe Friday, Vera Frenkel, Shauna McCabe, Louise Déry, Steve Loft). Courtesy: CARFAC.

As it stands, the ROM's mortgage relief was but one more step in private government deals with private investors in a reported one billion dollars worth of cultural infrastructure building.

"THEN I SAW HER FACE, NOW I'M A BELIEVER"

While the three-day summit broke out into panel-themed discussion groups, the recommendations from those groups did not proceed into the final communiqué that was being written separately and simultaneously by an editorial team. Reading the final communiqué, "A collective agenda for the visual arts," the writing team itself clearly could have benefited from a writing workshop on how to deliver talking points to the media. It begins by proclaiming, "Art is the face of Canada." Note, in isolating grant category fashion, the name of this meeting is the Visual Arts Summit, and not the Visual and Media Arts Summit. The more obvious cultural "Faces of Canada" could have met as the Canadian Broadcasters Summit or the Mass Circulation Magazine Summit or The Canadian Filmmaking on Big and Little Screens Summit. So what again constitutes the true "face of Canada"—and how is the *zit of the visual arts* faring and affecting the smile on the face of Canadian cultural industries?

Another theme of the communiqué is that the sector is newly "united." The problem with this theme is that "the media" has rarely if ever viewed "the visual arts sector" as being disunited or differentiated. And whose fault is that, who has worked hard both within and outside of the art and mainstream media to make the sector appear scared of its internal disputes being made public? Who says controversy = funding cuts? So irregardless of Summit's feel-good desires about unification, "unifica-

tion" itself is just a non-story and a purging of what can be useful drama.

The only other item of note in the communiqué is a vague reference here italicized and reproduced in context:

In a time of global challenges calling for dialogue and understanding, the Canadian government has cut support for our international cultural profile. *The unique and diverse character of Canada is under threat.* The visual arts offer the best opportunity to counter this threat.

What is the threat? An explanation offered was that this was meant to be a reference to cultural sovereignty, which is all well and good. But a clarifying question that any journalist might ask is: why and in what ways are the "visual arts" the best opportunity to counter a loss of cultural sovereignty? According to CMA Director John MacAvity, who effectively acted as hands-on summit wrangler, the communiqué was intentionally "general" so that it could be signed by a 10,000-person petition. Some two months later the petition signers number 1,125. (Yes I signed it, silly; the petition awaits your name and can be found at (http://www.petitiononline.com/mod_perl/signed.cgi?visarts.)

ARE WE THERE YET?

Pre-summit and in-summit talk of an era of "post-struggle" or at least a truce on "divisiveness" in the visual arts was the agreed-upon message. When it comes to tiers of presentation organizations, the apparent disconnect from reality is an imagined level playing field where larger museums in particular are willing to surrender their ever-expand-

ing funding entitlements.

In November 2007, The Globe and Mail's John Barber reported an unannounced and unsecured Ontario government loan to buy out the ROM's \$84 million mortgage. This allows the ROM to save \$5 million in interest costs over the next 10 years. In Barber's news report, the AGO's Director is cited as saying that the ROM payment "is a sign that the Ontario government truly believes in the role of the arts" and that the AGO would be pursuing similar opportunities. As it stands, the ROM's mortgage relief was but one more step in private government deals with private investors in a reported one billion dollars worth of cultural infrastructure building. Searching the Globe and Mail's on-line archives, it is not difficult to find accounts of the Ontario government's engagement with infrastructure-building as being primarily concerned with mollifying arts investors like Hal Jackman, Joey Tannenbaum and the Thomson family.

Reports on the final communiqué of the Visual Arts Summit and the announcement of the "historic agreement" on artists' fees were both absent from the mainstream media. Instead the purported national paper of influence, The Globe and Mail, chose to occupy its pages with good news, bad news stories about its biggest hometown institutions. In her 2007 wrap-up under a heading "Building most likely to come down in 20 years," Globe and Mail architectural critic Lisa Rochen pointedly wrote, "Put the ROM down as a \$240 million constructed indulgence of a silver-tongued architect at a particularly rich time in Toronto."

The AGO does much better on the architectural review front augmented by the Globe's Visual Arts critic Sarah Milroy who never seems to tire of gilding the AGO lily. In her 2007 national arts scene wrap-up, Milroy wrote: "The closing of the Art Gallery of Ontario ... back in the fall has *deepened the stillness of the art scene in Toronto*" (emphasis mine). It's as if there are two art scenes in Toronto: One of which contains the AGO and nobody else; the other "scene" contains everybody else with the AGO as a times-past delusional family member who is watered and fed but, for the sake of safety, kept locked up in our mental attics.

STRATEGIC PLANS AND POLLING RESULTS

While a "big tent" desire in the visual and media arts might be fulfilled in better implementation of and revisions to federal legislation, the real future action will remain centered around the Canada Council for the Arts. And it is precisely here that the sector's conflicting needs and wants meet, where agreements on what constitutes change for the better are still in dispute and structural resolutions and acceptable compromises are avoided by the frequent ploy of changing the subject.

In their summary report analysis of responses to the Canada Council for the Arts Strategic Planning 2008 – 11 Online Survey, consultants Hill Strategies Research write that if the sample of 1,182 respondents had been random (which they admit it wasn't), such a sampling would suffice to "provide a reliable snapshot of the entire

population of Canada."² Only 46 percent of the respondents identified themselves as professional artists or arts professionals. Members of art organizations made up a further 13 percent of respondents, followed by Other (9 percent), Arts Patron (7 percent), Arts Funder and Government (both at 1 percent), with International arts funder trailing at 0.2 percent. Given this mix across all of the disciplines that the Canada Council services, it is somewhat surprising then to read that "respondents mentioned funding or support for artists almost twice as often as organizations." It is less surprising that the survey reveals some of the very common and known disagreements that the Visual Arts Summit appeared to want to put aside. Hill Strategies Research note, from a careful reading of responses, it appears that there were some areas of disagreement among respondents including:

- The balance of funding between individuals and organizations.
- The balance of funding between risk-taking, research, innovation and experimentation (on one hand) and activities that are presented and have community impact (on the other).
- The balance of support between emerging and established artists.
- The balance of support between new and established organizations (as well as small and large organizations).

This rough snapshot gives some idea of how the present "pie-dividing" and the pretense of how well it works is a constant source of irritation. Artists, artist's organizations and those who engage in

or host critical curatorial practices and attend to art publishing have to find more effective ways of making sure that their work receives the support it deserves. Such an alliance of interests is a focus not well reflected in the current ways that national service organizations in our field chose to communicate and advocate either alone or with each other.

Notes:

1. www.visualarts.net.au/advicecentre/codesofpracticeandprotocols/code
2. www.50.canadacouncil.ca/en/consultation/default.aspx

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As it stands, the ROM's mortgage relief was but one more step in private government deals with private investors in a reported one billion dollars worth of infrastructure building.

CRUDE CULTURE: *The Creative Industries in Canada*

BY KIRSTY ROBERTSON

On 12 July, 2007, Edmonton mayor Stephen Mandel wrote in a letter to the editor of *The Globe and Mail*, "It's a baffling mystery why *The Globe and Mail* would run a picture of an oil-sands excavation alongside a synopsis of Edmonton, one of Canada's most artistically vibrant and culturally diverse cities." In answer to an article that ranked cities on the basis of now well-known urban guru Richard Florida's creative cities index,¹ Mandel continued to outline Edmonton's cultural accomplishments, among them the newly-designed Frank Gehry-style art gallery (set to open in 2009). He ended by observing, "We are host to more than 30 festivals annually and, yes, our reputation earned us the title of Canada's Cultural Capital." But it seems to me that although the dismissal of Edmonton's cultural accomplishments may be a disappointment, it isn't a baffling mystery, for the politics of separation between the arts and the economy run deep in Canada, going back to and beyond the Massey Commission's 1951 positioning of Canadian high arts culture as needing protection from the mass culture of Canada's American neighbour. In spite of Edmonton's investment of millions of dollars in cultural infrastructure, credibility strains to imagine Edmonton as a cultural capital, not because it isn't, but because the syllogistic politics of representation are such that Alberta equals oil and hence it cannot equal culture.

Such a blunt separation is characteristic of many responses in Canada to creative industries models that posit the amalgamation of culture and the economy. While this may have much to do with mutual suspicion (on the parts of business, government and the arts), it also has a great deal to do with a hang-over from the cultural politics of the 1990s. Cultural policy in Canada is haunted by its complex histories — contestations over national identity and belonging and the legacy of deep cuts to social and cultural spending that characterized the previous decade. The implementation of (and perhaps also resistance to) creative industries models has taken, and will continue



River Bow Valley, Alberta. Courtesy: the CTC.

to take, a different path from that of the numerous countries that have rushed headlong into the economization of culture as the next logical step in the extension of knowledge economies and finance capitalism. Clearly, as demonstrated by both Mandel's letter and the example to follow, initiatives that use culture to either bolster the economy or place Canadian cities level with their global counterparts, are taking place. This concatenation of actions, however, remains largely unlabelled and thus fundamentally lacking the centrifugal force that has made the creative industries model in Britain one of such potency and contestation.

CRUDE CULTURE

In the summer of 2006, Alberta Premier Ralph Klein traveled to Washington DC to discuss energy policy in a controversial visit that coincided with the showcasing of the province of Alberta at the Smithsonian Museum's annual *Folklife Festival*. For several weeks in the middle of an atypically hot, wet and humid summer on the US east coast (brought on, the experts tell us, by global warming), Canada's culture was represented on the Washington Mall by the central object of the Alberta display — a massive Caterpillar truck, of the sort used in the oil fields, complete with 18-foot-high tires. The festival drew thou-

Canada's culture was represented on the Washington Mall by the central object of the Alberta display — a massive Caterpillar truck, of the sort used in the oil fields.

sands of visitors to a pancake breakfast, a display of native dance, a storyteller and drama troupe, as well as activities that gave visitors a chance to dig for dinosaur bones, wear a Stetson, hear about Alberta beef, join in a line dance, view works donated by the Alberta Crafts Council or observe the black gold of the oil sands, transported to Washington from Fort McMurray.

Given that Ralph Klein was in Washington on an expedition to educate the American government and populace about Alberta oil, and given that the vast majority of export profits from Alberta, and a good chunk of Canada's GDP, come from sales of oil to the United States, the donation of the oil truck takes on a certain tongue-in-cheek inevitability. Asked about the \$38 million cost of transporting the truck (and the rest of the exhibition) to Washington, Alberta Minister of International and Intergovernmental Affairs Gary Mar responded, "It will be worth the cost if it furthers Alberta's influence in the US capital."² Completely overlooking the fact that the festival was ostensibly about the folkloric culture of the participating nations, he continued, "We want, as a province, to punch above our weight in terms of trade and international relations."³

Coupled with a near obsessive referencing of Canada's role in the United States — we are told *ad nauseum* that only 4 percent of the American population knows that Canada is their number one supplier of oil — the news coverage of the festival repeatedly instrumentalized culture as a service industry, part of a publicity machine designed to highlight Canada, and more particularly Alberta, as a prime target for investment. But, in spite of the Festival's relative success (economically and culturally), in spite of Mandel's passionate letter and Mar's 2005 campaigning for investment in the cultural industries sector as a catalyst for economic growth, it wasn't until very recently that the oil-rich Conservative Alberta provincial government began pumping up investment in the arts.⁴ This brought them in line

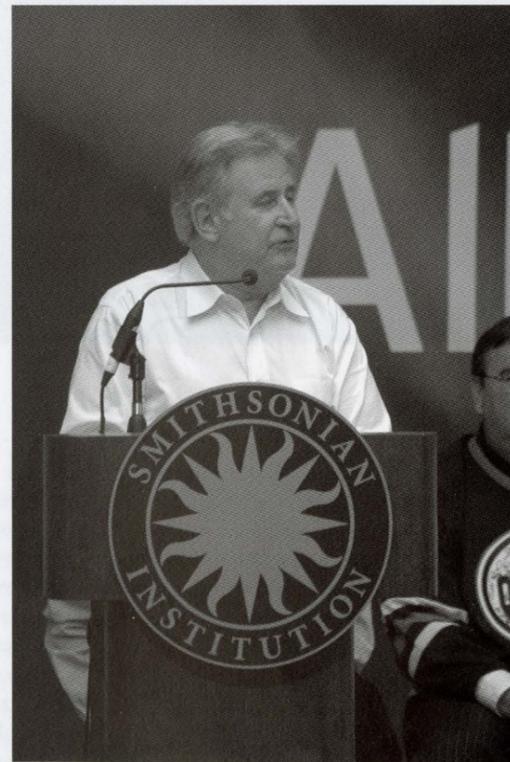


Oil Sands truck in the Alberta program at the 2006 Smithsonian Folklife Festival. Photo: David Abbott. Courtesy: Smithsonian Institution.

with the creative industries rhetoric that characterized the neoliberal encompassment of culture by economies in Britain and elsewhere since the mid- to late 1990s.

MAPPING THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

The idea of merging culture with the economy isn't new, but the recent discourse surrounding it is, having been codified by British Culture Minister Chris Smith in the now infamous 1998 *Creative Industries Mapping Document*.⁵ Smith's report called for the "exploitation" of culture and creativity for economic gain, primarily through increased revenues made off intellectual property (IP) rights. Increase innovation and creativity, the argument goes, and the profits will follow. Indeed, the "Shenzhen speed" of change brought about by the rise of economies in the East (most notably China), coupled with the immense profits made off immaterial property, is inexorably changing the face of global capitalism. Culture, as collapsed into the creative industries, means "not the traditional fine arts, nor the modernist cultural industries like cinema and radio, but instead the newly minted and digitized professions that shape the lightweight, complex, ephemeral, ever-changing aesthetic experiences of the hyper-mediated city."⁶ Nevertheless, the tra-



Alberta Premier Ralph Klein welcomes visitors at the Opening Ceremony of the 2006 Smithsonian Folklife Festival on the National Mall. Photo: Hugh Talman. Courtesy: Smithsonian Institution.

No global city, no global corporation, no culture of interest to a globalized world, and most importantly no authoritative museum or gallery, is complete without its shell of twisted glass and steel.

ditional arts continue to play a significant role, for along with the vast flows of immaterial goods — software, IP, experience, entertainment — come the material façades. The buildings of the new order, "starchitect"-designed edifices that come with a litany of names associated with the apex of cultural celebrity in this new world (Koolhaas, Gehry, Foster, Cavatrava, Hadid), act as beacons for the so-called "new economy." No global city, no global corporation, no culture of interest to a globalized world, and most especially, no authoritative museum or gallery, is complete without its shell of twisted glass and steel. And in turn, these buildings are made possible by the innovative software of the knowledge economy, which allows seemingly impossible architecture to emerge unimpeded from the infrastructure of an ever-increasing number of cities that had been left to crumble under the divest-and-survive policies of the early to mid-1990s.

Canada is no exception to this, as cities from St. John's to Toronto, from Calgary to Vancouver undergo their own "transformations" and "renaissances." Yet, it is not just Alberta that lacks a language to describe what is going on. Rather, in

Canada, creative cities and creative economies still appear to operate in discrete spheres, seemingly unfettered by connections to a rapidly changing global economy. Perhaps this is the result of a sort of lazy chauvinism — an increasingly incorrect assumption that China and India will provide the sweatshops, but not the technological expertise. Perhaps Canada, with its reliance on natural resources, did not face to the same extent the perceived need to create new economies (symbolic or otherwise) in the wake of the flight of traditional manufacturing from Britain, Europe and the United States. But even as reports in the business sections of national and provincial newspapers call for Canada to provide the "knowledge" for the new economy — the green technology for a gasping planet, for example⁷ — the rampant boosterism connecting culture, technology and the global economy that has characterized the British model (and can also be seen in China, Australia, New Zealand and a number of European countries) is largely absent. And although there are exceptions (the preparations for the 2010 Olympics might be a case in point), Canada's unwilling-



Randall Stout Architects Inc. The new Art Gallery of Alberta, opening late 2009. Courtesy: Art Gallery of Alberta.



Jasper Park Lodge, Alberta.
Courtesy: the CTC.

ness, or inability to once and for all make these connections speaks to a very different understanding of the relationship between the arts and the economy.

But what, precisely, is this difference? The ambiguity towards creative industries is not only the ideological stance of the current Federal government. At other levels (for example in the arts community itself), it is also a result of the shadow cast by the fractious identity debates that characterized the 1990s — a fraught national identity being the shibboleth that separates the expediency of culture in Canada from that of other G8 nations. I should state clearly that I am not arguing that Canada needs any kind of unified narrative of nationality to enter the global sphere. Nor am I suggesting that the British creative industries model should be applied here as a *fait accompli*. Rather, I am arguing that the contestations over nationality that characterized the 1990s in Canada fit uncomfortably with the politics of globalization so necessary to determining the global flows of hybridized culture that tend to underlie even nationalistic definitions of creative industries. And, it is the very ways in which this ambiguity could potentially be used to resist some of the more malevolent aspects of a burgeoning immaterial-property-based capitalism, that are of interest to me here. Before bringing this argument full circle, however, it might be worth first analyzing the relationship between nationalism, globalization and the creative industries.

Symbolic nationality has been essential to the economization of culture. Contrary to the homogenization that was predicted would come with globalization, it is more accurately national difference that is celebrated. The “Cool Britannia” project, for example, billed itself as a cultural re-branding of Britain. However, this re-branding was fundamentally in con-

trast to the self-conscious and loaded efforts to define a settler nation characteristic of the many attempts to describe a “unified” Canadian nationality.⁸ “Cool Britannia” was a project of nationality turned outward. It relied extensively on the new definition of Britain being accepted by the global art world and market, not to mention the global financial markets underlying the “new economy.” Any rebranding of Britain was tantamount first to a repositioning of Britain globally, and second, to the deregulation and privatization of nationality. In many ways it is this privatization of culture and nationality that in Canada grates against the very basis of trenchant beliefs in a publicly funded cultural sphere that defines cultural nationality. To privatize culture creates a rift directly through the state-funded culture that is often referred to as separating Canada from the United States and giving Canada an identity in the global sphere. This isn’t to say that culture and nationality aren’t increasingly privatized in Canada. Rather, where information technology and intellectual property meet notions of a protected national culture, the *discourse* of creative industries collapses under its own weight.

An unwillingness to talk about creative industries, however, should not be confused with an unwillingness to participate in the economization or commodification of culture. Though a consideration of the *economic* role of culture was largely absent from both the 1988 Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the US and the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement, culture has become in the years since, a major engine of activity and capital accumulation. According to UNESCO, in the 18 years between 1980 and 1998, world trade in cultural goods increased from \$48 billion to \$214 billion. In Canada this is no less the case. By 2001, the arts and culture

sector was contributing \$26 billion to the GDP along with 740,000 jobs (equivalent to agriculture, forestry, fishing, mining, oil and gas and utilities combined). The sector’s employment grew twice as fast as the total workforce through the 1980s, with growth continuing through the 1990s.⁹ In 2000, the export of Canadian cultural goods and services totaled \$5 billion, and between 1996 and 2002, the Canada Council reported that the export of Canadian cultural products increased by 80 percent, ranking third in terms of exports. Culture is the ultimate renewable resource, always able to respond to the rapid changes of the global economy.

And yet, in spite of culture’s seeming economic prowess, the Canadian government’s position on culture-as-commodity has always been one of ambiguity — to protect and commodify all at once. At international negotiations for agreements such as the 1997 Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) and the 2001 Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), both of which failed, government negotiators clearly favoured positions that paid lip service to protecting national cultures while simultaneously transforming those same cultural products into commodities through subsequent agreements that privileged the deregulation of intellectual property and copyright. The division embraced by the Massey Commission between elite and popular culture has bled into the expression of the need to protect national culture *even as* elite and popular culture are collapsed in economic agreements. In other words, the protection traditionally offered artists in Canada by the state remains ostensibly in place, but any notion that culture is not a commodity, and hence the very intellectual property underlying the “new economy,” is false.¹⁰ The contradictory politics of this stance might also explain why, even as on an international scale the protection of culture was repeatedly referred to as a fundamental right, within Canada, the same years were characterized by the brutal slashing of budgets for social services and the arts.¹¹

RESISTANCE

More recently, as the idea of “creative cities” has caught on, many of the people involved in protests against the anti-culture and anti-social services stances of 1990s governments (for example the 1996 Days of Action against the Ontario “Common Sense” Revolution), and somewhat later against global capitalism

in the alter-globalization movements, are being offered the choice of incorporation into the very system that had disavowed them. This begs the question, what happens to radical activist movements and the producers of culture, if culture is recognized as a powerful economic tool? In short, when incorporation takes place through an apparent about-turn on the perceived importance of arts and culture to the economy, left-wing and elite arguments that highlighted the importance of culture to definitions of national identity, and that had depended upon critiquing the government for its support of corporate above collective interest, are left in a difficult position.

Take for example the case of the left-wing NGO, Council of Canadians (CoC). Fervently nationalist, the Council bases many of its arguments on an idea of shared nationality threatened by the loss of Canadian ownership of business, the potential destruction of Canadian culture, the selling off of Canadian resources and the perceived Americanization of Canadian life. In a speech in 1998 at the University of Toronto, founder Maude Barlow clearly set out this framework by stating “from the mid-1930s until recently, successive Canadian governments designed and implemented cultural policies to build a strong and dynamic pool of Canadian artistic talent and cultural enterprises and to ensure that Canadians’ own stories were told and our values and history preserved.” She continues, “public support for Canadian culture has been crucial to our survival as a nation.”¹² Locating her argument in a fear of American envelopment, Barlow points to drastic cutbacks to the arts sector throughout the 1990s, including massive cuts to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the Canada Council, the National Film Board and the National Libraries and Museums Budget. She also implicates cuts to tax credits and incentives designed to attract investment to the publishing, recording and film industries. With an impassioned plea, Barlow ends, “My greatest fear is that, as we lose our identity, our so-called knowledge economy may start to reflect a society drowning in information but starved for purpose. Canada as a knowledge nation must reflect our history and culture, what we know and value ... We must reject the siren call of economic globalization based on the model of privatization and competition.”

Seven years later, in 2005, Barlow’s CoC partner Mel Hurtig was making similar claims, pointing to the foreign own-

In spite of culture’s seeming economic prowess, the Canadian government’s position on culture-as-commodity has always been one of ambiguity — to protect and commodify all at once.

ership of most Canadian cultural infrastructure and industry, to the unequal import-to-export ratio on cultural goods (books and magazines, for example) and to what he perceived as the inevitable threat to Canadian nationalism and identity that would result from this form of globalization.¹³ Where is the solution? For both Barlow and Hurtig, it is in “better” government and political participation. To ignore this, and continue in a direction that encourages economic over cultural solutions will inevitably lead, in Hurtig’s estimation, to the “swamping” of the Canadian culture scene by American products and the destruction of Canadian identity through a lack of cultural assurance that “we” actually exist.

This is a tremendously difficult situation, for it wasn’t just the Council of Canadians that was mobilizing such nationalistic arguments. Even as Canada was beginning to negotiate away the symbols of Canadian cultural identity, those same symbols were being exploited in a series of divisive debates over national belonging. The nation, in other words, was fetishized as symbol even as it was being taken apart. The end of the nation state, written about in the mid- to late-1990s scholarship of



Peter Doig. White Canoe, 1992. Courtesy: Victoria Miro Gallery.

Exhibitions by those best able to supply utopian visions of unified nationality received a great deal of support.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Arjun Appadurai and others, that in turn led seamlessly into the more recent scholarship surrounding the creative industries, arrived in Canada precisely at a moment of high crisis and fetishization of an always-out-of-reach national identity. The result has been an obscuring of Canadian participation in transnational economic and cultural negotiations and the establishment of a double narrative. This consistently places Canadian culture as metonymic representation of Canadian identity, always “off the table” at trade negotiations, while simultaneously being highlighted as a vehicle for encouraging new economies and investment in Canada. As new markets are opened for cultural goods, and Canadian cultural “emissaries” are sent around the world to promote national culture, it is difficult to define “the table” that Canadians can have their cultural cake and eat it too).

(ART) MARKETING CULTURE

In England, what Simon Ford and Anthony Davies call the “surge to merge” culture with the economy, relied fundamentally not just on the support or use of the arts by business, but also on the edgy production of contemporary artists working in the cosmopolitan environment of London — most notably the Young British Artists.¹⁴ In turn, contemporary art flourished with the growing economy, with secondary sales reaching a record half billion dollars in sales at Sotheby’s and Christie’s in New York in one week in February 2007. In Canada, in spite of a growing number of jet-setting contemporary artists, the institution of a number of corporate-sponsored art prizes and International Art Fairs and the Canada Council’s recent attempt to help contemporary art dealers, the contemporary art market, on which much of the London creative city fandango is built, is relatively lacking. While British-Canadian artist Peter Doig recently topped a record for contemporary art sold at a Sotheby’s auction, bringing in a whopping \$11.5 million for his painting “Canoe,” the art market in Canada is still largely rooted in historical work. Although 2005 was a banner year for Canadian auction houses, most of the sales were of Group of Seven, Tom Thomson and EJ Hughes, the most expensive among them selling at \$428,000 at Sotheby’s, and that to the late Kenneth Thomson, who has almost single-handedly influenced the direction of the Canadian art market when he paid over 5 million for a Paul Kane in 2002.

Instead of the contemporary, the sponsorship and support of Canadian culture as often as not harkens back to what is imagined to be the ethnic nationalism of the past (represented most obviously by the work of Emily Carr and members of the Group of Seven). If the relationship between artists and entrepreneurs in Britain is one of synergy, in Canada it is much more tentative, relying as much on references to historical figures as it does on the networking and production of contemporary cultural workers. Paul Webster ties this back to the Quebec Referendum and the perceived need to sponsor cultural narratives that supported a unified nationality in the wake of a vote that nearly tore the country apart.¹⁵ Exhibitions by those best able to supply utopian visions of unified nationality received a great deal of support — a strong unified nation is, of



Top left: Emily Carr, Quiet, 1942. Courtesy: Heffel Fine Art Auction House.

Top Right: Tom Thomson, Northern Lights, 1916. Courtesy: Heffel Fine Art Auction House.

Bottom: E.J. Hughes, Fishboats, Rivers Inlet, 1946. Courtesy: Heffel Fine Art Auction House.



course, an economically viable one. So perhaps it is not surprising that in the years since the Referendum, it is not the edgy contemporary artists who receive the blockbuster exhibitions, but painters such as Tom Thomson, Emily Carr and the Group of Seven, whose works, when on tour, do as much to promote Canada's natural resources in their depictions of an apparently uninhabited land full of minerals, oil and fresh bulk water, as they do to advertise a spirit of Canadian nationality.

To make my point clear, "Cool Britannia" is hardly represented on an international scale by John Constable paintings. And although the "serge to merge" might seem to be clearly demonstrated by the recent presence of Thomas d'Aquino, (CEO and President of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives and one of the leading private-sector architects of NAFTA), as Chairman of the Board of Directors of the National Gallery of Canada Foundation, the final ingredient of contemporary art production and the growth of the art market has yet to be added.

What does all of this mean? The concept of "creative industries," has, of late, come under a great deal of criticism for exacerbating the precarious labour standards of cultural workers. Rather than the promised monies flowing to producers,

financial gain has instead flowed upward to rights holders.¹⁶ It is, as theorist Brian Holmes puts it "the monetization and contractualization of social relations." In this sense, the ability to criticize in Canada has been badly undermined by the lack of rhetoric surrounding Creative Industries, that is, by the fact that it is not labeled as such.¹⁷

Nevertheless, I would like to end here by arguing that the ambiguous position taken towards the creative industries contains within it potential resistances to the inaccessibility that would go alongside any total commodification of culture. Take, for example, the recent backlash against copyright legislation proposed by the Conservative government. The legislation, proposed in December 2007, would have instituted restrictions of the sort found in the US Digital Millennium Act — far beyond the standards required by Canada's support of the World Intellectual Property Organization. The massive outcry against proposed copyright was reported as if it had come out of nowhere. On the contrary, the protection of users in fact fits well with the model described here — one that sees access to culture as a fundamental Canadian right. Although the politics of fair copyright or proper payment for producers are somewhat obscured here by an outcry against the criminalization of

file sharing, this has nevertheless been an immensely successful campaign that (at the time of writing) halted the passage of the controversial legislation in its tracks. In this case, it is possible that the movement benefited from not being labeled part of anything wider than copyright. It was not connected, for example, to the slashing of budgets to museums in 2003, to the cancellation of DFAIT arts program or to the first tentative steps to abandon a Conservative ideology that tends to ignore the arts for one that investigates their economic potential. Although the movement to halt the legislation takes up some of the goals of both the Council of Canadians and of the alter-globalization movement, these connections were never made.

Returning to Edmonton Mayor Stephen Mandel's comment at the opening of this article, it becomes obvious that the provinces and cities aren't waiting for the federal government to get on board. The recently elected Liberal government in Ontario, for example, ran on a culture budget, pledging at least \$75-million annually in new money to the province's museums, media, libraries and school arts programs. Is this something to celebrate or are the lessons learned in Britain and Australia to be applied here? Will the rhetoric catch on? Certainly Liberal pledges to the arts were overshadowed by Tory backpedaling on issues of funding for independent and religious schools. Under no circumstances was this an election decided over culture. It also remains to be seen whether the lessons learned in the divisive debates over identity and multiculturalism in the 1990s will continue to inflect the incorporation of culture into the economy. But also, to go back to the original example, perhaps this is all connected to oil. The profits pouring in from the oil sands are at least partially connected to unrest in the Middle East and to the War in Iraq. Should that end, as promised by the Democratic candidates for President, what then? With the dollar up and oil production and manufacturing down, the economy will inevitably change, perhaps setting in place a domino effect that, as in Britain and Australia, may lead to the search for new areas of investment, new areas that will inevitably include the further exploitation of culture. What remains to be seen is whether the almost reactionary response to a creative industries model can be mobilized as an oppositional discourse to some of the abuses that have taken place under the umbrella of an economy based on intellectual property.



Maligne Lake, Jasper National Park, Alberta. Courtesy: the CTC.

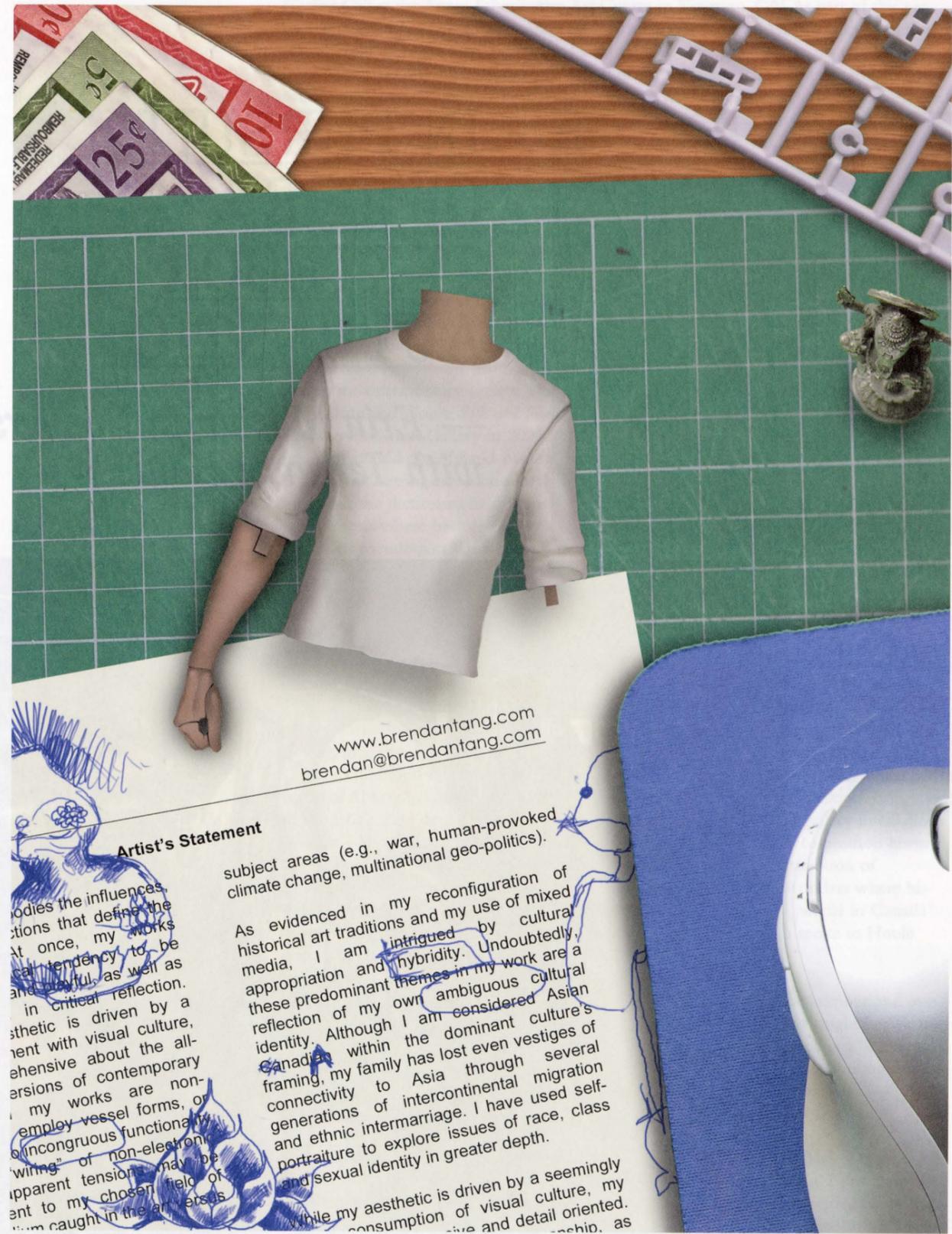
Notes:

1. The article that so angered Mandel was Caroline Alphonso and Joanna Smith. "Stars aligned" for urban guru's move." *The Globe and Mail*. (10 July, 2007), p.A12.
2. Stephen Hunt. "Alberta takes over U.S. capital: Special events to sell province's virtues." *Calgary Herald*. (26 June, 2006), p.A1.
3. CBC Arts. "All things Albertan focus of Smithsonian Festival," *CBC.ca*. (27 June 2006), www.cbc.ca/story/arts/national/2006/06/27/alberta-smithsonian.html
4. Alberta. "Alberta Finance (Alberta Budget, 2006)." *Community Development Business Plan 2006-09*. (March 22, 2006).
5. Department for Culture, Media and Sport. "Creative Industries Mapping Document 2001". *Department for Culture, Media and Sport*. www.culture.gov.uk/Reference_library/Publications/archive_2001/ci_mapping_doc_2001.htm.
6. Giovanni Arrighi. *Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the Twenty-First Century*. (London: Verso: 2007), Brian Holmes. "One World, One Dream," *Continental Drift: The Other Side of Neoliberal Globalization*. brianholmes.wordpress.com/2008/01/08/one-world-one-dream/#sdfootnote18sym.
7. David Crane, "Parties must tackle nation's economic fate." *Toronto Star*. (9 December, 2005), p.E02.
8. See Diane Francis. *Fighting for Canada*. (Toronto: Key Porter Books: 1996), or J.L. Granatstein. *Who Killed Canadian History?* (Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers: 1998), for example. See also Eva Mackey. *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada*. (London and New York: Routledge: 1999), or Himani Bannerji. *The Dark Side of Nation: Essays of Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Gender*. (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press: 2000), for a very different take on the idea of a "unified" nationality.
9. Canada Council for the Arts. "Creating Jobs and Economic Impact." *Canada Council for the Arts*. (29 May 2004).
10. See Crean, Susan, Laurie Edwards and Maria D. Hebb. "Intellectual Property and International Trade." *Paper Prepared for the Canada Council*. (August 2000), www.cra-c.ca/CanadaCouncilpaper2.doc
11. Canada's leading role in the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Diversity of Cultural Contents and Artistic Expressions is a case in point.
12. *The Council of Canadians*. www.canadians.org.
13. Mel Hurtig. "My Perspective." *Culture.ca: Canada's Cultural Gateway*. (2005), www.culture.ca/perspectivepointdevuee.jsp?data=200512/tcp01200122005e.html
14. Anthony Davies and Simon Ford. "Culture Clubs." *Mute* 18. (2000), www.infopool.org.uk/cclubs.htm
15. Paul Webster, "Who Stole Canadian History?" *This Magazine* 33. (March-April 2000), pp. 29-31.
28. See Ned Rossiter. *Organized Networks: Media Theory, Collective Labour, New Institutions*. (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers: 2007).
16. Holmes, 2008.
17. For example, at the recent Visual Arts Summit in Ottawa and attended by more than 500 participants, the notion of Creative Industries didn't even come up for discussion, much less as something to be potentially resisted.

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Maligne Lake, Jasper National Park, Alberta. Courtesy: the CTC.

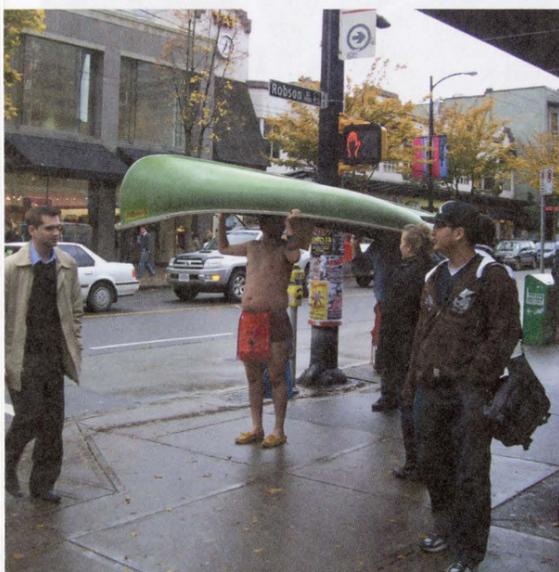


Artist's Statement

...odies the influences, ...ions that define the ...t once, my works ...al tendency to be ...and playful, as well as ...in critical reflection. ...sthetic is driven by a ...nent with visual culture, ...ehensive about the all- ...ersions of contemporary ...my works are non- ...employ vessel forms, or ...incongruous functional ..."wiring" of non-electroni ...apparent tensions may be ...ent to my chosen field of ...them caught in the art's us

subject areas (e.g., war, human-provoked climate change, multinational geo-politics).
 As evidenced in my reconfiguration of historical art traditions and my use of mixed media, I am intrigued by cultural appropriation and hybridity. Undoubtedly, these predominant themes in my work are a reflection of my own ambiguous cultural identity. Although I am considered Asian Canadian, within the dominant culture's framing, my family has lost even vestiges of connectivity to Asia through several generations of intercontinental migration and ethnic intermarriage. I have used self-portraiture to explore issues of race, class and sexual identity in greater depth.
 While my aesthetic is driven by a seemingly consumption of visual culture, my ...ive and detail oriented. ...ship, as

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IN PURSUIT OF THE TEXTBOOK AUTHENTIC:

— Erin Morton in Conversation
with Terrance Houle

Top: Terrance Houle and Trevor Freeman, *Portage*, grunt gallery, 2007. Photo: Glenn Alteen. Courtesy: grunt gallery.

Bottom: Terrance Houle and Jarusha Brown, *Untitled*, from the *Urban Indian Series*, 2006. Courtesy: the artist and Walter Phillips Gallery.



On 20 October 2007, Terrance Houle staged the second round of his performance *Casting Call* at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre in Kingston, ON. As part of this performance, which was held in conjunction with curator Richard Hill's touring exhibition *World Upside Down*, Houle circulated a casting call that read, "Auditions will be for roles of Natives playing Non-Natives acting in Native roles." The open call sought "traditional, contemporary, bannock experience, Native war veterans, horse riding experience, an interest in bingo, war paint, Indian car, regalia, black wigs" and insisted that "any size and shape will be acceptable. We are looking for fit, big, small, tall, hunky, beautiful, ugly, etc ... Owners of buckskin loin cloth, breach cloth and general hides a bonus." The cheeky humour of the *Casting Call* text is a political strategy that permeates Houle's larger practice, which references not only the trauma inherent to colonial histories through pointed irony but also speaks to the resilience of Aboriginal cultures to these legacies. Performances such as *Portage*, in which Houle — dressed in a buckskin loin cloth and moccasins — and his collaborator Trevor Freeman portage a canoe through downtown Calgary (2005) and Vancouver (2007) and *Buckskin Mounting* (2006), a spoof of the film *Brokeback Mountain*, in which a cowboy garb-clad Houle and Adrian Stimson (as Buffalo Boy) rub each others' bodies with Lakota joint cream before retiring under a Navajo blanket, push the limits of what is an acceptable representation of an Aboriginal person in contemporary society. This latter performance was part of a larger installation by Stimson and Houle, *Sick and Tired/Paper Bag Indian Princess* respectively, held at Vancouver's Grunt Gallery in 2006. For his portion of the piece, Houle constructed the figure of a child out of hand-made paper from children's clothing and a paper bag "Indian suit" sitting at a school desk and dressed himself in paper Powwow regalia to write out the dictionary definition of an "Indian Giver" on the blackboard behind her.

It is somewhere between irony and humour that Houle — who often performs under the pseudonym *Runs Downtown*, a character he first envisioned wearing Powwow regalia made out of business suits — negotiates the boundaries of the traditional and the modern, the authentic and the imitated, the rural and the urban. Drawing on these historically constituted binaries, Houle created the *Urban Indian* photo series in collaboration with photographer Jarusha Brown in which, dressed in his Powwow regalia, Brown records him shopping for organic groceries, riding the subway and taking phone calls in his office cubicle. These images have been turned into roadside billboards in Kingston and Banff, as part of *World Upside Down*. The performativity of even these photo works drive home the point that Houle sees himself wholeheartedly as a performer, growing up on the Powwow trail. He draws influence from his home city of Calgary, childhood experiences with Canadian government education policy and trajectories of Aboriginal cultural production such as beadwork and textile making dating back to the 1920s. And despite the success of numerous performances and gallery installations — over 40 during the past two years alone — Houle often struggles to position himself as an Aboriginal person performing "Indian" within a longstanding tradition of Aboriginal artists using performance as a politicized tactic. He also wonders where his work fits in relation to contemporary artistic practice by Aboriginal people in Canada today. A few weeks after the *Casting Call* performance, Erin Morton spoke to Houle about these issues in relation to his own artistic production:

Erin Morton:

Richard Hill was recently quoted as saying "Terrance has a genius for humour and overturning expectations of what the proper terrain of indigenous identity might be. We have a real problem that people, sometimes even our own people, tend to see our "authentic" identity as tied to the past and this, in turn, is bound to a bunch of very limiting stereotypes. All this has little to do with our actual experience of contemporary life."¹ Could you speak a bit about this?

Terrance Houle:

The idea of humour and the overturning of indigenous identity ... Well all of my work is culled from my own experiences growing up as an Aboriginal army brat. I pretty much grew up like any other kid and as an Aboriginal person I also grew up with a lot of tradition. This put me in a position where I would be in school learning Canadian history and it was just this completely skewed view of who we are as people. I'd be dating women —

or girls, when I was in high school — and their dads would say to me, “So I hear you’re tax free, you don’t have to pay taxes” and I’m thinking, since when? These are the perceptions that people had about me and I always thought that was messed up. It was funny to me that these people didn’t know anything — or that they didn’t want to know anything — and how easily they fell into these stereotypes of Aboriginal people. I had long braided hair growing up and I’d go to reserves and dance Powwow and then I’d come home and back to public school and we’d have to learn about my culture. The idea for *Paper Bag Indian Princess* came from me questioning the teacher in class one time when we had made these paper bag Indian suits. I told my teacher, “You know, this isn’t what we wear,” and I got punished for saying that. Looking back now, the idea was that identity stops and whatever is written in books is the here-all end-all. I’m an Indian with tonnes of knowledge, even at that age, but I’m negated because I’m not textbook authentic.

Erin Morton:

Because all those textbook ideas place Aboriginal people in a time capsule anyway.

Terrance Houle:

Exactly, so with my artistic process I’m just riffing on what people already learn. Because I learned exactly what those people learned in public school, so I understand where it comes from. I got beat up a lot as a kid because I was Native, so I had to learn to defend myself. Being an army brat and growing up on the Powwow trail, you’re constantly meeting new people. So I just developed this sort of humour and my parents were always telling me to use that. It’s just part of Native culture, laughing and making fun of yourself, that’s just how it is, and that’s what I really riff on too.

Erin Morton:

The strategy of using these binaries of humour and tragedy seems very apparent in the installation *Sick and Tired/Paper Bag Indian Princess* with Adrian Stimson, in the way that it addresses the histories of residential schools. I read this strategy as providing a way to move away from the constitution of Aboriginal people as victims of colonial violence and to begin talking about survival and resistance. Is this important for you?



Terrance Houle. *Paper Bag Indian Princess*, 2006.
Photo: Merle Addison.
Courtesy: grunt gallery.



When we did Portage, it was so funny because it was literally just two dudes taking a canoe through Vancouver! We went into Native arts stores to buy moccasins as part of the performance and people were freaked out by it.

Terrance Houle:

It’s really important to me because both my parents are residential school survivors and they are going through residential school payouts right now. My mom said that they didn’t realize a lot of things that happened to them were abuse. I’m first generation away from the residential system, but the residential school affected my life hugely. My relatives killed themselves and there are lots of fucked up problems that happened because of those things. So for me it’s huge because residential school has been part of my life because of my folks, both good and bad. My parents are second or third generation survivors and Adrian caught the tail end of residential schools. His piece is directly referencing the residential schools and my piece, *Paper Bag Indian Princess*, was referencing my experience outside of residential school and sort of dealing with this other school system. That’s what was really haunting about that exhibit that we did. And that was a serious piece although mine sort of had some humour in it, but you know it’s tragic. That’s just the way that I view it, our culture is a hardened culture, compassionate and passionate, and at the same time we’ve survived so much and we’re going to keep on surviving and living. That was a very dear piece to me.

Erin Morton:

I found a post on Kimowan McLain’s blog in which he describes you as “not quite an Indian jackass, but somewhat smarter, [because] his puns linger.” I’m going to reference Dave Chappelle, although I’m not comparing you to him; when he was recently interviewed about ending his sketch comedy show he said that he did so because although he was glad it made his black audience laugh, he often thought white people were laughing a little too hard at his reversion of stereotypes. Although I’m sure that you anticipate both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginals will laugh at your work, is this kind of thing a concern for you?

Terrance Houle:

I love Kimowan’s work. I remember that interview with Chappelle and I think that, in a weird sense, I want to offend both groups of people because I know that Natives need to be criticized as much as non-Natives. I don’t want to make anybody a hero and I do that purely by pointing the finger back at myself. When we did *Portage*, it was so funny because it was literally just two dudes taking a canoe through Vancouver! We went into Native arts stores to buy moccasins as part of the performance and people were freaked out by it. We ended up going down Robson Street and people were pissed, just so mad because this Native and this Métis guy with a canoe were walking through their hip, young, trendy area. With my work, I just want it to be no holds barred. I think my work



Terrance Houle. *Portage, M:ST Festival*, Calgary, 2005.

is getting more mature in that it plays with making humour out of tragic moments, which again comes from my experience as an Aboriginal person living in mainstream culture. Nobody's really innocent in who they are or where they stand and I just feel like it's no holds barred in that sort of punk rock sensibility, you just do it and shit's got to be said and nobody else is saying it. A lot of it is making fun of those things that people learn and that they still believe in, like this idea of portaging and traversing through a landscape with people and buildings. It's absurd and it's putting that absurdity to a reality. I guess I just want to beat people to the punch, that's where my weird humour comes from. What's weirder than an Indian telling an Indian joke? And you're telling it to a bunch of racist people and they're laughing. Fucking idiots. Also, the thing is that I don't know if I've gotten a lot of critical writing about my work. I feel like no one can really approach it or that nobody wants to approach it, and I've had these senior Aboriginal artists and curators wagging their finger at me and telling me, "We did it in the 60s, Terrance." I was kind of put off by that, you feel like you can't get any support. I like the quote from Richard Hill, he's really bang-on about where I come from in my work. I want my work to be very literal but at the same time people can read so much into it. I think about that constantly. For *Portage*, we talked about that piece forever but it was just a joke! We were doing the what-ifs, "you know what would be funny?" That's usually how I start off my work and then it turns into a piece.

Erin Morton: In many of your performances, you make use of Cowboy versus Indian scenarios. Can you discuss this process?

Terrance Houle: It's mainly just that good and evil thing, the government versus the Indian, we're always up against something. Those binaries, those opposites, those things that are paralleled, cowboy versus Indian, that's the kind of a legacy that's going to be around forever. As an Indian, you're tied to the cowboy, so you might as well use it. And it's a game that I grew up with and that's the one thing I think people read into it, Cowboys and Indians, but again the idea of tragedy. My work deals with that tragic innocence, the innocence of playing a kid's game and how easily something like that can get really tainted. I think that's where the funny aspect comes into my work, it's quite disturbing really.

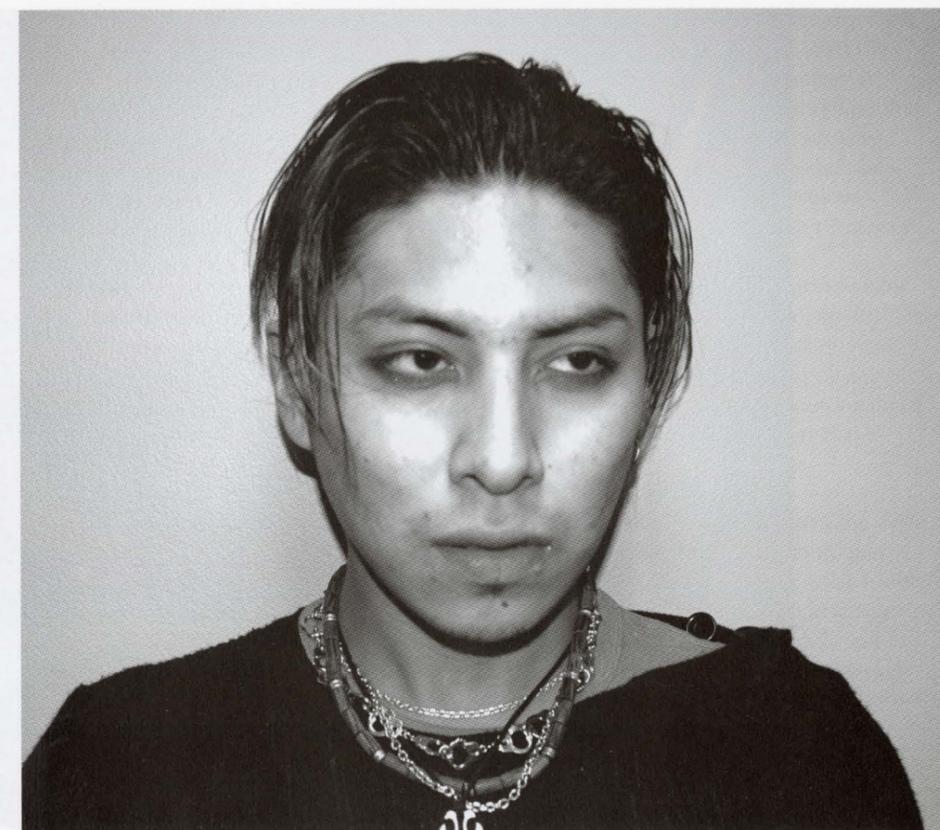
Erin Morton: Could you discuss how you came up with the concept for the *Casting Call* performance?

Terrance Houle: I was thinking about *Casting Call* for a while because I have a lot of Aboriginal actor friends here in Calgary, where a lot of films have been shot recently. I always got these casting calls in the mail and friends of mine would want to go to them. I thought that was really funny because I was looking at all these casting calls around the same time that I became a father and started sinking into my body and getting chubby and pear-shaped! So I was looking at these things thinking, a) I don't have long hair b) my body's not fit for that c) I do know how to ride a horse but how often do I do that? All these calls were ridiculous, the way that they looked for types of Aboriginal people and I started meeting these people who were playing every single Aboriginal stereotype in movies:

What's weirder than an Indian telling an Indian joke? And you're telling it to a bunch of racist people and they're laughing. Fucking idiots.



Images on this page: Terrance Houle. *Casting Call*, video stills, 2006. Courtesy: the artist.



they had long hair, they grew it all out and dyed it black, so there are literally people out there who want to fit this stereotype and perpetuate it. When I was doing *Casting Call*, I just thought of all the different people that I know who couldn't be in these films and I wanted to give them a chance and a voice and a way to speak out about that. I realized that I wanted to use actual films that had Natives that were played by non-Natives and explore these sorts of ideas through the Hollywood characters. Those characters still permeate the screen, even though people think that they don't. My actor friends still only get jobs as Indian actors. I wanted to make the piece to see if people would actually come to my casting call, because it's so completely absurd. Sometimes I feel like I have to play this persona of an Indian and that's what I question a lot — especially with a lot of my photo works such as the ones in *World Upside Down*. How do I fit in the role of what people perceive me to be? Is it traditional? Powwow dancing is really not traditional. The dance is traditional but the regalia and the things that people wear are not, they are very contemporary. With *Casting Call* I want to eventually make the auditions into a film, people who came out to be an Indian or what is perceived to be an Indian in the Hollywood or public sense. I've been playing Indian all my life.

Erin Morton: We've had previous conversations about the fact that most curators want to get more Aboriginal people to come to their galleries. How do you see this in relation to performances such as *Casting Call*, since a large part of the piece involves sending out the call to Aboriginal communities?

Terrance Houle: I think for me, it's not that I want to get Indians into the gallery because I think Natives are pretty sick of institutions. I want to question whether that's a viable thing for Aboriginal people and culture — do Indians go to the gallery and do they give a shit



Terrance Houle and Jarusha Brown. *End Trail/Not End Trail*, installation on Banff Public Transit, 2006. Photo: Tara Nicholson. Courtesy: Walter Phillips Gallery.

INDIGENOUS AND
MEMORY IN DOT
TIER'S MINING THE
MEDIA ARCHIVE

Erin Morton:

about the gallery? If I want my audience — my Aboriginal audience — to see my work in a gallery, that benefits the gallery. But does it benefit Aboriginal people? I want my work to be accessible to non-Natives and I think that part of my political strategy is messing with the concept of Indians coming to the gallery. Maybe curators shouldn't be thinking about it that way. What about bringing the work to the Indians? That's why I like doing public intervention, like in *Casting Call*, the main thing about it is that the actual call gets out into the community. That's why I made it so fucking ridiculous, because people get it in their email and then they pass it on because they can't believe it.

My reading of *World Upside Down* is that it is about unlearning colonialist narratives by subverting them, a process that might be described as “negotiation rather than negation.” It seems to me that your art practice plays within this dynamic, employing reversion and subverting dominant histories yet simultaneously constructing a new political object in your work that is, in Bhabha's words, “neither the one nor the other” — that is, neither the language of the dominant nor that of the oppressed, but a language that moves beyond such limiting binaries in order to foster a new space for conversation.

Terrance Houle:

I look at myself as being colonized but my worlds are paralleled. Neither one's the dominant over the other, I don't allow them to be. And for me that's what it's about, questioning those things, questioning is that a good thing or a bad thing? That's what I look at when I think about both of my sides, that I can look at not knowing my language but knowing my traditions and being able to pass that onto my daughter, while still loving punk rock and trying to make all these things fit together rather than oppose each other or at least run alongside one another. I live in a world where I have to use both of them to survive. And that's what my parents taught me, they specifically said we didn't teach you your language because we knew you didn't need it but we can teach you other things. And it's that ideology around it, do I look at the reserve as being the only place I can experience my culture and myself, or do I know that my backyard is where my people have always walked and is that home? And to me, it is. Did I live a life as an army brat or did I live a life of an actual Native person moving from place to place, wherever his people moved, not being confined to one area? So it's breaking out of that mentality.



Terrance Houle and Jarusha Brown. *Landscape 1*, 2007. Courtesy: the artist.

I look at myself as being colonized but my worlds are paralleled. Neither one's the dominant over the other, I don't allow them to be.



Terrance Houle and Jarusha Brown.
 Untitled (billboard), from the Urban
 Indian Series, 2006. Photo: Don Lee.
 Courtesy: Walter Phillips Gallery.

Erin Morton:

What are your plans for upcoming projects?

Terrance Houle:

I'm going to be involved in a show at the Glenbow called *Tracing Histories: Presenting the Unpresentable* where I'm working on something with my grandmother, which is a really dear piece to me, called *Aakaistsiiksiinaakii: Many Snake Woman: The Daughters After Me*. It's a video portrait of my grandmother based on a photo portrait of her in the Glenbow collection by a German born artist called Winold Reiss. He did all these portraits of Aboriginal people and she's the last surviving member of all of his subjects. So I'm going to do a video portrait of her, my mother, my sister and my daughter and I'm going to get them to sit in the same stance that she's in. But the thing about it is that I want to kind of give life to this original portrait that didn't really speak about the person sitting there, since it was about capturing the last Aboriginal. My piece will be about giving life to my grandmother and her legacy. I want her to laugh in it and I want to make sure that my presence as an artist is in it, by giving her directions in the video by speaking to her during it: "Grandma look, look this way." So it will be a nice portrait with her grandson the artist.

Notes:

1. Mary-Beth Laviolette. "Wanted: [Final Edition]." *Calgary Herald*, (January 5, 2007), www.proquest.com.
2. Kimowan McLain. "Laughing with Terrance Houle." *Studioblog*. (November 25, 2007), web.mac.com/kimowan/iWeb/portfolio/Studioblog/5ACFE6ED-2351-4471-9E64-52822C7A55CF.html.
3. Homi Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*. (London and New York: Routledge: 1994), p.25.

Erin Morton is a PhD candidate and Teaching Fellow in the Department of Art at Queen's University. She specializes in Canadian visual culture and museum representation and is currently completing research on the installment and expansion of liberalism in Canada, those who re-shaped and resisted this project and the intersections of these political developments with visual culture in Atlantic Canada.

Terrance Houle is an internationally recognized interdisciplinary media artist and a member of the Blood Tribe. Involved with Aboriginal communities all his life, he has traveled to reservations throughout North America participating in Powwow dancing and other native ceremonies. It is Houle's life experiences that drive his work.

REVIEWS

**MIMESIS AND
 MEMORY IN DOT
 TUER'S MINING THE
 MEDIA ARCHIVE**

YYZBOOKS, 2005

review by Tabitha Minns

Mining the Media Archive is a collection of essays that represent Dot Tuer's career as a writer, cultural theorist and critical historian from 1989 to 2005. A valuable contributor to Canadian cultural history, Tuer is an intellectual whose accessible and readable social critique strives to promote social change by stimulating discussion at the level of community. The essays in this book are organized thematically: Canadian new media art; the history of Canadian community and cultural policy; and testimonies of cultural resistance in Canada and Latin America. The book also includes a short introduction outlining the theoretical and personal impetus of the compilation, which focuses on the recent history of Western artistic practice for social change and the role of narrative and textuality in retelling this history.

The conceptual basis for the book is rooted in a rejection of the legacy of Western philosophical tradition that places art outside of daily experience (and inside the hallowed halls of the museum, for example) in favour of relocating art within the heterogeneity of local memory as a site of political resistance and oppression. Tuer blends a range of methodologies to mine visual history in Canada and South America. That Toronto seems to stand in for Canada in her writing is probably less a failing on Tuer's part than a symptom of a conceptual and historical legacy in Canada of centre vs. periphery.

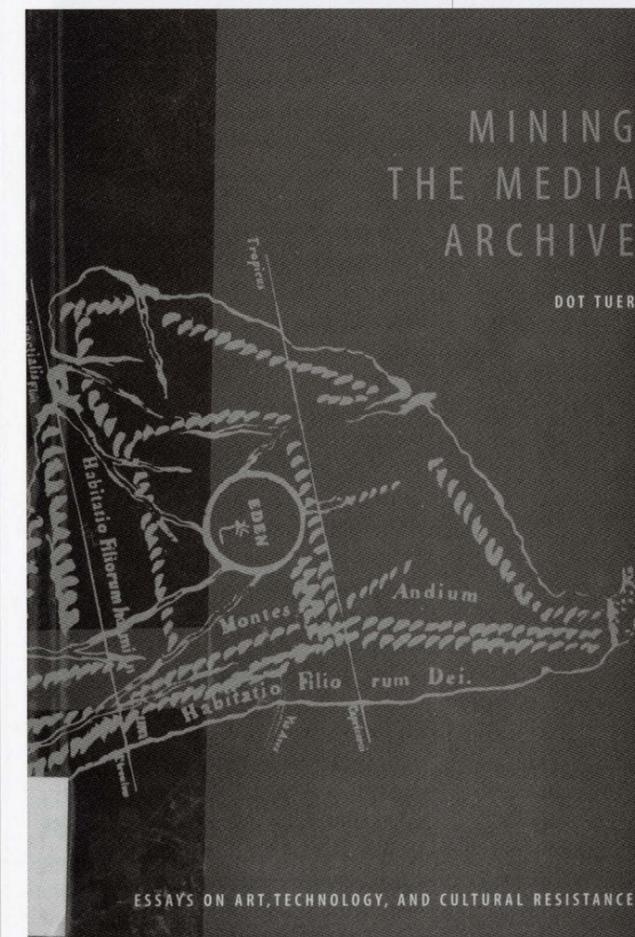
Although nowhere in the book does Tuer explicitly acknowledge this bias (though she is no doubt aware of it) she does provide a vivid articulation of her own position as, "Suspended above the clouds somewhere in between the grey sheen of Lake Ontario and the muddy

waters of the Río Paraná ... in the process of moving back and forth between Canada and Argentina." (181) Tuer asserts that, "Central to this collection of essays is the reconceptualization of history as circular and fluid, rather than chronological and fixed." (xi) Indeed, in order to reconceptualize history it is necessary to be somewhat outside of it; in order to excavate meaning from local memory it is necessary to be somewhat without locality.

This places Tuer in a slightly uneasy position between her use of Michel Serres' utopian historical analysis and her interpretation of mimesis as anti-utopian. She reconciles these tensions in her role as storyteller: retelling conver-

sations, reliving personal experiences and re-experiencing representations as repositories of memory. Images in particular explicitly embody her reconception of history as multifaceted and complex, as residing not in dominant linear narratives but in the unreliability of memory and experiences.

In her essay, "Parables of Community and Culture for a New World (Order)," Tuer states that the cultural catchphrase of the 1990s was "community," the enactment of community providing the grounds for resistance and a collective future. Network is likely the cultural catchphrase of the current decade. Tuer's reconception of history in this book — as the sum of many individual voices —



anticipates the interconnectivity of the network; the World Wide Web. "The Second Nature of Simulation," "Threads of Memory and Exile" and the title essay are characterized by a distinct apprehensiveness toward the social roles of new technologies such as the Web. Thematically, these essays are linked by a caution against conceptualizing new media as utopian spaces disconnected from influences of politics and social identity. It is important to keep in mind that perhaps the nuances of online interactivity were not quite as developed in the late 1990s when the essays were written as they are today (or even in 2005). Although Tuer's reflections on the impact of political and historical legacies on these technologies are still very relevant, I am less apprehensive than optimistic (perhaps a bias of my generation) that these technologies can be a site of community, of shared localities and of interconnectivity for the promotion of social change. (I am thinking in particular of the role blogs such as "Art Fag" have played recently in political activism and social criticism).

The specificity of Tuer's perspective comes through most clearly in the second section, "History." This section begins with a lengthy text describing the activities of the Centre for Experimental Art and Communication (CEAC), which operated in Toronto in the late 1970s. Tuer opens the piece with an invitation to the reader to bring his or her own knowledge of Toronto's art community to bear on this history of CEAC. As I read this and the following two essays, written several years before I started my undergraduate studies, I am acutely aware of the contrast between my experience of this history and Tuer's conception of history as personal narrative.

My concern is that these stories, while important to Canadian cultural history, cannot stand alone in addressing ongoing concerns over new technologies, cultural policy, cultural imperialism and the political in art; in their specificity they perhaps lack longevity. I am not unaware of Tuer's intention to pro-

vide alternative histories, nor of the fact that, as she states in her introduction, she is influenced by Cornel West's imperative, "To reject the absent, general, and universal in light of the concrete, specific and particular; to historicize, contextualize and pluralize." (x) In this purpose Tuer succeeds, and the result is refreshing and thought-provoking. I am interested, however, to know what her thoughts were in 2005 when the book was published. For example, in the essay "Is it Still Privileged Art?" first published in 1994, Tuer examines how artists Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge worked to critique issues of accessibility, particularly those embodied in the simultaneous negation and reinforcement of class divisions prevalent in institutionalized media and exhibition practice. In 2005, the Art Gallery of Ontario had announced plans for what is now known as "Transformation AGO" — what was declared to be an institutional move towards transparency and accessibility. What were (are) her thoughts on this institutional push for change? How have her perceptions and anticipations of the effects of global capitalism on the Toronto art scene changed, if at all? Certainly Canada's technological, cultural, and economic environments have changed since the 1990's; I was disappointed to find no afterword relating her reflections on some of these changes.

Most useful are the essays in the third section, "Testimony." These writings truly encourage and demonstrate change in the way that political and conceptual media are theorized and disseminated. In this section, personal experience is carefully nuanced in the telling of histories of colonialism and oppression. Tuer juxtaposes the violent political history of South American countries such as Nicaragua and Argentina with the silent violence of colonialism that characterizes the recent history of Canada. Through personal narratives — her own and others — Tuer reinfuses histories of conquest with human emotion and memory, rightly describing popular television

media as possessing, "A hundred ways to describe poverty without a hint of human misery, one thousand ways to image war without a hint of human suffering." (133) Post-colonial critique can also become empty ideological theorizing of difference; a symptom of anxieties caused by recent globalization and multiculturalism. Too often, taking a cue from the "cynicism and passivity of Baudrillard's simulacrum," (179) conceptual art is emptied of true political engagement. Tuer's writing, on the other hand, serves as the repoliticized and re(con)textualized (hi)story beneath the simulacrum of ephemeral, deterritorialized imagery.

Ultimately, *Mining the Media Archive* is a thought-provoking and much-needed contribution to re-historicizing and re-politicizing virtual space — the world of representations — after the legacy of Donna Haraway's cyborg and Baudrillard's simulacrum left us cold over 15 years ago. As a retrospective of Tuer's writing it is a valuable resource for anyone interested in art and politics in Canada and Latin America. The book is dedicated to los desaparecidos (the disappeared) of the late 1970s Argentinean civil conflict in Buenos Aires, but in a more general sense it can be seen as relocating many who are affected by colonial deterritorialization (be it geographic, technological or cultural). At its best, Tuer's mix of complex metaphor, critical theory and personal narrative demonstrates that media and their interpretations can move beneath the simulacrum and be truly politically and socially engaged.

Tabitha Minns is pursuing an MA in Art History with a Diploma in Curatorial Studies at York University, focusing on the work of artist David Rokeby. She completed her BAH at Queen's University and was Curatorial Assistant in Contemporary Art at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre. She is currently working on content development for new media and art/technology for the Canadian Art Database, Toronto.

EMBRACING COMPLEXITY:

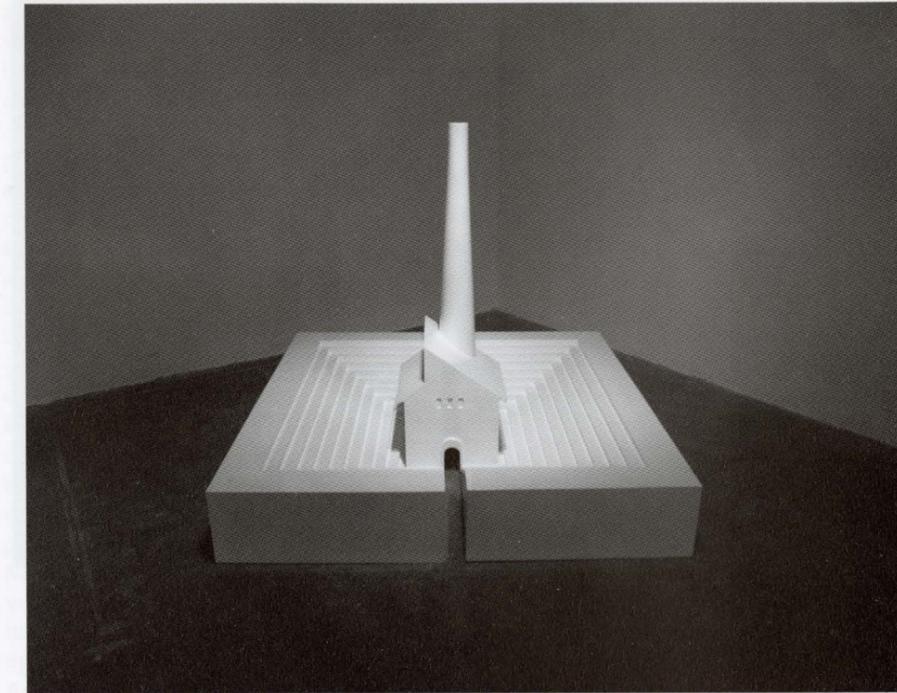
small Leaves Room for Thoughts to Grow

Curated by Marcus Miller
18 January - 24 March 2008
Art Gallery of Alberta
by Amy Fung

A single carbon nano tube, embedded in a sheath of the thinnest silicon wafer, rests on a solitary plinth inside of the gallery entrance. Confronting each viewer in all its breadth — a nanometer is one-billionth of a meter or 1/80000 of the diameter of a strand of human hair — gallery viewers circle about the glass encasement to stare and speculate into the darkness of the silicon, where anything nano-sized remains undetectable to the human eye. A leap of faith is required to believe that anything at all exists on this scale, let alone revolutionary breakthroughs in technology; but standing alone as an introduction to the *small* exhibition, the presence and reality of something so minute and complex immediately challenges our notions of size and scale beyond a relative experience.

Curated by AGA's Assistant Curator Marcus Miller, *small* as a whole presents a multimedia inquiry into the obtuse notion of scale. In a contemporary era where many artists are seemingly working in limitless scale, the challenge to go small has produced a number of approaches to the idea of art in scale.

Recent University of Alberta graduate Bonnie Fan's miniature copper prints and Craig Le Blanc's scaled-down monuments present the most accessible and literal measurements of what it means to be small. Fan's penchant for creating small works continues in "smallish prints for bookish lovers," a series of doll-like birdhouses. Each ornamented birdhouse encases a set of Redbird matchbooks that contain Thumbelina-sized etchings. Twenty-three unique prints are on full display and available to be perused by passing viewers. Unfortunately, each print does



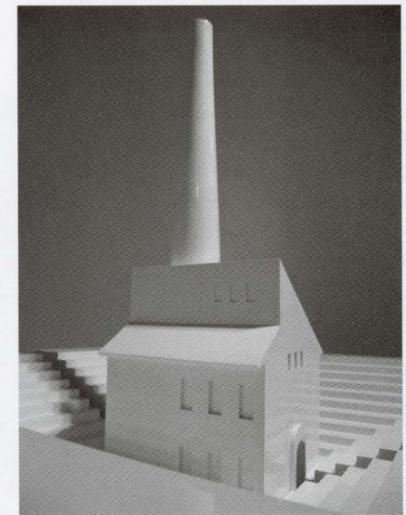
Top: Craig Le Blanc. *Form Study 1*, 2007. Courtesy: the artist.

Bottom: Craig Le Blanc. *Form Study 1 (detail)*, 2007. Courtesy: the artist.

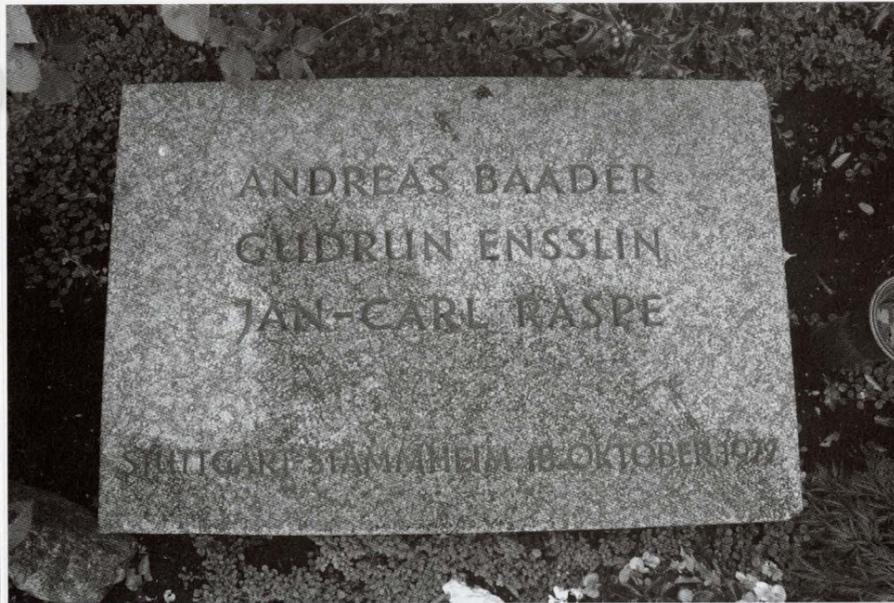
not go beyond the novelty of its size. Craig Le Blanc's floor models of a reduced amphitheater and factory building offer a similar interpretation. Brightly white and highly saturated with urethane, the buildings are more a testament to Le Blanc's craftsmanship than to his response to the theme.

There are other slightly more thoughtful approaches to the task of investigating small. Relative to the output of work produced inside each of its pages, Harold Pearce's tower of his personal hardcover sketchbooks barely reaches a meter high. Accumulated, the stack of notebooks communicate nothing; but showing the progress from 1 January 1988 - 1 January 2008, Pearce's daily dutiful sketches reveal a steady stretch of both eye and hand. A small gesture in scope relative to the space and time each page consumes, its compendium exceeds quantification.

Recording the oddest of quantities in "Settings," Shane Krepakevich (who



grew up in Edmonton, but recently relocated to Montréal) documents his most personal details as logical scales and measurements. In one of five diagrams, he provides a precise rendering of his body mass converted into cubic meter volume in direct comparison to his apartment's cubic meter volume. In another, Krepakevich approximates the location of his first kiss relative to the



Bottom: Allen Ball and Kimberly Mair. Marker, 2007. Courtesy: the artists.

geographic distribution of the North Saskatchewan River. The seemingly arbitrary connections between his meticulous calculations subtly suggest an inverted and solipsistic notion of small. His cartographic understanding of the world exists only in relation to his own self. The intrinsic dualism in his comparative measurements is rooted in the significant and sentimental milestones of his life. At first estranging in proximity, the world is made small as its reality is humbled into the scope of memory.

Going even further into exploring the visible and invisible traces of memory and monument in public space is Allen Ball and Kimberly Mair's project *The German Autumn in Minor Spaces*. As a looping photo slideshow based on images taken from a regular digital camera shared between Ball and Mair, the project's investment does not fall on the craft of photography. Ball, an acclaimed painter and Mair, a sociology researcher, plainly documented a series of public spaces in Berlin, Kassel and Stuttgart in June of 2007. Last year marked the 30th anniversary of state crisis known as the Autumn of Terror in the former Federal Republic of Germany, a period fraught with protests

and violence following the rise and fall of the Red Army Faction (RAF). Ball and Mair's choice to use a household dimension of 5 X 7 for photographs maintains the banality of their cartographic rendering of RAF's subversive activities. There is a vagueness in the experience of looking at these photographs; the history of their locations are lost without the knowledge and presence that imbues them with significance. These minor urban locations have been photographed numerous times before as the sites of crime scenes, protests and glory. Those same sites, as captured in Ball and Mair's vacant snapshots, do not re-create the moment between then and now, but trigger the unfolding of time as history lived and relived.

One photograph, *Acoustic Isolation*, depicts a beautiful pastoral garden. Capturing lush fauna in an undisturbed setting, the title could easily refer to the tranquility of the scene. Only slightly off-centre in the image, however, rests the grave marker of one of RAF's central figures, Ulrike Meinhof. Her remains lay beneath the umbrella of an idyllic ficus tree. As a prominent young journalist she helped break rebel Andreas Baader out of prison, then was

forced to go underground herself before serving jail time for attempted murder and eventually committing suicide under highly suspicious circumstances. It was during her prison time in Ossendorf that prisoners were held under 24-hour fluorescent lighting and isolated from any sound from the outside world — known as acoustic isolation. Later reports described the experience as being buried alive, separated from the living and prevented from speaking and forming thoughts. The non-monumentalness of the photograph shrinks the magnitude of Meinhof's history into its present state as a minor space. Vastly different from the glorified era and radical implication of most RAF artwork, Ball and Mair take off from Deleuze and Guattari's frame of minor language as an entry point into investigating the political and historical reverberations of these condensed public spaces. The work deals directly with the present, examining how we confront meanings and matter that have seemingly exceeded their root significance.

Although the series of 18 photographs run on a continuous loop, the unofficial last image is a present day photograph of Stammheim prison — the maximum security prison where the three core members of RAF all mysteriously and independently committed suicide on the night of 18 October 1977. In the image, the building and sky are saturated with an institutional grey. Taken from the prison's surrounding open fields, the photograph captures in the foreground three tiny red poppies emerging against the overcast concrete. As a haunting testament to presence, those three serendipitous wildflowers signify the history and reverberation of Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin and Jan-Carl Raspe, living specters that permeated *The German Autumn* of 1977.

Embracing the complexity of the most ordinary places, the documents of *The German Autumn in Minor Spaces* consciously fail to articulate memory and experience. Only there is a beautiful failure in its attempt to perform

those attachments within their photographic cartography; and it is the difficulty and desire to articulate lived experience that perpetuates the motivation to create and to do something too big for ourselves.

Curated through an open call to Alberta-based artists, *small* remains a lightweight exhibition in terms of relevance and transparency outside of its theme. As stand-alone works of art, only Ball and Mair and LeBlanc's projects are ready to exhibit elsewhere. Limiting works to fit a theme rather than finding the thread that ties a body of work together, the end result produced inklings for a larger idea. Yet to reach their full potential, the works in *small* remain undersized in artistic scope.

Amy Fung currently writes from Edmonton, Canada. She recently became the new President of Mile Zero Dance, a contemporary dance company established in 1985. Her writings on visual art and media can be tracked in a host of Canadian and international print publications and always on PrairieArtists.com.

THE HOLOCAUST VISITED:

Paul Antick's itourist?

by Rachel MagShamhráin

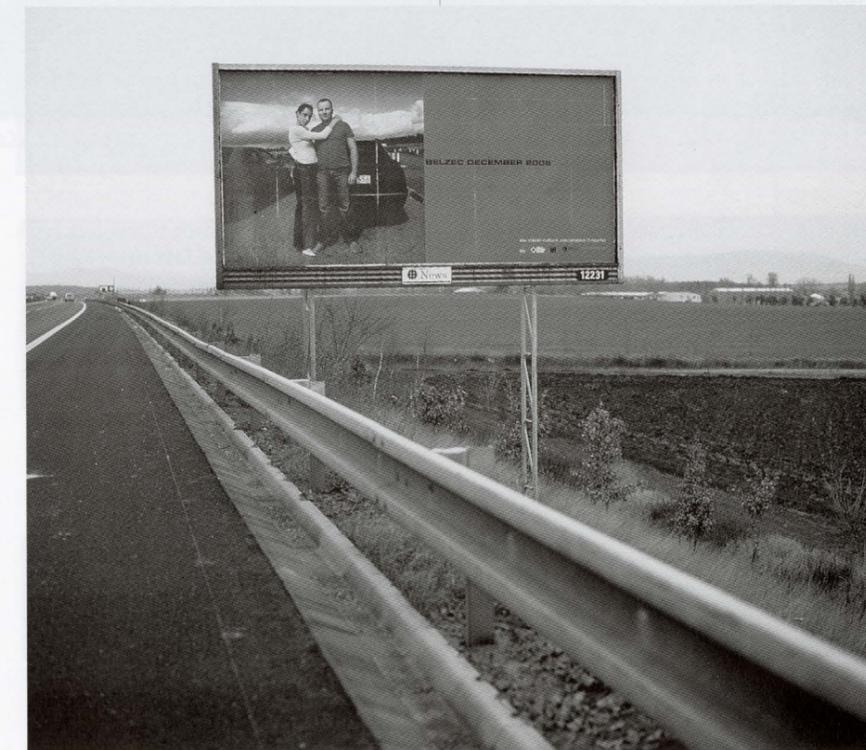
At first glance, Paul Antick's web- and billboard-based project *itourist?* looks like an attempt to devise a new way of looking at the Holocaust, while remaining conscious of the fact that this is inevitably a Sisyphean undertaking. In its creation and deflation of the expectations that attend modern viewing practices, the project is fairly typical of visual culture. It self-reflexively probes the use, abuse and consumption of images. And not atypically for such projects, it turns to the Holocaust, an issue that poses particular viewing challenges by both insisting on and resisting the gaze.¹ But while it is easy to situate *itourist?* in the discursive field of visual culture, speaking about its content is far more problematic. As a result of its

reliance on the postmodern trick of the strategically placed blank, it is impossible to pinpoint what the project is actually about.

Since the Holocaust features in the project as a nontheme, it seems reasonable to look elsewhere for *itourist?*'s content. It is possible, for instance, as the title suggests, that this project is about the idea of tourism as an activity that never actually achieves arrival, or the links between acts of viewing (including tourism), advertising and consumerism. This would mean that the Holocaust dimension (in the form of deliberately "disappointing pictures" of concentration camps, to use Antick's description of another set of his photographs in the same context) is a McGuffin, providing the occasion for various undoubtedly compelling ideas that are not Holocaust-specific commentaries on our so-called global age. And because Antick chooses to deal in

blanks, in shots that deliberately miss their target, any subject could have served as the photographic pretext for the project. After all, what is not seen by an averted or interrupted gaze ultimately becomes an irrelevancy. But this sense of irrelevancy or interchangeability does not sit at all easily with the ghostly presence of the Holocaust.

Of course, Antick might easily argue that encouraging concerns of this kind, including issues of Holocaust significance and specificity, is precisely the intention here. Indeed, multimedia projects like this one, which consist of a decentred interplay of different discourses and discourse levels, have the advantage of a certain positionlessness. They act as a sounding board for an infinite number of even antonymic ideas, echoing in its emptiness at a safe remove from the authorial presence. The website's invitation to all comers to react by "blog[ging] back any thoughts



Paul Antick. two lovers - mauve colour block - belzec - december 2006. Courtesy: Paul Antick.



Paul Antick. red girl with camera - red colour block - sobibor - december 2006. Courtesy: Paul Antick.

or ideas you might have about the billboards or any of the other material posted on this site" would seem to support this interpretation. Curiously, the *itourist?* website contains a description of the tourist that might readily be applied to the project at hand, if not to all such projects: "a mere tabular [sic] rasa upon which the dominant ideology ... is effectively writ large."

As a cyber project, *itourist?* speaks to an increasingly participatory tendency in art consumption in the internet age, whereby "consumers seem increasingly to favour art forms and modes of participation that allow them to determine what they consume, when, where and how — sometimes referred to as "consumption by appointment."²² Antick's project encourages precisely this kind of consumerist approach, inasmuch as the

billboards around which it revolves really have more of an online existence, despite their temporary outdoor display at three locations in November — December 2006. In their current incarnation, they form part of the *itourist?* website, alongside the abovementioned blog, an image gallery, a bibliography with quotes that inspired the project and links to excerpts from relevant articles by Antick. Given the fact that *itourist?* both verbally and visually criticizes the consumerism of the gaze encouraged by "the neatly packaged world of mass culture, with its easily digested narratives," it is perplexing that Antick's online project should by its very design facilitate the "consumption by appointment" it seems to reject. After all, visitors to the *itourist?* site differ from the visitors Antick pho-

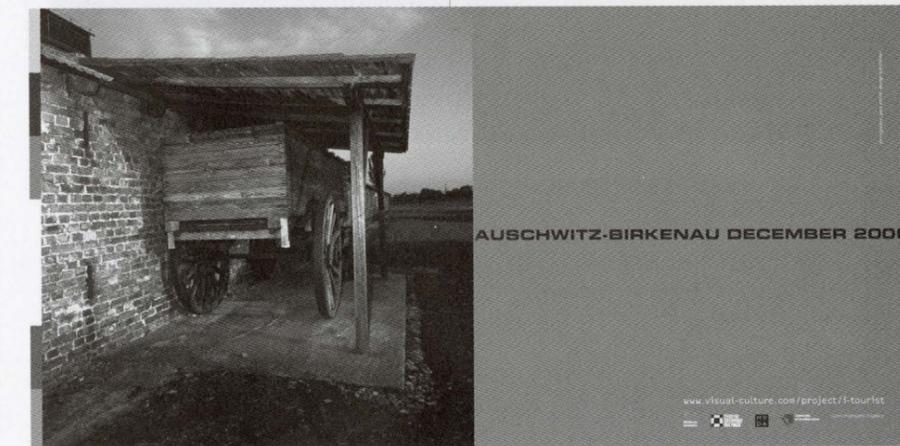
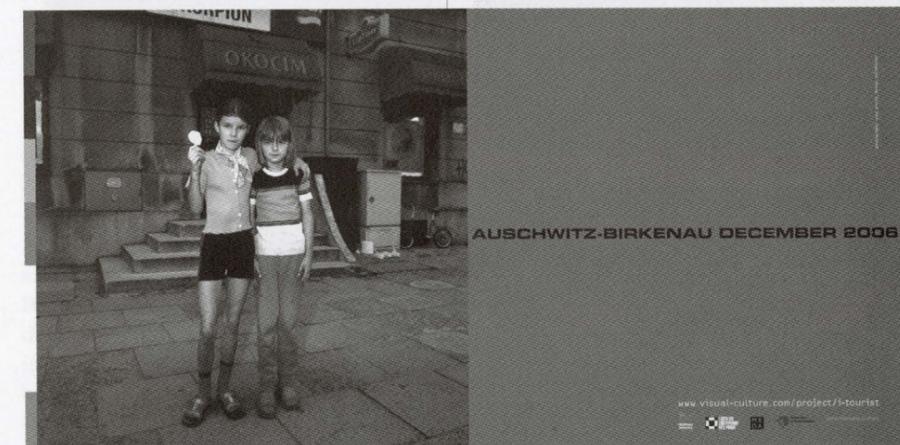
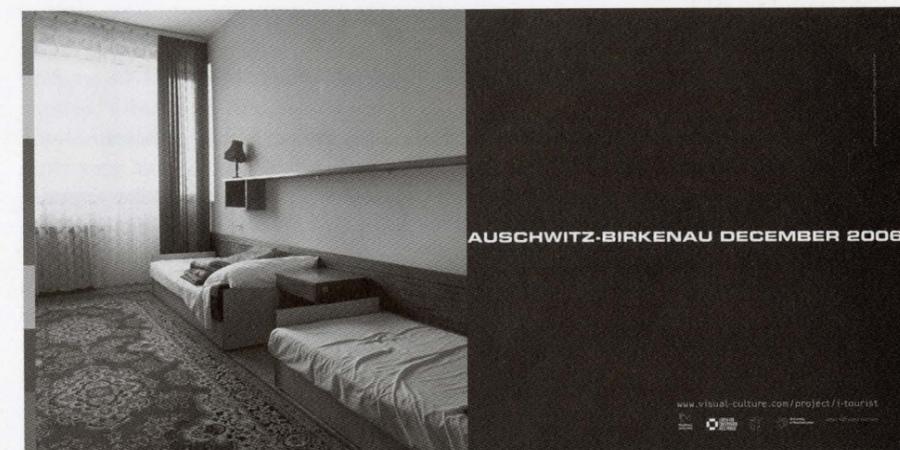
tographed in all their gaping inanity at various concentration camp sites only insofar as the former are much more literally out of place.

For a moment, set aside McLuhan's claim that the medium is the message and turn to *itourist?*'s other content. The billboard part of the project, the website claims, takes direct issue with conventional Holocaust iconography by employing a hybrid idiom that plays with the conventions of holiday snapshots and billboard advertising gimmicks. The *itourist?* billboards feature photographs of key Holocaust sites such as Majdanek and Auschwitz, which have been shot so as to be unrecognizable as themselves. The intent, presumably, is to resist our reifying and commodifying gaze. However, the disguise is rather pointless since each site is

immediately recognizable by the equally iconic placename emblazoned across the right-hand colour panel of each poster. And since the location remains clear, the disguise, we may presume, must be hiding something else. Be this as it may, Antick's failed photographs deliberately focus on relatively benign objects such as a wooden cart, children with ice-cream, a hotel room or garden. The images (if not the words beside them) speak only of the Holocaust through glaring absence.

There is, of course, a tradition of eloquent absence in Holocaust representation. The practice is rooted in several concerns, including the problems inherent in attempting to give voice to the unspeakable, the inevitable gap between lived experience and its narration. But there is a worrying dimension to the system of taboos to which the Holocaust is subject: good intentions aside, they are at least as destructive as they are protective — acts of censorship and memory are notoriously difficult to reconcile with one another. Given all of this, how are we to interpret Antick's barred Holocaust images? Are they to be understood as traumatic scotoma, as sacred taboo, as censorship, as denial, or perhaps as an aporetic monument to Theodore Adorno's claim that "suffering ... also demands the continued existence of the very art it forbids."²³ Whatever the case, the project privileges absence over presence to the extent that it could be said to deny itself a content altogether.

The absences temporarily bracketed out, it is difficult to overlook clear and present references in *itourist?* to Oliviero Toscani's controversial United Colours of Benetton advertising campaign, where the company slogan appeared (albeit diminutively) in white on a vivid green background and was aligned with some arresting and, the company stressed, "real" image. The campaign included photographs of a dying AIDS patient on his hospital bed, the blood-stained clothes of a dead Bosnian and a duck caught in an oil slick. The diminutive logo and traumatic images



Top: Paul Antick. hotel bedroom - black colour block - auschwitz-birkenau - december 2006. Courtesy: Paul Antick.

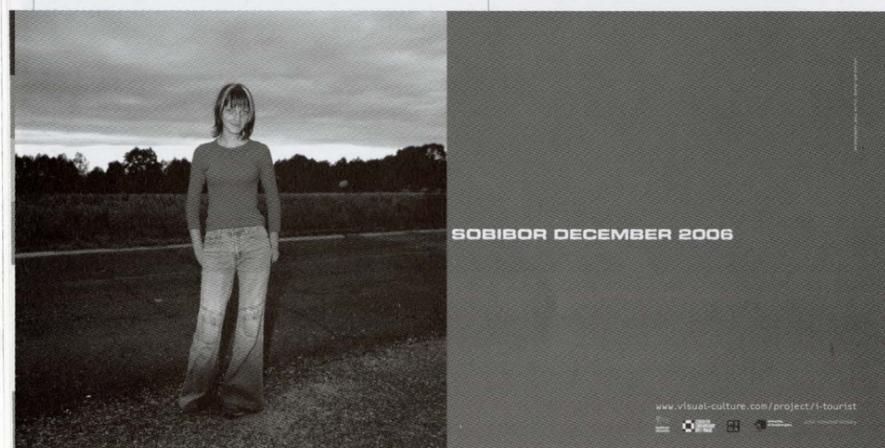
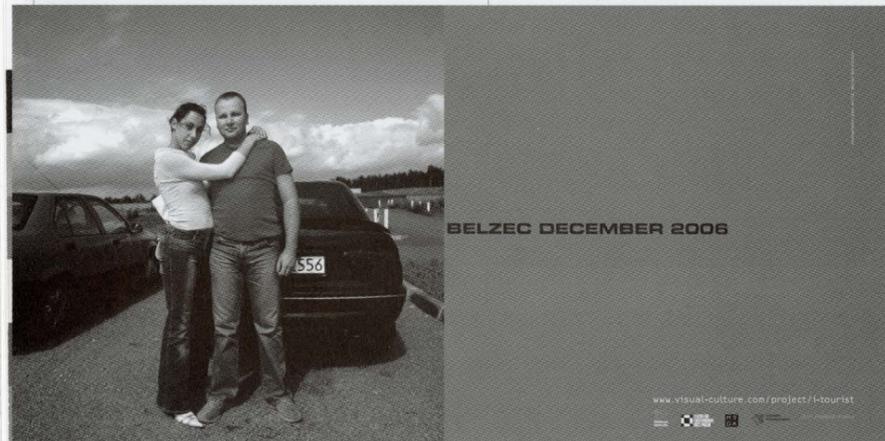
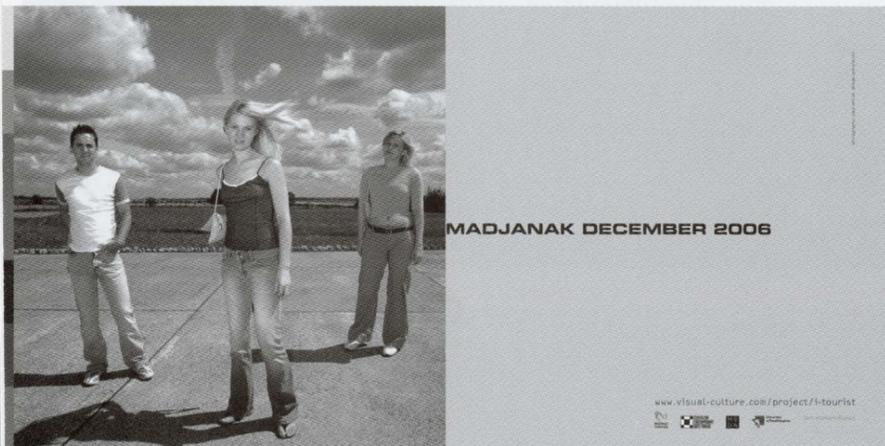
Center: Paul Antick. white ice cream- mauve colour block - auschwitz-birkenau - december 2006. Courtesy: Paul Antick.

Bottom: Paul Antick. wooden cart - brown colour block - auschwitz-birkenau - december 2006. Courtesy: Paul Antick.

Top: Paul Antick. three young people - pink colour block - majdanak - december 2006. Courtesy: Paul Antick.

Center: Paul Antick. two lovers - mauve colour block - belzec - december 2006. Courtesy: Paul Antick.

Bottom: Paul Antick. girl with blonde highlights - blue colour block - sobibor - december 2006. Courtesy: Paul Antick.



became the only constants in the poster series, with the clothing eventually disappearing entirely.

Toscani's groundbreaking substitution of the product and its identifiers with pictures usually seen in the news recalls the defensive substitutions that Freud saw as being characteristic not only of dreams but of any undertaking that aims to conceal an "objectionable statement in an apparently innocent disguise."⁴ In the case of *itourist?* the defensive substitutions seem to be concealing not so much an objectionable statement as no discernable statement. In Antick's billboards, the product (in this case, the Holocaust as we have traditionally come to view it) has also been replaced with a banality that may be valid inasmuch as it speaks of the banality of evil, but is arguably just banality.

This reversal of the Benetton substitution recalls another advertising project: the 2001 campaign conceived by the German agency Kakoi to promote Holocaust awareness and fundraise for the planned *Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe*, where the slogan "Den Holocaust hat es nie gegeben" (*the Holocaust never happened*) was superimposed on a perfect Alpine landscape, which bore no trace of the event being denied. In Antick's version, when elements of the Holocaust's traditional iconography are raised, as in *railway track - green colour block - auschwitz-birkenau - december 2006* — where a length of railway track disappears into the photograph's distance — the iconography is swamped precisely at its vanishing point by a girl in the foreground in a self-conscious snapshot pose, wearing a blank expression and clutching, almost as though to hide it, that universal tourist identifier, a camera. But in hiding the railway track behind the girl, what precisely is Antick achieving? Is he drawing attention to it *ex negativo* or is he positively drawing attention away from it. And if, as Susan Sontag amongst others has argued, stock Holocaust images have lost their representative function through overexposure, a point with which Antick may agree, what possible function is

served by either drawing attention to them or obliterating them? To this question *itourist?* can offer no answer, lost as it is in its own aporiae.

Antick's use of colour (whether consciously or unconsciously) also references the Benetton campaign. The diminutive block of bright green surrounding the United Colours of Benetton name becomes much larger in *itourist?* taking up half the page. This arguably redresses a cynical and disingenuous imbalance between logo and image in Toscani's ads, but can also be seen as simply repeating Toscani's scheme. A crucial difference is that Antick's colours claim a significance that is, as far as one can tell, wholly absent in Toscani's concept.

In each billboard Antick uses one in a series of eight colours, the series, according to the website, coincides with the eight-colour system used both to identify and reify prisoners in the concentration camps. In the rather vague and partially inaccurate words of *itourist?*: "Each billboard includes a block of one of the seven [sic] colours used by the Nazis to designate different categories of camp prisoner: yellow = jew; pink = homosexual etc." Yet the colours as used in Antick's project bear no clear relationship to the individual images with which they are paired. For example, the purple of the Jehovah's Witnesses is teamed with a shot of a commercial building in the modern town of Oswiecim, a building that has, again somewhat randomly, a "Ksero Kolor" colour copying shop on its corner. Potentially a reference to Benjamin's thoughts on art and technical reproducibility or to *itourist?*'s own borrowings. But potentially also a non-reference.

Artistically speaking, the project does reference the Holocaust art of Arnold Trachtman, David Levinthal and Maciej Toporowicz in the US and Jochen Gerz in Germany, all of whom have used photography in their Holocaust projects in similar ways. Toporowicz, for instance, fused Third Reich images of ideal Aryans and pictures from the standard repertoire of

Holocaust images with lettering and names redolent of the Calvin Klein perfume ads in a project appropriately entitled "Obsession." And, significantly, Toporowicz's fake ads in the Obsession series were also not only shown as a gallery installation but displayed as posters on the streets of Manhattan. However, *itourist?* mirrors Toporowicz's not unproblematic art without taking issue with it and thus just becomes even more "Adorno for the MTV generation," as John Haber called it.⁴

Antick's uncritical use of advertising idiom leaves the impression that he is himself advertising something. But one is left to wonder what this might be in a way that was, ironically, never unclear with either the Benetton ads or the Kakoi campaign. And while the logical corollary to Lacan's assertion that a letter (if not a tourist) always arrives at its destination might seem to be that a letter always has content, *itourist?* remains obdurately unclear on what (alternative) view it is promoting and to whom. Reproducing and perpetuating the devices of the advertising industry, *itourist?* fails to critique them precisely because it has subjected its own message to erasure.

And while the intention of *itourist?* is perhaps less to reflect on the Holocaust than to explore Lacan's claim that "[N]othing exists except insofar as it

does not exist,"⁵ any invocation of the Holocaust even as a non-theme carries with it certain obligations that should be met. A moral imperative demands partisanship in this context, which is perhaps the one thing that cannot be accommodated by a hold-all project that, ironically or not, in the end just averts its gaze.

Notes:

1. Barbie Zelizer's *Visual Culture and the Holocaust*. (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press: 2001), is a good example of how the Holocaust provides visual culture with endless material.
2. Kevin F. McCarthy. *From Celluloid to Cyberspace: The Media Arts and the Changing Arts World*. (Santa Monica: RAND: 2002), p.13.
3. Theodor W. Adorno. *Can One Live After Auschwitz?* trans. Rodney Livingstone. (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press: 2003), p.252.
4. Sigmund Freud. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. (London: Pelican: 1976), p.224.
5. John Haber. *Trivia Quiz*. www.haberarts.com/naziart.htm.
6. Jacques Lacan. *Écrits: A Selection*. trans. Alan Sheridan. (London: Tavistock, 1977), p.392.

Rachel MagShamhráin received her doctorate from Trinity College Dublin on the works of Heinrich von Kleist and lectures in German Studies in Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick. She is currently producing a first English translation of Kleist's Die Hermannsschlacht.



Paul Antick. town center - mauve colour block - auschwitz-birkenau - december 2006. Courtesy: Paul Antick.

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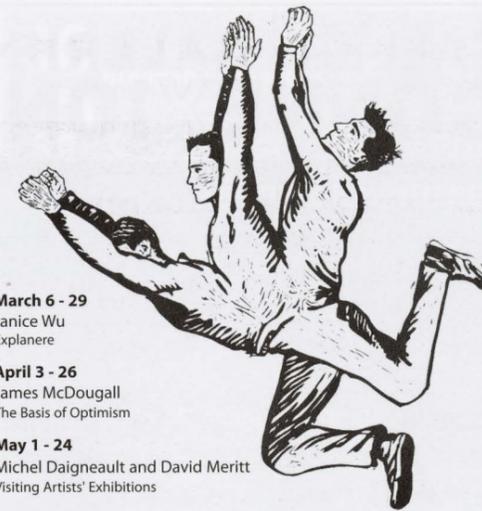
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Image: James McDougall, untitled (triple), woodcut, 29" x 29", 2006, from The Basis of Optimism. Courtesy the artist.

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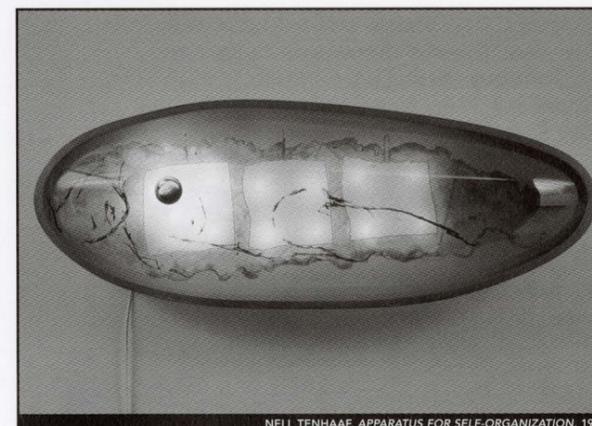
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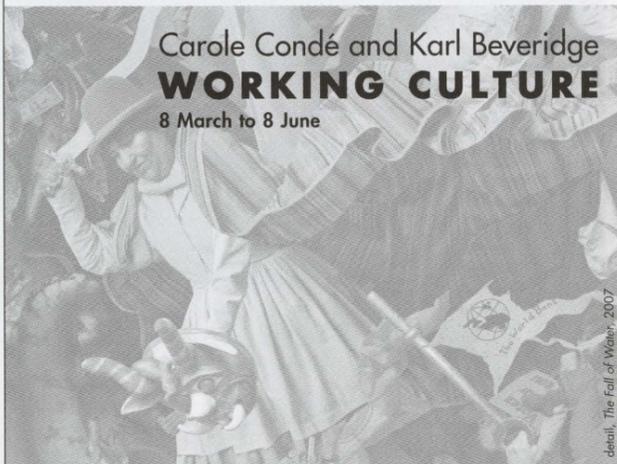
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WAITING FOR THE DUST TO SETTLE

BY LAURA PAOLINI

If a student falls inside OCAD's Sharp Center for Design, can anybody hear them tumble? Known as the Cow building for its black and white blotted exterior, it has an echo when you stand alone inside it. I tried it once, considering the effects of the reverberations of a single student's voice. As a recent graduate of OCAD, I've had the opportunity to observe a number of changes since the art college became a university in 2002.

There are the obvious physical changes with the addition of the Sharp Centre, as well as significant curricular changes from the Beal Institute for Strategic Creativity, which finds bidders for design student prototypes and "focuses on understanding underlying behavior in people in order to foresee future product and service opportunities" to the newly minted "interdisciplinary" Master's in Art, Media and Design. These days, what qualifies as First Year Studies is ever-changing and throughout my time at OCAD, there

were always rumors about the amalgamation of Sculpture/Installation with Integrated Media and the discontinuing of Ceramics programs altogether.

Whether or not these rumors become fact, they are reflective of anxiety among students about shifting curricular agendas, access to faculty and growing class sizes. With class sizes becoming increasingly larger and faculty and technicians struggling to keep the shops safe and give meaningful critiques at 15 minutes per student, one wonders if OCAD will be able to maintain its structural integrity, especially when its curricular integrity is already in question.

As a recent graduate, I find some of these changes disconcerting. Particularly, as the school's role as a hub for artistic development feels like it is deteriorating. As OCAD develops its stage presence, like many of Toronto's art institutions, with starchitect designed buildings and campaigns about public engagement, it is also shifting its orientation to a model focused on business and profit. The shift from studio-based art to a design and research-based university makes more dollars than it does sense. It begs the question, what are the repercussions of one form of creativity being more lucrative than another?

Since 2000, Toronto has been seeking to generate more cultural cache and OCAD is like several "new structures;" allegorical of wisdom in its design with pedagogical responsibilities that increasingly rest on their laurels. The ROM only just re-opened, and like OCAD, has been one of the knights of Toronto's Renaissance. The Art Gallery of

Ontario, also knighted, will soon re-open after its own extensive renovation. Following in the footsteps of several European ventures like Nuit Blanche, these events and expansions have sought to solidify Toronto as a creative city.

"Live with Culture" has become a popular marketing slogan developed by the City of Toronto and seen plastered on lampposts around town. This sounds more like a command than an integrated state of being and begs the question of how one participates in their cultural impulses. The institutions that seek to instill in the public the virtues prescribed in their architectural design can only go so far if people can't afford their admission. The ROM, for example, only has free admission during rush hour (45 minutes before closing at 5:30pm), next to the Friday night specials.

"Ideas Need Space" (OCAD's Slogan) is a worn out cliché. Ideas seem to have a lot of space in a city that aspires to recognition on a global scale. Despite the new additions and architectural masterpieces, what the entire system lacks is substance. These masterpiece buildings give the impression that simply being in the presence of their façades is valuable, yet the institutions inside seem to lack the needed public engagement.

OCAD'S sentiment that "Art Creates Change," continues to be contentious, and ultimately it is yet to be determined whether the changes that are implemented will meaningfully benefit the city.

Laura Paolini is an emerging artist, writer and critical thinker.

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