

Issue 4 September 2008

# brunt

grunt gallery in print

brunt  
Issue 4





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Authors and Artists

*grunt*

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*Hive performance by Archer Pechawis,  
photograph by Merte Addison*

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*Showcasing the artists exhibiting at grunt gallery, brunt magazine is a complement to the exhibitions and a closer look at the artists, their processes and the ideas that inspire their work.*

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*Harold Coego, Brain-Muffin-Motel,  
photograph by Henri Robideau*



*Portage, Terrance Houle and Trevor Freeman,  
photograph by Tania Willard*



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**Skeena Reece** is 33 years old. Coming from the Tsimshian Territory, born of Métis/Cree and Tsimshian/Gitksan descent, she has been working in the arts since 1996. Her multi-disciplinary practice includes performance art, spoken word, humor, "sacred clowning," writing, singing, songwriting, video art and arts administration. She travels well, packs good lunch and would be your pick to be "stranded on a deserted island" with. For more information visit: [www.myspace.com/skeenareece](http://www.myspace.com/skeenareece) or email [skeenareece@hotmail.com](mailto:skeenareece@hotmail.com)

**Warren Arcan** is a Victoria-based writer and artist. He's proficient in performance art and video production and is an occasional installation artist. His artistic concerns are largely triangulated by Aboriginality, Desire, and Identity. He most recently has devoted himself to screenwriting, being a long-time fan of genre movies. He's worked with puppets, headsets and lard. His upcoming projects include a short film involving domestic strife and drug use, and a performance conflating Nosferatu and Nanook of the North.

**Laiwan** is an artist and writer recognized for her interdisciplinary practice based in poetics and philosophy. Born in Zimbabwe of Chinese parents, she immigrated to Canada in 1977 to leave the war in Rhodesia. Editor of *Front Magazine* from 1994 to 1997, Laiwan is published in numerous journals such as West Coast Line, *The Capilano Review*, *Mix Magazine*, *Esse: Arts & Opinions*, *Parallelogramme* and in anthologies such as *Swallowing Clouds*, *Many Mouthed Birds* and *Facing History: Portraits from Vancouver*. Laiwan teaches in the MFA Interdisciplinary Arts Program at Goddard College in Port Townsend, WA and lives in Vancouver, Canada.

**Michael Turner's** fiction includes *Hard Core Logo*, *The Pornographer's Poem*, and the forthcoming *8x10*. He has contributed essays to *Intertidal: Vancouver Art & Artists*, *Vancouver Art & Economies*, and *Fred Herzog: Vancouver Photographs*.

**Tania Willard** is an artist and designer from the Secwepemc Nation. An honours graduate from the University of Victoria ('98), Tania has continued on to work in the arts in many capacities, maintaining a commitment to celebrating Aboriginal expression and weaving narrative and story throughout her work in the arts, media, and advocacy to share people's stories, history and experiences. From her early work with *Redwire Magazine*, a national Native youth publication, to her curatorial and critical work with grunt gallery, Tania has demonstrated passion for the arts. "I believe we all have a story to share – the stories of this land. Our cultures and our experiences enrich our lives."

**Bill Jeffries** is currently the Director/Curator at the Simon Fraser University Gallery, a post that has held him in its grip since late 2005. Rumors regarding his imminent retirement from SFU have been greatly exaggerated. It has been his habit to stay in any post for a minimum of three or four years. Recent exhibitions he has organized for the SFU Galleries include shows by Tonel, E.J. Bellocq, Robert Morris, Susan Bozic and Julie Mehretu.

**Maria Hupfield** is an artist working in sculpture, installation and performance. Her work focuses on land, memory, community, and power dynamics of gender. She is currently exploring contemporary indigenous approaches to aesthetics and design, with a specific interest in the relationship between function and form as it relates to oral tradition and the role of the viewer. Maria is of Anishnaabe (Ojibway) heritage, and a member of Wasauksing First Nation, in Ontario. Maria has a MFA in Sculpture from York University and an Honours BA Specialist in Art and Art History from the University of Toronto and Sheridan College. She was awarded a SSHRC Scholarship and Heisley Scholarship in 2003. She is an Associate Professor in Visual Arts, First Nations, Foundation, at Emily Carr University of Art + Design in Vancouver, BC, where she currently lives and works.

**Glenn Alteen** is a Vancouver-based curator and writer and director of grunt gallery. He has worked extensively with performance art and is co-founder of LIVE Performance Biennale (1999, 2001, 2003, 2005). His writing on Performance has been published in *Sydney Biennale Catalogue* (2006), *Caught in the Act* (YYZ Books, Toronto, 2005), *La Dragu* (FADO, Toronto, 2002), *Ablakela* (grunt, 2001), *LIVE at the End of the Century* (grunt, 2000) and *Locus Solus* (Black Dog, London, 1999).

**Peter Morin** is an independent curator, visual artist, and writer currently living and working out of Victoria BC. He is from the Crow Clan of the Tahltan Nation. Peter has been working in the arts community for over ten years, in support of emerging Aboriginal artists and writers. As a practicing visual and performance artist, Peter's work looks deeply into de-colonizing through relationship building and speaking one's indigenous language. His most recent visual and performance work includes: "A Return to the Place Where God Outstretched his Hand" for the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto (2007), and "Things that are left Behind for Ravens" at the ODD gallery in Dawson City (2007).

**Victoria Singh** is a "half-breed" South Asian multidisciplinary artist, curator and children's art teacher, originally from New Zealand and now living in Vancouver BC. Singh's nineteen-year practice started with a strong base in visual art (predominantly painting) and morphed into a heavier concentration on performance art in the later years. Her most recent public performance was a cameo appearance at Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens' "Green Wedding" on May 15, 2008 in Santa Cruz, California in conjunction with the Intervene:Interrupt! Performance Art Conference. Victoria Singh has a Bachelor of Arts (Art History) and a Master of Arts (Graduate Liberal Studies).



Harold Coego, *The Dream Repairst*, photograph by Henri Robideau

# Harold Coego: If It's Organic, It Must Be Molecular

*Bill Jeffries*

In Cuba, the cartoons during Coego's childhood uniquely came from a range of countries within the Soviet sphere of influence: Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and East Germany. Coego's drawing style was strongly influenced by those cartoons, which he describes as being "very serious stuff" that would often move child viewers to tears rather than the laughter that was historically at the core of Hollywood cartoons.

Vancouver's outsider art scene is thriving, but it is a bit below many art viewers' radar and is not often described as such, even though several spaces (grunt, JEM, Gachet, occasionally Access) host exhibitions with outsider credentials. Unlike Seattle, we do not have a dealer clearly specializing in outsider material, which is not only Vancouver's loss, but also a lost opportunity for sales that would support the outsider artist community. Vancouver may have its share of underground spaces that are an in-group secret, but other than Gallery Gachet there is no Vancouver venue that aims to be described as being "outside". Harold Coego's show at grunt was an outsider revelation to me. It consisted of what he likes to call "big drawings," many of them done with fine-tipped felt pens. Coego's work felt wonderfully unrestrained, and, as it turns out, he never did attend art school. He has, however, been in ongoing contact with picture-making throughout his life, starting with family members who made drawings, but also contact with artist friends in Cuba working in theatre, film and visual art, many of whom took the art school route to art.

The perseverative repetition that characterizes so much outsider art is lurking in the wings of Coego's work, but unlike those rhythmic elements in the paintings of highly regarded outsider Martin Ramirez, for example, repetition does not take centre stage. Coego's repetitions derive more from the frame sequences in cinema; film was (and is) one of his major influences and it shows up in his work in several forms, but mainly as a kind of visual stutter, as when a cinematic shot shows freeze-frame motion. Some of his works remind one of those by the Italian Futurist Giacomo Balla, but Coego is mining areas normally associated with outsider artists: his shapes and forms are drawn from a personal reservoir of what he terms ancient, primitive visions. His primitivism has, however, a source that is somewhat unique to Cubans, and Cuban artists.

Many people assume being an outsider artist is invariably linked to medical, psychological or neurological “issues,” which is, of course, not the case. Self-taught artists are a significant proportion of the outsider community and it is safe to say that most folk artists have reasonably normal body chemistries. Harold Coego’s particular background points to yet another source for his type of outsider work. In Cuba TV cartoon shows were as much a staple of childhood television as they are in North America. In Cuba, however, the cartoons during Coego’s childhood uniquely came from a range of countries within the Soviet sphere of influence: Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and East Germany. Coego’s drawing style was strongly influenced by those cartoons, which he describes as being “very serious stuff” that would often move child viewers to tears rather than the laughter that was historically at the core of Hollywood cartoons. The uniqueness of this exposure derives from the fact that within those other countries children would not have seen such a wide range of material from other cartoon cultures.

Coego’s drawings illustrate a personal cosmology, and it is that world-view that is the basis of the visual language that he has developed. For me, his language is molecular as well as organic because his structures feel as if they derive or describe microcosms rather than macrocosms. Each work in Coego’s exhibition at grunt gallery was like a molecule from an unknown, quite foreign part of the cosmos, made up of marks from an undulating felt pen gone wild, with invasions of paint and ink that were under the control of the felt pen lines. Signs of organic growth were everywhere to be seen, resulting in a quite extraordinary visual cacophony, each bit of which had a semi-discernable schema of narrative content.

What one realizes when looking at Coego’s constructions is that practices that have a bad rep, such as “organic art,” never deserve the brush-off they’ve received; the methodology itself is as interesting as any other, it just takes artists who know how to make something astonishing and unique out of the undervalued nooks and crannies of art. Coego says that in art, outside is the best place, the luckiest place to be. For him, it allows one to work for oneself, and to work without a plan or a strategy. Harold Coego moved to Canada from Cuba in 2002. He has an upcoming exhibition consisting of large oil paintings at the Slide Room in Victoria in May, 2009.





Harold Coego, Ramirez Train, photograph by Henri Robideau



*Tipi-Aalayah, a performative Installation by Victoria Singh, photograph by Merle Addison*

# What Kind of Indian are you...?

## Tipi-Aalayah a performative installation

*Tania Willard*

In her performative piece Tipi-Aalayah, performed in June 2007 at grunt gallery, performance artist Victoria Singh channels museological hybrids of Hindu and Native American spiritual identities. Victoria enters the space as a goddess character, a golden icon fusing a Hindu goddess and a Native American chieftain.

When Victoria was growing up in New Zealand, her father brought her back brown dolls from his travels. They were Indian dolls from the tourist trade in the America's. She bonded with these dolls because they had dark skin and she saw herself in them confusing her own identity in an echo of Columbus' original blunder.

Victoria begins the performance inside a tipi made of multi-coloured saris in shades of red and brown. Crow and peacock feathers are sewn in amongst the patterned fabrics. She sits quietly in her goddess gear inside her sari-covered lodge with two enameled tubs, one full of red-skinned apples and another full of earthy brown-hued potatoes. These apples and potatoes are like small bodies or dolls that Victoria is treating with a tenderness as she peels their skins, exposing the white flesh inside.

Alongside the performance installation is a table with small replicas of the tipi that occupies the gallery. Tiny Indian sari's are stitched to their twig frames and a single peacock and crow feather adorn each curiosity. They are souvenirs, engaging culture as commodity in their handicraft, questioning the 'authentic'.

Traditional music and drumming are fused and Victoria's voice is looped in a repeating audio track that fills the space around the lodge. The sound and the peeling become hypnotic throughout the durational performance; moments are punctuated by a bell Victoria rings, reminiscent of the bells used in Hindu ritual.

When I was peeling those potatoes and apples, the more I peeled the more I almost entered an alternative state of consciousness, and the more I related to them, the more there was a transference of energy and animism. I felt like I was skinning them like animals.

- Victoria Singh

as a way to induce a meditative state and alter consciousness.

Victoria handles these apples and potatoes as small bodies, as those brown dolls. Methodically and meditatively she references women's work and feminine energy in the peeling.

Stripped bare, the apples and potatoes did not maintain their whiteness for long; they returned to states of brownness. After the peels were all stripped from their flesh, the apples and potatoes were dissected and jumbled together to be laid out in a circular patterning on the inside of her lodge. After 3 hours of peeling and slicing the apples and potatoes, Victoria laid out the pieces, the bodies now intermingled, each piece transforming independently of the artist and of its own original form, releasing its scent, earthy and aromatic.

The installation was left for seven days. In these seven days they became our ancestors, wrinkled and brown, their states altered, a transformation completed.







# Pillow Book

## Lady Justice's Instant Fame Photo Op

Victoria Singh



It is difficult to find an entry point to the work of Margaret Dragu: her performances begin long before she reaches the “official” location and long before the “viewer” arrives. Everything is part of the performative experience. Life intersects Art, and ordinary or day-to-day actions inform the created experience.

She comments: “I travelled for hours/miles by bike/bus/foot [to grunt] with four roasts of pork, vegetables, wine, flour, yeast, sugar, [and] oil to create a feast for the goddesses [her collaborators at the event].” The journey was an unseen yet vital part of her performative process as well as the many duties (like cooking, setting up video and cameras) and interactions with people before and after the “show.”

I perceive Dragu’s intentional merging of Life and Art as part of a continuing discourse stemming from the astute observations of artists like Yves Kline (“Life, Life, Life itself is the absolute art”); Allen Kaprow (“The line between art and life should be kept as fluid, and perhaps as indistinct as possible”); and Linda Montano, who founded the Art/Life Institute and asserted that we are not performance “ARTISTS” but performance “LIFEISTS.”

In this performance, La Dragu intersects life/art by fusing the fictional tale of “Lady Justice” (her self-styled persona) with the reality of her day-to-day activities. Lady Justice is the consummate muse, self-described as the “world’s oldest model.” Her image appears in Paris’ Louvre, all over Western Europe’s courthouses, and in prized eBay memorabilia collections. Dragu’s make-believe story of Lady Justice and the quest to reclaim her stolen sword from Klaus the Collector (capitalism) sets the scene for this performance. However, Lady J. needs the audience’s help to complete her mission; the “photo-ops” at the end of the evening will raise the funds.

She cuts her pubic hair, rubs ice over her throat, breasts and arms and inserts it into her vagina. She binds ice-cubes to her eyes with a red-silk blindfold and crawls within the audience, washing their feet.

The show begins: we see Lady Justice in the company of the 7 Virtues up high in their “goddess loft” (Mount Olympus). She stands and begins her descent down the spiraling staircase, swooning and striking poses for her adoring entourage who follow taking pictures like voracious Hollywood paparazzi. The artist enters the “sacred” performance space, moving seductively to Leonard Cohen’s “Till the end of Love” in front of video projections showing “bites” of her previous work. Her actions slowly morph as the erotic becomes a series of disturbing ritual actions. She cuts her pubic hair, rubs ice over her throat, breasts and arms and inserts it into her vagina. She binds ice-cubes to her eyes with a red-silk blindfold and crawls within the audience, washing their feet.

Exhausted, the artist slowly rises and begins to spin, weeping until she collapses on the floor. The 7 goddesses take Lady Justice back to “Mount Olympus” where she stands, raising a knife (symbolizing the stolen sword) in a triumphant pose that she describes as being “like a phoenix from the flames ... transformed through tears.”

The audience is in awe, eager for the opportunity to be photographed with their beloved Art-star at the end of her performance. But is this the end?

Her story continues at: <http://ladraguasladyjustice.blogspot.com/>



*Margaret Dragu as Lady Justice (performance), photograph by Merle Addison*





*Haircuts by Children, Darren O'Donnell, photograph by Lee Towndrow*



# Darren O'Donnell: Haircuts By Children

Michael Turner

Of all the artistic disciplines, the Visual Arts is the most expansive - as curious about the intellectual architectures of Dance, Music and Theatre as the works those disciplines produce. Yet of those disciplines, Theatre, especially lately, seems most receptive to the Visual Arts' advances. Two local examples of contemporary visual artists working with theatrical tropes are Geoffrey Farmer and Judy Radul, while those with theatrical backgrounds practicing in the Visual Arts include California's Jens Hoffmann, a curator who casts artists in shows that have less to do with the artist as object-producer than as exhibition collaborator.

Like Hoffmann, Darren O'Donnell is another of Theatre's dissidents. In his book, *Social Acupuncture: A Guide to Suicide, Performance and Utopia* (2006), he writes: "[I]n terms of contemporary cultural relevance, the European tradition of representational theatre as an active part of civic discourse is more or less finished...a definitive break with certain traditions needs to occur if we want to salvage the aspects of theatre that contribute to a healthy and vibrant exchange of ideas."<sup>1</sup> Hoffman's "break," as it were, had him abandoning Theatre altogether, whereas O'Donnell, a founding member of Mammalian Diving Reflex, continues to work within its grant structure, creating relationally aesthetic "interventions" like *Back of the Bus*, *Beachballs41+All*, and *Haircuts By Children* presumably for audiences that include those unaccustomed to going to the theatre.

Co-produced by the performance-friendly grunt gallery and the equally expansive PuSh Festival, *Haircuts By Children* made its Vancouver debut last January at Nunu's Hair Salon on Commercial Drive. In advance of the production, John Lauener produced an eye-catching photo of two African-Canadian kids trimming the locks of a man who looks a lot like Santa.

To say that Lauener's photo tells us everything we need to know about *Haircuts* would diminish the experience O'Donnell wants us to have - namely, one that "brings together adults and children in a situation that reverses the typical power dynamic, leaving adults at the kids' mercy." (85) For O'Donnell, this reversal has "political" implications - not only the child's empowerment, but also the rehabilitation of the "narrow-minded" adult.

For O'Donnell, this reversal has “political” implications – not only the child’s empowerment, but also the rehabilitation of the “narrow-minded” adult.

Granted, I am quoting from what O'Donnell wrote prior to *Haircuts*' first production, but I am doing so in order to draw attention to the author's activist impulse. For it is this impulse – this need to prefigure the outcome of his performance (for the greater good) – that returns us to an aspect of Theatre he complains about in *Social Acupuncture*: “a redundant conversation with itself.”(17) For me, this redundancy includes situations where everything we are told is going to happen, happens – much like it would during a production of *King Lear*. Contrast this with the Viennese Actionist's unpredictable taboo-attacking approach to art and child-rearing; or, perhaps more to the point, what Rosalee Goldberg says of live art's “anarchic” and “boundless” nature – an “open-ended medium with endless variables, executed by artists impatient with the limitations of more established art forms.”<sup>2</sup>

Which is not to say I was bored with *Haircuts*. Once I got past the well-prepped kids (working alongside attentive professionals), their parents (whose faces provided the predictable conflation of pride and fear), and those nervous yet earnest customers, I found myself reflecting less on the action (and where it was invariably headed) than the room itself – a room groomed not for overflowing crowds but for the cutting and styling of hair.

Indeed, it was while watching these children, parents, customers and onlookers mirrored in infinite regress (as only a hair salon can) that I was able to appreciate how work shapes the construction of the workplace, and vice versa. Of course it is the recognition of this construction – up to and including its limits (to paraphrase performance artist Carolee Schneeman) – that returned me to what O'Donnell wrote of Theatre's most “disabling trait”: that it is “not just any room, but a theatre” where Theatre, as we know it, takes place.

1. Darren O'Donnell, *Social Acupuncture: A Guide To Suicide, Performance and Utopia* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2006), 16

2. Rosalee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), 9

# HIVE 2

June 5-14, 2008

grunt gallery Director of Programming, Glenn Alteen, curated nine performances by local artists over nine days for HIVE 2, an event inspired by the visual art community's SWARM. *Images for HIVE performances page 22-27*

## June 5 2008 - Paul Wong – Mainstreet

This two-projector montage encapsulates new work by Wong from his perch on southern Main Street. The live mix of video, produced recently, looks at a series of Main Street characters and situations.

## June 6 2008 - Skeena Reece - Nurse Shaman

This Tsimshian/Cree Nurse Shaman is sure to ease your modern ailments, from white guilt, to stress about the end of the world. Make an appointment for 5–15 minute sessions!

## June 7 2008 - Bobbi Kozinuk – Fitting in

Kozinuk enlivened the holding space with micro-scenes created from images of Vancouver and scenes from movies. The projections were “moved” around the space with the help of a mirror.

## June 8 2008 - Archer Pechawis - Shoot the Indian

In this new work, the audience was invited to “shoot the Indian” in his natural habitat, using paintball guns. Audience members could view the Indian as he performed traditional quotidian tasks, and for a fee rent the use of a paintball gun for five minutes.

## June 10 2008 - Marlene Madison – Close to me

Madison engaged audience members individually on matters of etiquette.

## June 11 2008 - Margaret Dragu - LADY JUSTICE GOES BUZZ-BUZZ

A 3 hour durational performance about public/private grief and unspoken desire for justice/revenge.

## June 12 2008 – Cheryl LHirondelle - êkâya-pâhkaci [don't freeze up]

An interdisciplinary and exploratory process-based performance piece: an intersection of nomadic site-specificity, visual patterning, language, narrative, movement and rhythm.

## June 13 2008 Norma – Warm up Act

The performance consisted of 7 performers acting out, one by one, an introductory speech, over and over again.

## June 14 2008 – Rebecca Belmore – Victorious

This new performance by Rebecca Belmore comes on the heels of her solo survey exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery.



*Portage, Terrance Houle and Trevor Freeman, photograph by Glenn Alteen*



# History Lessons

Glenn Alteen

Terrance Houle and Trevor Freeman move through downtown Vancouver quickly, more like bike couriers than a parade. I'm documenting the performance and it's frankly hard to keep up with them. Most people on the sidewalk see them as a glimpse: one guy dressed in Native dress and another wearing a Métis scarf around his waist, carrying a canoe down the sidewalk.

*Portage* is a subversive work. Part one-line joke and part historical reminder, it resonates, first as comedy (unlikely and out of place to see a canoe portage in downtown Vancouver), then as tragedy. Houle and Freeman's work is a reference to the deep betrayal at the heart of the colonialization of the Americas. Treaties made, then broken, the endless eras of assimilation enacted through the banning of ceremony in the Indian Act, the destruction of language through residential schools and the white adoption of Native children, have made this a long, ugly history that traces back to the founding of our nation and continues to the present.

The image of a Native man and a Métis man carrying a canoe should be a proud and founding image within our Nationhood, but the subsequent forced assimilation of the Métis people after the Northwest Rebellion, the hanging of Louis Riel and the segregation of First Nations onto reserves make Houle and Freeman, as icons, a national embarrassment. And while some people on Vancouver's streets smile, others aren't so happy with the image. You can see it on their faces. "What is this, some kinda protest? After all, isn't that all Indians do?"

*Portage* brings us down to this whole ugly underside side of Canada, the great multicultural society, with a deep, abiding hatred of its founding peoples. We welcome all people to our shores but treat the people who welcomed us with utter and complete disdain. It is illegal in Canada to deny the Holocaust but denying the 500-year-old genocide of Native people in the Americas is a national pastime. Houle and Freeman's *Portage* exploits this racism in careful and provocative ways.

Part one-line joke and part historical reminder, it resonates, first as comedy (unlikely and out of place to see a canoe portage in downtown Vancouver), then as tragedy.

*Portage's* reference to our past addresses how our national history has been written and shows us the genesis of a very different relationship. The deterioration of this relationship has been the national reality we are left with and is being played out traumatically in the daily lives of First Nations people from coast to coast. To most Canadians the mistreatment of Native people is a situation of the past that doesn't exist anymore, though nobody seems to have a date for the transition. Was it when Canada re-allowed public ceremonies and the potlatch in the 50s or gave Aboriginal people the vote in the 60s? Or, maybe when we closed the residential schools in the 80s?

Regardless, Aboriginal children still grow up in appalling conditions of poverty, with limited access to their traditional languages and culture and with incredible rates of youth suicide. Aboriginal women are subject to appalling rates of violence and poverty and mortality rates of Aboriginal people are below the national average. It seems Canadians can bring potable water to villages in Africa more easily than we can to reserves in Northern Canada. But, as a nation we have decided this is not our problem and has nothing to do with us.

*Portage* doesn't so much accuse us as remind us to look at our history and actually recognize it for what it is. It asks us if the myths we built our nation on are actually true, and reminds us that the truth is still out there whenever we want to recognize it.



*Portage, Terrance Houle and Trevor Freeman, photograph by Glenn Alteen*



*Tears Melt Like Water, Naufus Ramirez-Figueroa (installation), photograph by Merle Addison*



# Tears Melt Like Water

## Naufus Ramirez-Figueroa's installation

Warren Arcan

Naufus Ramirez-Figueroa's installation is made up of three things: paper, salt and poetry. The artist adds to this a statement, stuck on the gallery wall: "In Children's Tears Laid Out To Dry, I explore emotional and public responses to the loss of children, and specifically to recent kidnappings and trafficking of children in Guatemala."

His artist statement would call up the pathos of the oppressed and a specific Central American villainy and so one would know what to expect from the installation: the artist will rely on the audience's desire to create solidarity with the represented sufferers; they will want to build bridges of empathy between these distant children thereby guaranteeing the North's foregone conclusions regarding the war-torn and strife-worn Other America. But there may be something else at work in this installation. It seems to be found in how the elements refer to their methods of construction.

The tears are represented by honeycomb paper sculptures hung from the ceiling and are suggestive of falling. Their construction recalls Latin American cut-out paper craft and cottage industry knick-knacks produced for the tourist trade or homemade decorations for celebrations like the Day of the Dead or Cinco de Mayo. As such they recall domestic interiors: friends and relatives gossip and sip tea at kitchen tables while busy with their piece-work. By associating paper crafts with recollections of Latin America, the artist makes a fine ambiguity: delicate paper sculptures bear the weighty horror and violence of civil war and its aftermaths.

The salt on the floor must be from the tears left to dry, leaving sinuous patterns on the gallery's concrete floor. (NRF tells me he dissolved salt in hot water then poured it onto the floor of the gallery.) There must have been a lot of tears. Tears of children falling from heaven.

NRF drew on The Quebecois writer Anne Hébert's last book of poetry, *Day Has No Equal But Night*. The title of his installation, for example, is a line from a poem in the collection *Small Sadness* (p. 58). He's made a pastiche of direct quotes, altered quotes, and original phrases on the floor and laid them out in a font that looks like Alphagetti or Alphabits. Two phrases are quotes – "Remain secret and hidden" from *Summer Night* and "A bowl of black air" from *Slumber*. The rest are the artist's variations and inventions. ("Eyes candles blown out"; "Eating their hearts"; "Ankles pinned down"; "Closed rooms"; "Tears melt like water"; "Milky darkness"; "Severed hands"; "Haunted its light body"; "Brown child"; "Without friends".) The phrases serve as a condensation of meaning, following the evaporation of the titular tears. The phrases have been laid out and made to follow the sinuous forms in salt. Does he want to suggest a kind of spirit writing, the marks of ghost children? Maybe yes, but not only, I think. The text implies a speaker, of course,

NRF's artist statement refers to the personal and to Guatemalan history: the kidnapping of children of revolutionaries in Guatemala. He himself escaped such a kidnapping.

and a point of view. The points of view indicate subject positions and so the text works to light the installation from within, as it were. Language in the context of NRF's installation implies witnessing, recovery, redress and other forms of speaking and making public that are politic analogues to gestures of coming or bringing to consciousness. Not to suggest NRF's installation reduces to political statements. And further, that given the text is sourced in a French Canadian expatriate's poetry, the image of the political in NRF's installation willfully turns away from any reductionist reading exactly by making connections beyond its supposed context, complicating the frames of reference and thwarting foregone conclusions. Also, the horror overloads any politics. If the text speaks the voices of the lost children, it operates like tragic expressions of history waiting to be recovered. This view of the text recalls the children's drawings Kübler-Ross found in the concentration camps. Yet, there is heroism in giving voice - and here is the gift of poetry.

Not to suggest there's any final truth in poetry versus politics. I'm saying that in his installation, NRF has reached a point of dialogue, of contributing to the human project, rather than being a place or face where conventional images of history or political phenomenon are presented or redeployed, thereby making the installation more consumable - read "successful" - by being legible to those who might be looking for more familiar representations. When those who are made to bear the consequences of institutional history - such as persistent fallacies like "History is written by the winners" - speak on their own account, transformation occurs. It may or may not matter whether such expressions find their way into foreign or domestic policy. The social change hinted at in the installation is not concerned with the maintenance of current institutions. Institutional organs like policy positions are poorer for it; in this way an inability to serve as the voice of lost children would be symptomatic of an institution's broad failures. And of course, without reducing the installation to biography, the text is the voice of NRF and his repeated explorations of the personal through representations and re-representations of self in different media. The remnants of his conversation with Hébert scattered on the floor are his vulnerability, a place for a hidden history to walk. This history he is directly related to is the history we are all related to. Those things, the murders, the kidnappings and everything else, there is nothing to be done about it; it happened. But by being spoken and witnessed, change can be made; gestures in paper and salt can have a kind of heroism. A lyric or a poem is powerful in its speaking of experiences that up until then had no language. The power of bringing powerful, horrifying, impossible experiences into language is in its making connections and defeating isolation and those other places where fear and dread hide. The lost children of the installation, the stories that spill over the frames, are his children, are him, brought before us in a curiously maternal gesture. Anne Hébert and NRF



*Tears Melt Like Water, Naufus Ramirez-Figueroa (installation), photograph by Merle Addison*

would be the textual mothers of NRF's multitude of children. NRF's artist statement refers to the personal and to Guatemalan history: the kidnapping of children of revolutionaries in Guatemala. He himself escaped such a kidnapping. These children were killed or adopted by families of the ruling class. The tears of these children would collect on the floors of the illegal daycares, the places where these stolen children would be housed.

The polished concrete floor of grunt gallery seems a curious relative of these other floors. The salted floors also recall geography because the patterns resemble aerial photography: brown and gray hills and river valleys. The radical emptiness of the gallery that aspires to being a nowhere and an everywhere, pervasive like capitalism, geographically void, is put to use by NRF. His references to Guatemalan geography highlight the emptiness of the gallery and the moral dangers of an apolitical stance. The multifarious horrors of war – that which is meant to happen in other countries – arrives here in peculiar form. The installation is a language made of salt, salt as the remnant of bodies no longer there, salt as a product of bodies being made to be not there, of erasure, disappearance and memory murder. The attention of the gallery goer is as if to remake the process of wetness moving to dryness and to make an image of that, like some kind of witnessing, as if the salt is a recording device or the preservative for a Mayan death poetics for later use.

# **HIVE Performance**

## Magnetic North Festival



*Hive performance by Rebecca Belmore, photograph by Merle Addison*





*Hive performance by Cheryl L'Hirondelle, photograph by Merle Addison*



*Hive performance by Bobbie Kozinuk, photograph by Merle Addison*



*Hive performance by Margaret Dragu, photograph by Merle Addison*

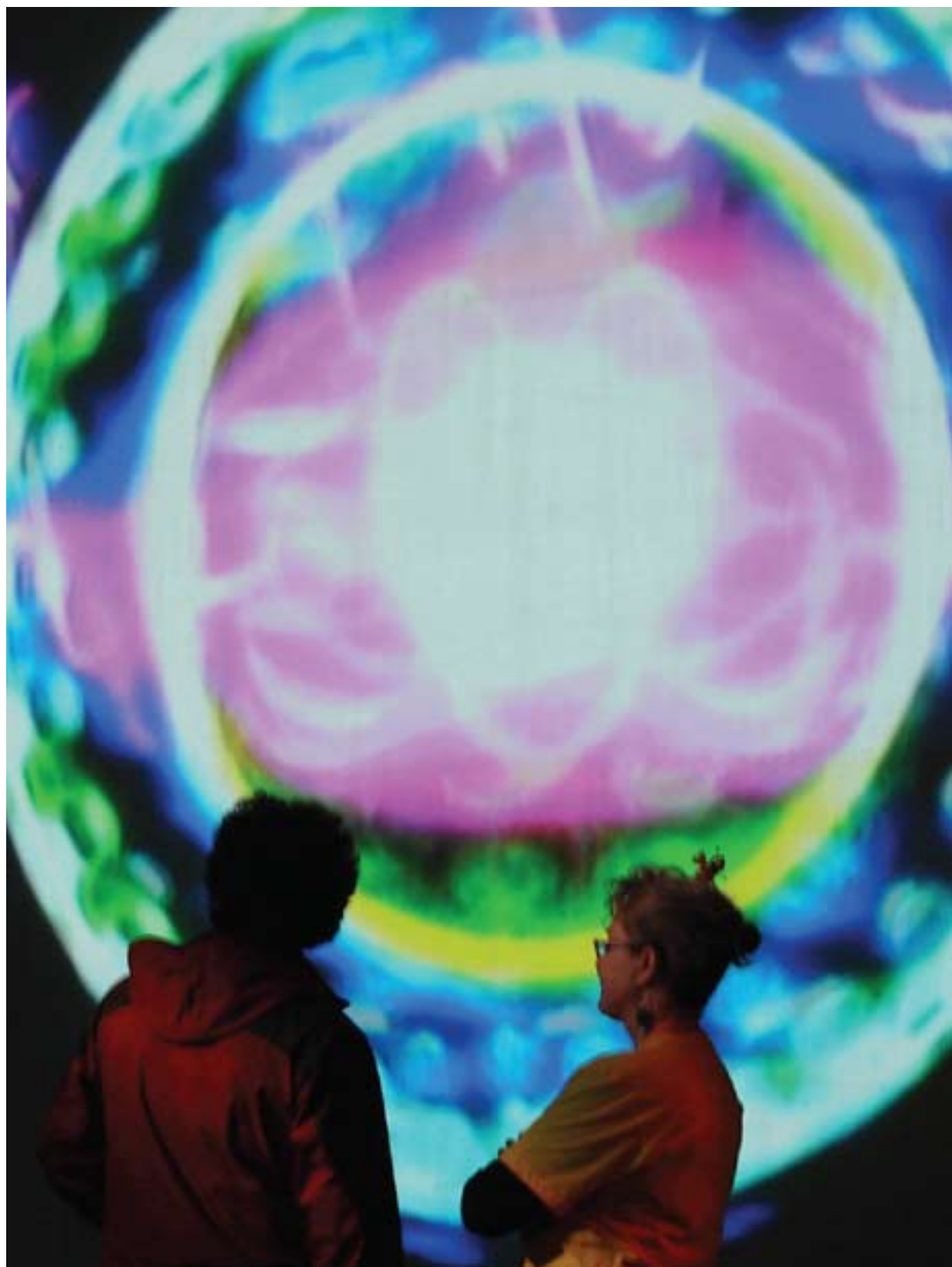


*Hive performance by Norma, photograph by Merle Addison*



*Hive performance by Archer Pechawis, photograph by Merle Addison*





*Hive performance by Paul Wong, photograph by Merle Addison*





*Hive performance by Marlene Madison, photograph by Merle Addison*



*Hive performance by Skeena Reece, photograph by Merle Addison*



*Rolande Souliere, photograph by Henri Robideau*

# You Are Cordially Invited

## To the Visceral Feast of Rolande Souliere

Skeena Reece

Rolande Souliere is a name that begs the question, “Where are you from?” An-  
ishinabe Visual Artist is how people can place her, but her work is not as easily  
described. In the grip of a visceral experience, I relate pieces in *Materiality* to my  
‘known things’, like the creatures of the sea, bustles (used in traditional Plains  
cultural regalia), or even anuses and g-spots – delicate things, moving and in rela-  
tion.

Upon closer inspection of *Materiality*, we see on two walls Souliere’s installation of feathered cones. A  
cluster of pieces on the left and a couple to the right, they are intricately fashioned to display like horny  
peacocks, those elaborate feathers in perfect rows. Inside are deeply colorful weavings of seemingly  
seamless proportions. They draw you in to see them closer and examine the pieces. However, a need to  
stand further back registers as if they would curiously retract if advanced upon. When confronted with her  
pieces, it’s as though you are forced to participate in a meditative chant. It pushes and pulls and breathes,  
finding your rhythm until you lose track of your breath. Perhaps the language she is using requires more  
context.

Rolande now lives in Australia and is raising three children there with her husband. A graduate in Visual  
Arts at the University of Sydney, she is one of ‘ours’ over there. This most certainly has impacted her work  
and informed her use of materials. Her blatant use of colour installed against white walls is a welcome  
shock. The pieces are made with such care and purpose, but to what end? I think the artist also asks the  
question. We can agree that she is communicating with us; the language is relational and it can be seen in  
many of her earlier works as well.

Her self-titled website reveals past works that either catch and reflect light or generate it. Her urban  
Torontonion and native life experience intermingle and dance on reworked traffic barriers; they glitter  
through light fixtures and fissure, through hand dyed and woven tufts and clumps of hair. As a native artist,  
much of this world that she navigates from is unknown to the layman, or is it? Perhaps they are beautifully  
crafted portals, connecting us through the color, texture and light, and communicating a common  
language like Chinook (Northwest Coast trade language).

Everyone understands colour and feathers, weaving and design. Feathers can be found in every facet of  
the human social fabric. Indigenous cultures make statements signifying everything from sex to ritual, from  
religion to politics. As weavings are traditionally the women’s ‘craft’ (careful), we see through Rolande’s

work a marriage, but less dichotomized. We see the interdependent relationship of the male and female energies to create the perfect transgender package. Feathers found on men's regalia, adorning their sexy bottoms, splayed wide like the horny bird, dancing and moving, hopping and displaying 'that' energy. Or feathered boas adorning the classic burlesque dancer, moving slightly, accentuating subtleties found in the anticipated movements of the human form behind it. Feathers concealing identity at masquerade parties, adorning capes in Hawaiian cultures, splayed in fans and held high by traditional dancers to honour the drum, essentially the heart beat of mother earth herself.

Less sexy is the political usage of feathers. The 'Sacred' eagle feather is used to wash away stagnant energies in the smudge ceremony. Eagle down is of special significance to Northwest Coast Nations in the Chief Headdress dance, where down is placed in the top of a Chief's hat and the dance disperses the feathers upon the guests at a Potlatch (governmental assemblage). It is said that feathers that fall upon the guest is granted honour; it is a way of showing respect and a message of peace and welcome. Feather use and weaving patterns place the person within the culture. Where does Rolande come from? An international traveller picking up stories and the ways of others, she is telling us that she is from many places. More important is perhaps her invitation to listen or even to speak. The conical nature of the work is inviting. The tiny openings surrounded by bright, alluring color and conveniently splayed feathers make you want to approach the work and touch it with your mouth, a gesture of intimacy and of vital connection.

Something more public, but just as intimate, is ceremony surrounding the eagle feather. Notably, the highest honoured gift is the eagle feather. It is revered – coveted – so much so that like any rare thing in the world it is sought after in less than honourable ways. Undeniably, if an eagle feather ever looses and falls from regalia at a Pow Wow, the entire event is stopped until a ceremony is done to pay respect to the fallen 'relative'. Prayers and words of honour, respect, gratitude and apology are spoken until the appendage is retrieved to above ground status. In a house, often these eagle feathers are placed high and above all else to show reverence and respect.

Rolande does not know exactly what she is saying with her use of feathers, weavings and color, but she honours the vision and leaves it up to the viewer to make their connections with it. Free to interpretation, but steeped in history and in meaning, the pieces are not altogether autonomous. Like any piece of artwork they make the statement that "I am alive, I am here," but the difference is that "we" were never meant to be alive or here. The connections she makes are far deeper than her grasp of the "material"; it is the silent song of our connection to the creator of all things, brought to the cusp of extinction, like the birds we honour today.





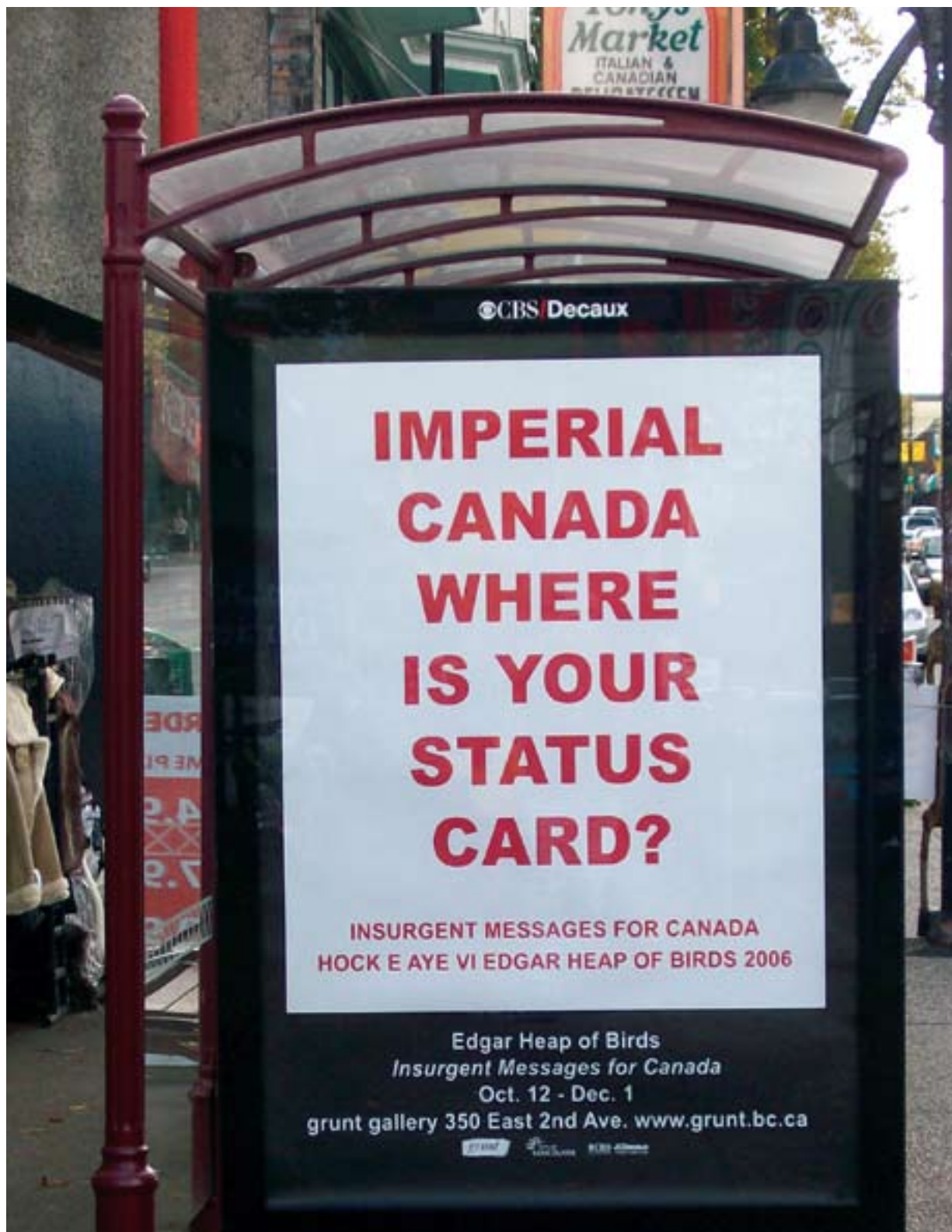
*Rolande Souliere, photograph by Henri Robideau*



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*Insurgent Messages for Canada, Edgar Heap of Birds, photography by Glenn Alteen*



# Public Art for the Americas

## HOCK AYE VI Edgar Heap of Birds

*Daina Warren*

Edgar Heap of Birds is a multi-disciplinary artist, curator and academic from the Cheyenne and Arapaho reservation in Oklahoma, U.S.A. He has garnered both national and international acclaim for his text-based prints as well as for his community and public art collaborations. In his mixed-media practices, Edgar uses his art to respond to politics surrounding the intertwined social histories of indigenous and non-indigenous peoples throughout the U.S.A., Canada, and Mexico.

His respected practice mainly relies on co-opting media such as municipal city-signage and advertising ploys to create personal messages that are based in historical, political or cosmological ideas site-specific to the urban environments he specifically chooses to speak about. Through this process he challenges the surrounding local public to contemplate Aboriginal issues by creating a conceptual space that restores visibility to the Aboriginal communities that live within these contexts.

In Edgar's artist statement for grunt gallery, he specified that four projects – *Native Hosts* (a public art commission by the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery), *Wheels: Overlays* (an installation at the Museum of Anthropology), *Insurgent Messages* (a public art intervention, grunt gallery), and *Words, Trees, Chiapas/ In Honor of EZLN* (an exhibition at grunt gallery) – were conceptualized as artworks that would be programmed to take place over one year, all part of a composite art project titled Public Art for the Americas.

In *Native Hosts*, the 2007 public art commission by the Belkin Art Gallery at the University of British Columbia, he installed twelve signs that directly addressed the public. In this context, his signage intervenes the student populace of UBC, which is national and international in its scope. His messages address each person as a visitor, stating that Aboriginal Nations are the hosts to students' daily experience, gentle visual reminders that are placed beside sidewalks and spaces intended to move people between their routine classes and institutional buildings. It is this type of work that Edgar is most noted for, creating similar signage projects for public spaces in New York and Oregon.

A series of posters were created for grunt gallery and functioned as public art interventions, titled *Insurgent Messages for Canada*. For four weeks in October, these posters were installed in ten transit (bus) shelters located throughout the downtown area of Vancouver. This project was a visually different extension from the *Native Hosts* project in that Edgar designed six posters that were printed with identical black frames around red and white text, and each of the six messages had varying texts that were poetic in rhythm. However, the content was about rebellion and challenging authority, and he directed these messages at the Canadian government, instructing this political body to cease authoritative measures that traumatize indigenous peoples. Single words were matched to create strong metaphors that spoke about historical and contemporary contexts, the artist engaging with ideas about time and space.

## **"IMPERIAL CANADA STOP BLACK ROBES ABUSE"**

References like this use words that have significant meaning to Aboriginal people. "Black robes" could be read as a play on history based on the cloth of the church and residential school systems or as metaphors of judicial bearing, which has weight with Aboriginal communities today. The colors that he used to compose his pieces created a visual language that is rigid, with straight lines, intense colors, and block colored lettering - an advertising ploy meant to alert the public, and capture their attention during a daily commute. However, this advertisement wasn't to sell an object or service; its function was to inform the public about human rights violations against indigenous peoples both historically and presently.

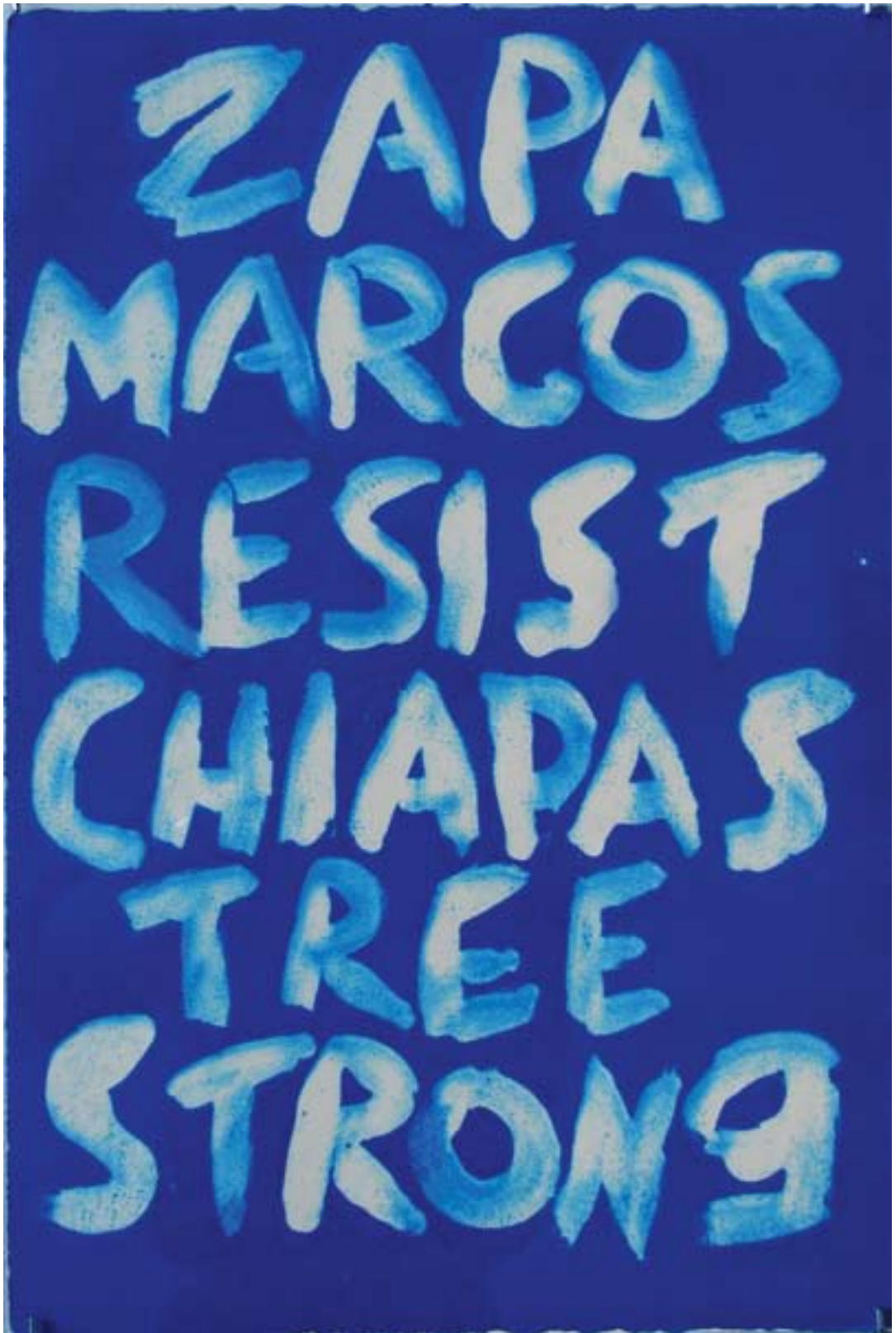
The grunt gallery exhibition, *Chiapas/In Honor of EZLN*, had a softer, more spiritual aspect to the text-based work and correlated to the *Wheels: Overlays* project that was programmed the previous spring in the Great Hall at the Museum of Anthropology. Both exhibitions were derived from Edgar's spiritual contemplations involving trees, yet differentiated in that *Wheels: Overlays* was based on Cheyenne beliefs and the grunt exhibition was a project he began while visiting Mexico, where his work inspired by the spiritual beliefs and art of the Chiapas people.

Heap of Birds created his own painting process for this body of work, and he gave the mono-colored prints subtle layers so that each piece had a translucent surface quality. The text of the work was formatted similarly to that of the poster interventions in that single words were vertically stacked to create poetic metaphors.

## **"BIRD SEEKS WATER WINGS WANT LEAVES"**

Fourteen printed images were hung on the long gallery walls, and the smallest wall had a large, poster-size photo of Edgar standing by the sacred Ceiba tree, which is located in northern Mexico. A small leather piece was hung beside the photo to add another layer to the exhibition, a reference to the worldview of the Chiapas people involving their complex spiritual beliefs around birth and death for which this Ceiba tree carries the connection between the various spiritual and physical worlds. All in all, this particular part of the four-part project referred to indigenous presence and provided space to contemplate the Chiapas' spiritual and cultural knowledge, as well as to illustrate and support the Zapatista's fight for indigenous freedom from colonial authority.

All four components to the project *Public Art for the Americas* are an honouring of Aboriginal communities that exist within and around Vancouver as well as a bridging of indigenous peoples from North to South America. Heap of Birds locates parts of the work in tree metaphors: tree as spiritual marker, tree as sustenance, shelter, and a symbolic organism that is connected to the world that it inhabits. However, he goes beyond creating metaphoric binaries that could be read as indigenous identities based in either political or spiritual personas; the overall readings of the four projects are deeply rooted in cultural knowledge bases in which he uses "interventions or announcements" to relay his messages that call attention to laws and practices that oppress indigenous communities.



*Words, Trees, Chiapas/In Honor of EZLN, Edgar Heap of Birds, photography by Merle Addison*

# Auto-mnemonic Six Nations

To aid the memory, automatically

*Maria Hupfield*



*auto-mnemonic six nations, Greg Staats, photograph by Henri Robideau*

Greg Staats' *Auto-mnemonic Six Nations* uses photography and video to present a portrait of place where Mohawk memory endures like a rhythmic heartbeat to the land in Southwestern Ontario.



The subject is based on the artist's home community of Six Nations unceded reserve. Reflecting on the historical exclusion of Aboriginal peoples' contribution to the national Canadian identity, the work adapts the authority of documentation as a means to insert presence by addressing the occulted memories of a culture. The acknowledgement of such cultural memories is introduced through the use of black and white chromogenic prints, video, and digital colour stills of broadcast footage. Recorded history as evidence of a community in cultural transition provides the backbone to the exhibition.



Working from a documentary viewpoint and drawing inspiration from a variety of sources, Staats pieces together an enduring history of strategic disempowerment and systematic assimilation of Aboriginal people. He draws from a range of sources including his father's journal, translated text from the Condolence Ceremony taken from traditional Longhouse ceremonies of the Haudenosaunee (the Five Nations of the Iroquois), and broadcast footage of *Six Nations and Family, Ways of Life* from the National Film Board of Canada.

On the gallery walls, two series of photo works are placed in bands facing each other on opposing walls. Individually, each image recalls the conventions of traditional portraiture, with a central composition depicting the subject matter and a middle-to-foreground focus including only enough of a background to hint at its Canadian boreal farmland environment. In the fashion of artists such as Roy Arden, Greg Staats makes use of one's backyard as a laboratory for art-making, thereby capturing the everyday conflictual aspects—in this case, of Aboriginal experience in relationship to land and Nation. The images depicted are easily identifiable and all indicate a passage of time, some of which include a tree, a cropped fragment of a figure or figures, a chair, and the remains of a burnt-out church. As portraits, these detailed objects become affirming moments of existence; unassuming and casual, they assert their presence. In isolation a chair references its relationship to the body, indicating a presence as well as an absence.



*auto-mnemonic six nations, Greg Staats, photograph by Henri Robideau*

The panoramic format of the photo work references landscape or linear time, while the grid of each individual image provides a rigorous measured structure for comparison. In this way, the gridded images set up a sequence of expectation, a rhythm of carefully measured intervals. In an interview with Am Johal, Staats talks about how the photos provide a contemplative moment to pause and reflect on the subject and introduce relationships as a principle of organization as paralleled by the Great Law of Peace, an oral document taken from the Iroquois Confederacy which takes seven days to recite and outlines relationships to land, family, agriculture and ceremony. The complexity of location, memory and time are woven together through the reassertion of these found objects. Both manmade and natural, they speak as much of progress and adaptation to change as they do to the environment and the state of the natural world.

Other contemporary photo-based artists such as Koichiro Kurita also utilize repetition to reference time or progression. Kurita's platinum palladium prints are printed on Japanese hand made paper; his gridded and consecutive photos group together to present a personal sense of perception, place and slowing down of time within the western landscape. Isolated within the landscape, the images contribute to a bigger picture, or sense of place, community, and the ways in which we relate to the world.

The panoramic presentation of the photos as two bands on facing walls physically embodies a striking resemblance to the Two Row Wampum Treaty also known as Kas-wen-tha. As a treaty of peace, this wampum consisted of two long bands of purple beads separated by a strip of white beads. As formal agreements, wampums also recall a way of viewing the world, and include principals of organization involving relationships to land, community, friends, and all of creation from a very specific Mohawk tradition as honoured to this day by the Six Nation Confederacy. The Two Row Wampum is the basis of all subsequent treaties with Europeans and North American governments and was first recorded as an agreement made between representatives of the Five Nations of the Iroquois (Haudenosaunee) and representatives of the Dutch government in 1613. In the depiction of two rows of purple wampum shells separated by three rows of white, the white beads represent friendship, peace and respect between two nations. The two purple stripes are reflective of two different ways of life, each travelling in its separate vessel. Parallel on the same river, contained and without conflict, they remain in their own boat, never to interfere or attempt to steer the other's vessel. The wampum as visual document reminds the viewer of a way of life based on balance and respect.



Generations of grief are further implicated in the landscape through a political history tied to the loss of land. As one of the biggest urban reserves in Ontario, Six Nations has a well-documented history of the imposition upon and reduction of their ancestral land base since contact. Originally granted 9,680 acres for remaining loyal to Britain and the Queen during the American Revolution, today only 10 square miles remain to the Six Nations. As Nations containing both physical and agricultural ceremonies connected to farming and the land, they were highly regarded for their enterprising and environmentally sustainable approaches to farming irrigation techniques and crop rotation as well as their ingenious approach to seed planting, such as the three sisters harvest of beans, corn and squash, which were planted in the same crop for their reciprocal benefits. With connection to land broken by imposed lifestyle changes driven by government-mandated actions such as residential schools and religious intervention, a community's relationship to the land, once removed, must be re-forged or it remains inert and auto-mnemonic.

Staats visually documents his own memories while negotiating the loss of community, a way of doing things and relationship to the world. Staats speaks in his interview with grunt gallery about the numerous deaths during the early years in his childhood. When faced with one's own mortality, Staats recalls, it was death that brought community together regardless of both the traditional and more recently introduced Christian ways, and it was at this time that the relationships and roles of Mohawk traditions were clear and well defined. The loss of community members undoubtedly unified and strengthened the community by bringing everyone together through protocol. Such dualities based in the balance of life and death characterize Aboriginal experience as rising above fourth world conditions in survival across the continent. Even in death—the most universal of all human ceremonies—there is balance, as there can be no death without life. In the Condolence Ceremony, grieving is counter-supported as reflective of the balance of the traditional lodge. In this ceremony, there is both a grieving side and a side of the good mind, where clear-minded ones help others through the grief and nobody is alone. Balance is maintained and restored.

Taken from a worldview that is set to a different pace—where systems of governance take seven days to recite laws of peace—Staats' Auto-mnemonic Six Nations provides a visual record that questions what is left, the links we make, how we pass knowledge, how we fill in the blanks and how we pass things forward to future generations.

themedicineproject.com

Warren Arcan  
Kootchie Willard Charlie  
Neil Eustache  
Trevor Freeman  
Terrance Houle  
Michelle La Flamme  
Nadia Myre  
James Nicholas  
Marianne Nicolson  
Skeena Reece  
Sandra Semchuk  
Richard Van Camp  
Russell Wallace  
WAWAW

*The Medicine Project was produced by the grunt gallery and uses valid XHTML and CSS.*

*This project was made possible with the support of the Department of Canadian Heritage through The Gateway Program and the City of Vancouver through the Diversity Initiatives Program.*





Dana Claxton, Curator  
Skeena Reece, Curatorial Intern  
Archer Pechawis, Website Design and Coding  
Travis Neel, PHP and Javascript Coding  
Glenn Alteen, Producer  
Mary Ann Anderson, Project Support  
Hillary Wood, Editing



*La Robe-Ruche, Héloïse Audy & Julie Faubert, photograph by Henri Robideau*

# Threading Language Into Body

## *La robe-ruche* (The Hive-Dress) by Héloïse Audy & Julie Faubert

*Laiwan*

“We collected over a thousand sentences—thoughts from the women working in the textile industries located in Montreal. These thoughts were sewn one after the other on an infinite ribbon, made from dyed scrap fabric from these same industries, pursuing our ritual of transforming thought into vibrant material. The material is shaped into an immense conic structure that hangs from the ceiling. This conic dress is covered with hundreds of sentences surrounded by a comforting and unsettling micro-cosmos.”

Héloïse Audy & Julie Faubert

To stand inside the Hive-Dress is to encounter a swirl of life, a gentle hurricane. Living thoughts radiating as if surrounded by blood. Red, in the center of a heart where body encounters language, where heart is embodied into this container, made softly warm of tactile textiles, texts read, red, blood like bodily flesh. Woven into this encounter are traces of each seamstress. We tread where they have written, fleeting emotions, thoughts quick footed; like a blessing, a wish, honing into an arrival, into home. We tread with care each thread, to embrace both a presence and an absence of each invisible seamstress.

“The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture... [The writer’s] power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them...In the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be disentangled, nothing deciphered; the structure can be followed, “run” (like the thread of a stocking) at every point and at every level...”

Roland Barthes<sup>1</sup>

The artists describe the initial challenge of engaging the participation of the seamstresses who work in the factories of Montreal’s textile district. It is an attempt of one world (art) reaching out, attempting to speak to another world (industry and labour). Yet, both speak different languages, have different realities, and hold differing values and processes. Why would busy seamstresses take the time to participate? What’s in it for them when they are being paid for each piece of clothing made and must make hundreds within a limited amount of time?

So while the expansive creative space of the artist – of duration, reverie and patience – conflicts temporally and quantitatively in a world of labour calculated by the clock, constructing the constrained realities of the

seamstresses, the Hive-Dress proposes here a world of presence and engagement. Where the sensuality, beauty and love of life encounters the world of labour and industry, of function, materiality, and mundane repetition. Its proposal attempts to create a relation, to communicate, to stand beside in companionship or solidarity, so as to give us a bridge into les intermittences du coeur <sup>2</sup> (of the pauses, of places unknown, with Proustian syntax). It is this intermittence, this pause within functional reality, where the gap between various plateaus <sup>3</sup> gives space for breath to live, where love desires -- desiring possibilities for invention and imagination, to collide, as in sex, so a refreshed being can take shape.

"[T]he expression of flight from 'normal' work, whose contents and meaning appear less and less obvious to us, toward the 'borderlands', since it is not only a matter of fleeing from wage-earning but also of engagement in the search for 'meaning', engagement in a becoming-other of the self and of what one makes. But the history of the movement of intermittent workers is also one of permanent 'expertise', which inspires a reflection on the politics of knowledge and poses the relationship between minoritarian knowledges and majoritarian knowledges as a problem."

Antonella Corsani <sup>4</sup>

This busy hive of labour, this labour of love – spoken through the fleeting thoughts of each seamstress in the threads, the ends of fabric, the beginnings of encounters that bridge language and body, labour and art, industry and emotion – is a space between two defined worlds (possibly of minoritarian and majoritarian knowledges) that do not normally meet. But, here with an elegant grace, tall defiance and architecturally embracing motherliness the creation of identity evolves to become multifaceted, multi-leveled and panoramic. A culmination of a long process of relations and courtship, transformed into an encounter of delight, where one can see one's thought, a fleeting feeling, embodied here among others, building this symbolic and beautiful red blood-filled hive, ready to be read. An entranced bees' dance <sup>5</sup> that transcends mundane functionality and reveals a pleasure in curiosity, absurd endeavours, imagination and risk (for no purpose but delicious discovery in human connection).

The artists call this sculpture a "utopic garment that reinserts value into heterogeneity, where the 'space of thought is a space of freedom.'" Here the interminable labour where each seamstress makes her assigned shape of clothing – a pocket, a hem, a sleeve, a zipper, a seam – enabling the mind to wander while the hands are busy. It is where she can claim reverie as an exit, a flight to dream of possibilities for the end of the day. This project furthers this freedom so as to invent a model, a process, where we commit bodily being into material engagement, where words become flesh, language transcends virtuality, and dreams become embodied and possible. Here, production is transformed into a sculptural space alive with acknowledged pauses and gaps, to let us breathe into and feel alive and in the process engage a utopic proposition to transform both art and labour.

Within this space, listening is made physical as we bodily press ourselves to the wall of the gallery to heed the voices of seamstresses speaking in various languages from small speakers embedded into the gypsum. Placed at slightly awkward heights and places, we bend, crouch, tip-toe, push ourselves into the wall to hear each voice. The voices are gentle, tender, quiet, calming. We are entering a relationship, listening earnestly as this space is fragile, vulnerable, tentative, as found in any intimate relation. Pushed into it, we listen intently. We seek to break through.





Once engaged we have a chance to taste a memory, a bodily memory that becomes written into the fabric of our lives, creating a thread between labour and imagination, body and language, materiality and virtuality. Now in our cellular memory lives a poetic nest, reminding us to take a moment to rest with others, dream, imagine and create. In this return to cellular memory, we stand within a swirl to travel through an aorta of emotions so as to feed mundane everyday repetition with nourishment. It is nourishment we seek and so too must imaginative dreams be fed to live on, survive, and propel us toward a utopia found in a renewed desire to relate, if not to others then at least to one's self. To have opportunity – time and space – to encounter a relation to one's self as mirrored among others and not remain alienated and isolated as written into us bodily through the assembly lines of Fordism.

The Hive-Dress reminds us that desire in itself is capital. It is in itself value. By circumnavigating the undesirable exploitative capitalism inherited from the feudal, a new approach – understanding the inherent investments of courtship, seduction, and coalitions of relationality – rejuvenates our practice of capital into one of true exchange and growth.

The aspiration of this project is not simply one that could be seen as addressing Marxist class conflict so as to unify artists and labourers. Instead it is a proposal to insert new value into human capital. It is an injection of invigorating circulation into the static blood of industry. A value that acknowledges desire – human emotions, interrelations, empathy, compassion – so as to be circulating circulation (“the circulation of a rumor; the circulation of money”) and in doing so reinventing capital and exchange. It is the desire of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's orgasmic field of a thousand plateaus – multi-leveled, multi-vocal, panoramic, swirling, body centred, acknowledging seduction and pleasure found in labour, voicings, textures, capital, embodiment, human exchange and its continual stream of influence transforming the current endgame of industry into an on-going open engagement for any one to exchange possibilities without hierarchy at any given moment.

## NOTES

1. Barthes, Roland. “The Death of the Author.” In *Image — Music — Text*, trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977. pp. 146–148.
2. “Barthes says the site of *jouissance* has two edges. This is what Barthes variously calls the seam, the cut, the fault, the perforation, the break or the intermittence. This means one reaches *jouissance* not through the coy manipulations of a stagy strip tease, but through the glimpses of the hidden body, the human body and the textual body. The eroticized human body tantalizes, showing itself where the garment parts. These are the edges where articles of clothing meet and separate.” From *into the body of the text: Protocols of feminist orgasmic reading* by James Palermo [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa3971/is\\_200004/ai\\_n8882808/pg\\_5](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3971/is_200004/ai_n8882808/pg_5)  
*Les intermittences du coeur* was Proust's original title for the first 2 volumes of *A La recherche du temps perdu*. In French the word *intermittences* also refers to “sporadic” intermittent activity – “fits and starts.” *Intermittences* now also refers to workers whose work is sporadic, not fully employed: “What is an intermittent worker of the spectacle? ‘Manufacturing the sensory’, an intermittent worker of the spectacle is a wage laborer discontinuously employed by multiple employers at rates that vary according to the projects and the employers.” Knowledge production and new forms of political action by Antonella Corsani, Translated by Timothy S. Murphy, <http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0406/corsani/en>
3. Of that explored in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Mille Plateaux) (1980) by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.
4. Corsani, *ibid*.
5. “Bees can communicate to other bees the distance, direction, quality, and quantity of a food source with a unique dance.” <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/bees/dances.html> showing us dance (art), labour and sustenance are not antithetical.





*Enpaauk ( Andrew Dexel ), Gratitude 4'x6' Spring 2008, photograph by Henri Robideau*

# A Way to See Gratitude

## Enpaauk's Visual Storytelling

*Peter Morin*

1.

Today this is our art gallery.

Inside the chairs are already set up in a circle for us. There is hot coffee and Labrador tea. And there is bannock made special for tonight. We don't turn away anyone from the path.<sup>1</sup> By now you should know that when we come to the art gallery, it is a time to share our best stories. You should also know that there is a lot at stake in the sharing of these stories. Reputations can be made in one night. Reputations can also be broken in one night.

From one quick glance, I can see the gang's all here. My favourite cast of characters. I know from one look around the room that it will be a really special night, and they will tell stories in turn until there is one recognizable winner. And at the end, he or she will go home with the title of cultural storytelling hero for one night only. In the circle I see that there are several of our Raven brothers here, waiting their turn to speak. Those Ravens have tricky stories. They are always telling of making loud trouble. I see several standing Aunts and Uncles have joined the circle tonight; their eyes tell stories of catching giant fish and walking up hill to go to day school, down for lunch, and then back up the hill for the rest of the day. And I see our cousin Frog has come back to join us. Her stories are always full of sadness.

Enpaauk is here also. He is waiting his turn to speak. His story starts, as all the stories start when spoken here in this city and in this circle: I want to acknowledge the Indigenous Nations whose territory we live in, and acknowledge them for allowing us to live here on their traditional territory for the time that we have.

His stories are about the animal beings and their healing power for those of us who choose to live in the city. He tells us about why the animals felt they needed to return to the city. And he tells us that the person who gives away generously is given to by the animals.<sup>2</sup>

And I see gratitude, with his head bowed in graciousness. And I see his hands lifted up in acknowledgment, like our Coast Salish teachers have taught us to show our appreciation to someone who has honoured us with their kindness. Gratitude opens doors to your full potential.<sup>3</sup>

I can't help it. While I am sitting in the circle, I am the most interested in the graffiti story that Andrew tells. The story seems out of place, in this book of traditional stories that the others tell. I'm curious about it. I want to interrupt and ask questions. But I've been taught that I need to wait my turn to speak.

The story he tells about his art making begins at the age of 13 with a spray can and an empty street at night. It moves from tags, to planning throw-ups, to designing pieces and murals, and continues towards creating a visual style that is part graffiti, part beadwork, and part Northwest Coast form line. This story is a visual taxonomy. His story of graffiti reminds me of an older story I heard about the maker of petroglyphs. Graffiti has the allure of the moon. It is the walking at night, in the twilight hours, alone, in mostly lonely locations. Just like the moving out on to the traditional territory, strong inspirations can happen when you



travel back out into a moonlit cityscape. The petroglyphs are also about moving out into the landscape. They are also a moving with purpose.

The making of a petroglyph is a very specific cultural marking into the history of the landscape. It is like a story within a story of the land – it tells of a location, a journey, a marking of time, and a marking of the history of the nation. The petroglyph story talks about a dreaming that needs to be done in preparation, a dreaming not unlike the dreaming of graffiti. Its making also requires planning as most petroglyphs are done in secret, in secret locations, in secret writing. Then Enpaauk's story makes perfect sense.

I see his artwork return to the city past the walls of the story and the gallery, the making of a new style of petroglyph into the foundations of art, and etched into the cement stones of the cityscape. The animals that figure prominently in the visual works grow and embody the topographical letters, adding extra layers of meaning beyond the indigenous, and beyond Western art history. This line is distinct and accessible; it stands apart from any of the other form line work I've seen. It doesn't just define the two-dimensional space; it envelopes it because the perspective is unique to the histories that move with it. The line looks like it is breathing and pushing itself out of the frame on to the walls, and back out onto the street. The colour of the work is sharp and straight out of the can, no mixing. It is the same strong colour that bead workers use to tell their stories of our history. It is the same no-apology colour I've seen in the works of other prominent Aboriginal artists.

Andrew talks about how he is stepping up his spiritual commitments because it is the spirit that nurtures this work. In his story, he acknowledges some of his mentors in the form line work – people like Huuyaah<sup>4</sup>, who was taught by Reg Davidson, and mentored in the ceremony by Joe David.<sup>5</sup>

These works are urban teachings on a spiritual ground.<sup>6</sup>

2.

Today we come to a new gallery. It is a gallery that lies directly at the point of intersection of identity, place, histories, locations, culture, and practice. This gallery is a place that welcomes our urban culture.

In the story of beadwork, the work is done as a prayer. As you sit there, picking up beads on your needle, you are making prayers to the creator and sending good thoughts into the community. This beadwork is your way to contribute to community memory. In the story of the button blanket, the wearer dreams up the crest. The maker of the blanket, depending on the community, will put three hundred and sixty-five buttons along the border of the blanket to symbolize the days of the year, and each button year is stitched with good thoughts for the wearers on those days. This is what the art brings with it to the gallery. In the story of the Aboriginal graffiti artist and his paintings, he is bringing visual medicine<sup>7</sup> to the people. And that is what he is contributing. Like the other artists of our community, he is bringing a line that is a path out to the land. And like the graffiti we see in the dark place of our city, this line is a good reminder to remember and look for beauty wherever we are.

#### NOTES

- 1 Personal conversations with the artist, May 2008
- 2 As told by Charlie Yahey, Robin Ridington, *Trail to Heaven, Knowledge and Narrative in a Northern Native Community* (1998) University of Iowa Press. p. 118
- 3 Personal conversations with the artist, May 2008
- 4 Huu Yaah is a Haida artist and is Andrew Dixel's mentor.
- 5 Joe David, is a Nuu-chah-nulth artist.
- 6 The original line is "These are urban teachings on a spiritual ground." Personal conversations with artist, May 2008
- 7 The name of Enpaauk's business



*Enpaauk ( Andrew Dexel ), Transformation 3 ' x 4 ' Spring 200, photograph by Henri Robideau*

# grunt at a glance

September 4 – October 11, 2008

**Jake Hill – New Work**

Exhibition opening: September 4 at 8 pm

October 24 – November 29, 2008

**Wally Dion – Red Worker**

Exhibition opening: October 24 at 8 pm

Artist Talk Saturday October 25 at 2 pm

October 18, 2008 at 8 pm

**Laurie Anderson – Homeland**

Performance at the Centre For Performing Arts,  
Vancouver

November 13 – November 29, 2008

**Kevin McKenzie – SCREEN**

Performance/Installation opening: November 13  
at 8 pm

September 2008 to February 2009

**Cheryl L'Hirondelle – nikamon askiy ochi  
(song land for/from/of the)**

*a grunt gallery commission*

Public Performance February 7th 2 pm

October 26 2008 from 1:30 – 4:30

Publication Launch **Access All Areas:**

**Conversations on Engaged Arts**

Edited by Tania Willard

November 4 – November 19, 2008

**Beat Nation: V1** (*part of the Aboriginal  
Curatorial Collective conference*)

Exhibition opening: November 6, 2008 7pm

Curated by Tania Willard and Skeena Reece

At The Roundhouse Community Centre

January 9 to February 14, 2009

**Claude Perreault –Queen Elizabeth  
1 in six Portraits**

Exhibition opening: January 9 at 8 p.m.

February 21 to March 28, 2009

**Andrea Cooper – Fickle As Poison**

Exhibition opening: February 21 at 8 p.m.

April 3 to May 8, 2009

**Dmitry Strakovsky – ....as if a forest**

Performance April 3 at 8 p.m.

**Natalie Ball** Title TBA May June 2009

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