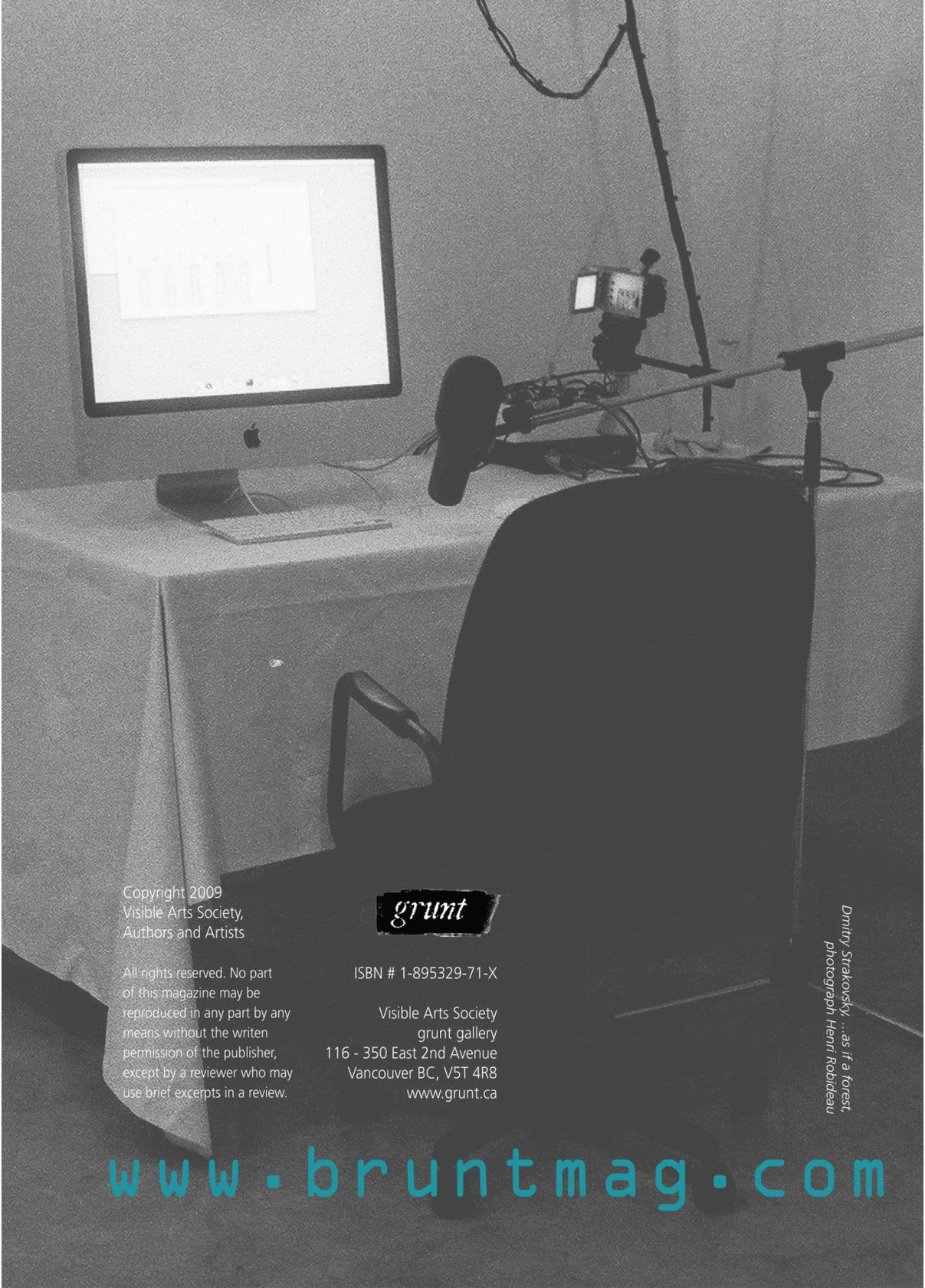


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brunt
grunt gallery in print





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grunt

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*Dmitry Strakovsky ... as if a forest,
photograph Henri Robideau*

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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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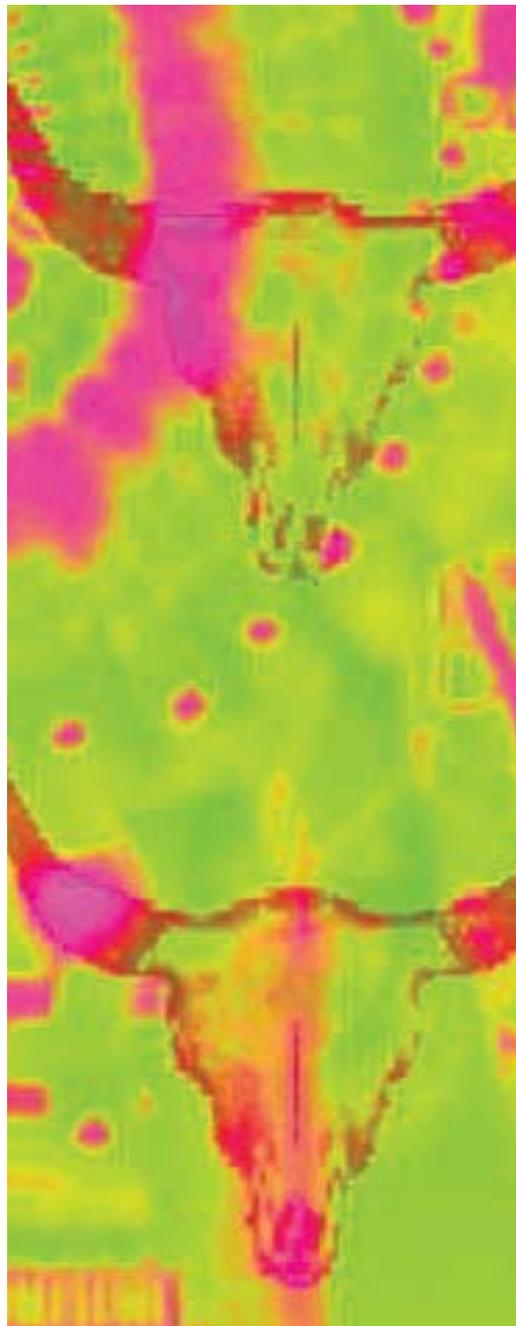
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paper on masonite, acrylic varnish, 3'x4', 2006
(inspired by Cate Blanchette in the 1998 film Elizabeth)*



Beat Nation visuals (video still), Tania Willard, 2009



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Sean George, artist, animateur and educator continues to examine the role of art in everyday life through an archival montage of self, circumstance and surroundings. For the past 15 years he has worked as an animateur (guide) at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Since 2007 he has been teaching History and Analysis of Design in the Graphic Design Program at the Art Institute of Vancouver. His upcoming exhibition *Bad Boys: Portraits of Mediated Performance* will open in January 2010 at grunt gallery.

Demian Petryshn, originally from Edmonton, Alberta, moved to Vancouver, British Columbia to study at the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design. After working in the artist-run centre community as an artist, volunteer, staff-person, and advocate, he recently graduated from the Masters of Fine Arts program at the University of Western Ontario.

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).

Dr. Michael J Boyce's fiction includes *Monkey* and the forthcoming *Anderson* (both Pedlar Press). He has contributed essays, reviews, art catalogue pieces and short stories to such publications as *Borderlines*, *CTheory*, *This Magazine*, *Dandelion*, *Front Magazine*, *Netreality*, and *Acoustic Space Magazine*. He is managing editor of an online journal and coordinator of a digital literacy centre at UBC. Dr. Boyce has also created work variously as a musician, a videographer/editor/producer, a new media artist, a radio producer/host, and an academic. He has shown his work at Gallery 101, Windsor Art Gallery and the Esplanade Arts & Heritage Centre.

Merritt Johnson is an artist working in two- and three-dimensional media, performance, and video. As a person of mixed Mohawk, Blackfoot, and Non-Aboriginal heritage, the overlapping and often forceful interactions between nations and individuals are a continuous theme in her work. A member of the Faculty of Visual Art at Emily Carr University in Vancouver, Merritt earned her BFA from Carnegie Mellon University and her MFA from Massachusetts College of Art. She has exhibited and performed in traditional and nontraditional venues throughout the United States.

Jeremy Todd is an interdisciplinary artist, teacher, writer, musician and curator living and working in Vancouver.



Jake Hill, New Work, photograph Henri Robideau

Jake Hill

Architecture and Light

Glenn Alteen

Architecture and light have deep affinities in human history. The earliest surviving architecture – Stonehenge, the Pyramids of Egypt or Central America – all share a connection to the phases of the sun or moon, built to allow light to enter them on the solstice or equinox. As though building these structures allowed people to enter into relationship to the cosmos and the Gods, kings and priests who commissioned these structures took on the mantle of the Gods through their construction.

The interplay of shadow, light and architecture as a holy trinity marks a physics of the spirit; logical physics, though employed, are opened up to reveal the imaginary and the ephemeral. Light and shadow are intrinsic to architecture and conceptual art, forming the foundation of aesthetics in architecture and in artistic pursuit. One is an applied science and the other an esoteric one, but the relationships between construction and idea have fueled each other in important and fascinating ways. They are at once diametrically opposite but maintain an integral relationship between seeing and imagination, between a built world and an imagined one.

Jake Hill's installation, *New Work*, posits a reflection on architecture and light to contemplate how we see and what we perceive when we see. Hill's installation at grunt gallery was so subtle that if you didn't look closely you could easily miss it. He embedded a concavity into the wall that was connected to a larger circle incised directly into the adjacent wall by two parallel lines. He then projected a spotlight directly onto the wall using a ping-pong ball in front of the light to create a shadow that mirrored the concavity exactly, making it almost disappear. This architectural intervention created a tension both highlighting and obscuring the concavity by manipulating the light, but in doing so encouraged us to disavow what we know and enter into another system of logic.

Subsumed by shadow, the architectural dent could be read as a lunar eclipse. There was a stillness in the piece not unlike watching an eclipse – the awe of seeing celestial bodies converge that seems to make time stand still, completely modern and ancient. The light source in Hill's work also encourages this lunar allusion. The ping-pong ball

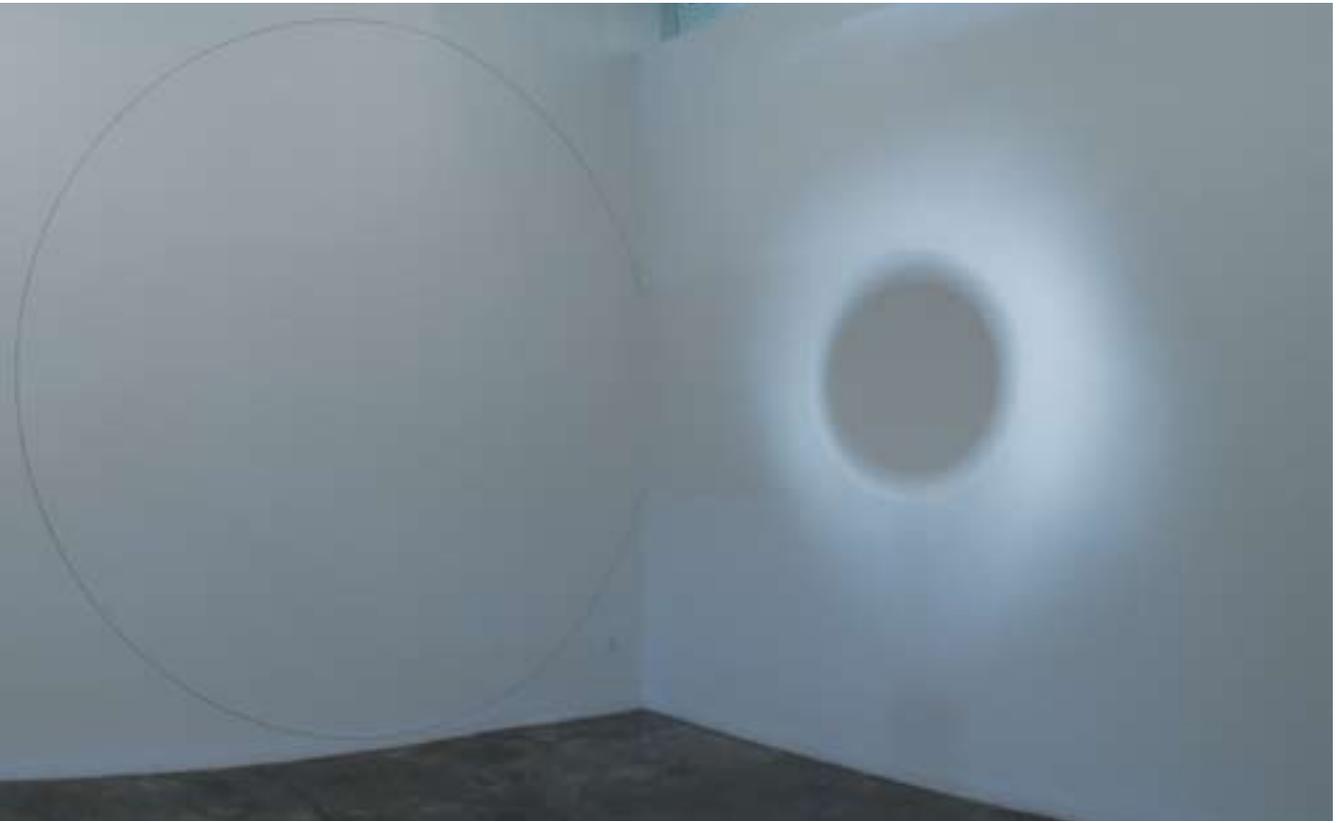


sits aligned with the light source, as if a sun, on a shaft of wire that vibrates gently from the air pressure of the bodies moving through the room. And the shadow reflects this movement, vibrating slightly, almost imperceptibly. Its position in relation to the light reminds one of a high-school science project using ping-pong balls to show the movement of celestial bodies in the creation of an eclipse. But Jake Hill's work is not about an eclipse; it is about perception.

Many gallery goers only saw the shadow, but those who looked closely started to realize the concave alteration to the wall. Many walked up to the wall, needing to put their hand into the void to make sure it was there. It was as if their eyes were not enough to behold the intervention. Hill's intervention requires perception to see it and reflection to process it.

Hill states in his artist statement that

“the installation continues research into achieving scale and form through the use of materials that are absent, vacant, or almost nothing. The work is inspired by drawings that depict making things – like shop sketches or illustrated recipes. Such devices lie, or at least they cannot tell the whole truth. They need faith or a willful misreading to believe that something could exist as a result of them.”



Jake Hill, New Work, photograph Henri Robideau

Hill's earlier works conveyed conceptual ideas in built objects but were of a different order. Using humour and related directly to the body, they employed kinetics and mechanics to work their magic. But since those works he has obtained his Masters in Architecture and this was a deciding influence in *New Work*. While the installation is built to human scale and related to the optical, it also questions on a different level than the previous work by creating its own logic.

The incised circle becomes three dimensional as a lens through the concave form because of the direct proportions delineated by the parallel lines. The shadow in mirroring this intervention heightens this perception. Suddenly the shadow is how we see the installation moving from a void to a presence. This takes us full circle because ultimately Hill's intervention is all about seeing. More to the point though, it is about the logic we bring to seeing. He somehow gets between our eye and our brain and exploits this territory, opening up new logic and possibility.

The installation plays with our expectations. A wall is flat, a shadow a result of light moving past structure. But in Hill's work this logic is circumvented; our old laws of physics no longer apply. We move into a new arena where logic and perception merge and fluctuate. What we see and what we know no longer associate and we enter into a universe of possibility between the real and the imagined.



Kevin McKenzie, Screen, photograph Merle Addison

Screen

Constructed Performative Actions

Kevin McKenzie & Daina Warren

A bright light is set in the corner of the room; long thin shadows are projecting off the figure in sharp angles. He is dressed all in white, t-shirt and heavy work pants. He eyes the minute red laser beam that is situated just above his head on the long, bare wall. The artist begins to work, turning on and turning up the 70's punk music on the player at his side.

He selects a steel metal girder and places it parallel with the red beam of light, then drills the first beam to the wall. Then a second, third, and fourth are added to make a rectangle shape. Next he attaches a piece of drywall to the girders, and smoothes everything over with plaster to create a soft layering of wall against wall. The assistant hands tools and objects as the artist requests them, a suggestion of a surgery taking place, or the raw actions of construction workers? Every detail of the plaster and drywall are inspected before finishing. Next a look occurs between artist and assistant, they locate their gaze upon the raucous object of music. Hammers are selected and as both simultaneously start the final demolition, bits of hard black plastic fly through the air until the silence is once again set upon the room.

During the few weeks of the installation, you project the documentation back upon the "Screen" that was constructed at the performance. I see this as a mirror effect and wondered if you were referencing how the public should observe our own desire to construct and deconstruct public and private spaces?

Kevin: The installation challenges the viewer on many levels and offers an alternate sense of reality. The projected image actually distorts reality and time. Watching the construction of the piece being projected back on to the finished piece may cause confusion, visually and intellectually. Ultimately the "Screen" piece does offer the viewer a glimpse into the surreal.

You have created many types of visual art references to Vancouver's changing urban environments. Can you elaborate on how this piece specifically challenges those ideals?



Kevin McKenzie, Screen, photograph Merle Addison

Kevin: When one lives in a fast-growing urban environment, we witness the constant construction, but it all becomes an illusion. By projecting the performance back on to the finished construction, the viewer is challenged by not quite knowing where it begins or where it ends.

What aspects of the performance do you feel relate to your work within the construction industry?

Kevin: I did work in the construction industry for many years. As a visual artist, I had to find a way to incorporate these skills into my visual art practice. The inner workings of the wall are exposed, facades are created and the repetitive nature of most tasks or occupations are also exposed.

Your previous projects have incorporated influences taken from the Punk scene and I wondered how those influences may have been inscribed in this performance?

Kevin: The punk music was a last-minute element added to give the viewing audience a sense that they were witnessing a spontaneous event. The musical element offered the people at the performance a beginning and an end. The destruction of the portable music player was symbolic, in the same way that the Punk scene broke down and rebelled against the status quo of the time.



Kevin McKenzie, Screen, photograph Merle Addison

What do you envision about the urban landscape after the Olympics and more specifically the Downtown Eastside?

Kevin: The Screen piece does not intentionally comment on the Vancouver 2010 Olympics. It does comment on the growth and progress of any urban environment. The city has made a huge effort to make a glossy facade and cover up the problems attributed to the downtown lower east side. These problems are being masked over, but they will still be there after the Olympics.

McKenzie's Screen performance exposes us as creatures of habit; our daily survival depends upon the continued repetition of mundane tasks, that we call jobs. This project has produced a double negative that warps time and reality. The performance combined with the looped projection doesn't answer any questions, but it also doesn't reveal any answers to our existence.



Wally Dion, *Red Worker*, photograph Henri Robideau

Wally Dion: Red Worker

Tania Willard

“ Modernists assumed that along the way the ethnic groups shed their traditional clothes, life-styles, language and religions as the world became a global village in which we all worked for inter-related corporations, ate similar diets, and laughed at the same comedies on television. Neither the classless society of communism nor the global village of capitalism managed to homogenize the world during the twentieth century. ”

- Jack Weatherford, *Savages and Civilization*, 1994ⁱ

In Wally Dion's portrait series *Red Worker*, exhibited at grunt gallery, the subject becomes monumental, a social realist hero of the working class and a re-signification of the painted portrait. As a Salteaux artist, Dion reclaims portraiture of Aboriginal people by replacing the romantic notions of the *Vanishing Race* as evidenced in Paul Kane's portraiture or the constructions of Edward Curtis photographs with the heroic nature of social realism exalting the marginalized, creating icons of Nationhood not of 'our home and Native land' but of 'our home on native land.'

Paul Kane's sketches and paintings and Edward Curtis' photographs have both been scrutinized for authenticity as well as the *colonial gaze*.ⁱⁱ Kane and Curtis' work is all about cultural signifiers, constructed as a documentary image supposedly untainted by colonial influence or civilization. In Dion's portraits, he removes the visual cues to *Indianness*. Paul Kane's paintings are not paintings of Indians; they are paintings of what we think of as Indians as representations of embedded stereotypes. Wally's portraiture is a response to this romanticism and ideas of evidencing authenticity: his portraits are stripped of their cultural signifiers equalizing them with the 'working class' while suggesting larger narratives and identities of his subjects.



Wally Dion, Pipe Carrier, photograph Henri Robideau

In a solo exhibition of Wally Dion's work at the Mckenzie Gallery, 2008, curator Michelle LaValee states,

“His combinations of portraiture and representations of work encourage us to reconsider portraiture from an Aboriginal context. He wants to reverse the stereotypical images, which many have in their minds of formerly noble savages who are now victims of colonialism. Dion shows heroic labourers, working men and women who happen to be Aboriginal. Dion is part of an active culture and his work is a way of expressing this reality.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Situating the subjects as working people, the signifiers of identity that are expected are interrupted by signifiers of a social realist nature. For example, in *Red Worker* the hammer is treated much the same as the portrait; it is as much a portrait of a hammer as the person holding the hammer. The hammer also becomes here a weapon of liberation, a symbol of constructing new identities rooted not in prescribed visual cues of cultural origin, but in lived experiences, complicated and interwoven.

Another example of this reconstruction of identity can be seen in the subject gaze of *Red Worker*. As opposed to a haunting or stoic gaze into the camera—all for the consumption of the viewer's hungry eyes—in both *Red Worker* and *Pipe Carrier* the gaze is towards the horizon, to the glorious future as it is used in socialist realism to reinforce the promise of the revolution, and here Wally uses this pictorial reference to indicate changing and shifting identities that are concerned not with being consumed, but with carrying and constructing futures.

In *Pipe Carrier* there is a subtle dissonance of subject to title: the subject is in a stark white shirt which could be a uniform or casual dress, but the title of the work suggests a ceremony. The title *Pipe Carrier* suggests a ceremonial reading but you can't actually see the pipe. It both is and is not a ceremony or *Indian peace pipe*, and a pipe as in a an instrument for plumbing and pipe-fitting. Wally is juxtaposing expectation with realism, creating a sense of distrust in the image itself, complicating the desire to consume an image of 'otherness'. His work seems to reflexively suggest that portraits that Curtis and Kane's work provide are treacherous, whereas his portraits have reappropriated a romanticism not of the noble savage, but of the worker, and in this ironic assimilation of social realism the work becomes authentic in its exaltation.

Other works in the grunt gallery exhibition diverge from social realism in their exploration of abstract forms, though there is a similar exploration in terms of the dividing up or gridding of the painting subject and forms. Recalling another portrait

by Dion not in the grunt exhibition, *Epic Indian, 2004*, Wally depicts the landscape as a gridded square, the flat Saskatchewan plane divided as if seen from an aerial view of the Plains. This intersection of parallel and perpendicular can be read in the paintings *Red Worker* and *Pipe Carrier* and can be seen as the jumping-off point in the exploration of the fracturing of the portrait seen in *Skill Saw* and *Nurse Tracy*.

Scaled back as smaller works, *Skill Saw* and *Nurse Tracy* become more immersed in the process of the portrait itself, the shapes and colours that create signification for reading the subject of the portrait. The realism of the former works is broken down to reveal more formal concerns, again interrupting any one reading or attributing of one [cultural] identity to the works. *Nurse Tracy* is also the title of a 2004 large-scale work by Dion more stylistically related to *Pipe Carrier* and *Red Worker*. In the smaller *Nurse Tracy* work, the portrait is less identifiable and identities become increasingly indefinite.

Viewed together, the work suggests a feedback loop interpreting and breaking down of status. In Canada inclusion as “an Indian within the meaning of the Indian Act, chapter 27, Statutes of Canada (1985)”^{iv} is a legislated identification. Wally’s work subverts ideas of measuring authenticity. By appropriating social realist styles, abstraction and pop references, his work actually becomes more credible. It is thought that of the body of Paul Kane’s work—his field work—is the most authentic in his artist tour of the Pacific Northwest. These sketched portraits present their subject as ethnographic documentary, whereas Wally’s depictions of Aboriginal labourers as heroic, despite being a constructed image in and of itself, resonate a stronger sense of identity. Kane’s ethnographic portraits do not have personality; they become evidence, where Dion has created idols. Their one identity has become many, not as a stereotype but as a conduit, an induction of possible identities.

Gazing into the glorious future, Dion’s portraits reverse the trajectory of the *Vanishing Race* to become the *Emerging*.

i *Savages and Civilization*, Jack Weatherford, 1994, Published by Ballantine Books

ii Co-curator, Andrea Kunard, of the exhibition, *Steeling the Gaze: Portraits By Aboriginal Artists*, (Oct. 31 2008- March 22 2009, presented by The Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography at the National Gallery of Canada.) outlines, “The portrait is a European convention which exerts control over the subject.” Steven Loft, curator from the National Gallery adds, “These artists [KC Adams, Carl Beam, Dana Claxton, Thirza Cuthand, Rosalie Favell, Kent Monkman, David Neel, Shelley Niro, Arthur Renwick, Greg Staats, Jeff Thomas and Bear Witness] use their cameras to create a means of cultural self-determination.”

iii Michelle Lavalee, Wally Dion, Mckenzie Art Gallery catalogue, 2008.

iv Certificate of Indian status, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

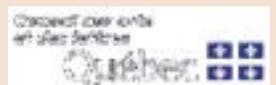


Wally Dion, Nurse Tracy, photograph Henri Robideau



Claude Perreault, *Flora* (detail), 2008, , photograph Henri Robideau

This exhibition made possible with the assistance of:



It Is Marvellous In Our Eyes

Sean George

“Be not ashamed, woman – your privilege encloses the rest, and is the exit of the rest; you are the gates of the body, and you are the gates of the soul. ” Walt Whitman, *I Sing the Body Electric*, 1885

I see artwork all the time. I am inundated by it – I work at an art gallery. To say I have become jaded is an understatement. I am rarely moved in the way I once was...say twenty years ago, with fresh but inexperienced eyes. After seeing the artwork of Claude Perrault, I came home and immediately began to write.

The deceptive simplicity of the term ‘hiding in plain sight’ immediately came to mind. Rather than channelling my written ideas through a cherry-picking of bibliography that reflected scholarly notions, I wanted to write about how this work personally impacted me.

I imagined the artist free from the burden of technology, sitting with a large stack of new gay porn magazines. Scissors in one hand, magazine in the other, cutting the same image from each one over and over again. In retrospect I remember my own stack of gay porn magazines that were always carefully hidden in some available but not obvious place. I viewed each one over and over again. I remember telling a friend if something were to happen to me, make sure to defag my house so my parents would not find this material.

Left ‘hiding in plain sight’, Claude Perrault’s collaged portraits of Elizabeth I—England’s ‘Virgin Queen’—as a quasi patron saint of gay pornography and Hollywood movie fascination are meta-pictures, movie actresses playing the character of a queen who became a caricature of herself, portraits crafted from pornographic pictures of men to create portraits of a famously mythologized woman. Moving back and forth between the ocular, the sexual and the cerebral, Perreault’s portraits represent a complex reign of ideas enhanced in a profoundly subtle and conceptual way.

In 1543 two groundbreaking books were published before Elizabeth ascended the throne in 1558, ruling for 44 years. The first book by Nicolaus Copernicus, the founder of modern astronomy—*On the Revolution of Heavenly Spheres*¹—asserted that the sun, not the earth, is the center of the universe. The second—Andreas Vesalius’s *On the Structure of the Human Body*²—became the first detailed work on anatomy. For me, it is here that Perreault’s conceptual work begins. The artist has created an astronomical revolution – heavenly spheres of homoerotic beauty.



Claude Perreault, *Flora*, 2008, photograph Henri Robideau



Claude Perreault, Bette, 2006, photograph Henri Robideau

Whether the artist consciously conceived his work on this metaphoric level is unlikely. But I do not believe that an artwork is limited by an artist's intent or any singular idea. Viewing the portraits, one vacillates between a detailed and wide view of the art works, zooming in and out, fastening, and then releasing the gaze. This telescopic action, a masturbatory reference, recollects nights alone with gay porn magazines and my fantasies, my imagination and my 'telescope'. There was a time in my early teens when my penis was the centre of my universe. I was always looking for a new star: Rick 'Humungous' Donovan in my teens, Jeff Stryker in my twenties.

Perrault works with the precision of a master surgeon, the consummate eye for detail of a great couturier and the loyalty of a lady in waiting. There is much ceremony in the way Perreault has dressed and addressed each Elizabeth—eight in total. Here is where the artist's conceptual work begins to court and curtsy to the formal composition. Cut after divine cut, layer upon majestic layer of hidden colonies of representational lust and desire. Gay men assembled in sexual acts to create the anatomical structure of the 'Virgin Queen.'

An anatomical study that is as carefully detailed as Vesalius' legendary observations became an auspicious observation point for my contemporary eyes. Are the queens that inhabit Elizabeth's royal attire and facial court liberated from their hidden acts as the viewer's gaze discover their lair? Stepping back, the protective eyes of the Virgin Queen's defiant gaze seem to challenge all who inhabit the high and low court of art, a fortification of fornication.

Elizabeth inherited the monstrous vanity of her Father Henry VIII. She encouraged the ritualized cult that surrounded her as she grew older. Balding, with blackening teeth and wearing thick white pancake makeup to cover her smallpox-scarred face, she was hardly England's rarest beauty. Perrault gives her a facelift far more studied than that of any of the actresses whom he depicts inhabiting the role of the 'Virgin Queen.' In the hands of this artist the medium of collage delivers many messages, commanding attention unlike anything seen in today's world of quick and instant desire.

Collage has a healthy tradition of creating deconstructive disorder. Like the Dadaist Hannah Hoch, collage and appropriation can assert the artist's 'will to power' over an omnipresent world of images. In the hands of postcolonial cutters like Kara Walker and Wangechi Mutu, a new order is being established in this medium.

The tradition of court painter is reborn with scissors in one hand and glue in the other, revealing an eye for digesting lascivious court life. Here the artist's work is worthy of

an Oscar nomination, which Blanchett, Mirren and Dench have all received playing a member of the royal family. He represents them along with five others who have played the role of Elizabeth on screen.

Like Grecian urns, Japanese Shunga prints and the work of Aubrey Beardsley, Perrault's royal portraits sit alongside a rich history of fine and vernacular art where sexuality is openly displayed. One could argue the coming together of vernacular and fine art is what gives this work the subtle tension and rich mosaic of a cultural historical artefact.

Perrault's architectural turn is his clear understanding of colour and form. The 'Virgin Queen' conceals the cocksuckers as if she were Mary presenting but protecting the baby Jesus in the nativity scene of Gaudi's ornamental masterpiece *Sagrada Familia*.

Perrault unites the gloss-and-fluffer world of contemporary gay porn into the realm of the English Elizabethan Renaissance. With every blink of the eye this work challenges the platitudes of virginity, making the viewer subject to questioning sexual experience. Like the pomp and circumstance of court and everyday life, these portraits both celebrate and challenge our understanding of our past and present attitudes.

Upon hearing the news of the death of her half sister Queen Mary, it is said Elizabeth fell to her knees exclaiming in Latin, "This is the doing of the Lord, and it is marvellous in our eyes³." In *On the Revolution of Heavenly Spheres* Copernicus states, "if only we face the facts, as they say, with both eyes open."

Elizabeth held court at grunt gallery in Vancouver from January 9, 2009 until February 14, 2009.

1. Copernicus, Nicolaus: Hawking, Stephen (ed). *On The Revolution of Heavenly Spheres*, 2004, Running Press.

2. Philadelphia Wren, Linnea H. *Perspectives On Western Art, Source Documents And Readings From The Renaissance To The 1970s (volume 2)*, 1994, Westview Press, New York

3. Fraser, Antonia, *The Lives of the Kings and Queens of England*, 1975, Knopf, New York

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Andrea Cooper, Fickle As Posion, photograph Henri Robideau

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Coming To Terms With *Fickle As Poison*

Jeremy Todd

Andrea Cooper's *Fickle As Poison* consists of a 15-minute looped video projection (with sound) accompanied by framed photographs taken during the shoot, printed excerpts of dialogue, and some narration that seems to have been initially intended for inclusion within the video: "At this very moment I am passed out." One actor, Susan Kent, appears throughout, dramatizing the fragmentary perceptions, recollections and proclamations of a woman and man (Mary and Frank) concerning their tumultuous relationship. Each considers the consequences of unrequited love in their lives while ruminating on the essence of the other. Loosely premised on a story told by Cooper's Grandmother about her own Grandmother¹, this relationship apparently culminates in Mary being shot in the face by accident during her wedding day — a traumatic incident that is never explicitly represented within the work.

Cooper explores storytelling and the monologue form in *Fickle As Poison*, focusing on the specificity of her own family's Newfoundland narrative traditions (in which stories were often passed down from generation to generation). Cooper suggests that such tales have an insidious ability to infuse and order the lives of those who hear them — reflecting their needs, wants, fears and longings — while suggesting or promising the possibility of access to some kind of originary meaning or sense of purpose in their lives. *Fickle As Poison* enacts a process of re-writing, re-telling, re-staging and re-invention, playfully exploring and problematizing how meaning is inscribed through narrative.

Evocations of madness and desire abound, providing recurring instances in which the signification of images and language break down. Binary oppositions stop making sense. The performative selves (or embodied clichés) of Mary and Frank become a kind of rhetorical looking glass. Viewers are led to consider their own tenuous conceptions and access to any sense of objective reality.



To engage with this work is to be quite literally “trapped inside the head” of these characters, and yet they are boldly presented as constructions animated by an actor. This actor serves in turn as a doppelganger of the artist (it is no accident that Kent is also a Newfoundlander whose accent and diction are conflated with those of Cooper’s characters). Frank and Mary dominate the actor as much as the actor exposes them as inventions. A character smokes but there is no cigarette. Mary might be at her kitchen table even though she/Kent is sitting on a grassy knoll. The environments they imagine themselves to be in are imposed upon the generically rural outdoor setting that is utilized throughout the video — even as this constant setting demonstrates their absence.

As the actor obscures the latent presence of the artist, the absent artist continues to inhabit the actor. A kind of feedback loop of displaced persona threatens to extend past an imaginary art/life threshold and engulf those who are watching and listening.

In facing Mary or Frank’s gaze and hearing their monologues, viewers become surrogates for an always missing other (Kent? Mary? Cooper? Frank?). In all of these instances, processes of transference are enacted that recall Sigmund Freud’s theorizations of the term in his case study *Dora* (1905) and *The Dynamics of Transference* (1924). Each encounter becomes an exchange of preconditioned projections, in which real or imagined formative types and traumas over-determine perceptions and understandings of all subsequent people and relationships. Figures of erotic interest, friendship or authority become replications/facsimiles of imagined/remembered characters and situations involving real or imagined family histories and formative impressions. It’s as if Cooper wants to proceed in *Fickle As Poison* as though this process is a kind of known or established precondition — an acknowledged state of being with inferred therapeutic utility (particularly within established or



Andrea Cooper, *Fickle As Poison*, photograph Henri Robideau

conventional psychoanalysis) that must be re-evaluated in coming to terms with historical trauma.

The collapse of the real and imagined within *Fickle As Poison*, and by extension the breakdown of individuation between “real” and imagined people and situations (involving the actor Susan Kent, the characters of Frank and Mary, the artist Andrea Cooper, the artist’s family history, Newfoundland, the characters’ imagined environs, the unspecified shooting site and viewers in the gallery space) are beautifully refined by the work’s structural form. Time, space and senses of place are collapsed alongside (and within) these various identities. As is pointed out in the artist’s original working script, the action really takes place within the “minds of the protagonists” and not in the “constructed world” around them. Cooper successfully complicates just who these protagonists are and what is (and isn’t) a constructed world to begin with. Kent/Cooper distinguish between the characters of Mary and Frank through subtle shifts in gesture, hair, make-up and wardrobe.

While the tales that are partially revealed through their fragmentary monologues seem to be of the past, the situations and personas presented onscreen seem somewhat contemporary in setting and costume. Linear sequencing of a “main narrative thread” is confused by all of this in combination with disorienting scenes of the characters (always alone) interacting ambiguously with their environments, camera movement, lighting wash-outs and ambient sound. Viewers are left with a series of vignettes that compound, rendering them somewhat equivalent and interchangeable. Rather than dealing with something happening in sequential time and definable space/place, one must engage a structure of purgatorial stasis and simultaneity — a sense of the eternal or always present.

Self-evident meaning in language, place and gender are repeatedly called into question through alienating enactments of identity. The characters' behaviors are "*performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured through corporeal signs and other discursive means."² Any senses of integral "core" being for the peoples and places within *Fickle As Poison* are reduced to a swirling conglomeration of expressed (and unanswered) desires. Reality becomes a phantasmagoria of surface appearances — of acting out. Dialogue is repeatedly confounding in its descriptive and expository ambiguities (the title of the work alone, taken from the script dialogue, exemplifies this condition).

Cooper gleefully employs the baroque cadence and vocabulary of stereotypical Newfoundland vernacular speech (somewhat already established within popular culture). Consider this monologue passage: "Give me a drinks and I'll drink it. That's my way. I still carries rocks in my pocket so I won't blow over. If I was born on this miserable place better, I woulda tried." What is voiced here is suggestive, dispersed, plural — and constituted through a complex constellation of associations and clichés without distinct and specific origins, sources or conclusions. Meaning is in flux — always deferred. These excerpts from Frank's dialogue, as a metonymic example of the structuring principles of *Fickle As Poison* as a whole, generate a subversively paradoxical state of play that challenges the very possibility of rational integrity.

This strategy doesn't constitute some sort of pre-conscious/ego state or primal libidinality. The character of Frank (as played by Kent standing in for Cooper) enacts a negative transference of possible identities (an always inadequate or fragmented projection), continually problematizing any sense of fixity or categorization beyond cliché. A concrete historical subject remains elusive. This process is reiterated throughout the work, resisting any satisfactory location, confrontation and resolution of the traumatic event at its inaccessible core (Mary being shot in the face by Frank, perhaps accidentally, during her marriage to another man). An understanding of this horrific, violent moment remains suspended. *Fickle As Poison* enables viewers to vicariously experience a desire to breach the unknowable truths of an inherited, inscribing narrative in the construction of self — a desire without end.

1 "Many years ago my grandmother told me the story of her own grandmother being shot on her wedding day. By all accounts it was an accident. In Newfoundland and Irish tradition, a gun is shot off to celebrate the nuptials as a sign of good luck. As the story goes, my great-great-great-grandmother's face was badly scarred as the bullet tore past her face burning a small ditch into the side of her face. The man was supposedly drunk. My grandmother and I always wondered about this man. Who was he? It was said that he tried to shoot her husband on purpose, but missed and badly burned her face. He was supposedly in love with her. The details of the story are now lost, but the framework and my own wonder still remains. The story is a beginning." — from the artist's original working script

2 Please see Judith Butler's well known theorizations of performativity in her book *Gender Trouble* (Routledge: New York) 1990, p. 171-90.



<http://www.beatnation.org>

“Native graffiti art, indigenized iPods©, Inuit break dancing, indigenous-language hip hop and video, Indian bling and urban wear: the roots of hip hop culture and music have been transformed by indigenous cultures and identities into new forms of visual culture and music that echo the realities of Aboriginal people. Beat Nation is about music, it’s about art and it’s about the spirit of us as indigenous peoples and cultures.” (Tania Willard, Co-curator)

Access All Areas: Conversations on Engaged Arts

Edited by Tania Willard, this publication explores the nature of community arts covering topics as wide-ranging as community arts practice itself, this publication takes a critical look at individual practice, multi-culturalism and approaches to working with marginalized communities as well as building knowledge of the roots of community art.



**\$18.00 Available
at www.grunt.ca**



Interactive media project by

Glenn Alteen Curator
Sandra Dametto Interactive Producer
Myron Campbell Designer
Danyul Carmichael Web Programmer
Michael Boyce DVD Author
Elisha Burrows & Kristian Olsen Videographers





Dmitry Strakovsky, ...as if a forest, photograph Henri Robideau

. . . as if a forest:

Dmitry Strakovsky

Demian Petryshyn

“Welcome to . . . as if a forest, an audio experience. To guarantee the ultimate in customer satisfaction this experience is packaged together with a set of easy step-by-step instructions. Please read the instructions carefully before beginning to assemble this project. We are sure that you will be as proud of the end product as we have been to supply it to you.”¹

Upon entering the installation . . . as if a forest, by Dmitry Strakovsky, one is immediately enveloped by the soothing sounds of a forest audioscape. A combination of animal calls and washes of white noise give the impression of being deep inside the maze of a dense, damp forest teeming with life. The effect is reminiscent of new-age CDs one might find in a local organic health food store, on a stand-alone display promising therapeutic relaxation. In contrast, however, the installation is stark.

Ten speakers, each playing one of ten bird calls, frog chirps, or ambient noises that make up the audioscape, are suspended by fishing line throughout the gallery at varying heights. Each of these speakers is playing a separate channel of audio. The audio level and the looping of each track is being controlled by a custom computer interface running on an iMac™ hidden behind the gallery wall. As one moves through the space among the speakers, each sound fades in and out, becoming more or less distinguishable, giving a dimensionality to the illusionary audio space. Each speaker is connected to a black wire; converging into a central trunk, these wires are also suspended and arranged in such a way as to evoke branches or vines, visually echoing the forest sounds that fill the space. A black and white jumble of electronics floats in the otherwise clean, empty space of the gallery. This minimal gesture is broken only by the presence of a monitor on a plinth.

The monitor plays back a recording of the process used to create the audioscape that fills the room. Recorded during the opening of the show, this video shows Strakovsky alternatively reading instructions from a manual on how to make each of the ten sounds, and him making those sounds into his microphone:



Dmitry Strakovsky, ...as if a forest, photograph Henri Robideau

“Step 1: Begin by establishing a foundational sound for your audio environment. Allow your mouth to do all the work, large relaxed movements. Remember to produce occasional clicking.

Step 7: Produce a second set of dominant sounds for your audio environment. Move your tongue to the roof of your mouth, create an “O” shape with your lips, let your tongue roll as you exhale.”*

The manual is written and performed in a disaffected tone, reminiscent of furniture assembly instructions or PA announcements in an airport, a distinct contrast to the organic and illusionary character of the audioscape it is designed to produce. The inclusion of this video in the otherwise minimally populated space of the installation suggests a distinct desire to undermine the auditory and sculptural illusion the rest of the work provides.

At last count there were seven rolls of fishing line at grunt gallery accumulated over the course of several exhibitions. The installation of . . . *as if a forest* accounts for at least two. The use of fishing line as an art material occurs with a notable frequency. Its basic function is to create the illusion of something floating independently in space. There is a seductive pleasure in these illusions. Like a fish, the audience is invited to suspend its disbelief and follow its appetite for the unlikely.

This positions the work in a territory adjacent to that of magic tricks and similar fictions. Like a magic trick, the attraction cannot exist in either the total belief or disbelief of what one is seeing. Unquestionable magic would register as mystical, occupying a dogmatic space and even the best illusion loses its appeal once its mechanics are made evident. The generative pleasure in the trick, the wondering, can exist only so long as the two contradictory beliefs—that it happened and that it is not possible—can be maintained. It forces one to think and imagine.

Throughout this work, Strakovsky strives to present the audience with these dichotomies: the illusion of the forest audioscape, and evidence of it being the product of an electronic media process; the romanticism of the sound of a forest contrasted with the starkness of an instructional manual; fishing line magically suspending the most basic components of the electronic system, wire and speakers. The pleasure of illusion is tempered with a skeptical underscoring of its materiality. At all these points the components of the show are taking on two meanings. On one hand their materiality, on the other, their functioning together as if they were a forest.

Only by functioning with both significations at the forefront simultaneously can the work operate in a generative manner, engendering interpretation and new meaning. If the illusion is totally accepted and the materials ignored, the work begins to read like the new-age relaxation CDs, and if the illusion is totally rejected then no space is created to indulge in the pleasure of the fictional forest. Strakovsky is underscoring the ability of signifiers, like artificially produced forest sounds, to signify both a fiction and the means by which that fiction is produced. Unlike the fish which is fooled and takes the bait, understanding only one possible signification, an ambivalent position—both accepting and rejecting the illusion—is required.

Strakovsky urges the audience to adopt a critical stance, to consider the generative potential of electronic media, not to solely enjoy the soothing sounds or reject the potential of the virtual experience. Contemporary electronic, digital media is consistently producing new and surprising products for popular consumption. From video on demand to social networking, there is a plethora of new things to consume. Strakovsky proposes a mode of viewership, or even a politic, where the consumption of media occurs simultaneously with an understanding of its production. The audience is asked to occupy both the position of consumer, enjoying the pleasure of the illusion, and the position of the skeptic, understanding how the work was made and perhaps even why.

1 Text excerpt from the performance component of . . . *as if a forest* [<http://www.shiftingplanes.org/work.php>]



Dmitry Strakovsky, ...as if a forest, photograph Henri Robideau
brunt magazine 33



Natalie Ball, *Savages*, photograph Henri Robideau

Natalie Ball:

Self Excavation and Auto-Ethnography

Merritt Johnson

Natalie Ball is a descendent of African slaves, English soldiers, and a great, great granddaughter of Kientpaush, also known as Captain Jack who led Modoc resistance during the Modoc War of 1872. Her lineage and a practice of auto-ethnography inform her work as an artist.

With a degree in Ethnic Studies and Indigenous Visual Arts, her work focuses on creating dialogues with racial narratives critical to understanding of both the self and the nation, based on shared experiences and histories. Ball writes, "Because my work is not limited textually, it goes beyond the language of memory to allow for witnessing that does not diminish the past or the present. The past is not the past."

Ball's work addresses issues of authenticity, questioning the role of blood quantum and tribal belonging to practices of ethnographic portraiture. She is working to upend the historical discourses on Aboriginal people that have constructed a limited and inaccurate visual archive that distorts our past experiences and misinforms contemporary expectations of who we are.

The installation of Ball's work in the gallery seems to center on, or perhaps revolve around, the diminutive figures resting on the floor against the rear wall of the gallery – *The Savages*. Ball refers to them as dolls, but find I relate to them as figures the size of toddlers: too big to be played with, but the right size perhaps to play themselves. They are not playing though; they are starkly motionless – frozen in their stuffing. Constructed from various cloth, shells, bits of leather, buttons, and string, they reflexively point to the hand of the artist. Each figure is both body and clothing – there is no separation between the two – so either they are not dressed, with their ornamentation sewn to their skin, or they are their dress. It is in this conflating of clothing and body that Ball succeeds in pointing to the problematic identity signifiers of Native-ness. We are, and have been, identified and categorized through visual measures of authenticity.



Natalie Ball, Dancers Kakols, photograph Henri Robideau

The figures recall John Feodorov's *Totem Teddies*, which have screen-printed faces, but whose bodies share the same treatments as Ball's "dolls." Both echo an unsettling reference to play – play with definition and performance of culture, and the resulting stereotypes of identity. In Ball's *The Savages*, her rough gestures at referencing these visual cues to identity and authenticity become almost brutal in the way the figures are what they signify, nothing more than wearers of crude and generalized badges of identity. They do not have faces. Without joints, they are stiff, and unable to shift and move in their cloth skins. But despite this, they occupy the gallery and feel as though they are loved and precious somehow within the installation. They are both the observers and the observed.

Flanking the space and leading toward the figures are four large painted fiber panels: *Dancers Kakols*, *Incident at Fort Klamath*, *Coley the Giant* and *Boney Fingers*. Each is quilted and exposes both finished seams and the rough hems normally hidden from view on the inside of a quilt. Again, the construction of the work is evident, pointing to its own process of becoming: the cloth has been painted over, moving the images toward collage.

There is something familiar in Ball's quilts. In the handling of the material, and perhaps the gestures, they contain some of the qualities in the work of Jaune Quick-to-See Smith. Though they are less about paint, and the act of painting, they retain a similar energy and approach to Quick-to-See Smith's layering. Sitting between hung images and sculpture, they are stretched across wooden frames on legs. The un-batted quilts reference signs and banners, like those from a protest or rally, rather than bedding. While the images do not carry a didactic protest message, the forms propped against the wall as they are seem as though they could be easily lifted and carried about using the legs as handles, or like signs, planted in the ground to mark a place. Instead, they lean against the wall, slightly precarious.

The leg of one quilt rests on a small reproduction of a U.S. Cavalry uniform jacket from a century ago. Again, the object is child-sized, replete with gold buttons and decorated sleeves; it is flat on the floor with one sleeve partially stuffed. The little jacket is a loaded object in its surroundings, and extremely strange due to its size: it would fit a three-year-old child. And I find I am reluctant to view the whole, or any part of what it represents, as child-sized.

While perhaps there is room to explore the history presented here through play, or the passing of belief systems to children, I cannot help but wish this jacket was larger, at least large enough for an adolescent, so that it could bear up under what it is charged with representing in this context.



Natalie Ball, Coley the Giant and Boney Fingers, photograph Henri Robideau

The history Ball has charged herself with dismantling and exposing for view is in some ways complex and convoluted (as it relates to identity and the genealogical, to individuals and families) and in others ways stark, despite generations of suppression (the repeated historical events that pushed Indigenous people onto smaller and smaller patches of land, and intentional efforts to erode highly developed cultures and social structures). While the figures and the painted quilts are contemporary, the objects placed under the quilts pull the viewer into Ball's historical unraveling. Again, we are engaging with signifiers here – old black and white photos, wrapped rocks in glass jars of water. The objects feel as though they have been intentionally placed, somewhere between offerings, and ballast for the quilts on their frames. In many ways, they are not entirely legible. While they draw us into a more historical consideration of the work, they remain somewhat mysterious, and as they are placed on the floor, this mystery appears intentional on the part of the artist. The jars and photos and rocks are something to be seen, but not too closely, certainly not on a plinth.

The work taken in its entirety as an installation holds together, but loosely enough that each object has its own space. Experienced together, the work wraps the viewer in a history, both foreign and familiar according to one's own experience, but clearly a history that has diverged from what has been taught in grade school, or recounted in film. It is a murkier history, a more convoluted and engaging story. Ball has created her own representation of historical fact, and in doing so poses questions about both historical and contemporary identity and identity signifiers for Native people, and the questions are left hanging in the gallery space for the viewer to engage.



Hip Hop As Indigenous Culture
Online exhibition featuring:

Corey Bulpitt
Bunky EcoHawk
Cheryl L'Hirondelle
Jackson2Bears
Jolene Nenibah Yazzie
Nicholas Galanin
Sonny Assu
and more

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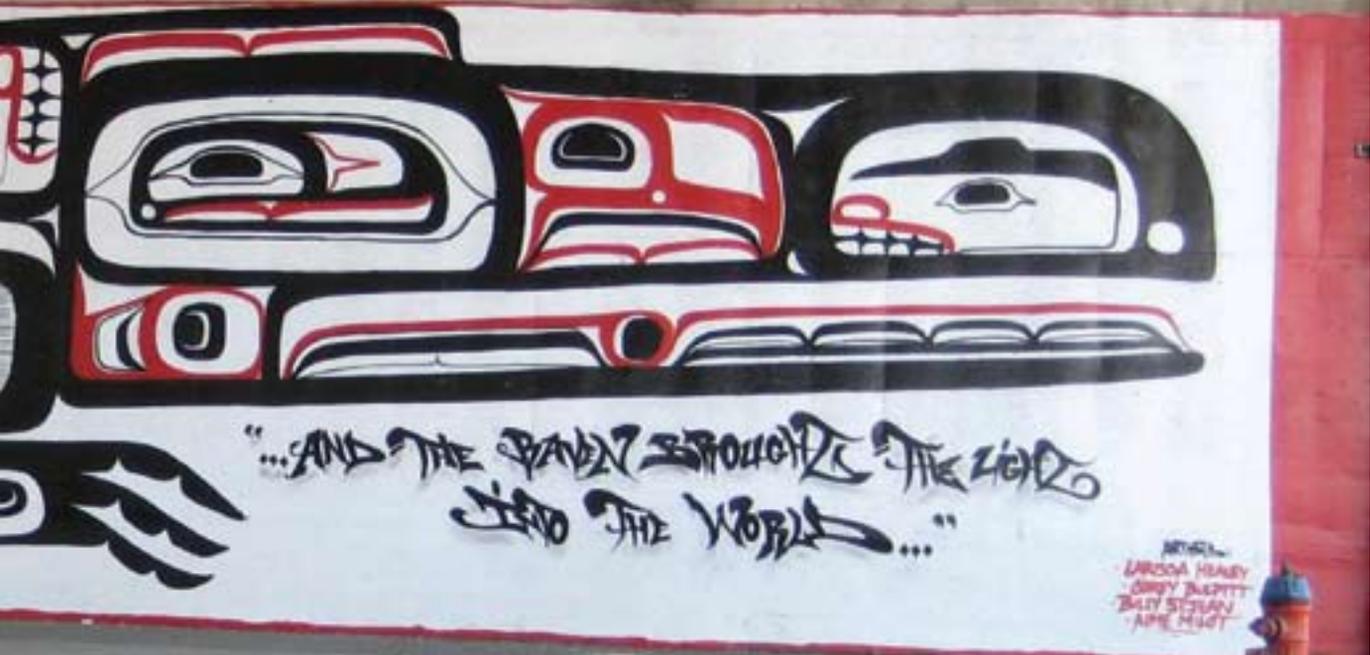
JB The First Lady

Rapsure Risin'

Kinnie Starr

Eekwol and Mils and

Daybi



graffiti mural, Corey Bulpitt lead artist

Curated by Tania Willard and Skeena Reece



BEATNATION.ORG



Cheryl L'Hirondelle, *Songs Because of The Land*, 2008, photograph Henri Robideau?

This exhibition made possible with the assistance of:



Reviewing Because of Songs by Cheryl

Dr. Michael J Boyce

Cheryl L'Hirondelle's *Nikamon Ohci Askiy* (*Songs Because of the Land*) is a mobile communication arts project sponsored by grunt gallery. It is, in various parts, performance art, concept art, an interactive web-based installation, musical composition, musical performance, Compact Disc recording, DVD, web 2.0 exhibition (via YouTube, Twitter, Blogger and MySpace), and spirit quest.

These are some of my reflections on this project. It's her and it's the land. The land is her and us and them and all the other things. The land makes us. We make the land. It is all around us. We are all around it. She sings songs *because* of the land. An inspiration. A celebration. A cry. A plea. A spur. It's a motivation to respond in kind, in kindness, in gratitude, in relationship with 16 values of the Cree (Strength, Humility, Obedience, Respect, Freedom, Love, Hope, Faith, Cleanliness, Kinship, Gratitude, Balance, Protection, Sharing, Good Child Rearing, Happiness). The values are the basis of her living. And her work and her living are the same.

Life is mobile. She is mobile. And the piece is mobile too, both in terms of its technology and its process. And conceptually, the project makes a mobile correspondence between organic and constructed things, tantamount to a correspondence between her and technology. The piece operates as a mobile (shifting) platform for bringing communication (abstractly as interest, desire and potential) and communications technology, (the mechanics of the process and technique of communication, which includes singing, of course), together through an act of communication itself: Song, which is also an act of communion. These things are in relationship; they affect each other. Together, they make the land, and are made by the land, and are thereby joined in the making.

She does not interpret or describe the land; she sings the land. The sounds of the city are around her. They also make the land. She records them, and makes them part of the greater song. She listens to the land. She plays along. And she does it on the go. It's a walkabout. While she goes, she communes—she talks, she sings, she records, she gathers it together and she gives it all away, back to the land, to you, for you to use to sing along with her. You can contribute your sounds too. Together you can make the greater song, which is the land. And it is always different that way. The land is always different. The song is thereby also always different. The song is hers and yours, and everybody

else's too. That is also how it is with songs because of the land. It is a give-away, a gift, a disclosure.

Some songs are only hers to play, but she gives them to you anyway. At the launch of the CD/DVD, she performs the songs, screens the videos, and then gives away the CD/DVD to the audience.

She performs for you two ways: She performs the songs in front of you, and she performs them all around you. And you are part of it. You make the land, and the land makes you. Therefore, songs because of the land, is thereby, songs because of *you*. Therefore she does not just perform *for* you, she performs *because* of you.

The land gives to her and she gives to the land. There is a lot of taking all the time, so she wants to give. She shows gratitude. I am grateful to her too.

Full credits for the project, including the participants, producers, designers, programmers, musicians, staff, acknowledgements, links, and the curatorial statement by grunt gallery Director Glenn Alteen can be found at the website vancouver songlines.ca.

Beat Nation Hip Hop as Indigenous Culture

Publication
available
Jan. 2010

grunt



Cheryl L'Hirondelle
Nikamon Ohci Askiy (songs because of the land)

Cree artist, Cheryl L'Hirondelle sings the landscape on her daily journeys through the streets of Vancouver as part of this grunt commissioned project, currently accessible as a website and CD/DVD. Please contact the grunt gallery for more information.

<http://vancouver songlines.ca>

grunt at a glance

Sean George – Bad Boys: Portraits of Mediated Performance

January 5 - February 6, 2010

An exhibition by Vancouver artist Sean George, featuring 13 portraits of famous men. Created using a variety of archival, historical and contemporary images and information.

Jerk

A grunt + PuSh Festival co-production
Jan 21–24, 2010; VIVO Media Arts Centre,
Post-show talkback Jan 22, led by Glenn Alteen

Gisèle Vienne's *Jerk* is a disturbing and provocative one-man performance based on the chilling text of Dennis Cooper, an author deemed "the most dangerous writer in America" by the Village Voice (New York). It is a story told from the vantage point of David Brooks, the real life accomplice to Texas serial killer Dean Corll who was responsible for the gruesome deaths of more than 25 teenage boys in the early 1970s.

KAMP

A grunt + PuSh Festival co-production
Feb 3–6, 2010; Roundhouse Community Arts and Recreation Centre;
Post-show talkback with Holocaust survivor Feb 4, led by Jane Heyman

An enormous scale model of Auschwitz fills the stage, with thousands of tiny handmade puppets representing the prisoners and their executioners. Through a series of wordless vignettes, these delicate puppets made of clay, wire and cloth reenact the atrocities that took place within the confines of Auschwitz almost 70 years ago.

Altered, Jan Wade and Nhan Nguyen

February 11– March 27, 2010

Altered at Mountainview Cemetery. Access to the site is at 39th and Fraser St. Feb 20, 11am-11pm

Altered is a new project by Vancouver based artists Jan Wade and Nhan Nguyen focusing on altar pieces or shrines which both artists have explored extensively within their work over the past two decades. The project looks at cultural histories around Memorial and how we remember. The project includes screening of two newly commissioned media works at the new celebration Centre at Mountain View Cemetery over the period of the Olympiad and two solo exhibitions at grunt during the Cultural Olympiad.

Signs of Change, Nicole Dextras

(Curated by Curator-in-Residence Tania Willard)
March/April 2010

An exhibition by Vancouver artist Nicole Dextras, curated by Curator-in-Residence Tania Willard. A continuation of an ongoing series of sculptural texts made from ice, placed in the landscape and allowed to melt. The exhibition is comprised of photo documentation of previous text pieces and the presentation of an offsite installation of new melting text works.

Sky Dome Merritt Johnson

(Curated by Curator-in-Residence Tania Willard)
May/June 2010

An exhibition of paintings, drawings and installation elements by Vancouver artist Merritt Johnson that addresses concrete and imagined aspects of landscape through references to vector mapping and indigenous North American methodologies for visually recording information.

Strange Indian, Neil Eustache

June 2010

A new multimedia performance work by Kamloops artist Neil Eustache. A multimedia performance with text, video and live streaming it explores the nature of being Indian in the 21st Century.

