Transcontinental Divide

The Helen Pitt Gallery Artist Run Centre is pleased to be hosting this exhibition in conjunction with Gallery 101 in Ottawa as part of BC Scene and gratefully acknowledges the participation of Raymond Boisjoly, Karina Bergmans, Jennifer Cook, Steven Hubert, Roy Lu, Sara Mameni, Isabelle Pauwels, Minh Nguyen, Stefan Thompson and Ron Tran. The work in this show is tangentially informed by a history of correspondence art, which, from the point of view of Vancouver also includes the notion of the Eternal Network, Robert Filliou's hopeful term for interconnectedness and exchange.

Vancouver has long played an important role in nurturing a diversity of artists and practices through its pioneering Artist Run Centres. International attention through the past few decades has not only made artists and arts professionals elsewhere more aware of us, this attention has also had the effect of making us more aware of activities in the broader world of contemporary art. Our geographical location has often meant that arts professionals working from this city are sooner and perhaps more willingly connected to networks in Europe, Asia, the UK and America than they are to other cities in Canada. Vancouver's community has certainly thrived in negotiating this complex relationship to international exposure.

In considering the taxonomical impulse implicit in the desire to identify and group artists together according to regional identity, the parameters for this exhibition suspend comparative analysis of works that are exemplary of the participating artists' practices. Instead of an emphasis on what these artists usually make, this exhibition gives evidence of disparities in the way they think.

Restricted to the space of three standard letter sized pieces of paper, the five Vancouver artists and five Ottawa artists in this show were asked to provoke, instruct, direct or lead each other as unknown colleagues in the production of a new work. From the outset, the participating artists were informed that both sets of these instructional documents would be displayed in the concurrent exhibitions. The work resultant from the received instructions, however, would be displayed only in the artist's "home" gallery. In other words, should a viewer see this show at Gallery 101 in Ottawa, they would see facsimiles of both the Ottawa and Vancouver artist's instructions, but only what an Ottawa artist has made of a Vancouver artist's ideas.

It is not unusual for artists to work at the behest of a curatorial agenda. I am generally wary of those instances where an artist is engaged in the process of their own instrumentalization. Increasingly at the mercy of bureaucrats and arts professionals, the work that is generally funded, exhibited or collected has often already succeeded in establishing its own cultural legitimacy. The entrepreneurial model in which the artist must repeatedly produce works that are consistent with their artistic identity dominates the cultural field. At best, artists do their work – what they want to do - without giving way under the pressure to fit easily into accepted categories. At worst, the artist makes work that plays directly into the desires of a system that adores consistency and categorization. Experimentation is displaced in favour of career stability.

In this case, the artists have been invited to participate in an exhibition that asks them to perform two tasks.

Firstly, they have been asked to produce an instructional document for an artist who is unknown to them. These documents constitute the principal contribution of each artist to this show and they vary in their approach and authoritativeness. Some are poetic, setting impossible or loosely defined tasks. Others are almost excessively step-by-step and diagrammatical. It is typical in the working methodologies of many contemporary artists for the idea of an artwork to be sketched out before entering into the production stage. Typically, such instructions are passed on to a craftsperson or labourer who is usually expected to execute them exactingly if not unquestioningly. (Consider the history of minimalist sculpture and the many instances in which industrial manufacture was absolutely essential to the materialization of an artist's idea.)

The second role these artists have taken on is to evaluate and in some sense rescue each idea from the unadulterated labour of its execution. Granted the autonomy to reject, salvage, interpret or submit to the received instructions, what is finally produced in either exhibition space is not the result of co-operative collaboration. In fact, these pairings might more accurately be described as a form of criticism. The discrepancy between each set of instructional documents and the works they have spurred is an indication of the points of departure each artist has taken in making the idea align with their own artmaking process. The space between thought and materialization (or thinker and maker) allows each artist the room to negotiate a response that respectfully engages with what they've been asked to do.

It has not been our desire to force collaborations or correspondence upon incongruous subjects. The only communication we've facilitated between the artists as a component of this exhibition has been the transmission of their instructional documents. Neither have we wanted to flatten difference through idealistic unities. If distinct regional tendencies are visible in the approaches these artists have taken, then a space had to be made for the individuals participating in this show to misunderstand and reinterpret one another. We could not assume that these artists share much in common, apart from the need to approach artmaking exactly as they believe they should.

We would like to thank all participating artists for generously and perhaps nervously relinquishing some authorial control while simultaneously working so thoughtfully through this project. The complex responses they have contributed help to sustain rather than resolve the questions engendered by the conceptual parameters of this exhibition.

Paul Kajander
Director/Curator

Raymond Boisjoly works in Vancouver, BC. He has participated in recent group exhibitions at the Vancouver Art Gallery (Vancouver), Crawl Space Gallery (Seattle), the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery (Vancouver) and Organ Gallery (Chongqing, China). He has also published visual and written work in Pyramid Power and Woo. Raymond studied at The University of British Columbia and Emily Carr Institute.

Steven Hubert is a Kelowna-born Vancouver-based artist who graduated from Emily Carr Institute in 2007. Bearing the imprint of previous study in English literature, his work in painting, sculpture, drawing, photography, and video takes cues from poetics with a backsplash of history that is partly logical, partly mystical, and perforated by alternating bouts of the simple and the complex. It is often absurdly expansionistic and lacks clarity due to its chronic and programmatic mistaking of one idea for another, for example. He has exhibited at CSA Space, Or Gallery, Helen Pitt Gallery, Shudder Gallery, LES gallery, Eyelevel Gallery (Halifax), Jeffrey Boone Gallery, and has upcoming shows at Café for Contemporary Art (North Vancouver), Ministry of Casual Living (Victoria), and 2of2 Gallery (Toronto). His work has appeared in Pyramid Power and The Fillip Review. He was also the recipient of the 2008 Painting on The Edge grand prize.

Sara Mameni Born 29/03/1977; debts $50000 (and growing); 2008 tax return $734.56; debit card # 5872971307****; moving to San Diego in September.

Born in West Flanders, Belgium, ***Isabelle Pauwels*** lives and works in Vancouver, BC. She studied sculpture at Emily Carr University in Vancouver, and completed her graduate studies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago where she integrated video into her practice. Recently she has shown at Blackwood Gallery, Mississauga; Artspeak, Vancouver; and Presentation House Gallery in North Vancouver.

Ron Tran was born in Saigon, Vietnam and currently lives and works in Vancouver, BC. He graduated from Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in 2004 and has exhibited at Lawrence Eng Gallery, Vancouver; Neon Gallery, Sweden; Artspeak, Vancouver; the Seattle Art Museum; Western Front, Vancouver; Norwich Gallery, England; Charles H. Scott Gallery, Vancouver; The Power Plant, Toronto; Saidye Bronfman Centre, Montreal, PQ.

HELEN PITT GALLERY ARTIST RUN CENTRE

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Images courtesy of Raymond Boisjoly and Isabelle Pauwels.

Artist Run Centre
Established 1975

Tuesday to Saturday 12 to 5pm
Wednesdays 1 to 7pm

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