

ARTEN

BADER • ENRIGHT

Curated by
Edward Bader

Text by
Robert Enright

ARTery

Curated by Edward Bader

JANUARY 2008 100 AVENUE GRANDE PRAIRIE ALBERTA CANADA JAN

CAMPBELL MICHAEL CAMPBELL MICHAEL CAMPBELL MICHAEL CAMPBELL M

HOFFOS DAVID HOFFOS DAVID HOFFOS DAVID HOFFOS DAVID HOFFOS DA

SKVIRSKY KARINA AGUILERA SKVIRSKY KARINA AGUILERA KARINA AGU

LEXIER MICAH LEXIER MICAH LEXIER MICAH LEXIER MICAH LEXIER MIC

BÖK CHRISTIAN BÖK CHRISTIAN BÖK CHRISTIAN BÖK CHRISTIAN BÖ

WELLS C. WELLS C. WELLS C. WELLS C. WELLS C. WELLS C. WELLS C. W

WILL JOHN WILL JOHN WILL JOHN WILL JOHN WILL JOHN WILL JOHN JOH

TROAKE ANNE TROAKE ANNE TROAKE ANNE TROAKE ANNE TROAKE ANN

VIOLA BILL VIOLA BILL VIOLA BILL VIOLA BILL VIOLA BILL VIOLA BIL

ARTery

CATALOGUE OF AN EXHIBITION

100th Avenue, Grande Prairie, Alberta, Canada,
January 4 - 31, 2008

The Prairie Gallery Society gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the City of Grande Prairie, the Province of Alberta through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, the Canada Council for the Arts, our members, private and corporate sponsors.

CURATORIAL STATEMENT

Ed Bader

ESSAY AND INTERVIEWS

Robert Enright

ARTISTS

Michael Campbell, David Hoffos,
Karina Aguilera Skvirsky, Micah Lexier, Christian Bök,
C. Wells, John Will, Anne Troake, Bill Viola

PHOTOGRAPHY

Olivia Kachman

COVER PHOTO & CATALOGUE DESIGN

Rob Swanston

ISBN. 978-0-9780646-1-7

V. Title. ND248.3658214 2008 698.21 C2008-9568

PRINTED IN CANADA

Menzies Printers

Grande Prairie, Alberta, Canada

COPYRIGHT

2008 The Prairie Art Gallery



Installation view of ARTery projected on building at 99th Avenue

CURATORIAL STATEMENT

The ARTerY project uses art as a means to revitalize the heart of the city of Grande Prairie during the bleakest darkest month of the year. Since the site of the exhibition is along 100 Avenue, a major thoroughfare, commuters are able to experience a number of works from their vehicles, reaching a potential audience that normally does not visit art galleries. The pieces selected for the exhibition clearly differentiate themselves from the realm of commercial street advertising in terms of their imagery and content. Due to its latitude, Grande Prairie experiences long hours of night. Therefore video and text based works were chosen their ability to engage the viewer quickly, as they will be glimpsed under lowlight often for only the briefest of moments.

The ARTerY project draws upon the various meanings of the word "artery" as a channel for the flow of life, goods and ideas. The word refers to the system of vessels by which blood is conveyed from the heart to all parts of the body. In 1805 Thomas Jefferson used the term to describe the major rivers and roadways used to transport goods and services throughout the continent of North America. The Oxford English Dictionary defines "artery" as "a main channel in a ramifying system of communication". The works selected for this exhibition respond to one or all of the various definitions of the word "artery". **MICHAEL CAMPBELL'S**, *I want to know who you'd be in the best of all possible worlds*, 2000, evocative image of a lone canoe aflame, floating down a northern river, refers to the original modes of transport in North West Alberta and takes on ceremonial and mystical connotations associated with journeys. **C. WELL'S**, *41°53'N12°30'E / 41°58'N82°30'W (WHITE ROMA / WHITE PELEE)*, 2006, juxtaposes two roadways; one winding through the verdant green of Point Pelee Park, Ontario while the second is a film clip from Federico Fellini's film ROMA. In the first instance the viewer travels to the heart of nature, while in the second case towards the Roman Coliseum, the symbolic heart of Western European civilization. Duality is found in **MICAH LEXIER AND CHRISTIAN BÖK'S**, *Two Equal Texts*, 2007. Lexier and Bök explore the communicative intricacies and expressive possibilities of language. **JOHN WILL'S**, *India Moves*, 1992, records the teeming street life of Nasik, India, during the Kumbha Mela festival and provides a stark contrast to Grande Prairie's urban winter landscape.

KARINA AGUILERA SKVIRSKY'S, *Margaret*, 2003, refers to the various Diasporas that have unfolded throughout human history, as people endeavor to escape war, oppression and poverty. The lone figure of the Kenyan runner Margaret Okayo within an ethereal landscape, explores the contradictory representations of women of colour both within the public spectacle of sports and our collective memory of history. On a more playful note, **DAVID HOFFOS'** *Disaster*, 2000, while poking fun at the excesses of Hollywood's spectaculars shows how vulnerable our contemporary transportation systems are to the forces of nature. This ominous tone of journeys undertaken but not completed is reflected in **ANNE TROAKE'S** dreamlike video, *The Sinking*, 1997. **BILL VIOLA'S** *Angel's Gate*, 1989, provides closure to the exhibition as the viewer is confronted a succession of individual images focusing on mortality and transcendence. All of the works chosen for this exhibition are intended to provoke thought about personal, political and metaphysical concerns surrounding the numerous voyages we embark upon in our lives.

Foremost, I would like to thank all the artists who agreed to exhibit their work. I would like to acknowledge the support of the Prairie Art Gallery and in particular Robert Steven, Director, and his very capable staff in helping make this project a reality. I wish to thank the various businesses for allowing the use of their storefront windows as a venue for the exhibition. Ideas do not happen in a vacuum and I would like to thank Tina Martel and Ken Housego, coordinators of Grande Prairie Regional College's Prairie North Residency, 2007 for the time to dream.

Edward Bader, 2007



Edward Bader
Michael Campbell Installation
Urban Home

The image features two vertical dashed lines, one on the left and one on the right, composed of short, light gray rectangular segments. These lines are positioned symmetrically around the central text.

THE
EXHIBITION

Michael Campbell



I want to know who you'd be in the best of all worlds, 2000
Video, 2:52 minutes
Photo courtesy of the artist

C. Wells



41°53'N12°30'E / 41°58'N82°30'W (WHITE ROMA / WHITE PELEE), 2006.
Video, 8:00 minutes
Photo courtesy of the artist



Installation
Urban Home



Installation
Bama Furniture

Micah Lexier with Christian Bök

Bill Viola

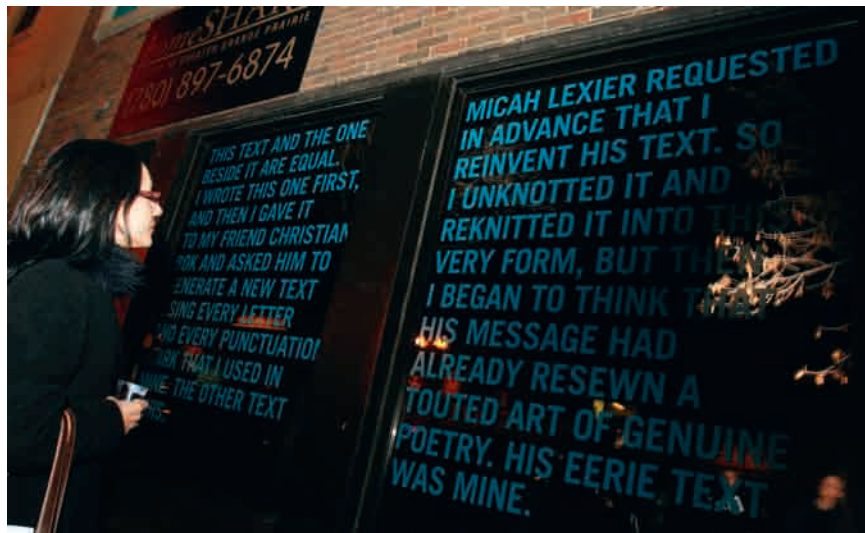
THIS TEXT AND THE ONE
BESIDE IT ARE EQUAL.
I WROTE THIS ONE FIRST,
AND THEN I GAVE IT
TO MY FRIEND CHRISTIAN
BÖK AND ASKED HIM TO
GENERATE A NEW TEXT
USING EVERY LETTER
AND EVERY PUNCTUATION
MARK THAT I USED IN
MINE. THE OTHER TEXT
IS HIS.

MICAH LEXIER REQUESTED
IN ADVANCE THAT I
REINVENT HIS TEXT. SO
I UNKNOTTED IT AND
REKNITTED IT INTO THIS
VERY FORM, BUT THEN
I BEGAN TO THINK THAT
HIS MESSAGE HAD
ALREADY RESEWN A
TOUTED ART OF GENUINE
POETRY. HIS EERIE TEXT
WAS MINE.

Two Equal Texts, 2007
Text courtesy of the artist



Angel's Gate, 1989
Videotape, colour, stereo sound; 4:48 minutes
Photo: Kira Perov



Installation
Tim Horton's Offices



Installation
Angel's Gate, 1989

Anne Troake



The Sinking, 1997
Photo courtesy of the artist

John Will



India Moves, 1992
Photo courtesy of the artist



Installation
Picture Perfect



Installation
Midwest Furniture Rentals

Karina Aguilera Skvirsky



Margaret, 2003
Video, 3:30 minutes
Photo courtesy of the artist

David Hoffos



Disaster, 2000
Photo courtesy of the artist



Installation
Curry's Jewellers



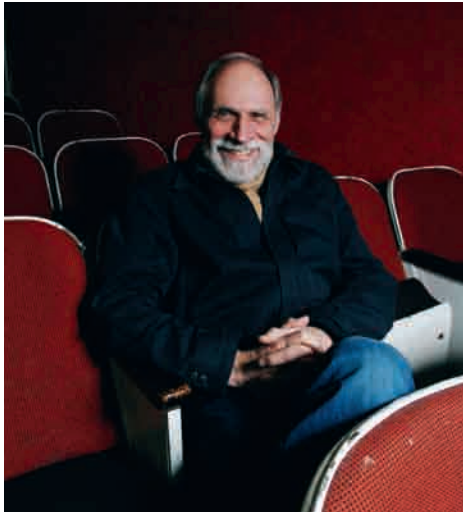
Installation
Wonderland Toy and Hobby



ARTERIALITY

Channeling
Body,
Space
and
Mind

ROBERT ENRIGHT



I have been musing on the idea of the artery. The pastime is understandable in thinking about an art exhibition named ARTery, organized in Grande Prairie, Alberta, a city which is a central point of passage from the South to the North and on a street that, if you follow it for 130 km, will lead you to Dawson Creek, Mile Zero on the Alaska Highway. The notion here is one of transport and communication, the highway as an artery connecting one place to another, a channel through which goods and ideas can be disseminated.

The artery also has corporeal importance; it is a muscular blood vessel that carries oxygenated blood away from the heart to the rest of the body. Arteries have thick, elastic walls and they can withstand eight times more pressure than veins. The

“The notion here is one of transport and communication, the highway as an artery connecting one place to another, a channel through which goods and ideas can be disseminated.”

artery, then, is the resilient transporter of the body's lifeblood. As it is with our physical selves, so it goes with our aesthetic selves: ARTery is conceived by Ed Bader, the Guest

Curator of the exhibition, as a functional way to circulate art, in his estimation a thing necessary to our physical and psychic health. “The core idea of the project,” he says, “is how art and creative forces can assist in revitalizing the heart of the city during the bleakest, coldest months of winter.” The warm heart in the centre of the frigid environment; you can appreciate the rich line of investigation contained in this oppositional nature.

Taken together, the two meanings of the word Bader nominates in the name of his exhibition (the highway and the blood vessel) combine external and internal dimensions; they operate both on the inside and the outside. Bader chose eight artists whose work he presented in the windows of local businesses, playing along the line where inside spaces open up to outside perceptions. You could see images or sequences from the videos included in ARTery as you drove along 100 Avenue, the one-way street that runs east to west through the centre of Grande Prairie, but to fully appreciate them, you

would either have to stop moving, or get out of your vehicle and stand on the street. That decision, in the January heart of a Northern Alberta winter, would not be without consequences. Bader is fully aware of this and, in one sense, has acted like a benign contrarian. He takes the coldest month of the year and picks a number of exhibition locations stretched along the city's main thoroughfare as a way of showing video, an art form best comprehended over time and from a fixed vantage point.

To be sure, there are a number of ways in which the installation of ARTery resists the habitual and reverses the expectant. Bader places the videos – and one text piece – in storefronts, but their presence is neither about advertising nor sales. This is an especially interesting choice because Grande Prairie is the location of a number of big box stores and functions as a service centre for a wide area, including northeastern British Columbia. On weekends the streets of the city are packed with cars bearing license

“On weekends the streets of the city are packed with cars bearing license plates from other provinces and territories, and thousands of visitors will drive to Grande Prairie to shop.”

plates from other provinces and territories, and thousands of visitors will drive to Grande Prairie to shop.

In that environment showing The Burning Canoe, a video by Michael

Campbell in the window of Urban Home, a local furniture store, is a subtle intervention. Campbell's video, which was initially conceived as part of a larger mixed media installation called, I want to know who you'd be in the best of all possible worlds (2001), shows an empty canoe drifting on the placid surface of Lake Muskoka. The drama comes not from where the boat is but from what is happening to it. For the entire length of the short video (it is 2:52 seconds long) the canoe is on fire.

What does it mean to set a canoe, a symbol of our agreeably tamed wilderness, on fire? The canoe belonging to Pierre Elliott Trudeau was recently on exhibition at the Royal Ontario Museum, a tribute to a public hero and his private passion, and the unexplained death of Tom Thomson continues to attract the attention of Canadian curators and artists, who worry it like an old wound. So the canoe is a potent object, a container for the drama of political, economic and cultural nation-building. But by drifting aimlessly on the lake, Campbell's canoe obliges us to ask a series of perplexing questions: what is the boat doing there; why is there no one in it; was there someone in it; where are they now; why is it on fire; who set it on fire? And so it goes. It's problematic enough to have these questions asked about an object so freighted with historical significance. But to leave those questions unanswered, and to further complicate the mystery, is to frustrate the arterial flow of information, commerce and recreation that is the canoe's natural legacy.

At one point the camera moves in quite close, so much so that the bow and stern are out of frame. Suddenly, it's as if Peter Doig had been brought in as cinematographer, and the resulting narrative implications are not reassuring. In some of his most famous paintings, Doig has conflated the canoe and horror, and Campbell's mysteriously empty vessel begins to assume some of that same tone. We are even practically uneasy; you hear the crisp crackle of the fire in the centre of the canoe and wonder why, given all that noise and combustion, the boat doesn't burn and sink? In its meandering journey across the lake, it seems indestructible, and vaguely diabolical.

Another of the videos in ARtery messes with the flow of orderly circulation that is the exhibition's point of departure. David Hoffos focuses on unraveling our dependence on modes of transportation and communication. He simply puts more fuel and raises the temperature on the kind of fire Michael Campbell has already

"We are even practically uneasy; you hear the crisp crackle of the fire in the centre of the canoe and wonder why, given all that noise and combustion, the boat doesn't burn and sink?."

lit. Hoffos's wonderfully amusing three-minute long video, *Disaster* (2000), is assembled from footage taken for a larger installation called

"Catastrophe", in which a model town is subjected to the kind of destruction, from wild nature and failed technology, that characterized disaster films in the 1970s. The town has stately homes, children's rides and an interior lake, all of which gets thoroughly toppled, flipped or blown apart. Disaster is Airport meets Earthquake in the land of Fisher-Price. It's playtime in a nursery where the kids have a wicked, dark and destructive sense of humour. (Ed Bader shared some of that mischief in his choice for the location of the Hoffos video. It was in the window of Wonderland Toy and Hobby). "Mommy, mommy, how much is that plane crash in the window?"

There is something wonderful about watching Disaster. It is a making of the making sequence, where we see how the artist and his crew stage the tricks that will supply the content for the installation. The fact that the filming of the overall catastrophe includes a minor disaster (one of the crew is hit by a fragment from an exploding bus and as a result throws her meteorite further into the set than was planned) is an accident fortunate for the film, if not for the crew member. But near the end of the video, Hoffos cuts from the raw footage of the filming to a short sequence of the film itself and any goofiness and awkwardness evaporates. The change is transfixing. The comic, post-apocalyptic landscape suddenly takes on a more ominous look; the toys are menacing and disaster gears down and gets back on track. One of the ironies, not lost on the population of Grande

Prairie or the gallery staff, is that Hoffos's piece was a reminder of the main reason why ARtery took the form of a series of street interventions and not a gallery exhibition. In March of last year the roof of the Prairie Art Gallery collapsed, causing severe damage, and necessitated a new strategy on the part of the art institution if it was going to sustain its traditional audience and attract a new one. Since the audience had lost the location for seeing art, the gallery would take the art to the audience. Director Robert Steven decided to hit the streets; in a manner of speaking, he made the determination to traffic in art.

Another pair of artists use the road as the artery through which they can inquire into very different kinds of human measurement and movement. John Will's *India Moves* (1992) and C. Wells's 41°53'N12°30'E / 41°58'N82°30'W (White Roma/ White Pelee), 2006 both deal with the idea of transcultural journeying. The former is a literal transit; the latter a conceptual one.

John Will, one of Alberta's senior artists, has been working for over 40 years in a variety of media, including painting, printmaking, photography and performance. His video in ARtery came out of a trip to India where he was the camera operator for a film being made on Ganesh, the elephant god. *India Moves* was shot independently around two connected events: the Kumbh Mela Festival in 1991 and a concert in Puna featuring Bismillah Kahn, a musician regarded as an Indian national

"Since the audience had lost the location for seeing art, the gallery would take the art to the audience. Director Robert Steven decided to hit the streets; in a manner of speaking, he made the determination to traffic in art."

treasure. Will shifts our perspective as he moves from the concert performance to the energized street life as crowds of pilgrims on their way to the Festival pass by the window of his car. The difference between the colour, the feeling of heat and the human density in India is in stark contrast to what we find in Canada. *India Moves* was shown in the dead of winter, in a window that looked onto a comparatively thinly populated street. Will shot the majority of his video from the window of his car; anyone watching what he brought back from India 15 years ago will see it, as they quickly pass by, from the window of their car.

The structure of the video is simple; we see either images from the concert, from the street, or framed sequences from the concert superimposed over a portion of the street scenes. The opening gives you a sense of the video's visual rhythm; we see Kahn playing his shehnai in a wide shot, he is quietly captivating as he smiles at the percussionist to his left, and then the camera pushes in on his solo. He picks up the tempo and we see – and hear – how expressive a player he is. Then the camera pulls back on the ensemble and that image stays in a rectangular

box at the top of the screen, at which point the video cuts to shots of people in the street, and the two lines of video run concurrently. The movement is deceptive because what looks like an increase in the scale of the rectangular frame is really the camera moving in on a musician on stage. He becomes larger but the space available to the concert footage, of which he is a part, remains constant. It turns out the movement in the title of the video isn't just the migration of crowds of people but the migration of our perception.

John Will is on a cultural journey from which he documents actual events. C. Wells sets himself on a combined pragmatic and conceptual journey that is less found than constructed. The pragmatic side is concerned with actually painting the line markers on the highway near Point Pelee National Park, the most southern point in Canada. It is the most recent performance in the "Line Marker Project", which he began in 1996. Line markers are part of a highway code which Wells uses to make connections between spatial organization, social convention and painterly practice. In this instance, he wanted to codify the relationship between Point Pelee and Rome, based on their shared latitude. He finds a 15 minute long sequence in Fellini's 1972 masterpiece, Roma (he edits it down to 2 minutes) in which the motorcyclists roar through Rome, ending up at the Colosseum in the course of passing by the same ladder line schematic that Wells is painting in Point Pelee. Wells had line

marker paint shipped in from Rome so that the "whiteness" in both places named in his performance would be synchronic. The poetic idea that buttresses the conceptual detailing

"Line markers are part of a highway code which Wells uses to make connections between spatial organization, social convention and painterly practice."

of Wells's piece is that if he kept painting the lines from Point Pelee, it would eventually take him to Rome. There is in this conceit a radical leveling out, a kind of willed democratization: if all roads lead to Rome, then it follows that all roads lead equally to Point Pelee. The centre, to re-apply Northrop Frye, is where you are.

Anne Troake, a choreographer and filmmaker from Newfoundland, and Karina Aguilera Skvirsky, a photographer, video artist and curator from New York, find their respective centres in narrative. Troake's *The Sinking: Stories of Cold Water* (1997), is a re-adaptation of her choreography combined with narratives told by her grandmother about a culture that for hundreds of years "has been eking life out of a sense of death", and for whom the sea is both sustaining and treacherous. *The Sinking* employs various kinds of footage, still images of a shipwreck (an etching from Troake's own kitchen), an actual rusted ship and marine paraphernalia that ends up as flotsam and jetsam scattered along the shoreline, and

an underwater dance sequence, performed in a diving tank in which Troake herself plays a major role. What you never lose sight of is that the social dance we observe takes place underwater and that regardless of how convincing is the costuming, or how impressive their breath control, the actor/dancer/swimmers have to get to the surface or they'll drown. It adds a certain edge to watching the performance. In this instance, art is well advised not to imitate life. The story in *The Sinking* is circuitous – it seems more like a number of incidents that are tonally rather than logically connected – but Troake has a fine instinct for the lyric. Lace doilies are suspended like jelly fish, or sea anemone, and a larger lace shawl undulates through the water like a delicate sting ray. Even amongst all this transforming beauty, the story told in *The Sinking* is, inescapably, a cautionary one. The last sequence is a man seen underwater; from this vantage point his head is invisible, so that he seems

"It's so much a part of who we are. The essence of what I was looking for was to assimilate that loss with generosity and grace and dignity."

to be without one. This image reverses the graphic stills from the beginning of the video, in which all we could see were the heads of drowning seamen just before their bodies pulled them below the ocean's surface. But Troake is essentially an optimist. "There's not a family that hasn't lost someone to the North

Atlantic," she says. "It's so much a part of who we are. The essence of what I was looking for was to assimilate that loss with generosity and grace and dignity."

In Margaret (2003), Karina Aguilera Skvirsky's three and a half minute long video of Kenyan Margaret Okayo's victory run in the 2001 New York City Marathon, grace and dignity are everywhere in evidence. Skvirsky, a runner herself, crafts the run from 60 seconds of video footage taken from television. She literally pieces the run together, at one point the Kenyan was so far ahead of the field that she and the spectators were the only figures in the frame. Skvirsky selected Okayo out, frame by frame, and artfully blurred the background. "It took six months but I did change what was there in this painstaking way."

If Troake's story took on the shine of a deeply felt local pride, Skvirsky's visual narrative is coloured by gender and race. "I'm playing with politics", she says, "I'm making her the woman who conquered Manhattan." Skvirsky has a South African woman actor read from the writings of Adriaen van der Donck, a 17th century Dutch explorer. In the video, condescension and racism are built into his comments about the aboriginal population he finds in Manhattan. We hear that "the natives are broad across the shoulders and well-adapted to travel on foot in dragging heavy burdens." What we see pointedly contradicts his observations: a lithe, exquisitely conditioned woman assuming physical and

metaphoric control of Manhattan. If Paul Klee defines drawing as taking a line for a walk, then she takes a video line for a run, but her passage is mediated by the disquieting

"It doesn't matter where you come from or what your race or background is, if you end up with the power, you get to write the history."

content of the Dutchman's descriptions; what is most disturbing is we know we are hearing the voice of power in these opinions and judgments, all of which sound ridiculous today. We see her in Skvirsky's altered video, at times radiant with light, and hear the narrator reading the Dutchman's words, "Both men and women are utterly unchaste and shamelessly promiscuous, which is the cause of the men changing their wives and women changing husbands." Since she herself comes from a rich mix of cultural backgrounds, Skvirsky is sensitive to the traps of history. With a mother from Ecuador and a Jewish father, she knows about control and how it can be misapplied. "It doesn't matter where you come from or what your race or background is, if you end up with the power, you get to write the history." Skvirsky is in the process of becoming an artful historian.

In his text-based collaboration with the Calgary poet Christian Bök, Toronto artist Micah Lexier took advantage of the double set of windows at the Tim Horton offices on 100 Avenue. The piece, called Two Equal Texts (2007), is an

anagram in which Bök redeploys Lexier's generating text. Lexier regarded the side by side windows as the pages of an open book. "THIS TEXT AND THE ONE BESIDE IT ARE EQUAL", is the first line of his original, and Bök responds with, "MICAH LEXIER REQUESTED IN ADVANCE THAT I REINVENT HIS TEXT." The point of an anagram is to use exactly the same letters and punctuation marks, which Bök (whose name is appositely pronounced "book") is able to do. His message is different from Lexier's but the components are identical. There is something uncanny about the doubling; in only three sentences Bök not only replies in a manner consistent with Lexier's request, but he also introduces and sustains a sewing metaphor – "I UNKNOTTED IT AND REKNITTED IT INTO THIS VERY FORM" and "HIS MESSAGE HAD ALREADY RESEWN" - that neatly weaves one text into the other. When Bök records in his concluding line that, "HIS EERIE TEXT WAS MINE", our acceptance of the eeriness of the achievement is unquestionable. In Two Equal Texts, Lexier and Bök explore the channels of communication and take the viewer/reader on a journey through language and its anagrammatic possibilities. They show us change without change, or put another way, they re-arrange our understanding of the same things differently.

All arteries are connecting points in a journey or process. Bill Viola's videotape called Angel's Gate (1989) traces the inexplicable transition from one state of existence to another.

In a tape that lasts just under five minutes, he is able to present the entire eschatological spectrum (from life to death) through a series of images and incidents that focus on "mortality, decay and disintegration"; a building being demolished, an extinguished candle, a flayed animal, a piece of fruit falling from the branch of a tree. There are moments of untrammelled beauty in the video, the underwater scenes are especially compelling (Viola regards the overwater-underwater state as "one of the primary dualities") and the scream of a Red-Tailed Hawk tied to a rock (you think of the animal as some form of feathery Prometheus) is startling in its speed and intense intensity. That sound is paralleled by the first cry of a child being born. The birth comes at a pivotal point in the trajectory of the video; from this juncture it moves in the direction of what amounts to a bodily dematerialization (Viola describes his intention as "lighting the dim border between memory and oblivion with a sort of universal light"). The location is the loading dock at what was once the San Pedro Naval Base and is now a being used for other purposes. We experience the camera's movement, and therefore the shift in our own perception, towards a light that intensifies to the point where it is blinding and fills the entire frame. Viola encapsulates this final shot as being about "pure light and the lack of any kind of materiality". It puts you in mind of Emily Dickinson's description of death as the "White Exploit". Her recognition that, rather than being a dark traversing,

the passage into death involves overwhelming whiteness, was especially prescient for someone living in the 19th century. Viola takes us to the threshold of the most

"In a tape that lasts just under five minutes, he is able to present the entire eschatological spectrum (from life to death) through a series of images and incidents that focus on "mortality, decay and disintegration."

profound point of transit we undergo. Whether viewed as a transition from life to death, or as a move from one state of consciousness to another, he insists it is the passage that matters.

In Dickinson's poem the White Exploit, once achieved, "annuls the power/ Once to communicate". For Viola the corridor leading to his bright whiteness is less an annulment, than the opening up of an urgent line of communication. It is the artery that connects experience to the imagination.

Robert Enright is the senior Contributing Editor to Border Crossings magazine and the University Research Chair in Art Theory and Criticism in the School of Fine Art and Music at the University of Guelph.



ARTERIAL MOTIVES

ARTery
Artists
In
Conversation

Michael Campbell



If we think of the artery as a channel of communication, and if we further think of it as a sustaining conduit, then it follows that we want as many branches and veins radiating from it as we can assemble. In doing research for the essay I conducted telephone interviews with each of the exhibiting artists. Their responses to my questions about their work and the motivations behind it are telling examples of the act of articulation moving towards the art of communication. These conversations form a kind of narrative in which the relationship between intent and achievement, and between desire and reality, is in constant flux. Each begins with an epigraph, a vein extracted from the body of the interview, as if it were a line of DNA out of which the entire conversation shaped itself.

Robert Enright

The image of the burning canoe had its foot in a bunch of mythologies, like Viking funerals, or a canoe trip gone very bad, or something dreamlike that never ended.

Q. Burning Canoe is part of a larger piece isn't it?

A. Yes. I've shown it in both formats, as a single channel video and as an installation. The installation was first in Calgary at The New Gallery, then it went to Montreal, Marseilles, North Bay and Toronto where it showed at YYZ. Then the video showed at Expo. There was a series of half-scale room fragments with little bits of renovation going on, and the largest room had a 50s chair sitting in the corner and a pull-down home projector screen. It was rear-projected. Whenever I use video in an installation it's always built in as a material part, not as a monitor sitting there, or as a projection on the wall. So the projector was hidden and actually played the sound of an old style sprocket machine.

Q. Thematically and contextually how did it fit into the idea behind the "I want to know who you'd be in the best of all possible worlds" piece?

A. It was an image that was knowable right away because it had its foot in a bunch of mythologies, like Viking funerals, or a canoe trip gone very bad, or something dreamlike that never ended. Whenever I'm using loops they are closed systems, so they never reveal any more than the first two seconds of what you can see in the process. Wherever it showed there was also this ambient audio track where you could hear this figure walking on the old creaking wooden floor and a dog barking in the background.

Q. So you didn't hear the lapping water and the crackling sound of the fire inside the canoe?

A. You did as you approached the piece. I centralized a lot of the audio cues. So as you approached that room fragment you heard the water and every once in a while the film would come up. It would work in waves. There's a fade to black and then it just starts all over again.

Q. So the canoe continues to burn but never disappears?

A. Yes, it would start smoking and would look like a really bad boat safety video. That was my first ever video piece and I realized I wanted them to work, not as narratives, but more as slow-moving closed systems that really don't provide much more.

I find I can watch it for hours because it's fire. I shot it in Huntsville, Ontario. We used to have a place in the Muskokas and it's interesting because I shoot wherever I am, whether living or travelling, but it started to show in places like Calgary and Marseilles, where the landscape was much more exotic than I had expected it would be. I did a test because I was worried all I was going to do was incinerate this canoe. Josh Freed and his brother left the canoe at our place and I used it. When he saw the piece in Montreal I told him it's okay because I removed the struts and put in a big sand container that was soaked and used a lot of cedar and rags and kerosene, which burns brightly and with intensity but it's not hot.

Q. As a viewer, you do expect that the canoe will burn and sink.

A. It was my first attempt at any kind of stagecraft so I did a test and it was spectacular. So I was waiting for an early grey morning where the mist was just leaving and Janice paddled while I lay low in the canoe. It was a small crew. We shot on digital video in 2000 when personal editing suites came on line. I had previously stayed away from video. It just seemed too complicated and too ready to break down and I didn't want to work with a technician. So I was teaching myself how to edit and this was my first substantial video piece. The canoe was in a river with a very slow current and I think I actually dangled a cinder block but it wasn't anchored, it was floating.

Q. Did you have any control over the manner in which the kerosene burned?

A. No. And it really took off at one point. There were minor technical things. There's a fade cut where the only other cottage on the river appeared. I had to cut that because I wanted it to be a nameless, uninhabited space.

Q. I assume you imagine people will project a series of questions onto the canoe. Why is it on its own? Why isn't there anyone in the canoe? All these questions come up. The piece suggests a narrative that is mysteriously toyed with.

A. Yes and when you see the piece contextualized in the installation, it's not answered any more than that. Was it shot by the missing inhabitant of the space, was it found and screened, is it just spontaneously occurring? Which is probably closer to my intentions, almost as if it were Brigadoon. It appears and then it disappears.

Q. You're playing to a central Canadian trope when you bring in the canoe. It's a much larger narrative than you would normally be engaged simply because you set a boat on fire.

A. Yes. I was originally going to use an aluminum Grumman but it seemed a bit too industrial. Even though the boat I use is fiberglass it seemed a little bit more capitol C canoe-like. But it had to be a canoe. I knew that the exoticization of the North, especially the Tom Thomson

mythology, was going to be part of the reading, so I really appreciated it more when it showed in Japan and France. Actually, in Japan it was in the Canadian Pavilion, so it did become emblematic as well. In France the responses I was getting were about the idea of the North. They were plugging it into older European myths and it was showing in this 1000 year old space in the Old Quarter. So you hear feet walking on wood floors on the ambient soundtrack, even though the exhibiting space was this old limestone building. The slippage was really nice. It's the cedar that cracks in the video, I threw in a few cedar shakes and kindling to get some pops. I didn't rekindle the fire. Once kerosene takes off it becomes incredibly intense and basically burns out. When we doused it the metal container in the canoe was still cool to the touch.

Q. How do you consider your piece fitting into the ARTery exhibition?

A. I have projected it before in storefronts (a Health Food store in Huntsville). I like putting work, especially video, out of context. When you put an installation in a window, there is the instant sense that whatever it is, it isn't for sale, it's not promoting something. But with video there's always the possibility that what you're seeing is some promotional ploy to sell the flat screen or the projector. I like the fact that it might not be immediately knowable. I have this optimistic hope that people will stop and look. I also

think Grande Prairie will be another exotic space. It will be a jarring to walk down the street and see this, jarring because it is so cold. There's this one building in the centre of town that looks like the obelisk from 2001. Everything else is very low and when I first drove into town, you couldn't see the top of the building for the ice fog.

David Hoffos



What I was thinking about when I started this piece was to find some ground between toy-destroying fantasy and the Hollywood spectacular.

Q. Did the origins of the piece have to do with Catastrophe?

A. Yes, it used the footage that ended up in Catastrophe and also some of the behind-the-scenes stuff as well.

Q. Was this a one-take set up?

A. There's a bit of a story there. I had been collecting the parts and

building that model, casually and slowly, over a year. We had it all organized for a shoot on the roof of our studio building in Lethbridge. We had all the pyrotechnics ready to go and we even had a professional photographer. I was shooting with two 16mm. Bolex cameras, side by side, and also doing video documentation at the same time. I had an exhibition coming up that the work was going to debut in, but that was still 9 months away. When we filmed it the plane flew over the set, the earthquake never happened, and the bombs didn't go off. So I put it away for a while and the pressure started to build because of this exhibition. It was probably seven months later when we actually gathered again to shoot it. This time everything went as you saw in the little movie. I'm not sure why it didn't work the first time, I guess I hadn't done a lot of testing with the pyrotechnics. That was stuff that I figured out on my own. I would have these little rocket engine igniters attached to batteries, with ping pong balls filled with match heads and you couldn't predict what they were going to do. It seemed that whenever one went off it had a different effect; it was either just smoke, a huge explosion, or a fireball.

Q. So you couldn't rehearse this?

A. No. What I did in the intervening months was a number of tests which were quite amusing. I'd blow up one little Fisher-Price house after another. What I discovered in that process is that toys are not meant to be destroyed. They're very hard to

destroy and they're fireproof. Then I worked some more mechanics into the set, so that there would be a tidal wave, an earthquake and a hurricane.

Q. How did you decide on the balance between the natural disasters and the man made failures of technology?

A. I think I thought mostly about 1970s disaster movies and the things that happened there. You had movies like Airport and then you'd have a movie like Earthquake. Actually, during the making of these effects somebody brought me a board game from the 1970s called "Disaster". It was a Parker Brothers game and I thought, 'it's all right there. In the game you have to manoeuvre through fires, earthquakes, meteorites and plane crashes.

Q. There is a moment in the video where it looks like your props person is surprised by the explosion, she panics, and almost throws the plane through the set rather than onto it.

A. She actually did get burned. She was one of 7 or 8 volunteers and she got hit by some shrapnel from the ping-pong ball match head thing. I had told her to stand back, because there was no need for her to be that close to the set, but she was keen to see everything that was happening, so she just moved in. I noticed later, too, that although I had a whole stack of safety glasses on the set, she wasn't wearing any. She did get a burn on her hand and there was a scar. That's why she recoils the way

she does. She got hit when the bus explodes at the beginning of the tape. She doesn't feel what she's hit by until she's ready to throw the meteorite. I think she does throw it a bit soon. That thing was also on fire and doused in lighter fluid.

Q. There are no people in the city.

A. No. In the end when the model gets displayed as part of Catastrophe there are people in the set, but it's now a post-apocalyptic sort of landscape. It's the same set but basically I've just removed a lot of the buildings and burned them and hammered them down and covered the whole thing in black charcoal.

Q. You're a monster kid ruining someone's model train set.

A. But I never did that when I was a kid. I was very protective of my toys. I kept them in a box and I wouldn't let anyone touch them. I would watch my brother and his friends spend weeks building a model airplane, only to fill it with firecrackers and launch it across the lawn. We made things like sand castles and little fort cities and the glee in making them was that you knew you were going to destroy them. What I was thinking about when I started this piece was to find some ground between that sort of toy destroying fantasy and the Hollywood spectacular. You have to remember that this work was coming out at the time of movies like Deep Impact and Armageddon and Volcano and Twister. There was that whole resurgence of disaster movies.

Q. Which means you don't have to have King Kong take on Godzilla. There are no monsters in your video?

A. No, there's nothing paranormal or anything like that. I don't think it's that different from when Jerry Bruckheimer or Stephen Spielberg set about to create mayhem in their movies. I'm sure the mindset they have is much like the 12 year old boy.

Q. How did you decide on the time sequence? You structure the video by going back to the pre-disaster state, then we see the disaster again. What's your sense of the timing of the piece?

A. I didn't want to reveal all the behind the scenes activity in the cold light of day video. Close to the end you can see a number of details sprinkled throughout the thing. So it goes between the almost real and the obviously artificial. I don't do a lot of single channel stuff, so I was also experimenting with that. That was the first movie I didn't edit with two VCRs.

Q. At a certain point as a viewer your apprehension shifts from playful and joyful to thinking differently about what you're seeing. Suddenly a somberness sets in. Was that your intention in the way the story unfolds?

A. By doing this sort of wicked boys' fantasy I was hoping there'd be something at the bottom of it. I think that does come across. Maybe there's a kind of wistfulness about it.

Q. Maybe it's post 9/11?

A. That's the problem now. The piece was made in 1998, which is also true of the installation Catastrophe. Until this summer that installation had not shown after 9/11. It was at the Orr Gallery in the summer of 2001 and then it went into mothballs because there was no interest in looking at this stuff. I was nervous about it being read as a commentary on what had happened. All I was talking about was that ridiculous millennial anxiety that was building up in 1998 - 99. That's when all those disaster movies were coming out. Then a year later the whole world changes.

Q. You're getting a toy store window for your installation in Grande Prairie.

A. Yes. As far as I know it will be rear-projected or on a large monitor in the window. I like that context. I wouldn't be surprised if they don't get a spike in sales for certain kinds of things just by having it in the window. It might awaken some sort of boyishness in some people. And that road it will be on goes straight up to the oil fields, right? It's like Deadwood. But there's an interesting community up there, with serious collectors and artists.

Q. Disaster is a darling little menacing film.

A. I'm glad you think so. I don't make a lot of single channel videos and I don't necessarily think that way. But I look at a lot of cinema and it's the right length. I don't think it needs to be anything more than it is.

C. Wells



It was serendipity that there was a shared latitude between Point Pelee and Rome. Of course, the adage that all roads lead to Rome was also in my mind.

Q. You did White Roma/ White Pelee in 2006. Where did the idea come from?

A. The performance component of my work began ten years earlier when I embarked on this "Line Marker Project" in Calgary. I began making paintings in line marker paint, just replicating the code of the road. When you first see them they oscillate between abstraction and representation. At the beginning of that project I thought I should connect the painting process to the world, so I decided to go out and start re-painting the lines on the Trans-Canada Highway by hand. It began in a diaristic way where I'd make a log recording geographical things - time of day, latitude. The project had three parts to it: re-

painting the lines, the paintings as objects, and dealing with issues around painting and code. I also wrote a lot about the works and the process, so the performance turned into photo-performance in which I started to work with both professional photographers and with anybody who would go out with me and take snapshots. The idea of shared latitude had always interested me, certainly there is a precedent within conceptual art practice with Piero Manzoni and his idea to paint the Greenwich Meridian. I've always wanted to paint the land's end of Canada in each of the directions. I've only done one to date and, of course, North would be very difficult to do. It would be hard to find a road up there, especially one that has existing line markers. The premise is to re-paint rather than to establish a language and it's not an act of civic disobedience either. I'm not painting yellow on white. So the east and west remains to be done. But I went to the most southern point in Canada, which is Point Pelee Ontario, and found the most southern road affiliated with Ontario Transportation. Those cars behind me are going into this National Parkland. Actually, the end of the road is right at that point. It was serendipity that there was a shared latitude between Pelee and Rome. Of course, the adage that all roads lead to Rome was also in my mind.

Q. Did you also pick Rome because it's a cultural centre?

A. Yes and so the notion, which is pataphysical and imaginative, is that if I were to paint that line in Point Pelee, by extension, it would go back to Rome. That was the poetic gesture of it. I went there to do the performance - I was there for maybe two or three days, while the performance probably took about two and a half hours and I actually painted a series of dash lines or broken lines. What you're seeing in the performance is me painting a ladder line schematic. When I went down to Pelee I knew where my location was going to be but I had no idea what kind of line marker awaited me. All I knew was that by convention it would be white. To tie it to Rome I wanted to find a pop culture reference, so I choose Fellini's Roma. The specific segment in the film is 12 to 15 minutes long and I've edited it down to 2 minutes. At the end of the motorcycle sequence, and this was complete serendipity, it shows the ladder line equivalent.

Q. Why is that ladder line there? It doesn't seem to make any sense.

A. Usually it's a proxy for a median. In Point Pelee it's a way for them not to pour concrete.

Q. Why not use a larger brush? Is the choice of implement significant?

A. Yes. The two inch wide, industrial brush is the standard I've used since 1996. The paint has very specific properties, so it's almost a painting issue rather than any symbolic issue connected to the tool. It has an incredible amount of hardener in it

and it dries almost immediately, so it's a matter of pushing the paint through the lines. If I used a four-inch brush, which is the standard size of most lines on the road, I would only have to make one pass but there would be too much paint on the brush and it would harden. It's also a climate thing. In the summer it was warm and that's why they have their own industry standards about when they can paint. But I've always used this two-inch brush. I make the paintings with the same brush and they are stretched canvas but they're painted flat on a tabletop. The actual painting process mirrors the means in which the performance is done.

Q. Are there legal problems you have to worry about, municipal by-laws and permits, that sort of thing?

A. I never get permission. I'm almost following the tradition of intervention. I'm trying to intervene within the transportation situation. In Kitchener we had to defend the project in front of the city lawyers and the transportation people. I had to prove two things: that I didn't have a death wish because I was out in traffic and secondly, I had to produce evidence that the paint I was using was accurate paint. These guys said, 'You can't brush that paint.' I said, 'Well, I've been brushing it for six years'. And they said, 'Well we spray it', and I said, 'I use a brush and that is the history'. The paint was first applied by a brush on a road in 1911 and then the technology developed.

Q. I assume there is a whole history of the line marker and I wouldn't be surprised if you knew it.

A. The first line was painted on a road in 1911 in Trenton, Michigan, just south of Detroit. The archives in Detroit are incredible. The line marker debuted that same year at what they called the International Mercantile Exposition in New York. It took off from there and became this global line marking system. There is some Canadian scholarship that says it was produced up here by a couple of different people. One of them was a guy by the name of Edward Hines, a crony of Ford, who was the Road Commissioner. The story goes that he was in the back of a vehicle going around a collision spot and there was a milk truck that was leaking milk in a streamlined fashion down the centre of the road and that's where he came up with the idea.

Q. Have there been changes in the way your work has been viewed and how you yourself have viewed it?

A. When people left my first exhibition of paintings at the New Gallery in Calgary they looked at the lines differently. I always felt that shifting their perception was one of the strengths of the work, in that it was a way to open up things that are seen, but not observed. When I first started making the paintings they looked different than they do now because of my knowledge of touch. And the duration of the process plays into what I'm doing. I painted in Kitchener for 14.5 hours straight, so there was also this idea of labour

involved. To paint that whole section you see in the ARTery video took about 2.5 hours, and to paint that ladder line schematic took about half that time, a little over an hour. It's a matter of coating the brush and then re-coating it so that when you stand back you at least get some evidence that you've been there. It's like a snail's trail. I went back about two months later and you wouldn't even know it had been re-painted.

Q. How important is the video part of the project now?

A. Video for me is almost an extension of the way I began with photography in that it's diaristic. Certainly White Roma/White Pelee was the most produced video that I've done to date. Other time-based captures of my performance have been evidentiary. I just set up the camera and point it where I am. My only other time-based project occurred when I went and re-painted the lines in Trenton, Michigan, the first lines that had ever been painted. That video still exists but I've never shown it as a video piece. I've only shown it as stills.

Q. Have you looked at the premise of the ARTery show?

A. My initial response was to look up what place Grande Prairie shared a latitude with, and Moscow was the city that jumped out. When the work gets affiliated with curatorial practices about investigations into the city, or things to do with urbanization, then I feel it naturally fits. I like the fact that the work will

be seen on the road, or in proximity to the road. The fact that it's Rome and Pelee and not any connection to Alberta ties in with larger issues surrounding ideas of the trans-local and globalization.

Q. The main street - 100 Avenue - can be followed right through to Alaska and Alaska has a connection with Moscow, so there is a way in which it makes sense that your video is there. In an odd way, you've done a road movie.

A. Exactly. Because it's a global emblem, the line marker relates to local networks. Sometimes it's a migrant transfer point. There are so many historic things about the line marker.

Karina Aguilera Skvirsky



It doesn't matter where you come from or what your race or background is, if you end up with the power you get to write the history.

Q. Your practice involves recycling images which you then re-contextualize in order to tell new stories?

A. Exactly. I appropriate images and then because my background is photography I also make images. But I'm really interested in creating new contexts. Especially in my media-based work, I underscore how ambiguous images are, questioning how images and also how we attach our own histories, narratives and politics to them.

Q. When did you decide to link Margaret Okayo's 2001 marathon run with the Dutch mariner's journal?

A. It's by Adriaen van der Donck, a Dutch explorer to Manhattan. I had the footage for a long time. I work that way, where I keep things until I get ideas. I was thinking what would it mean to have this Kenyan woman metaphorically conquer Manhattan. At first I thought of having travel journals from Africa but the space is Manhattan and it became so much about the place. I run myself and one of the things I like about running is that you start thinking about things in a stream-of-consciousness way.

Q. Is the Dutch explorer describing the flora and fauna and inhabitants of New York City?

A. He's actually describing Manhattan. I thought the juxtaposition would be really interesting. I came across it when I was doing research at the New York Public Library but it was

through running that I got the idea about what would she be thinking, metaphorically, while she's running. She's passing through her environment but she's not really looking at it. So in a way I'm playing with the politics, I'm making her the conquerer, because it doesn't matter where you come from or what your race or background is, if you end up with the power you get to write history.

Q. It's a curiosity and a lovely irony that Margaret's victory in the marathon is coupled with this disparaging narrative referring to the promiscuity of women in this particular part of the country.

A. Yes. And the way that the Dutch spoke about Native Americans sounds really sexist but it's not that much different from what you'd hear today.

Q. He does say they are 'slim at the waist, broad across the shoulders and very nimble and active and well adapted to travel on foot in dragging heavy burdens.' What you see is this exquisitely honed woman who is most certainly nimble of foot but not from dragging heavy burdens.

A. Exactly.

Q. Don't you bracket it with the description of Henry Hudson's ship, the Half Moon?

A. Yes. But that is all van der Donck's text. He's basically writing a letter to the King of the Netherlands talking about how bountiful and

wonderful the land is so that the King will continue to support the Dutch colonists.

Q. How much did you manipulate the video?

A. The amazing thing about her run was that half way through she was all alone because her competition was so far back. That started the idea of the piece. It's the New York City Marathon and there are probably close to 50,000 people competing and there she is, running alone through the streets of New York with huge crowds everywhere. I thought that was very interesting. What I did was select her out, frame by frame, and blur the background to enhance the idea of her running. I edited together all the clips that I had of her, worked on them frame by frame and then looped it. I think the extraordinary thing is that she beat everyone else by a minute and I think she set a record. She also won twice.

Q. How much footage did you have? The perspective changes, sometimes she is further away, at other times she's shot in close-up.

A. I didn't have much to choose from because I got it from television. I literally had a minute and the piece is three minutes long, so I had to loop it twice.

Q. The background is very painterly. Did you want that?

A. Yes. People say about my photography, and my other video, that it has a painterly quality. I've

never really studied painting, academically.

Q. There are times when she is almost radiant with light. Was that just a happy accident?

A. Yes and it's enhanced. The footage is from VHS tape and is as ugly as can be but I really played with it. Basically by creating a mask for every frame, I could do whatever I wanted. It took me six months because I did it in the most painstaking way. Collaging it out, I could change the background and enhance things. I didn't collage anything that was there, but I did change it. I also hired an actor to read the text. She does a dialect which is a little artificial but I ended up liking it after all. She is from South Africa.

Q. It's odd listening to something in which the content is reprehensible but the delivery and the image you're looking at is the opposite. There's a strange disjunction involved for the viewer. You wanted that ambiguity?

A. I definitely wanted the ambiguity and I was happy that it worked out as well as it did. I wanted the irony, the ambiguity, and the edginess of it. I come out of studying photography in the mid 90s, so I'm working with identity politics but in a post 90s way. That's how I would position myself. The idea of the victim isn't clear cut and we have to move beyond that dialogue. My mother is from Ecuador and my father is Jewish. I'm half and half. I haven't used the Jewish part

as much; I've identified more with my Latina side. But I think my Jewish side is evident in a lot of ways, in my interest in politics, in culture and in humanism.

John Will



Kumbh Mela is the largest periodic gathering of human beings on the planet and we got jammed in this traffic jam. So I just took out my camera while we sat there and filmed.

Q. What was the origin for the piece you included in the ARTery show?

A. I was a camera person for a project a religious studies professor was doing on Ganesh. We went to a secondary festival called Kumbh Mela and India Moves is the more textural footage that I shot there as an aside to this other project.

Q. What instrument is he playing?

A. It's called a shehnai and it's the flute that snake charmers use. Bismillah Kahn was singlehandedly

responsible for making the shehnai a famous classical instrument. He brought it to prominence with his concert in the Calcutta All India Music Conference in 1937. He essentially monopolized the shehnai, so much so that he and it are synonymous. In the concert I shot in Puna he was performing along with a bunch of other Indian musicians. We were invited to all these concerts and I taped it without thinking I was going to do anything with it. Then when I got back I had this other footage from the festival and I thought I'll twin these together and see if I can make a little travel thing, a bit of textural video. I remember when I began editing I wanted the total raga that Khan was playing to remain intact. So I laid down the Kahn footage and then proceeded to lay over and under the scenes of the crowds in Nasik. I didn't have enough continuous footage of the street scene (and I believe that is one uninterrupted, continuous shot taken from inside the car). So in one section I slowed down the motion of the people to accommodate the length of the music. The slo-mo wasn't done for any aesthetic reason, but in the end I think it somehow works.

Q. The way that you use the rectangular frame of the performance is interesting. There are times when you get a very confusing visual sense because you're trying to watch what is happening in the street and when you pan into the performance, the feeling is almost virginous. Was that intentional?

A. I think it was just fortuitous because I was using two sets of footage. I really liked his music. But there are a few ironic things about it. He's Muslim and the majority of Indians are Hindu. For my part, I hadn't looked at the tape for a few years and when I was invited to be in this exhibition in Grande Prairie I thought, 'wouldn't it be ironic to show it up there in the middle of the north.' Plus I had a feeling they'd have a problem with the sound and I doubted that the sound would be audible to the people outside. Visually though I like it. The title is a reference to the motion.

Q. The movement is so fluid and the people in the crowd are very close to you.

A. Well, I'm at the window. National Geographic calls Kumbh Mela the largest periodic gathering of human beings on the planet and we got jammed in this traffic jam. So I just took out my camera while we sat there and filmed. Eventually we started moving, very slowly. All the holy people converge on this site and at that time I had a long beard. The person who had the grant to do the Ganesh tape, who spoke a bit of Hindi said that some of the people thought I was a special holy man because of the length of my beard. It's not the case so much any more, but in those days Indians were fascinated by cameras. The minute you took a picture they wanted you to give them a copy and they'd give you their address so you could send it on. I shot it in 1991 using a small half-inch camera.

Q. There is a point where the direction the crowd is moving in seems to change?

A. I don't know where they're going and I didn't know where we're going. I don't make videos much anymore but when I make them I don't really have an idea when I start. I'll shoot footage and if there's something there I'll try and make something out of it. If not, I just ignore it. I think I once did a scripted thing but generally what I do is process-oriented.

Q. There is also an interesting moment when arms undulate in from the upper left hand part of the screen. It's quite riveting.

A. You see all these things I hadn't seen. It's funny but our main project was the Ganesh one and even though we shot over 100 hours for it, I didn't particularly like the end result. We also made a third tape of the Festival where these holy men from all over India converge on this holy water at four o'clock in the morning. It's quite fascinating. They're all naked with that Rasti kind of hairdo. Every four years the Festival moves to a different town that's special for its water. In Nasik the water was in a temple, a pond or a swimming pool. Most of the people in the crowd I shot are just pilgrims, but there are a couple of holy men near the end, sitting on the street divider and playing drums.

Q. The film ends with the drummer's flourish, which you freeze, and then you cut to black.

A. As I mentioned, my work tends to develop in the act of making the tape. Part of the reason I picked India Moves for Grande Prairie is that most of my other tapes have a narrative bent and I didn't think a narrative in the window up there would make any sense.

Anne Troake



I have an endless and infinite fascination with my own culture and the way the sea and the landscape give with one hand and take away with the other.

Q. What is the source of the shipwreck graphics off the top?

A. That's actually an etching I had on my wall. It was shot to be an element of a dance piece that incorporated storytelling, text and projection. All the footage, including the graphic stuff, was done for a different purpose and it was shot to be looped. It was for a show built around my grandmother's stories. I have an endless and infinite

fascination with my own culture and the way the sea and landscape have shaped who we are in Newfoundland. It's not an easy place to live. It gives with one hand and takes away with the other. It makes for an impassioned relationship with place that is palpable in the people who live there. This was the first film I ever shot. I liked the footage for the dance piece and I cut it into a short film and made a collage from some of the sounds that I'd used in the show. That short film went around to film festivals. A lot of the sounds came from a funeral of one of my great aunts that was a tremendous celebration of her life. There were 10 different clergymen. I had a tape of the preacher saying, 'We have so many people here we need beds, can you open up your homes?' This sense of faith is a very big part of our traditional culture, and our relationship to the natural world is very much tied in with our Christian faith. It's one of the few contexts in which a Christian church actually makes sense to me. It's that constant proximity to death and the hundreds of years of eking life out of a sense of death.

Q. One of the things that struck me about the graphic figures is that they look like they could be dancing as much as gesticulating out of fear. The same thing comes up in the two figures under water who join in what looks like a lyric waltz.

A. It's not joyful but there is some kind of peacefulness in the gestures in that drawing. I guess it's a constant obsession of mine that there is joy

and strength inside of loss and tragedy. Those two things really live within each other when we're dealing with them in a healthy way. There's not a family, particularly in the rural areas where I come from, that hasn't lost somebody to the North Atlantic. I've lost people since I made that show. Fishing is one of the most dangerous occupations in the world, so loss is a big part of our lives and who we are. An essence of what I was looking for was to assimilate that loss with grace and dignity and generosity.

Q. Where did you shoot the sequence up the side of the ship?

A. That was in Conception Harbour. I shot the exterior footage in three different locations around the province and the interior stuff is at the Flume Tank, which is part of Memorial University's Marine Institute, where they test deepwater gear. I'm one of the three people in the water, the one in the frilly dress. You see more of me because I was acclimatized to being in cold water. I was free diving a lot down south and that's where I learned to stay in deep water for a longer period of time.

Q. There is a lyricism in the piece. At one point a floating lace veil comes in like a sea anemone, and those lace doilies look like jellyfish. There is something very beautiful about the way the fabrics work in the water.

A. That was my intention. Because marriage is a rite of passage and a gamble, it seemed like another iconic moment. Call me Ishmael, but I

have lots of images with people who are semi-human or clothed in kelp. We grew up playing on the beaches, finding a little rock, putting a jellyfish on it and saying it was dinner, or draping kelp around our waist and turning it into a skirt. That was part of our imaginative landscape as children in Twillingate, the outport I come from. I read those physical elements with many associations to childish games of "Let's pretend we're getting married", or "Let's pretend we have babies". All those iconic, transformative moments.

Q. You completely reverse the point of view over the course of the video; at the end we see the floating body without a head; whereas you begin with a graphic image where you only see heads above the surface of the water.

A. Yes. That was partially an accident. I was too buoyant to go under water. But it has to do with memory. The people who have gone before us are very present in the day to day. They float into our consciousness. I had an uncle who died 10 years before I was born and I feel like I know him. He was an artist and a musician and he painted murals on walls in people's houses. He was so present growing up that I don't find a lot of sadness in dealing with these death images. I shot underwater with a 16mm Bolex. I used an old-fashioned housing that they used for research films at the Marine Laboratory. It looks like one of those old tanks the guys used to go down in, with the hose coming out of his head. I did some of the shooting and there were two other diver

friends who also shot for me. I hired a camera guy who would do the light readings and set up the camera and then we'd go down.

Q. Is some of this a way of reworking your grandmother's stories?

A. The show was called The Sinking Stories of Cold Water. What I had initially set out to do was commission some poetry from a woman whose work I really admired. I selected seven of my grandmother's stories; about people drowning, or dropping her baby brother in the water when she was supposed to be babysitting and a man saving him, various stories of things that happened along the shoreline. It also included my favourite story about my uncle. When he was three years old he fell through the ice on the brook that ran next to the Troake house. That brook ran past the house, down underneath the bridge, and washed out into the cove. My great grandmother heard the kids crying, 'Hardy's gone through the ice', so she ran from the house, across the bridge, down onto the beach and waited for him to come down. Apparently he had been holding onto a rock and when his hands started to freeze he had to let go. It was a long, long time before he appeared but she just waited there and when he washed out, she got him. So I gave this poet the transcriptions of my grandmother's stories and she felt they were so powerful, and the language so beautiful, that she couldn't transform them into something else. We ended up working with just the stories.

Q. How do you think all this fits into the ARTery show?

A. We had talked about the industrial and masculine landscape of Grande Prairie, with which I'm somewhat familiar. I've had various projects up that way and I've done a residency. I've been doing a lot of work with trappers during the last year and it's a pretty manly scene. I find these guys so grounded and clear and they have a kind of attention that movement people and body workers study and strive for years to get and they have it from being on the land. I find them the easiest people to work with in the world and very respectful. So I liked Ed's idea of infusing some art into that sterile and ugly landscape. It ain't so pretty.

Micah Lexier and Christian Bök



I get joy out of carefulness. It's that 'god is in the details' idea. It's definitely the thing I like.

Q. The importance of detailing and colour seems very clear in the way you install your work.

A. Absolutely. In Grande Prairie we chose the colour we did because of those blue window frames. This piece originated because I was doing an exhibition at Printed Matter in New York and the windows struck me as if they were pages from a book. Two equal windows with a very thin spine between them. It looked like an open book. But it wasn't just the formal context, there was an intellectual one as well. They had a permanent Joseph Kosuth neon sign up, in which he quotes from Michel Foucault. It's a very narrow sign that fills the top foot and a half of the window. That's permanent and then above it is the Printed matter sign, which is printed in vinyl on a clear transparency and mounted a couple of inches away from the old sign.

Q. So there's a layering of texts going on?

A. Exactly. More specifically, there were pairs of texts. Printed Matter is the new tenant over the old tenant, and Kosuth is quoting Foucault. There were always these pairs. I thought not only do I have two sides of a book but I have a pair of texts and a pair of voices. Christian and I are friends, he's written about my work and we have a mutual admiration society. I proposed a collaborative work for a show I did at Jack Shainman in New York, which was also a window piece, but we didn't end up showing it because it wasn't that successful. But I've always wanted to work with

Christian and I knew he and I had a great piece in us together. So I came up with this idea, gave him a couple of months to work on it, and he came back with the most fucking amazing text possible.

Q. How does he do it?

A. There are all kinds of tools, computer programs, where you put in the combination of letters and it gives you all the anagrams. So he has some tools but that's nothing, I have those tools and I could never come up with that. Picasso had a pencil, too. Christian is brilliant. I set up the premise and the text is to let you know what that premise is. I wasn't writing a text to him; I was writing a text to the viewer. It tells them what they're seeing.

Q. It's all uppers and there are no lowers. Why? I know these things are absolutely crucial to you.

A. If I had done uppers and lowers then Christian would have had to start each of his sentences with the same letter as mine. The idea of the anagram is it's identical, so he would be stuck starting with a 't' and that was a constraint I didn't feel it was necessary to put him through. So I did uppers and no lowers. The only other thing was I did not include his name. It's Bök, but it's pronounced book. When he sent his text back to me he had added the name Bök and then added my last name in my text. I was going to leave it a little more vague. I don't know if it was narcissism that made him want to include his name because he knew he was doing a

good job, or he might have needed those three letters. The reason I didn't initially put in his name is because he spells it with an umlaut and I couldn't imagine how that would be used. That's another reason for all upper case letters because you don't have to put umlauts in with them. If you ask me That's the only thing that's a kind of cheat if you ask me. Of course, what I love about his name is that it plays into the original conception about the windows being two pages of a book. The other thing is that he takes the two o's from his name and one of them has two little dots above it, which is the two o's again, only smaller. He might have done that on purpose. I mean his name is Christian Book. It's the best name in the world, and he's this total book guy.

Q. The fact that your text ends, "the other text is his", and his ends, "of course, his eerie text was mine", is a wonderful parallel. Two texts talking to one another across the page, as it were.

A. Un-fucking believable. That's my favourite part. It's crazy.

Q. Where it begins to get a bit off is in the "touted art" line. A sort of 19th century language sets in.

A. Cut him some slack. But you're right, that's really the only false step.

Q. Were you surprised by what he came up with?

A. Shocked. I thought he was going to say and these are the six letters I cannot use. I thought there'd be

some reference to how difficult it was. Something that everyone likes is that he had a theme running through it. He said I 'unknotted' it, I 'knitted' it and then later he comes back with 'resewn'.

Q. How do you think this piece fits in to the ARTery exhibition?

A. Well, I didn't have a video but I've been thinking about a window for this piece, so the fit was right. It's such a great street piece and Ed Bader is trying to activate the street. The other thing we did was a response to the place: it's Grande Prairie and they get a lot of winter and because those windows are a little longer we didn't have the text go all the way to the bottom. Part of it was that we couldn't stretch the text but I especially liked the idea that even if snow piled up against the window, you could still read it. I'm not always hopeful that people will but it's like anything in life, the more you put in, the more you take out. I'm always saying to people, promise me you'll read it, I know it doesn't look like something you'd want to read but it'll take literally 30 seconds and I swear it will pay off. And when they do it, it does. But there's something about the big bold text that makes you not want to read it. You know you're supposed to, but there's something not inviting about it. It might look seductive but the desire to read is not there. That's why uppers and lowers might have been better but, as I say, then there were other traps. My original idea was to handwrite it and then I'd cut and paste my handwritten text. It would have been

like those old ransom notes. But it didn't look good.

Q. What went into figuring out how the design of the letters would look on the window book pages?

A. I worked like a designer and I even had someone doing line breaks with me. It's pretty crude. We didn't do much finessing on the type itself, we just typed it in and then broke things so that they had an even rag. If we had really jutting ones we had to make sure that was consistent. They've got to look equal as well. Three periods and a comma, so there are three sentences. It was 44 words, and 191 characters, including punctuation. In mine there are 49 words and the same number of characters. I actually have a piece of paper where I stroked out each of the letters. It's like a beautiful drawing.

Q. You pay such close attention to things. The world for you is a place in which that kind of carefulness is necessary.

A. It's what I get joy out of. It's that 'god is in the details' idea. It's definitely the thing I like.

Bill Viola



Angel's Gate is about instability and fragility and things teetering on the verge of disintegration.

Q. Angel's Gate already has your trademark sense of painterliness.

A. Yes. That's been there even before Angel's Gate. But around the time I made it image quality was really advancing, cameras were getting better, and what you were able to pick up as far as light and gradations of colour was vastly different by the end of the decade than it was at the beginning.

Q. I was thinking more about the tonal shifts in your palette in the sequence of the boy's hand moving underwater, in the golden Rembrandt quality and the Whistlerian nocturnal look of some of the images than the technical side of the image quality.

A. The piece is somewhat like a haiku. I was challenging myself to create a story, not in a dramatic or narrative

way, but in a time flow way with a minimal amount of elements.

Q. Did you work out a structure that was as intricately demanding as is the haiku form in poetics?

A. I didn't do that and I also didn't go the route of Hollis Frampton, the great experimental filmmaker, who did a piece called Zorn's Dilemma. He almost single-handedly pioneered Structuralism in film, where he rigorously set up a montage structure that compared different images in different ways.

Q. Did you make a conscious decision to move in a direction that was more narrative and poetic and to move away from the Structuralist influence in your early work?

A. I think I did. The early work was very much about pushing the limits of the medium and actually defining the nature of the medium in the content of the pieces, while at the same time having a conscious being as a focal point, whether behind the camera or literally in front of it. Like a lot of artists at that time, I often used myself in my own work.

Q. So the guy in bed in Angel's Gate is you?

A. Yes. The thing about that shot is that I only had a week to shoot the whole piece and I got quite ill on the third day. I was confined to bed for two days out of that week and I was very nervous that I might not make my deadline. So I brought the camera into bed with me. It was

interesting to be able to use my weaknesses as strengths.

Q. I watch that bed sequence with a strange sense of anxiety because I assume the cup is going to tip over. It's sitting on the bed and not on the plate near you. It seems so precarious.

A. Well, that is intentionally the nature of the piece. It's about instability and fragility and things teetering on the verge of disintegration. Actually, that shot is the pivotal point in the piece; it's the longest shot and after it you're suddenly into a different image sequence, consisting of five images, one of which is the hand under water that you mentioned. After this lull in the middle, the piece picks up energy, moving towards the culmination.

Q. Is the young boy under water an imaginative restaging of your experience in almost drowning when you were 10 years old?

A. Unconsciously, but I didn't shoot that particular scene with that awareness. In actual fact, the boy is above and the camera is below water. We're looking up at him through the water. But it works both ways because the next shot - the power shot of the piece - is the birth sequence and it is about coming from water and darkness and emerging into light and air.

Q. There is a subtle ambiguity about the sequences. The boy may be above water, but you assume from the way he disappears that he's

drowning. Is there a deliberately ambiguous quality that emerges from those shots?

A. Yes. I don't think it's essential to the piece that people look at that shot and think the boy is either underwater or above water. That's not the main issue. The main issue is the kind of progression that's happening at that point, the introduction of water and the lead up to the transcendence of the material world by literally becoming light that happens at the end. That's really the only way all of us are going to get out of here.

Q. One of the most interesting things about the video is your use of sound, right from the opening sequence of the imploding building. There is no sound when it comes down, and yet there are moments when the sound is intense, like the hawk chained to the rock, or the birth scene. How were you thinking sound played into this visual essay on disintegration and the precariousness of life?

A. That's a good question. I've spent much of my life, as you know, working intensively with sound, in the performances I did with David Tudor in the 70s and in the specific sound pieces I've done myself. It's always been on my mind and it goes back and forth. In the Passion Series, the work I've done from 2000 onward, I dropped sound completely for the first time in my life. In the context of 20th century avant-garde practice, as John Cage so vividly taught us, silence is just as powerful as sound. You can't have one without the other. So I knew that the first shot

begged to have sound since, next to a volcano exploding, one of the most violent images is a building coming down. But I wanted that sound to be in the mind of the person watching it. In the first part there is the ticking of a clock, the sound of distant voices when the candles go out, the sound of fruit falling from a tree, a flash camera going off. They're actually pretty subtle sounds leading to the hawk and, of course, the baby.

Q. There are other startling things in the video. What is the animal that has been skinned?

A. It's an elk. It came out of a project I did in 1984 when I was artist-in-residence at the San Diego Zoo. I was there for a month and I had access to all sorts of amazing things, the animals up close, shooting after hours, and to the medical facility in the San Diego Zoo. I was able to record operations on animals and that particular one was a dissection of an elk that had just fallen over one day. They do autopsies on any animal that dies in the zoo, just to make sure there's nothing to be alarmed about. I shot the Red-Tailed Hawk in the zoo as well. What they do is they showcase different animals - they have a lion and a tiger show - and the hawk was part of the bird show.

Q. While I'm on the subject of affective moments, I want to ask you about the flow of bubbles you get with the arm under water. It has an almost religious quality. Was that an invocation you wanted to make in that sequence?

A. I think of it as being more latent in that image. I shot a body of images in a lagoon just down at the end of our street here in Long Beach, California, and the water is somewhat murky. It's not very deep but it's very mysterious and in the early 80s I got really interested in bringing the camera itself underwater. I was able to afford an underwater housing. By the end of the 80s I had several of these housings and was regularly shooting things underwater. I think underwater / over water is very interesting in a number of ways - philosophically, phenomenologically, technically, scientifically. It's actually one of the main primary dualities of the earth. The majority of the earth is covered by water and the rest of us mammal type beings live on dry land. So the sonic environment of under and over water is profoundly different. When you go in a swimming pool and duck your head underwater you sense that immediately. It feels like the sound is right inside your head or plugged inside your ears, as opposed to coming to you from a distance. To use a redundant metaphor, it's an immersive kind of feeling.

Q. In an interesting conversation you had in 1990 with Michael Nash you talked about the need to embrace the great, age-old themes: birth, death and consciousness. It's as if you were being self-prescriptive because they end up being the direct subject of Angel's Gate.

A. That's very true. The advantage of having video as my primary medium is that it's a direct link to the world

itself. The video camera is basically an instrument that captures actual light and actual sound that comes to you from the outside world. Of course, that can be modified and manipulated but it still has a sense of almost direct touch to the outside world. So that connection allows me to focus on the nature of my craft, which is image making. To keep this notion of the general art practice that you just described involves looking at these archetypal and deeply seeded human themes.

Q. I'm interested in the liminal and one of the intriguing aspects of Angel's Gate is that it exists at the boundary line between things. As you say, the baby is born and mortality is created. There is an image from a Dylan Thomas poem where he crouches in the doorway of the womb, "the sensual strut begun" as he says, and then begins the inexorable movement towards death. As much as one recognizes the truth of what you both draw our attention to, there is a bit of despair in the observation.

A. What you've just described is the human condition.

Q. There seems to be an eschatological connection between the corridor scene at the end of the video and the birth scene. I think of Emily Dickinson's image of death as "the White Exploit".

A. For me it's the idea of liberation and true liberation in human life is not going to come through the body, even though there are a lot

of serious spiritual, social, cultural and scientific practices that try and transcend the body. That seems to be a very ancient human desire but the way it's expressed in Angel's Gate doesn't include the body. It's about pure light and the lack of any kind of materiality. It will happen through ideas and consciousness, which for the Buddhists, is the only eternal aspect of the human being. If you read the Buddhist texts and if you look at Hindu culture, they all talk about consciousness being the fundamental element, not just within a human being, but in the universe.

Q. You make sense for ARTerly because your work deals with passageways and transitions.

A. Angel's Gate is about transitions. Generally speaking in Western culture that is regarded as loss, as a sad and negative thing. In the Renaissance, the notion of the individual self emerged in a major way. If you have that as one of your fundamental bases for approaching life, then you're in a situation where death is going to be seen as negative. A more healthy way to look at the whole thing is that it's just a way to get out of your body. But the focal point is not that I want to live forever and my body will disintegrate. That's not the issue. The issue is what you leave behind, what you do. There are birth and death cycles but there is also the knowledge base that everyone on the planet adds to in their lifetime and that's the most important thing. There is one other thing I want to say about the piece. When I heard we were going to talk about Angel's

Gate I realized that the piece is prophetic in terms of my later work, in particular for the stuff I've been doing in the last few years. It involves a series of what I call video poems. I've only done three so far but I'm planning on doing 24. I was thinking of the number of hours in a day and the number also goes back to the Sumerians, the ones who divided the heavens into 360 angles. I'm calling them Poem A and Poem B. and the second one, The Guest House, is in three panels and it's one of the best pieces I've done in a long time. It's rather modest. They are small, they just sit on a little shelf on the wall. But that one is similar to Angel's Gate if the images were placed together. It's taking me back to my earlier work where with CRT monitors we were able to stack images, almost as if they were building blocks. Angel's Gate is very much like this body of work that I'm starting at a later point in my life. Consciously or unconsciously, anything we do has a rather extensive root system. That's what art does. A system of infinite underground connections is something you can spend your life on. I think that's what gives the practice of art such a long-lasting and continuous life, for every generation, for every age and for every century.

**THIS TEXT AND THE ONE
BESIDE IT ARE EQUAL.
I WROTE THIS ONE FIRST,
AND THEN I GAVE IT
TO MY FRIEND CHRISTIAN
BOK AND ASKED HIM TO
GENERATE A NEW TEXT
USING EVERY LETTER
AND EVERY PUNCTUATION
MARK THAT I USED IN
MINE. THE OTHER TEXT
IS HIS.**

**MICAH LEXIER REQUESTED
IN ADVANCE THAT I
REINVENT HIS TEXT. SO
I UNKNOTTED IT AND
REKNITTED IT INTO THIS
VERY FORM, BUT THEN
I BEGAN TO THINK THAT
HIS MESSAGE HAD
ALREADY RESEWN A
TOUTED ART OF GENUINE
POETRY. HIS EERIE TEXT
WAS MINE.**



C. Wells, 41°53'N12°30'E / 41°58'N82°30'W (WHITE ROMA / WHITE PELEE), 2006.
Video, 8:00 minutes
Photo: Olivia Kachman
Installation View



Bill Viola, Angel's Gate, 1989
Videotape, colour, stereo sound; 4:48 minutes
Photo: Olivia Kachman
Installation View

ARTery Acknowledgements

The Prairie Art Gallery would like to thank the following organizations and businesses for their support of the ARTery Exhibition.

Canada Council for the Arts



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts
du Canada

Alberta Foundation for the Arts



Alberta
Foundation
for the Arts

City of Grande Prairie



The Prairie Art Gallery Board & Staff



THE PRAIRIE ART GALLERY

Alberta Computers



ALBERTA
COMPUTERS

Apex Security



Bama Furniture

Bama Furniture

Curry's Jewellers

CURRY'S JEWELLERS

Grande Prairie Downtown Association



Living Christ Youth Mission
at the gaiety theatre

Living Christ Youth Mission

Midwest Furniture Rentals



Picture Perfect



Pink Rain Hair Salon

Tim Horton's Administrative Building

Tim Hortons

Urban Home

urban home

Wonderland Toy and Hobby

