

FOREST STATION

The new exhibition “Forest Station” will allow Modern Fuel visitors to take an International art tour without leaving Kingston. The work of both artists exhibiting, **Yvette Poorter** and **David Ross**, reflects their wandering ways and their worldliness. The work in this exhibition is linked through the humorous and poetic use of the forest as a location for a creative wonderland.

Forest Station Photos

With “Knock on Woods,” Rotterdam-based artist Yvette Poorter has created a nomadic version of the previous, and sedentary, residency projects she has organized. Knock on Woods International Residency is a para-site that consists of a rustic tent-cabin and a forest of tree-flags, offering a respite for interested artists from the hectic and bewildering process of globalization. Functioning as a sculpture, an architectural intervention, an archive, a series of collaborations and a traveling circus, “Knock on Woods” is a state of mind. After a number of European stops in Holland, France and Portugal, Poorter is now finishing the process of touring the project to a number of galleries and sites in Canadian cities. Having visited Open Space (Victoria), the Helen Pitt Gallery (Vancouver), Mercer Union (Toronto), and articule with Quartier Ephemère (Montreal), Yvette’s project makes its final Canadian stop this summer in Kingston. From the 9th until the 12th of September it will be in the yard of the Artel, and documentation of the project, including work produced by its Kingston participants, will be on view at Modern Fuel beginning at the opening on the 13th, when Poorter will give an in-depth presentation.

David Ross’s “Self-portrait of the artist in Japan: Magic mountain. Hiroshima mon amour, Of floating weeds and seven other stories...” continues in the vein of his previous autobiographical installations such as “Autoportrait en Nature Morte a Kelowna.” In Ross’s installations the various elements combine to create a forest of signs, all of which accumulate and appear to grow organically, crowding the space with formal networks that must be navigated by and pieced together by individual viewers. Quilts are featured throughout the installation and are a key metaphor for the artist’s process: from traditional art materials, to social interactions and personal experiences, to cultural surroundings as fragments that can be considered and recombined in order to create an artwork. “Self-portrait of the artist in Japan: Magic mountain. Hiroshima mon amour, Of floating weeds and seven other stories...” symbolizes Ross’s experience of Japan, where he has lived for the past two years.

Yvette Poorter is a Canadian/Dutch artist currently based in Rotterdam. Recent solo exhibitions include The Vegetarians at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria (Victoria BC), ICI3 at Buro Dijkstra (Rotterdam), Monumoments (Paris), and Forty-Hour-Work-Week at Sox36 (Berlin).

David Ross is a Québec-born artist, currently based in Japan. He has exhibited his work in venues such as Heaven Gallery (Chicago), YYZ Artist’s Outlet (Toronto), The Space (Austin, TX), Langage Plus (Alma), and L’Oeil de Poisson (Québec).

Essay by Michael Davidge

The title of the exhibition at Modern Fuel that presents the work of David Ross and Yvette Poorter, “Forest Station,” is meant to evoke not only a place but also an activity. A forest station is familiar as a watchtower, a post on the lookout for conflagrations, a position that requires vigilance, watchfulness, discipline, and occasionally, the necessary sounding of an alarm. It is an outpost, peopled by a vanguard, which correspondingly number in the few. Solitude is almost mandatory. Forest station also homophonically sounds an activity, of planting and prefiguration, like

reforestation, only originary. In order for a forest station to arise there must be a clearing, a spacing that makes gathering possible, and makes the gathering able to relate. Here one can see the trees for the forest, as it were. The work of the artists in "Forest Station" makes manifest the twofold relation described, of separation and germination, of the individual and the populace. David Ross occupies a space and fills it with a world; Yvette Poorter opens a space and by letting the world fill it, fills the world with it.

David Ross's work is a colorful, kaleidoscopic recombination of his personal experiences and cultural influences which refracts both the individual and the social so that they converge in a way that makes it impossible to tell where one begins and the other ends. On view at Modern Fuel, "Self-portrait of the artist in Japan: Magic mountain. Hiroshima mon amour, Of floating weeds and seven other stories..." (2008) attempts to convey Ross's experience of Japan, where he has lived for the past two years, and in title alone, proffers a wealth of references. Visitors will lose themselves in a space crowded with a quilted network of signs and populated by numerous life-size figures in patchwork ninja costumes. These are silent sentinels, avatars of the artist that simultaneously reveal and conceal his identity and uncannily mirror his public. By calling his installations self-portraits, Ross places an emphasis on intimacy, encouraging a one-to-one, intuitive or personal relationship between the work and its viewer.

The fragmentary narratives he presents have to be pieced together by viewers as they navigate their way through his installation. The model is much less that of community theatre than of a staged community. Through his installation, Ross gives weight to time, embodies it in relation to its viewers' bodies, be they one or several, and represents its passage not as a fleeting experience, but as something that physically builds up in nature, like the rings in a tree. Trees are rich metaphors for Ross, and in this installation he makes an explicit reference to the radiated tree in Hiroshima's memorial park. Citing a similar correlation made by the protagonist of Thomas Mann's "Magic Mountain," Ross comments on the spiritual health of humanity as it is reflected in our impact on our physical environment.

With "Knock on Woods" (2007-ongoing), Rotterdam-based artist Yvette Poorter has created what she calls a "para-site," a mobile constructed space that can be inserted and opened up to those who need a retreat. "Knock on Woods" is a nomadic version of the previous, and sedentary, residency projects she has organized: "A Week in the Woods" (2001-03) in her apartment in Montreal; and "This Neck of the Woods" (2005-2007) in her backyard in Rotterdam. "Knock on Woods" is comprised of a trompe l'oeil rustic tent-cabin, a forest of tree-flags, and an archive box replete with offerings from the previous participants in the project, be it a drawing or poem, and audio or video recording inspired by the residency. After a number of European stops in Holland, France and Portugal, the project toured across Canada in the summer of 2008, with a final stop in Kingston. Artists were invited to participate by committing to at least a minimum stay of four hours, during which time any kind of work/non-work was encouraged, such as napping, hair-weaving, and other forms of composing. At the site hosted by Open Space Gallery on the West Coast, Isaac Flagg dug a hole in the floor of the tent/cabin, sat in it, and then filled it back in. In Kingston, Lisa Figge, dressed up as Madame E, traced the passage of Laurasia and Gondwanaland for visitors to the tent/cabin, and served tea.

A documentary video that gives a poetic summation of the residencies to date, "A Nothering of Means" (2008) is on display at Modern Fuel along with documentation of the residencies undertaken in Kingston. If anything, what the video demonstrates is the vast diversity of the projects and the participants who have resided in Poorter's Woods. A text on the archive box suggests that solitary dwellers sifting through the materials will not feel alone since they share in the inspiration of the other inhabitants. Poorter's project does not create a community, however: it exposes one, one that shares fewer similarities than differences. The heterogeneity of the material is not subsumed by Poorter, the resident technician. The projects remain as singular as the residents. In order for community to exist, relations of difference are necessarily established and maintained. Accordingly, Poorter's project is ongoing and may never be completed. Exposed, community is not one. It's always wanting more.

"Forest Station" presents work that reflects the wandering ways and the worldliness of both Yvette Poorter and David Ross. Ironically, their cosmopolitanism is rooted in a kind of pastoral that calls into question any stable founding of a

populace. For those who engage with their work, the terrain is constantly shifting. Community values are confounded by this kind of outreach.

Michael Davidge is the Artistic Director of Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre.