

SYPHON

A Special Edition
concluding Modern Fuel's
Media Arts Series
Aesthetic Alchemy

JULIE RENÉ DE COTRET in conversation
with SOFT TURNS, JANE KIRBY & DAVID
PARKER interview RICHARD IBGHY &
MARILOU LEMMENS, KASIA KNAP consults
with JANNA-MARYNN BRUNNEN and KIM
NEUDORF reflects upon YAM LAU.

syphon honours the etymology of the term "hoser," referring to those farmers who, on the Canadian prairies during the great depression of the 1930s, would syphon gas from their neighbours' vehicles with a hose. We reclaim the somewhat derogatory expression and apply it to all those trying to make ends meet in artist-run culture.



IMAGE CREDIT FOR COVER

Is there anything left to be done at all? (2014)
Five-channel video, sound, sculpture, dimensions variable.
Installation view, Trinity Square Video, Toronto, Canada, 2014.
ARTIST: **RICHARD IBGHY AND MARILOU LEMMENS**
PHOTO CREDIT: **RIML**

IMAGE CREDIT FOR PAGE 3, FROM LEFT TO RIGHT

Is there anything left to be done at all? (2014)
Five-channel video, sound, sculpture, dimensions variable.
Video still.
ARTIST: **RICHARD IBGHY AND MARILOU LEMMENS**

Jane Kirby and David Parker leading a workshop on microphone techniques and software for sound art, (2015).
PHOTO CREDIT: **KEVIN RODGERS**

MASTHEAD

SYPHON is an arts and culture publication produced by Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre that is meant to act as a conduit between the arts community in Kingston and communities elsewhere. It was created in response to the lack of critical arts commentary and coverage in local publications, and seen as a way to increase exposure to experimental and non-commercial art practices. Syphon has a mandate to feature local arts coverage in conjunction with national and international projects, and an emphasis on arts scenes and activities that are seen as peripheral. It acts, in essence, as a record and communiqué for small regional arts communities throughout the country.

MODERN FUEL ARTIST-RUN CENTRE is a non-profit organization facilitating the production, presentation, and interpretation of contemporary visual, time-based and interdisciplinary arts. Modern Fuel aims to meet the professional development needs of emerging and mid-career local, national and international artists, from diverse cultural communities, through exhibition, discussion, and mentorship opportunities. Modern Fuel supports innovation and experimentation, and is committed to the education of interested publics and the diversification of its audiences.

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Suite 305
370 King Street W.
Kingston, ON
K7L 2X4

613 548 4883
info@modernfuel.org
www.modernfuel.org

Gallery Hours: Tuesday to Saturday 12 noon to 5pm

EDITORIAL & PUBLISHING FOR SYPHON

Kevin Rodgers, Editor-in-chief
Vincent Perez, Editor-at-large & Art Director
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Printed at McLaren Press, Bracebridge, Ontario.

Kevin Rodgers on Syphon, moving forward

The failure of institutions to approach the work of artists in terms of materials, labour, organization and community renders the work of art abstract, both as a product and as a functional meaning. Artists and the community must depend upon each other in the determination of the meaning and value of their respective roles. If artists are to leap the economic hurdles and cross the void of constructed and incomplete histories that institutions have come to represent, it will be necessary for them to take a hand in determining the meaning and value of their work.¹

In the Winter of 2009, Modern Fuel launched *Syphon*. Edited by former Artistic Director Michael Davidge and designed by Vincent Perez, the publication sought to provide a space for artists and writers critically engaged in their surroundings. It was about “trying to make ends meet in artist-run culture,” especially for those located on the ‘periphery’ of major art centres.

When many publications are ceasing to print and online catalogues increase, when spaces for critical arts writing diminish and a complete overhaul of funding models in Canada is underway, where does the future of *Syphon* fit? In the six years since its launch, there have been issues on (among others) Art and the Economy, Community Practices, on Experimental Music and a special artists’ project by Montreal-based artist and researcher Steve Lyons. There was a DVD supplement of artists’ videos, and an online compilation of experiment music from the region. Each issue was widely distributed across the country.

While the scheduling was admittedly inconsistent, there was another more pressing concern. It was also a fundamental contradiction at the heart of *Syphon*. For as an advocate for artists’ rights and payment for creative labour, Modern Fuel’s production of *Syphon* was often reliant on the work of artists and writers who contributed without monetary compensation. It certainly wasn’t for lack of want, but it did lead to serious questions and debates. These debates were reflective of larger discussions on precarity, artistic labor and resources (or lack thereof) that have been widely—and noisily—circulating again the past few years.

As an artist-run organization, we recognize the need to create a space for word, deed and action—to make desire visible. This visibility is produced through various formats—of which the exhibition is only one—and *Syphon* is another. As *Syphon* features centrally in our continued negotiation of austerity measures with a push for a more just cultural landscape, we cannot let waver our role in helping determine the meaning and value of artistic labour. We are pleased to announce that *Syphon* 3.1 is the first to feature paid contributions—and is something that will continue in subsequent issues. On account of this, *Syphon* will now be released semi-annually: a Spring/Summer issue and a Fall/Winter issue.

In these negotiations, questions about visibility and participation emerged: how and where withdrawal from the visible, or outright refusal comes into play is one worth consideration. “Retreat performs a withdrawal from the world,” artist Yam Lau notes in a text written by Kim Neudorf in this issue of *Syphon*, “in order to create other kinds of value, autonomy and economy. It is predicated on a certain degree of *resistance as a point of departure*” (my emphasis). It is a welcome approach readily adapted by artists as an aesthetic strategy.² In addition to retreat or withdrawal, what of harnessing the notion of the *unproductive*? How is value thus conferred in such a scenario? Marilou Lemmens and Richard Ibhgy, two artists who are interviewed in these pages, have developed an eloquent practice that questions “how the logic of economy has come to infiltrate the most intimate aspects of life.”³

Lau, Lemmens and Ibhgy are three artists featured in *Syphon* 3.1. This issue concludes Modern Fuel’s 2014-2015 media arts project called *Aesthetic Alchemy*. With the support of the Ontario Arts Council and the Community Foundation of Kingston and Area, Modern Fuel invited eight artists over the duration of a year to share their work, give talks and deliver hands-on workshops. The artists were (in addition to Lau, Lemmens and Ibhgy) Janna-Marynn Brunnen (Calgary); Soft Turns (Toronto), David Parker and Jane Kirby (Kingston). Each of the visiting artists are featured in interviews or through texts on their work. Three additional artists were tasked with this—Julie René de Cotret, Kasia Knap, and Kim Neudorf—while David Parker and Jane Kirby interviewed Richard Ibhgy and Marilou Lemmens. Some of the interviews were edited for length, and the full interviews are available online at www.modernfuel.org/syphon.

Anchored in discussion and professional development, *Aesthetic Alchemy* was intended to provide forums for public conversation and for local media artists and participants to gain valuable feedback. Modern Fuel would like to thank each artist for the generosity they gave during their time in Kingston. The year was a better one for it.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Untitled Editorial. *INCITE: A Visual Art Magazine*, March/April 1984.
² In *Syphon* 2.3, the Ladies’ Invitational Deadbeat Society (LIDS) contributed a project whereby they proposed that *rather than rushing to stop the gap with people who are willing to work for free, what if we made tangible the space where there is nothing, where there is a lack?* Their unpaid contribution featured a blank page with a link to their online text *The Value of Our (Collective) Work*.
³ <http://www.ibghylemmens.com/bio.html>

KEVIN RODGERS is an artist and currently the Artistic Director of Modern Fuel.



DIALOGUE

Richard Ibghy and Marilou Lemmens interviewed by Modern Fuel’s Artists-in-Residence Jane Kirby and David Parker

DAVID PARKER & JANE KIRBY: What is your motivation for the current trajectory of your artistic practice?

MARILOU LEMMENS: I’m not sure there is such a thing as a “trajectory.” That would be a narrative constructed retrospectively, by selective inclusions and omissions. The motivation, on the other hand, is linked to a desire to think about specific problems or questions and to imagine ways of engaging with the complexity of their ramifications.

RICHARD IBGHY: I would say that the trajectory emerges from being drawn to certain things. For instance, I have long been interested in the graphical language of economy. Part of my interest is epistemological and reflects the growing importance of statistics and mathematics in the formation of knowledge. But perhaps more importantly, my interest is due to the weight and authority economic abstraction is able to enjoy in public discourse. In general, Marilou and I are attracted to dominant forms of discourse and today, I don’t think there can be any doubt that neoliberal economics is a dominant discourse.

D&J: How do you navigate producing work that questions neoliberal economics in a world where making art is increasingly subject to the logic of neoliberalism?

ML: One way I find to unpack a discourse I am simultaneously a part of is through humour. Humour has a directness about it that can puncture through the fabric of the ‘real.’ A lot of our work uses humour that way, like an interference in logic and in the assertion of meaning. It is impossible here not to think about what Michel Foucault wrote in the preface to *The Order of Things*, when he discusses laughing as he read a passage from Borges and

describes his laughter as something that shattered all the familiar landmarks of thought.

RI: Another way is to meet the difficulty you mention head on and accept all apparent contradictions. During a month long residency hosted by Trinity Square Video and the 27th Images Festival, in Toronto, we wanted to confront the increasing complicity of artistic practices with high-performance culture. This difficulty represents both a failure of critical analysis and of utopian imagination. So, we invited four artists –Justine Chambers, Kevin Rodgers, Rodrigo Martí and Ryan Tong – to help us remove the productivity from our production-based residency to workshop the generative potential of unproductive labour and expenditure in creative work. By suspending the expectation to produce something for someone or something, our collaborators were asked to engage with the desires that drive their creative practice without being oriented towards any purpose. The exhibition *Is there anything left to be done at all?* consists of traces from that activity.

Yet even in works where the subject is not labour, we often reproduce the language of neoliberalism (its discourse, aesthetics, tools) without trying to completely escape its logic; instead we work *within* its logic and try to demythologize it.

D&J: How do you navigate the removal of productivity outside your artistic practice and in everyday life?

“Marilou and I are attracted to dominant forms of discourse and today, I don’t think there can be any doubt that neoliberal economics is a dominant discourse.”

RI: The other day we were listening to a podcast documentary on the degrowth movement and without being implicated directly in the movement itself, we found many similarities with some of the ideas that orient the way we live. For the past few years we have been living on a farm which has greatly reduced our financial engagements. We get by without much of an income, and what we’ve learned

living the way we have is that reducing your financial necessities greatly reduces your need to be financially productive. I realize that not everybody wants to live on a farm and grow their own produce, but even for those living in the city, I think that reducing unnecessary expenditures can be the first step in reducing the time and focus one is required to produce income and to reevaluate the time and energy one puts into engaging with other desires.

ML: I would also say that, today, the social composition you suggest has to be reconsidered. We can no longer oppose the world of artists and cultural workers to “all other worlds.” Amongst the sociologists and cultural theorists who are concerned with the recent transformations in the labour market, there is a widespread recognition that artistic activity is no longer an exception to modes of capitalist production– i.e. as a site of unalienated labour. Artistic practices are now aligned with the neoliberal model of production, where competition, self-management, and flexibility are the norm.

Even more than in industrial production, the knowledge-based economy depends on activating, controlling and harnessing the creative, communicative, and ‘collaborative’ capacities of workers. Consequently, what needs to be governed has changed too. Instead of the old discipline of industrial societies – training bodies and minds through compulsion – what we have is a management of minds encouraged by a complex network of solicitations and incentives. We are dealing with individuals whose subjectivities are wilfully geared towards performing in the activities they are required to or choose to undertake. In other words, we want to perform because it is through our work that we feel that we can realize our potential. But it is more complex than that because under precarious labour and living conditions there is the fear of being left behind and marginalised. This fear is not unjustified – there are real consequences to being marginalised.

I would say that the art world is perhaps the sphere where the resistance to productivity would be the most welcomed precisely because it can be recuperated productively. Meaning that gestures of resistance to productivity in art, by being framed within the context of art, become productive of value – which is not the case in other fields of work.

RICHARD IBGHY & MARILOU LEMMENS have developed a collaborative practice that combines a concise approach to the form and construction of the art object with a desire to make ideas visible. For several years, they have examined the rationale upon which economic actions are described and represented, and how the logic of economy has come to infiltrate the most intimate aspects of life.

Their work has been shown at La Biennale de Montréal, *L’avenir (looking forward)* (Montreal, 2014), 27th Images Festival (Toronto, 2014), Manif d’art 7: Quebec City Biennial (Quebec City, 2014), La Filature, Scène Nationale (Mulhouse, France, 2013-14), Henie Onstad Kunstsenter (Høvikodden, Norway, 2013), Centre for Contemporary Arts (Glasgow, 2012), and the 10th Sharjah Biennial (Sharjah, UAE, 2011). Their writings have been published in *Le Merle*, *C-magazine*, *New Social Inquiry*, and *Pyramid Power*. They have published two artist’s books *Tools that Measure the Intensity of Passionate Interests* (2012) and *Spaces of Observation* (2012). Recently, they contributed a catalogue essay for the publication accompanying La Biennale de Montréal (2014).

They live and work in Montreal and Durham-Sud, Quebec.

DAVID PARKER is a multi-instrumental musician, composer, sound designer and digital media artist based in Kingston, Ontario. David’s musical background involves bands and collaborations in punk, free jazz, improvisation, drone, and metal. He writes and records music and audio art in a variety of contexts, for performance as a solo act and with other musicians. He has created sound design for theatrical productions and for circus choreography. David’s academic research in human-computer interaction gave rise to his digital media art practice. davidparker.co

JANE KIRBY is a circus artist and movement-maker with a focus on aerial acrobatics. Specializing on silks, rope, and modified rope apparatus, Jane has performed her solo, duo and ensemble work at numerous artistic, community and corporate events and festivals across Nova Scotia and Ontario. She works extensively with improvisation and embodied impulses as creation tools, and is interested in exploring questions of embodiment, the subversion of spectacle and intimacy with the audience in her work. lowlitaerialarts.ca

Aesthetic Alchemy with Richard Ibghy and Marilou Lemmens: February 11-12, 2015

Aesthetic Alchemy with Jane Kirby and David Parker: April 7, 2015

From February 17 to June 20, Jane Kirby and David Parker were Modern Fuel’s inaugural Artists-in-Residence in our new Workspace with their project echolocation.

In conversation with **Soft Turns**

By Julie René de Cotret

SOFT TURNS: Early Naturalists had a way of looking at things: touching and looking to understand, but with the advent of the microscope you had to de-animate the subject in order to examine it. Evelyn Fox Keller, Professor Emerita of History and Philosophy of Science at MIT, wrote “The Biological Gaze”, which we brought to discuss at Modern Fuel. In it she explains, “*It is not in fact an image of a cell ... it is an x-ray photograph of a crystalline structure composed from cell extracts, that is from excessive preparation, manipulations, purification of the homogenized contents of a vast number of cells ... no living object could survive the process of imaging*”. Keller speaks of how difficult it is to tell whether or not what you are looking at is even real. The images start to look like shadows on the wall, as you are trying to get closer to the thing, you could in fact be getting further. There is an increasing distance, nothing to hang on to, nothing to fix.

JULIE RENÉ DE COTRET: How long have you been interested in Keller’s theory and in what ways does it inform your practice?

ST: We came across her writing about two years ago, but we have always been interested in the way that humans create systems, organize knowledge from their understanding. During our USF Verftet residency in Bergen, Norway, we became fascinated by the natural history museum there. That place served as a kind of index for us. We were interested in the way the presentation of the displays echoed how we as humans relate to various people, specimens or artifacts. The museum had different wings that had been left unaltered since their unveiling (some dated back to the

1860s, others were immediately recognizable as products of the 1960s). You were essentially going through a museum of museums. This got us started on several works that dealt more explicitly with sciences.

J: Ontology is the theory around the nature of things that are in existence. Amongst all the things of the world, how do you decide to focus on one thing?

ST: After working for a while, repeating themes become evident, so there is a kind of artistic predisposition. One of the determining factors is that we have traveled and lived in different places and have had different means available to us. Living in Ontario, wood is really cheap, in Berlin or Paris other materials are available. We like to use found objects and re-use materials – for practicality as well as for the history they carry as things that exist outside of our use of them. For instance, *Icarus’ Dream (2010)* depicts reflections of the light on walls that approach the camera. We made this video in Berlin during January when it is really dark, knowing we would have no trouble finding discarded construction materials there. In Bergen we heard about the natural history museum and all of this stuff became the content. We have been interested in other issues, but those immediate realities worked themselves into our practice. When we made *Enclosed (2009)* we wanted to make an infinite library out of books. Berlin is a place where you can find books easily. We found a kind of depository space where they were giving them away. In fact, one of the books we found there coincidentally turned out to be the source of several projects later on.

J: Tell me about how you approach the encounter of your subject matter and how this translates in the audiences’ experience?

ST: We are consciously open about the encounter and try not to walk into it with pre-conceived ideas. We don’t want to be the sole authors of the videos. As an artist, you are always in control, you can’t say you are collaborating with the world, but we feel we can try to abandon ourselves a little bit more to the rhythms that we see in the nature of something. It might be interesting to simply try and aim towards that goal when working. Ultimately we would like the audience to have similar unresolved encounters with the work. We are giving them a lot, in a sense, but we aren’t telling them what is going on. Interest can expand exponentially outwards from that point of contact.

J: Looking at the work, I am in a constant state of hypotheses, making theories on how different aspects were resolved, realized, and on what the movements, sounds or subjects are doing in relationship to each other. The work is active and evolving. The complexity you empower during creation is delivered to the viewer. Knowing that your intent is not to deliver a precise message and knowing this contrasts with a large portion of art practices, why have you chosen to allow your subject matter so much freedom?



IMAGE CREDIT
STILL from work in progress
(the portolan maps)
ARTIST & PHOTO CREDIT:
COURTESY OF THE ARTISTS



“We don’t want to be the sole authors...”

ST: Stepping forward and stepping back, is a theme that has to do with Keller’s text but also goes back to other exhibitions we have had. We wrote a text called “The Vibrating Self” for our exhibition at PAVED ART in Saskatoon (2012). This is an idea we’ve developed to describe the movement involved in endlessly approaching something out of reach. For us, it’s kind of like enacting the subjective. Maurice Merleau-Ponty believed in this kind of subjectivity: how one sees and where one is situated determines everything, because so much of what one understands about the world is due to one’s position.

We also apply the approach of the vibrating self when thinking about travel, in terms of the actual act of travel, of moving from one place to another, as a metaphor for this kind of being open and ready to experience something on its own terms or slightly more outside your habitual response. When you are in a balloon you don’t feel the wind, the wind is actually propelling you, so you are one with the environment, moving, but not really mov-

ing in terms of what is around you, therefore having the feeling of being still. The world appears to be moving towards you, instead of you towards it.

1 “The Biological Gaze,” in Future Natural. Ed. Sally Stanford. Routledge, 1995.

This interview was conducted on January 19th, 2015.

Born in Montreal, **JULIE RENÉ DE COTRET** is a French Canadian interdisciplinary artist, independent curator and writer (NSCAD 2004). She has exhibited and curated internationally: US, Sweden, Greece, and soon in Geneva, Switzerland. René de Cotret is co-founder and Artistic Director of the artist residency program at the School of Environmental Science, University of Guelph, Ontario, where her studio is located. She is a member of Ed Video’s Media Arts Centre Board of Directors, 2006-2014 and currently on the board of the Galerie du Nouvel-Ontario.

SOFT TURNS is the collaborative effort of Toronto based artists Sarah Jane Gorlitz and Wojciech Olejnik. The idea of an encounter with something, as an ever-changing space

between the foreign and familiar, the accessible and inaccessible, is a central theme of their practice. Often featuring stop-motion animation, their installations have been exhibited widely in Canada and abroad; recently at Centre Clark (Montréal), Southern Exposure (San Francisco), Foundation 3.14 (Bergen), Greusslich Contemporary (Berlin), 17th and 18th Videobrasil (São Paulo), and Oakville Galleries (Oakville). They have received support from the Edstrand Foundation, the Toronto, Ontario, and Canada Arts Councils; the latter awarding them the 2008 Joseph Stauffer Prize and a 2013 Paris Residency.

**Aesthetic Alchemy with Soft Turns:
October 17-18, 2014**

Soft Turns will present a new body of work during their upcoming exhibition at Modern Fuel in Fall 2016.

IMAGE CREDIT
STILL from *westward looking east*
(2013)

ARTIST & PHOTO CREDIT:
COURTESY OF THE ARTISTS

Two sightings: On the work of Yam Lau

By Kim Neudorf

Simone Weil once wrote of the conception of a circle as ultimately unknowable: “The circle is not an object which, like the moon or the stars, exists without the mind’s participation; and yet, like the stars, it is for me, according to the poetic expression, an all-mighty stranger.”¹ Here, a certain attentiveness to an understanding of a circle means putting aside the known in order to give space to the unknown. In turn, the simultaneously introspective and detached nature of Yam Lau’s work actively invites attentiveness while resisting the idea of being known. In painting, Lau has sought a space where paintings can “withdraw” from “the name, or the event of painting”² while creating an interval between painting that is and painting that has yet to be. In animation/digital video, Lau explores the work’s relationship to “retreat” as both a place of resistance and of an experience of time “as a continuous, generative unfolding”.³ The phenomena of mirroring and its ability to implicate, deflect, and generate space becomes a point between these two worlds, while continuing to look back to the gesture of inversion or self-enclosure as a temporality outside of “real”⁴ time.

*The White Mirror shows and declares almost nothing. It surrenders itself to the world and lets the world pour into its border...And when there are more than one White Mirror in a space, they start to do other things.*⁵
— YAM LAU

JULY, 2011: “A-fold-in-two, in memory of Gordon Lebrecht” installed in The Fox, 2011, G gallery in Toronto. Set apart from each other, installed high on the wall, both leaning at an angle, the *White Mirror* paintings of Lau’s

“A-fold-in-two, in memory of Gordon Lebrecht” seemed to lift from, peel away, or pull forward a piece of the very wall. In 1997, Lebrecht rebuilt and installed replicas of the interior walls of Cold City Gallery, placing them slightly off-register. This off-set state originally housed Lau’s reflective white paintings, enacting, with every shift and turn, a *fold-in* or *folding-in* of space. In the context of *The Fox*, amidst a collection of other artists’ work playing at the corners and sides and seats of thought via, in lieu of, or informed by Martin Heidegger’s writing, Lau’s *White Mirror* paintings performed a kind of space outside of my radar, seeming to evaporate, evade, and deflect. Their blankness suggested a space of notation, designed to signal action at some unknown point in time. Unconsciously, I reacted in kind by letting them advance into peripheral space. Their logic of inversion still registers as inaccessible, or as a sudden clearing of the mind.

NOVEMBER, 2014: A Toronto studio visit with Lau and screening of “Rehearsal”, a computer generated, animation/digital video from 2010. The video begins in animated space resembling a small, bare studio. A small house or room, more like a drawing or model of a house or a room, sits on a table. Other models, seemingly of the same dimensions, move into the space. Exaggerated shadows crawl across the wall from a hidden light source. Light recasts the dimensions of space as curved. The models converge, models within models. In another room, another small house in deep shadow sits. The sound of rain creates a space of sound. A flash of lightning illuminates the digital interior of the small house, a small room. A woman sits and smokes. Another woman further away repeats this gesture. Not repeats, replicates. The same woman from two angles, two dimensions which are of one moment, identical, mirroring each other, acting together. This offset symmetry shifts my perception.

While the *White Mirror* paintings seemed to lift space toward some future or other action (the paintings are after all, another space other than that of the wall), the mirroring gesture in *Rehearsal* is an illusion which *acts upon* my understanding of space and through

its action, is not about space at all but about the moment of its appearance (a moment which is itself doubled: appear means to *appear* as well as something which *appears as* or *appears to*). For Lau, this is the moment when an image *appears* as an event preceding the image; or the moment when my understanding shifts. This moment interrupts a conception of space while extending it or repositioning it as a rhythm of mirroring.

“Retreat performs a withdrawal from the world, in order to create other kinds of value, autonomy and economy.

There is a clear correlation between Lau’s concerns with the appearance of images and the idea of painting as a space which *acts upon* rather than is about anything (including an end). For painting to act upon is to put something in motion, to create the conditions for a painting that is yet to be. At what point, as Lebrecht wrote of his collaboration with Yau, can you call work “a work (what I would like to call the remnant of a working through)”⁶ Or, “[i]n other words, whatever is at work here means to reset or rework...through a necessary folding-back (but *it*, the reworking, is “itself” this folding-back, this double articulation)”⁷

To reset or rework might also be to resist, or to turn inward rather than to turn away. Lau has referred to a turning inward in relationship to “retreat”⁸ and the culture of retreat cultivated by the historic literati class of seventeenth century China. In this culture of retreat is the historical Chinese scholar’s studio as a model of retreat and protest. “Retreat,” Lau says: “performs a withdrawal from the world, in order to create other kinds of value, autonomy and economy. It is predicated on a certain degree of resistance as a point of departure.”⁹

As a space to withdraw from the world, the studio is also a space to pay a different kind of attention and experience a different mode of time. In painting and in animation/video, Yau has proposed models of this sense of time as multiple temporalities (time and space as a process or rhythm with a certain porousness), and as generative possibilities (mirroring as deflecting static engagements while receiving and acting upon space itself).

Lebrecht warns: “what is momentarily opened here, and has yet to be accounted for, is the work of an agency which knows of no proper orientation.”¹⁰ To simply see what is in place or take stock of the mechanisms in play “is to fail to see the ensemble in the movement, the repetition-in-place of its ‘taking place.’”¹¹ The idea is not to settle or weigh in or hold forth on a single goal or manifestation of agency, but to allow oneself to be acted upon spatially, psychologically, intellectually; to feel a shifting of perception and pay attention to that which is coming into being. To engage with Lau’s work, which seeks to “show and declare almost nothing”¹² is to be asked to dream, but not to know.

KIM NEUDORF is an artist and writer who received her MFA at Western University in London (ON) in 2012. Her writing and paintings have appeared most recently in Paravent, curated by Sky Glabush, the fold-up, the get-up, the move about at Evans Contemporary Gallery, and The Room and Its Inhabitants at Susan Hobbs Gallery. In the Fall of 2014 she curated balloon / portal / starres / fiends at DNA Artspace in London, an exhibition of works responding to a short story by Donald Barthelme. Neudorf maintains a studio practice in London (ON) where she also teaches painting and drawing at Western University.

Born in Hong Kong, **YAM LAU** is an artist/writer based in Toronto. His creative work explores new expressions and qualities of space, time and the image through the application of painting, computer-animation and digital video. In addition, Lau has initiated a number of independent projects such as using his car (Toronto) and a donkey (Donkey Institute of Contemporary Art, Beijing, China) as on-going mobile project spaces.. He is represented by the Katzman Kamen Gallery in Toronto and Yuanfen New Media Art Space in Beijing, China. Currently, Lau is professor of painting at York University, Toronto.

Aesthetic Alchemy with Yam Lau:
August 8-9, 2014

FOOTNOTES
¹Thomas R. Nevin, *Simone Weil: Portrait of a Self-exiled Jew* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 151.
²Yam Lau, interview with the artist, November, 2014.
³Ibid., 2014.
⁴Ibid., 2014.
⁵Ibid., 2014.
⁶Gordon Lebrecht, “A Projective Schema Concerning Some Salient Features of An Ex-Position”, *Deadlines [a “fold-of-two,” an entre-deux]* (Toronto: Coach House Printing Co., 1997), 47.
⁷Ibid., 47.
⁸Lau, 2014.
⁹Ibid., 2014.
¹⁰Lebrecht, “A Projective Schema Concerning Some Salient Features of An Ex-Position”, 49.
¹¹Ibid., 49.
¹²Lau, 2014.

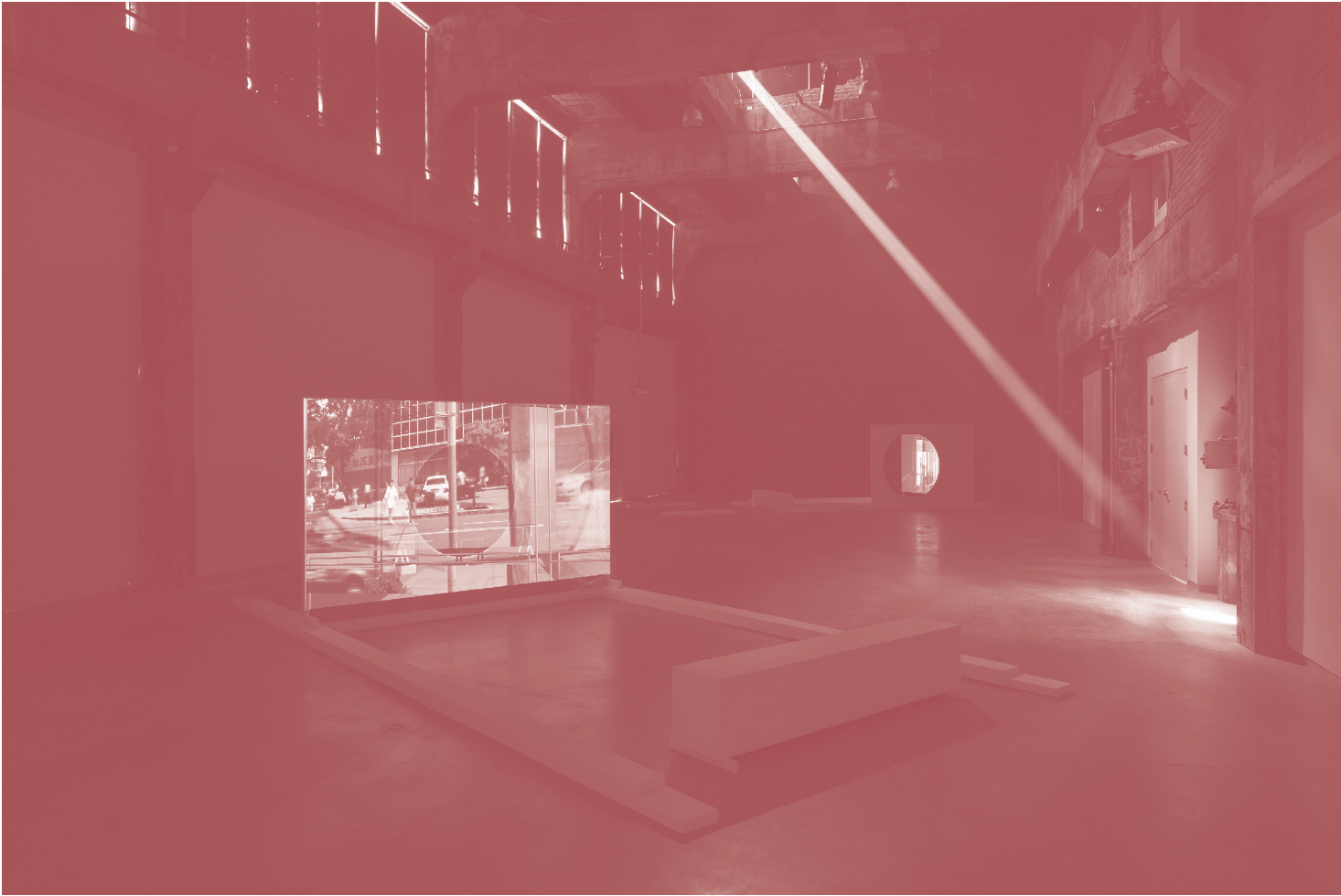
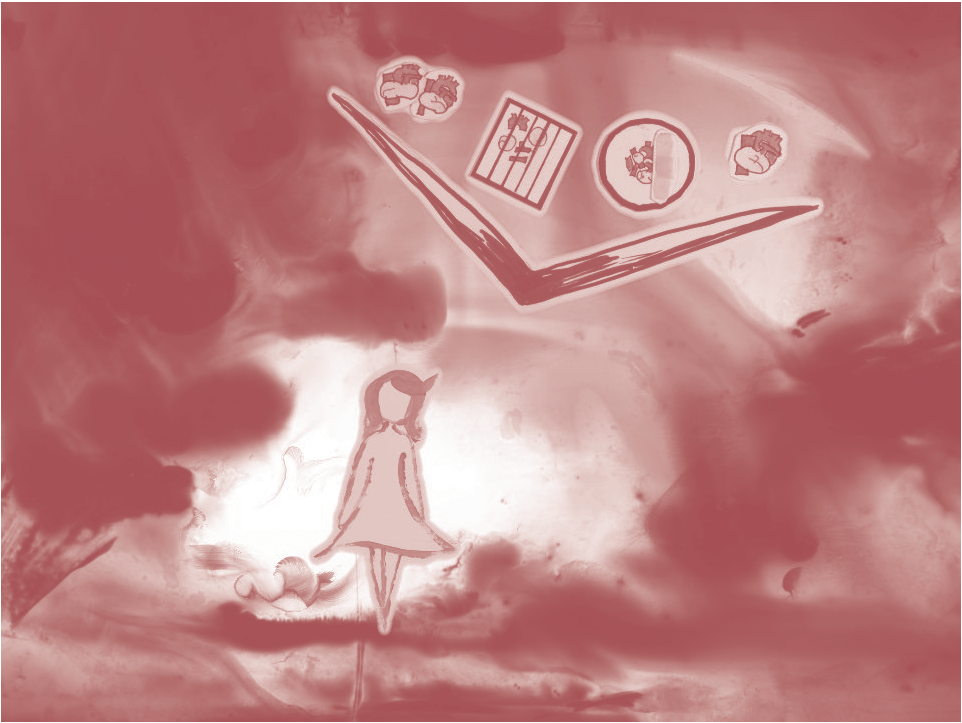
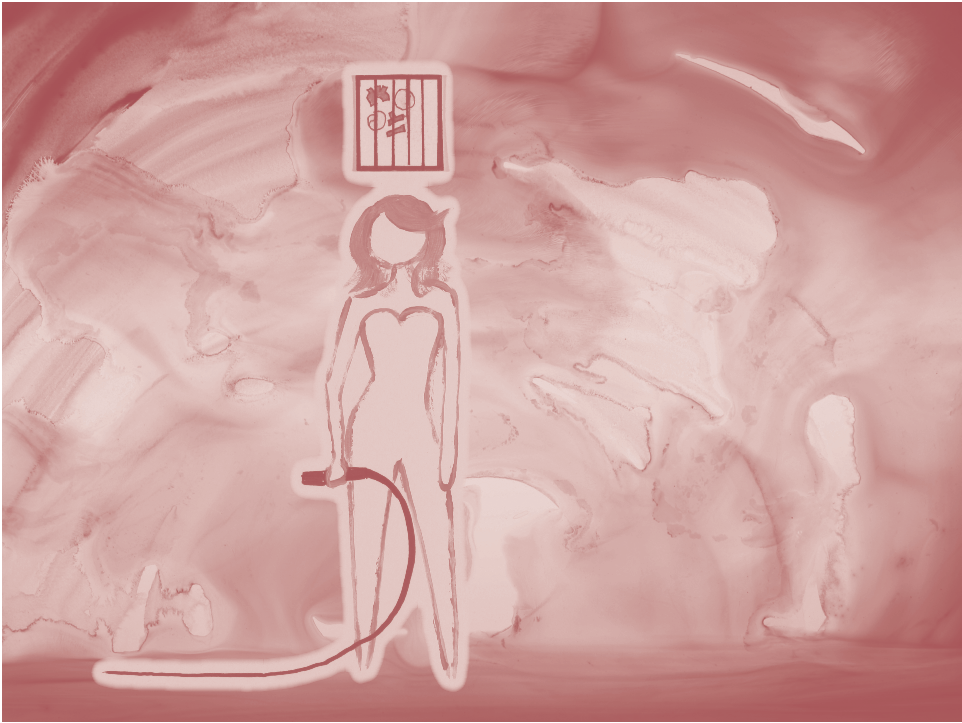


IMAGE CREDIT *A World is a Model for the World* Video (2013). Video installation, 2 projections. Darling Foundry. Montreal.
ARTIST: YAM LAU PHOTO CREDIT: **GUY L'HEUREUX**



Little Heart: an Ethical Approach to Storymaking

Kasia Knap and Janna-Marynn Brunnen

Little Heart (2010) opens with a beating paper heart, paint dissolving into the rush of water. Against washes of colour, faceless bodies of paper actors traverse the haze. Persisting through a narrative of young adulthood, the paper heart navigates first love and heartbreak: exchanged, then tossed and torn, but eventually mended for the stronger. Little Heart, Janna-Marynn Brunnen’s award-winning 7-minute animation, took over one year and 10 000 drawings and paintings to create. It became a force of self-growth for its author, maturing into a vehicle for engaging the experiences of her viewers that continues to reinvent itself. The film is less about Janna’s own journey now, and more about how others engage with it. For Janna, how others engage with Little Heart allows her to view the work through somebody else’s eyes and see somebody else’s story.

KASIA KNAP: Although autobiographical, Little Heart’s narrative is universal. Everyone must know heartbreak. I feel this is the video’s first point of access for viewers. How are discussions usually broached?

JANNA-MARYNN BRUNNEN: Haha. They’re usually not! Just kidding. The truth is, the story is rarely the first thing people want to talk about. I think because it’s the most vulnerable part of the animation. Engaging in discussions about the story usually means people doing the questioning have to put themselves out there and be vulnerable. Most people will start off with questions about the animation techniques and how long it took me. More technical things like that. It’s in the more intimate group screenings or the one-on-one discussions in the lobby that people brave the discussion about the story.

K: You had to get into character for each actor in Little Heart, even the “antagonists.” Would you have been able to engage in such a vulnerable way earlier in your career?

J: No, I don’t think I would have had the maturity I needed to do *all* the characters justice. It’s really quite hard jumping into the antagonist characters to animate them when the story is about you. You have to leave yourself at the door. What I wanted to animate and what I did animate were different.

K: You are invested heavily in the journey of the work—not only the goal but the *getting there*.

J: For me, the artwork is therapeutic. It helps me express things that I can’t seem to express in any other way. I work through a lot while I’m doing animation. I’m working through emotions and understanding things from all points of view. I am acting out each of the characters in the story. I like figuring out movement and the redrawing after you shoot a test of something and it doesn’t work. With animation, sometimes you have to draw a hundred drawings before you start to really see how the character is moving.

There will always be ways of doing something faster, but there is a value of doing something the harder way, something that is *not* faster. I am interested in showing how to express emotion without cutting corners or relying on tricks. Why would anybody animate if they didn’t love drawing?

K: Janna, you have a refreshing attitude towards criticality. Feeling that it shuts down people without a positive enough return, you believe that someone’s criticism is often a reflection of their insecurity. I think context matters enormously here?

J: Yes I think context matters, but I also think the purpose of the criticism matters. At the end of the day sometimes you are not the intended audience member and that’s ok too. There might be a disconnect for a valid reason.

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K: I speak from a limited background of practice mostly done within the confines of an institution. Emerging artists learning from this educational model are taught to see and speak critically. That’s how you become a better artist. Your background is different Janna. How has it contributed to your ideas of critique etiquette?

J: Coming from a theatre point of view you are always thinking of your audience, and the audience will change drastically with what play you are working on. But I think what it always comes back to is did I get across what I wanted to get across in the way I wanted to do it. And that is where criticism is great. I bring people in during my animation process to watch and evaluate and let me know if something doesn’t read well. Then I go back to the drawing board and alter the drawings so it conveys what I wanted it to convey.

My favourite critique was from a festival programmer who said to me “You know I didn’t really like it or get it the first time I watched it, but on the seventh time I think I get it.” All that went through my mind was- you watched a 7-minute film, that you didn’t like or get seven times? That’s awesome! There’s something behind that drive that opened up a discussion that was bigger than the art itself, which is what it’s all about. For me, art is about starting a conversation, not having the last word. It’s just as interesting talking to someone who didn’t get your work as it is talking to someone who loved it. It’s easy to be a critic, but it takes vulnerability to be a good critic; to leave your ego and identity at the door, while putting yourself out there to open up a conversation with an artist.

KASIA KNAP currently lives in Ahmedabad, India, where she works for a disaster mitigation NGO. When she is not engaged in capacity building efforts, she frequents pani puri stalls, keeps busy sipping chai, or tries to navigate and stay alive in Indian traffic. Kasia will start an MA in International Development and Women’s Studies in the fall.

JANNA-MARYNN BRUNNEN grew up in and around Calgary, Alberta. In 2008 she started studying classical and experimental animation at Quickdraw Animation in Calgary. In 2009 She received the National Film Board of Canada / Quickdraw Animation Scholarship for study and production. Her first animated short “Little Heart” was a year in the making and has gone on to screen at 13 international Film Festivals. “Little Heart” received the Gold Kahuna Award at the 2011 Honolulu Film Awards, the Audience Choice Award at the 2011 Calgary International Festival of Animated Objects and was chosen to tour in the best of the festival package — “Films on the Go” at the 22nd St. John’s International Women’s Film Festival. Her next film is currently in production. Over the years she has worked in Canadian theatre as a Lighting Designer, Sound Designer, Technical Director and Stage Manager.

Aesthetic Alchemy with Janna-Marynn Brunnen: April 16-17, 2014

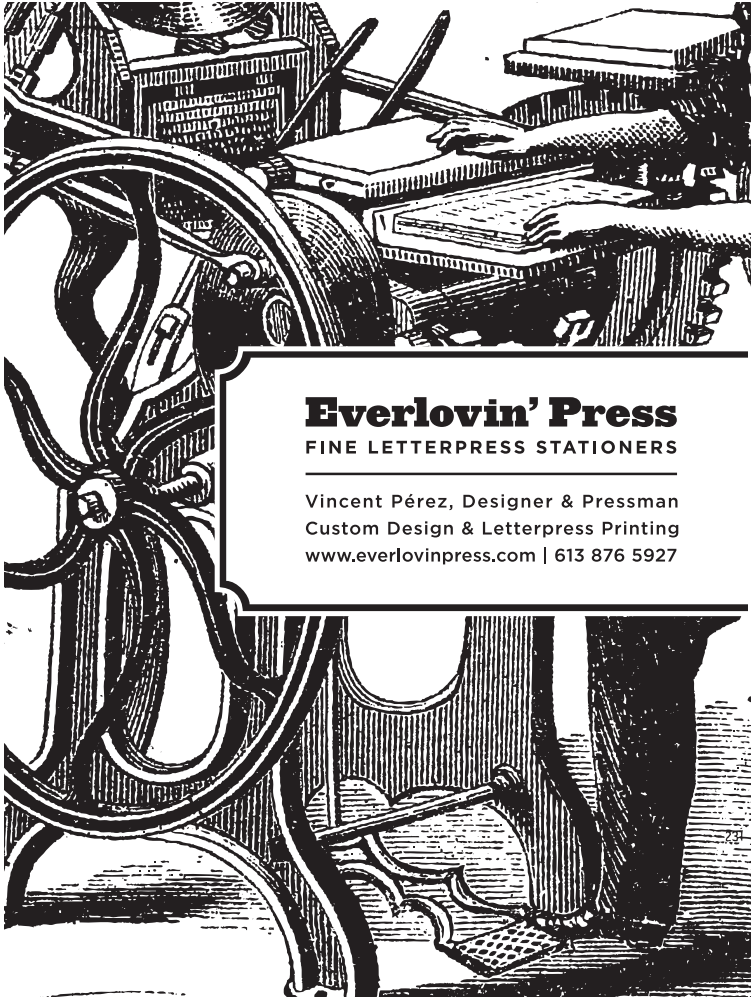
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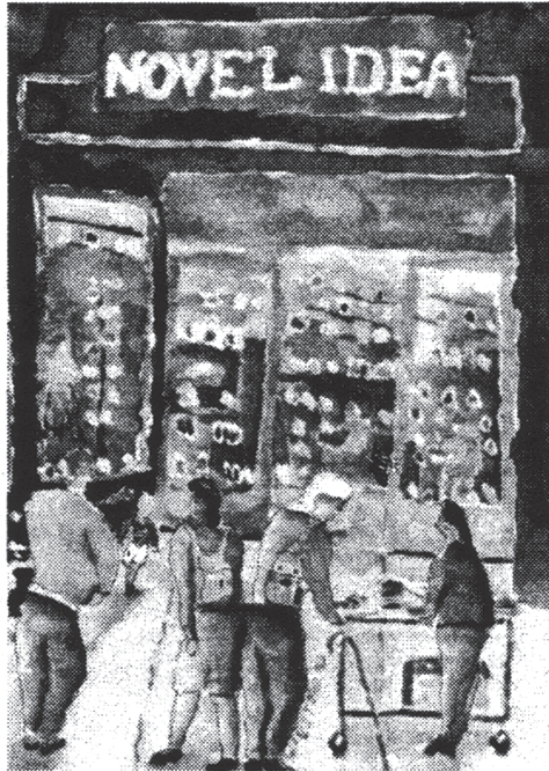


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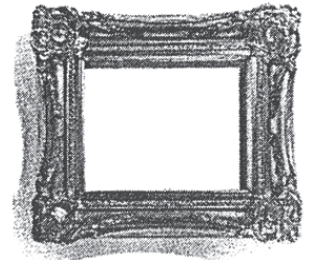
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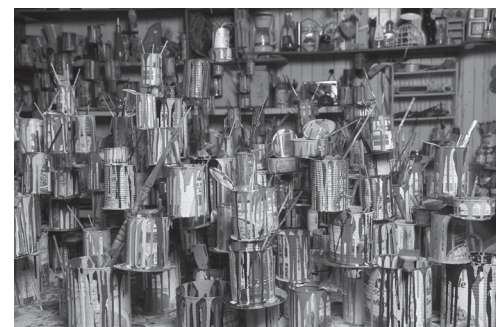
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BGL, *Canadassimo*, 56th International Art Exhibition La Biennale di Venezia, 2015.
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Out at newsstands May 8, 2015

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