

# AD HOC



"Ad Hoc" is an exhibition of photographs by two artists from the Kingston region, Noel Bullock (a founding director of Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre in 1977) and Jocelyn Purdie (currently the Director of the Union Gallery at Queen's). Both artists present a body of work that investigates a phenomenon of "vernacular" architecture.

Purdie provides a typography of the duck-blinds of Wolfe Island, and Bullock documents the displaced residents of Vancouver's East side through portraits of their shopping carts. Purdie proposes an investigation of hidden activity that might prove unsettling, while Bullock's work shows a side of Vancouver that will not be made visible during the Olympics.

A reception for the exhibition will take place at 7pm on Saturday, February 6, as part of Artignite.  
<http://www.queensu.ca/artignite>

## ARTISTS' BIOS

**Jocelyn Purdie** has been a practicing artist and an active member of the arts community since the mid '80s, and an independent curator since the early '90s. Her art practice includes work in sculpture, installation, and digital media. Recent undertakings include independent curatorial projects for the Swamp Ward Window, an alternative venue for contemporary art in the Kingston community. A graduate of St. Lawrence College in Kingston, Ontario,

**Noel Bullock** has also had teaching appointments at the institution. He has exhibited extensively both in Canada and abroad. Bullock may be best known for his permanent steel sculptures and his large outdoor permanent constructions.

## Exhibition Essay

Legitimizing the use of the Latin phrase as a title, AD HOC is an exhibition that brings together the photo-based work of the artists Jocelyn Purdie (Kingston, ON) and Noel Bullock (Gananoque, ON) featuring images of constructions designed for a specific purpose. Purdie presents a series of images of duck blinds that she has photographed on Wolfe Island, Ontario. Built by hunters in order to conceal themselves from the ducks that are their prey, the blinds are

great examples of vernacular architecture, often crude and provisional establishments built to address specific local needs using available resources and materials according to local traditions.

In contrast to Purdie's rural focus, Bullock presents a series of images, photographed in downtown Vancouver's Eastside, of an urban vernacular architecture of sorts, the mobile homes created by the homeless using shopping carts and scrap or other hoarded materials. The constructions also exhibit the impromptu or improvised connotation of the phrase *ad hoc*, as they appear both idiosyncratic and of the utmost necessity.

These images are found, freighted by the artists, within the more rarified environment of a gallery, demanding that they be considered as works of art. Approaching these works with an aesthetic disposition, one is compelled to reach for interpretive tools that would render their reception as an activity of bricolage, or an assemblage with suitable material on hand, much like the examples on view.

Purdie has titled her series of images of duck blinds *Habitus* (2009), with reference to a concept developed by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. In her artist's statement, she defines the concept as a kind of "cultural baggage" that, varying among different strata in society, predisposes or prepares individuals to act or make certain choices in their own milieu. *Habitus* is also the Latin root for a series of words that additionally resonate with Purdie's images: habit, habitat, habituate, and habitué. Perhaps habit conveys more of the meaning associated with *habitus* as it denotes not only a regular activity but also an article of clothing.

Purdie encourages a sociological reading of the duck blind, standing as symbolic marker for a particular place and culture, and the ecology and economy of the activity that it represents. But there is another activity that needs to be read into this scenario, the action of the artist, as she has perversely sought out these camouflaged hiding spaces in order to bring them into view. In proximity to these structures, her *habitus* has triggered a different kind of shot. And as it implicitly confers the legitimacy of these images as works of art, the exhibition of them should also be brought in for examination.

One could equally question the propriety of Noel Bullock's series, *Up Against the Wall in Wheeltown* (2008). The artist has stated that it is his intent to depict the dynamics of urban development and redevelopment in Vancouver, particularly as it has increased in preparation for the 2010 Winter Olympics and resulted in the displacement of residents with an observable increase in the city's homelessness. Bullock's images of shopping carts that function as shelters and vehicles for the homeless act as a record of that increase, confronting the viewer with an intractable problem familiar to most urban centres that will not be solved with the turning of a blind eye. Bullock wishes that these images be seen as a backdrop for the Olympics, and their exhibition is deliberately simultaneous with the efforts by officials to clean up the streets of Vancouver. It is not unusual for the administration of a city to want to keep up appearances on the world stage. Precedents come to mind, where the reach of the efforts extended even to a tidying up of the art that was on display, such as the demolition of the "ugly" *Corridart* exhibition days prior to the 1976 Montreal Olympics. Unlike the artists of the Vancouver Olympiad, Bullock has not been contracted to withhold any material that might be perceived as negative. Bullock's images expose the Olympic campaign as a decoy and draw attention to an unsightly aspect of the ecology and economy that it affects.

Though their subject matter is different and their locales are far flung, there is an affinity in the work presented by Bullock and Purdie, most of all in their shared strategy of making visible that which would preferably remain hidden. Both sets of images delineate relations of power within and outside the frame. Fundamentally, the control of appearance is an exercise of power. The ability to make appear or disappear, include or exclude, legitimate or discount, and exhibit or conceal is both the privilege of the powerful and the purview of art.

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