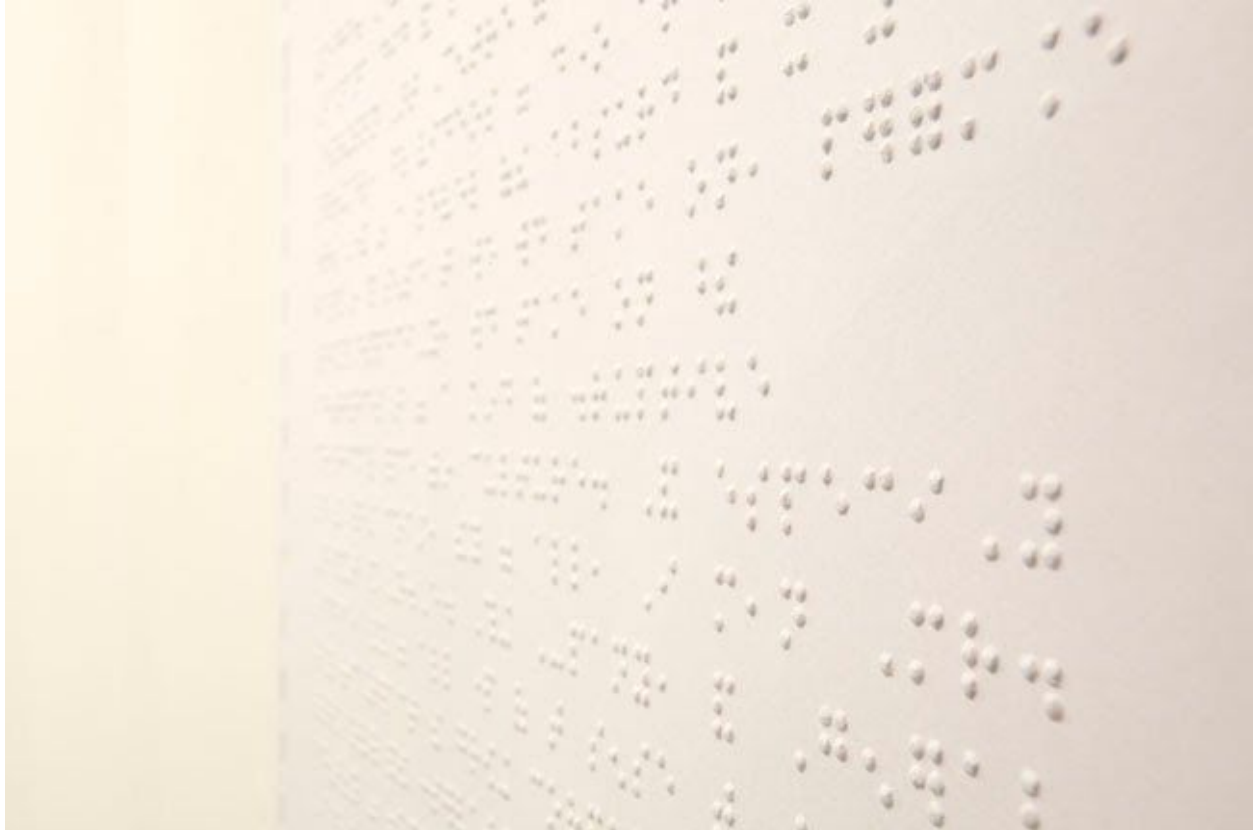


# INSTANCES: 30 YEARS OF MODERN FUEL AND THE K.A.A.I.



2007 is the 30th anniversary year for Kingston Artists' Association Inc./Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre! To commemorate this achievement, the gallery presents **Instances: 30 Years of Modern Fuel and the K.A.A.I.** The exhibition realizes a number of projects and proposals developed by Modern Fuel interns through 2006 and 2007 that were based on the collections of KAAI/MFARC stored in the Queen's University Archives. The exhibition addresses the need to preserve and document the histories of alternative art practices in Kingston at the same time that it questions the accessibility of that past, the reliability of memory, and the very impossibility of presenting a total account, that any history will be partial, selective, and subjective.

*Instances* presents an oral history of Modern Fuel in the Main Gallery space. It was produced following **Amy Uyeda's** proposal that called for interviews with artists who had exhibited in the early years of the gallery. Uyeda's proposal addressed the act of reminiscence in order to create a dialogue between the past and the present, speaking to the on-going process of history-making. **Brittany Wray**, working as MF's Special Project Research Coordinator this summer, contacted and conducted interviews with numerous individuals who have been involved with the gallery throughout the years. Representing each year between 1977 and 2006, a selection of clips from those interviews (featuring the recollections of **Joseph Babcock, May Chan, Jeff Childs, Julie Fiala, Dave Gordon, Bruce Grenville, Sandra Jass, Alana Kapell, Troy Leaman, Jocelyn Purdie, Bill Roff, Gjen Snider, Aida Sules, Lisa Visser, Jan Winton, and Lenni Workman**) was produced by Wray, and will be available as an audio tour of Modern Fuel. **Debbie Hurry** and **Kym Watson**, from the Canadian Hearing Society, worked with Modern Fuel to produce a sign language interpretation of the audio tour, and **Catherine Sullivan** converted transcripts of

the clips into Braille. The presentation of the materials is intended to mark a duality, fluctuating between various modes of accessibility and inaccessibility. Another outcome of this project is a list, now available on Modern Fuel's website, compiled by **Kari Cwynar**, of all the people involved in the organization as staff or board members and an overview of all of Modern Fuel's past programming.

In the State of Flux Gallery, Modern Fuel will be presenting a program entitled "**That '80s Show!**" featuring selections from the cable television productions made by the organization throughout the 1980s, one series entitled "K.A.A.Eye" produced by the Kingston Video Group, and another later series, "Artwaves." **Talie Shalmon** proposed a focus on these productions, which not only served to enhance public awareness of contemporary art, but also provided a training ground for local artists, journalists and media technicians interested in exploring a different avenue of creative production and distribution. Modern Fuel thanks Queen's University Archives for assistance in the production of this program and exhibition.

## Photos

## Exhibition Essay

About forty years ago, Canadian artists were looking for an alternative. Artists all over Canada were looking for a substitute to the bigger art institutions, places where only a lucky few were able to exhibit their work, places governed by non-artists. Artists at the time were frustrated with institutions and mandates that excluded all but a few and many were experimenting with new forms of art conceptualism. Growing out of this same sentiment, artist-run centres gave artists the spaces required to present alternative work such as performance, installation and media art. Several factors came together in those years, including the merging of artists in communities to create organizations reliant on self-determinism. At the same time, the Canada Council began to provide funding for alternative arts organizations, doling out generous grants to early centres such as Intermedia in Vancouver and A Space in Toronto. Within the decade that followed, artist-run centres and organizations popped up all over Canada, providing artists with the opportunity to produce, organize and exhibit their work independently from the "institutions." Within a few years a network had evolved across Canada, uniting formerly isolated artists. The dozens of artist-run centres which emerged in the 1970s included in their mandates the desire to promote experimental and avant-garde art and to foster artistic growth within the community.

In 1975, a group of Kingston artists in Kingston got together to propose an artist's cooperative promoting experimental and contemporary art among practicing artists in the Limestone city. Throughout 1976, the founders of the cooperative sorted out matters of space, membership and mandate, and an interim board of directors was elected. The need for space was the first priority and this was found at 325 King St East. St Lawrence College rented out the space for the establishment of an artist-run centre and the St Lawrence Art Projection (SLAP) was born. In 1977 the organization had grown into the Kingston Artist's Association Inc. They moved into the current space at 21A Queen St in March 1977 and were incorporated the following October. By 1980, the gallery had procured funding from both the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council, enabled the exciting programming that followed in the 1980s.

A large part of KAAI's contribution to Kingston's artistic growth came in the form of numerous special projects and events which have taken place over the past thirty years. In 1977 the Ear it Live Festival established the KAAI's integration in a network of artist-run centres. The festival, coordinated by the Music Gallery in Toronto, consisted of experimental musicians traveling to artist-run centres in between Toronto and Montreal, playing simultaneously from different locations and in improvised pairings. As the KAAI was recognized within the Canadian contemporary art scene, it was able to begin bringing reputable artists to Kingston and to the gallery. In the 1980s, many of these artists were focused in the alternative practices of performance and video art. Performances by Paul Wong and Anna Banana in the early 1980s gave local artists exposure to forward-thinking contemporary art, and allowed the opportunity to collaborate with successful and well known artists.

Throughout the 1980s, the Kingston Video Group (KVG) worked alongside the KAAI to promote video production and media art in the community. The KAAI and the KVG presented several successful video production residencies early on with well-known and successful artists like Patrick Ready and Michael Banger. These residencies as well as several special video projects were instrumental in promoting new technology and informing Kingston residents in the process of creation. In 1981, a grant of \$15,000 was awarded to the KAAI from the Canada Council for the purchase of video equipment which would be made available to members of the Kingston artistic community. In 1983 the KAAI produced a film series entitled *The View from my Room is Great*. The series included 12 experimental films by Kingston area artists which were screened between October 1983 and March 1984. The film screening was a way of establishing the KAAI as a contributing member in the field of experimental video and was a significant addition to the gallery's already strong programming schedule of performances, exhibitions and installations. The exhibition was proposed to be borrowed by the Gallery at Harbourfront in Toronto, Funnel Film in Toronto, Ed Video in Guelph, Artspace in Peterborough and SAW Gallery in Ottawa as a way of creating an interchange of video artists in Ontario and Canada. This was the first instance in the network of artist-run centres in Canada where a profile was created in video about an artistic community with a supplementary critical text. The series also served to increase awareness of the Kingston Video Group. In 1988, striving as always to promote contemporary arts in Kingston, the KAAI and KVG presented ARTWAVES, a 6 part television series broadcast on the local station that reached a wide audience in Kingston and exposed them to contemporary art.

In the May 1993 Modern Fuel newsletter, Bill Roff questioned the gallery's upholding of its original mandate and intentions. In the Kingston art community, he states, with "the Agnes Etherington as a straight forward art gallery, we should be at the forefront of artistic innovation and creativity and the exchange of fresh ideas, etc., among practicing artists. [Lenni Workman's Cold War Project and the Millenium Project] have accomplished this, but we have acted in general as purveyors of work that already existed." He argued that the KAAI ought to focus more on giving resources to its members which they would otherwise be unable to access. This was realized a year later, with the construction of the State of Flux Gallery, a member's only, non-juried space for up and coming and established artists to exhibit works in progress.

The special projects coordinated by the KAAI and Modern Fuel have been major catalysts in artistic growth in the community and have been important in placing the organization within Canada's network of art production. The projects have been created with the impetus to inform and educate Kingston artists in new art practices and also to create critical and creative discourse in this small city. Early projects such as the Ear it Live festival and the performance art series of the 1980s brought renown national artists to Kingston to collaborate with the community. In the 1990s, the Millennium Art Project brought contemporary art outside of the gallery walls and ushered in the new millennium in a grand way. Post-2000, Modern Fuel has continued to challenge and inspire the Kingston artistic community. Recent projects of the past few years have had explicitly community-based motives such as Parking Art in Parking Lots. This project brought local community members and young artists in contact with more established artists. The Tone Deaf festival has continued where Ear it Live left off, bringing established sound artists to Kingston annually for a weekend of innovative and unusual performances. In 2002, the centre was registered as Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre, a move which served to cement the organization's place within the context of Canadian artist-run culture. The centre continues to challenge the community by presenting experimental and provocative work by artists from both Kingston and elsewhere, both inside and outside the gallery walls.

Essay by Kari Cwynar.

*Kari Cwynar is Modern Fuel's Summer Intern!*