

TANIS MARIA S'EILTIN

Hit
2006
Installation with video,
found objects and mixed media



FRANK SHEBAGEGET

Beavers
2003
Installation
On loan from the Ottawa Art Gallery

Beaver Dam, Works in Progress
2006
Digital print

NADIA MYRE

The Scar Project
ongoing since 2005
Participatory installation
with thread on canvas

The Indian Act
2000/02

16 pages of 56, glass beads on paper
On loan from Galerie Art Mur and the
Woodland Cultural Centre



L. FRANK MANRIQUEZ

Not to give the cockroach a bad name
2001
Installation with found objects



TANIS MARIA S'EILTIN

S'eiltin's Tlingit lineage can be traced back 10 000 years. She holds a Master of Fine Arts from the University of Arizona, Tucson, and a BFA from the University of Alaska, Fairbanks. S'eiltin is Associate Professor of Art at Fairhaven College of Interdisciplinary Studies at Western Washington University, and received the 2005 Eiteljorg Fellowship for Native American Fine Art. She has curated numerous exhibitions, and has shown her own work throughout the United States, most recently at the Museum of Arts & Design, New York, and at the Eiteljorg Museum in Indianapolis, Indiana.

-The artist's presence at MMA was made possible through the support of the Fairhaven College of Interdisciplinary Studies

FRANK SHEBAGEGET

Shebageget holds a MFA from the University of Victoria, and an O.A.C.A. in Interdisciplinary Studies from the Ontario College of Art. His work has been shown in solo and group exhibitions across Canada, including Gallery 101, Ottawa, ON; Musée du Québec, Québec City, QC; A Space, Toronto, ON, and in the U.S. at Bard College in New York. Recent exhibitions include the Museum of Civilization, the Ottawa Art Gallery and the Owens Art Gallery. Shebageget's extensive curatorial and publishing experience includes collaborations with internationally renowned artists and arts organizations.

NADIA MYRE

Myre is a multi-disciplinary artist who has exhibited in Canada and abroad. Recent exhibitions include *The American West*, Compton Verney, Warwickshire, U.K.; *Au Fils de Mes Jours*, Musée National des beaux-arts du Québec, Québec, QC; *Skin Deep, or Poetry for the Blind*, Art Mur, Montréal, QC; *Fabrics of Change / Trading Identities*, University of Wollongong and Flinders University, Australia. She is the recipient of numerous awards from the Canada Council, the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec, the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation, and an Eiteljorg Fellowship.

L. FRANK MANRIQUEZ

Manriquez is a Tongva/Ajachmem artist and tribal activist. She is Board Member of the California Indian Basketweavers Association, the Advocates for Indigenous California Language Survival, and the Native California Network. She has received awards from the American Association of University Women, the James Irvine Foundation, the Fund for Folk Culture (travel to the Native Californian art collection at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris). In 1990 Manriquez was Artist in Residence at the Headland Center for the Arts in Sausalito, CA; her artwork has been exhibited widely and published throughout California.

Making Sense of Things



Tanis Maria S'eiltin
Frank Shebageget
Nadia Myre
L. Frank Manriquez

C.N. Gorman Museum

1316 Hart Hall
UC Davis
One Shields Avenue
Davis, CA 95616
Phone: (530) 752-6567
<http://gormanmuseum.ucdavis.edu>
Open 12-5 Monday-Friday & by appointment.

C.N. Gorman acknowledges the support of the Rumsey Community Fund

C.N.
GORMAN
MUSEUM

McMaster Museum of Art

Alvin A. Lee Building
University Avenue
McMaster University
1280 Main Street West
Hamilton, ON, L8S 4L6
Phone: 905 525 9140 ex 23081
<http://www.mcmaster.ca/museum>

New hours at MMA:
Tue, Wed, Fri: 11 – 5; Thu: 11 – 7; Sat: 12 – 5 Closed Sunday and Monday

McMaster Museum of Art acknowledges the support of the City of Hamilton

McMaster
University
MUSEUM OF ART

Exhibition at McMaster Museum of Art, June 15 – August 19, 2006
Opening at MMA: Saturday, June 17, 2 pm – 4 pm

Exhibition at C.N. Gorman Museum, October 3 – December 15, 2006

Curated by Ingrid Mayrhofer (McMaster Museum of Art) and Veronica Passalacqua (C.N. Gorman)
Texts by Veronica Passalacqua and Ryan Rice

This exhibition came together as a collaborative curatorial project intended to tour from MMA in Hamilton to the C. N. Gorman Museum at the University of California. It comprises four bodies of work that narrate past and present, as well as personal and collective experience. The participating artists share a common goal: to communicate meaning through an array of materials and objects. The creation and collection of multiples connects aspects of historical traditions and skills to the international visual language of contemporary art; signs of conflict and survival provide a frame of reference for the social positioning of the artists.

F o r m i n g

Ryan Rice

A / M a s s

In her analysis of traditional aboriginal art making, Dr. Deborah Doxtater claims that the process of gathering and preparing materials and making repeated patterns and forms results in narratives, memories, songs, or prayers becoming encoded into each object by the artist. Moreover, traditional art making remains steadfast, so that everything that was ever woven, stitched, carved, and assembled continues to function as a formal device, employed by the artist, to make sense of things conceptually. The physical act of making by hand grants the artist an opportunity to engage physically in a paradox of constructing, reconstructing, and deconstructing perception in order to divulge or disguise meaning and measurement.

Artists Nadia Myre and Frank Shebageget employ these devices in their works, produced as multiples, in order to engage with a continuum of tradition, translation, and transition. The multiple fashioned objects allow Myre and Shebageget to map and reiterate (over and over) the merit of collective histories and experiences. Both artists adopt a spirit of inquiry: Myre involves community collaboration as a strategy to draw attention to a collective yet individual experience of infliction, while Shebageget eliminates any trace of distinction by duplicating forms of mass production as a way to critique representation.

Myre’s *Indian Act*, 2000–2003, is a series of 56 beaded pages that address the government legislation that rules the status of Indians in Canada. The Indian Act is a settler’s tool of oppression that situates and governs Indians as wards of the state. Ironically, the Act has also been used by First Nations to defend, uphold, and protect indigenous treaty rights.

Shebageget re-built, by hand, each one of 1,692 deHavilland Beaver floatplanes ever produced. S’eiltin strategically positions an object of potential mass destruction. Manriquez stages a mass attack by patriotic plastic insects, and Myre invites museum visitors to embroider scars onto canvas.

Each of the artists has earned critical acclaim for a broad range of their recent work. The tour of their first joint exhibition from Hamilton to the C. N. Gorman Museum, presents an exciting opportunity for MMA to connect with a renowned teaching museum in California.

Myre’s endeavour to amend and deconstruct each page of the document took on a spirit of solidarity. She enlisted and corralled over 230 people to make a mark of erudition by beading each page, word, letter, and space of the amended 1985 version of the Act. In the installation, each page now contains new information — real experiences of those who read and contemplated each word, then concealed it by hand with a needle, thread, and white and red beads. One participant was Anishnabe artist and curator Barry Ace, who engaged with page 45 and imparts his personal experiences with the ambiguities of the Act concerning taxation. His interactions with the Act off the page led him to show his contempt on the page — bead by bead, amassing a mnemonic device as a form of objection. The 56 individually framed pages of red and white beads are testament to a communal act criticizing the colonial codification of indigenous life in Canada.

The communal aspect is also crucial to Myre’s work-in-progress *The Scar Project*, 2005—, in which personal memory is translated through a participatory exercise of making and sharing. The hands-on activity invites the public to identify their scars, whether inflicted by a psychological, physical, emotional, or spiritual wound. Symbolically, participants replicate as well as concede to their experiences by stitching virgin canvasses together as a form of healing or mending. Myre states that “Scars are beautiful; they are the language and story of history and growth.” Her Web site, www.nadiamyre.com/scarproject, archives and exposes the nature of the scars — which she treats like embellishments — as a way to make public the array of narratives related to reparation, regret, or recuperation.

Historical consequences of economies and technologies are relevant to Frank Shebageget’s installation *Beavers*, 2003, in which he



handcrafted 1,692 miniature de Havilland Beaver floatplanes to soar motionless in the gallery. Through this work, Shebageget evaluates the consequences of the intersection of European and Indigenous cultures as experienced and illustrated through the 17th century beaver fur trade and the introduction of the de Havilland Beaver plane in the 20th century. Like the (real) beaver, the de Havilland floatplane has become a national symbol for Canada, supporting the development of remote regions by accessing and opening up Canada’s “wilderness” for economic investment and exploration as well as exploitation. The impact of contact in the isolated territories of the north — where Shebageget is from — has brought positive connections that have created viable social and economic links. However, this contact has also shifted boundaries and forever changed traditional ways of life.

Colonial influence disguised as progress has disturbed order at both the natural and human level. The economies of the fur trade dwindled in the mid-19th century after the beaver was trapped to near extinction. Although the Beaver floatplane was a well-built machine, the market stalled in the face of other technologies. In Shebageget’s work-in-progress *Beaver Dam*, a digital “sketch,” the de Havilland planes are piled high to replicate a dam-like structure. Shebageget playfully negotiates parallels in the contemporary and historical implications of the plane and the beaver dam. The spill of planes represents histories of technology and economics, and reminds us that, no matter how great the need, they can still become abandoned — just like a beaver dam.

Ryan Rice holds a M.A. from the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, and a B.F.A. from Concordia University. He was Chief Curator at the Indian Art Centre in Hull, Quebec from 1999-2001. His curatorial projects include *Playing Tricks*, AICH Gallery, NY, *Guilty Pleasures*, The Other Gallery, The Banff Centre, and his thesis exhibition FLOCK, at Bard College. Rice recently contributed essays to catalogues at the C. N. Gorman Museum and the National Museum of the American Indian.

All Things

Veronica Passalacqua

bright and shiny

Whether oil or gold, America’s continuous pursuit of natural resources is inexhaustible. While some access roads are navigated by negotiation, many others are forged by aggression and brute force. In obtaining subsurface resources, particularly gold and oil, governments are forced to contend with the peoples and communities living on those territories. Through claims of manifest destiny and “democracy,” the relentless pursuit that started in the 1800s continues today.

As political visionaries, L. Frank Manriquez and Tanis Maria S’eiltin have found other routes of expression through their installation artworks. They document the commonality of revisionary histories of expansionism with false treaties, greed, and openly declared genocide.

A Tongva/Ajachmem artist and tribal activist from California, L. Frank Manriquez creates a representational model of consumption in *Not to give the cockroach a bad name*. In this piece, a sprawling swarm of rubber cockroaches cover objects representative of the indigenous landscape. The beauty and life of California sits on a deer skin that claims a small piece of Native territory, with antlers and acorns from the land that evoke her community’s natural foods and ceremonies. Whale bone and abalone shell reflect the sustenance of the costal communities, as well as being central in ceremony, regalia, and dance.

Colonizing their routes, the invader roaches bear U.S. flags as they come to this Native space, these Native things, to blanket everything that is natural and consume the landscape. The artwork is an indictment of “the U.S. government swarming over everything that is Indian life.”¹

Publicly announced genocide, enacted to obtain resources in California, was declared by Governor Burnett in 1851 when he stated, “a war of extermination will continue to be waged between the two races until the Indian race becomes extinct.”² The savage greed for land and gold unfolded as California Indians were relocated, imprisoned, enslaved, and killed for living on abundantly rich land.

Modern maps of federally recognized tribes in California are intriguing. From the cold northern regions south through Oregon,



the continental coastline is densely populated by federally recognized tribes. At the California border, however, there is an abrupt change with an all-too-obvious absence of Native communities living on the coast, which by no coincidence is some of the wealthiest real estate in the world.

Native communities in Alaska have faced the exploitation of natural resources for centuries. This includes fur, whale, fish, and oil — resources sought by governments in Russia, Canada, and, more recently, the U.S. Throughout her artistic and educational career, Tanis Maria S’eiltin addresses the conflicts between occupying governments and her Tlingit community by raising awareness of specific incidents from past atrocities alongside contemporary political activities.

S’eiltin’s complex installation *Hit* (“house” in the Tlingit language) confronts U.S. aggression, past and present, for the repeated use of callous militant force in the pursuit of natural resources. In response, the artist has developed a substantive counter-assault that addresses the historical bombardment of Angoon, the war in Iraq, and the use of military force disguised in the name of fear and democracy.

The attack at Angoon on October 26, 1882, remains vivid in Tlingit memory. It began with the accidental death of Tlith Klane, a Tlingit shaman, who was working on a whaleboat for Northwest Trading Company. As per Tlingit protocol, the community demanded 200 blankets in compensation for his death. Instead of compensation, the company contacted the U.S. Navy in Sitka, who then counter-demanded 400 blankets the next day to spare the village from annihilation. By noon, the villagers had assembled 120 blankets, while the Navy officer raised his demand to 800 blankets. Not meeting the demand, the Tlingit people of Angoon were bombed mercilessly.

Six children died that day as they hid in the clan house, but more importantly, by destroying all of Angoon’s housing, canoes, and food stores, the village faced an insurmountable winter that took countless lives. It was pure aggression undertaken because of fear, colonialism, and the business of the Northwest Trading Company. Guns for hire — for corporations only.

S’eiltin brings raw aggression to the room by encasing a semi-automatic M16 in petroleum oil. The weapon, used in Iraq presently,

nudges the viewer into a symbolic house where a complexly layered video projection creates a landscape of cultural conflict. The artist brings past and present together as she contemplates the death and destruction in Angoon and Iraq. Looming large are the benefactors — the monumental oil refineries that litter Alaska as they feed into the Trans-Atlantic Alaska pipeline.

Piercing through *Hit* is an ominous neon crosshair target in night-vision green. Where will it be aimed next? What resources will it seek to capture, and at what cost to human life? S’eiltin and her grandmother, in a large beaded portrait, shield us from the target with a sheer button blanket panel, a protective cultural barrier against threatening forces. “It is my connection to cultural heritage that is not only a story about colonization, the experiences of death and devastation, but a story about survival and hope.”³

The carefully chosen objects that Manriquez and S’eiltin include in their exhibits are enriched by stories and traditions that infuse the objects with centuries of Indigenous knowledge, strength, and endurance. They steer us toward other routes — ecologically sound paths to natural resources, centuries of harmonious living with the environment, and, most importantly, they represent Indigenous people still standing strong.

¹ Interview with L. Frank Manriquez, March 7, 2006.

² Governor Peter H. Burnett, January 1851.

Annual message to the California Legislature.

³ Interview with Tanis Maria S’eiltin, May 8, 2006.

Veronica Passalacqua is curator at the C.N. Gorman Museum, Department of Native American Studies, University of California Davis. For more than 30 years, the C.N. Gorman Museum has been dedicated to the creative expressions of Native American artists and artists of diverse cultures and histories, both established and emerging. As a writer, curator, and scholar of Native North American art for the past 15 years, Passalacqua earned her bachelor’s degree from Harvard University, and master’s degree in Museum Studies from Oxford University. She is currently completing her doctorate in Museum Studies from Oxford University, where her thesis examines political lens-based artworks by contemporary Native North American artists. Passalacqua recently facilitated the repatriation of a significant private Lakota collection of artifacts back to the Buechel Memorial Lakota Museum on the Pine Ridge Reservation.