

# Screens and Thresholds

Scott Benesiinaabandan

Tricia Livingston

Mike MacDonald

Karthik Pandian

Postcommodity

Krista Belle Stewart

curated by Raymond Boisjoly

**Presentation House Gallery**

October 7 - December 4, 2016



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The anthropologist Eric Michaels, writing about the circulation of Western media within Australian Aboriginal communities, noted that there was a side benefit to the broadcast of soap operas that at first seemed counterintuitive: soap operas provided Aboriginal peoples with access to Western culture in a manner that made Western peoples seem somewhat relatable. These Westerners were not the church officials and colonial administrators of daily life; these were people involved in drama, who could be talked about in familiar ways, even gossiped about.

Likewise, contemporary art, with its own niche market and specialized audiences, can serve to translate, and render accessible, complex phenomena in peculiar ways.

Much of Mike MacDonald's work from the 1990s was informed by the late artist's concern for butterflies, and demonstrated the importance of these creatures to our knowledge of medicinal plant life. *Butterfly* (1996) presents an assortment of species arranged in a grid; these butterflies, however, are not actual specimens, but images captured from television screens. MacDonald hints here that our understanding of the world and the life within it is not directly accessed through the objects of our interest, and that our knowledge is not our own. Our understandings are thoroughly mediated; words frame thought in the way a butterfly will lead us to a much needed remedy for what ails us.

*Oversight II: Monk's Mound* (2016), by American artist Karthik Pandian, visualises the discrepancy between the variability of objects and the rationalised systems of measure-

ment and classification that we impose in order to quantify and understand them. A single shell, photographed in the light of the sun, casts a digitally altered shadow on the gridded background of a self-healing cutting mat. The grid provides a sense of scale and legibility, but its usefulness as a measuring tool is diminished by the shadow of the shell. The slide projector sits atop a sculptural assemblage composed of a rammed-earth tablet and a gridded stand, inside of which an object constructed of synthetic hair and mirrors is suspended from an integrated rope. Cage-like, the grid contains and at the same time illuminates whatever discrepancies might appear.

*little resistances* (2015), a body of work by Montreal-based artist Scott Benesiinaabandan, maps the distance between images suggestive of personal memory and more overtly political images picturing Indigenous resistance—between familial relations and anti-colonial struggle. The snapshots were acquired by Benesiinaabandan while attempting to extract information about his birth family from various government agencies through bureaucratic channels; the pictures of indigenous activism were gleaned from journalistic sources. Paired images, crumpled to create three-dimensional forms, were then placed on a flatbed scanner to be captured and rendered on a shared visual plane, thereby formalizing their relations spatially. The pairings have each been given their own title; or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that their relations have been named: *little resistances: marykennethagnes / oka*, *little resistances: mary / ezln*, or *norman / ipperwash*—one half, ostensibly familiar images of Native grandmothers, aunts, uncles; the other half, images we should all know, from EZLN to Oka and Idle No More. The complex ways that Indigenous peoples frame their connections to one another as Indigenous people are thus made visible. Relations given a form, a connection, a belonging.

BC artist Krista Belle Stewart's *Indian Artists at Work* (2016) is conceived in response to the varied framings and representations of Indigenous peoples and their artistic and

cultural production. Visually, the work uses the title page of Ulli Steltzer's 1976 book *Indian Artists at Work* as the basis for an expansive grid of coloured rectangles. Steltzer's book portrays Indigenous artists from throughout BC in the landscape and their studios, and in relation to photographs of their work. The focus of the book is ethnographic, describing cultural worlds and material practices. Images are accompanied by brief contextualizing captions containing biographical data, ethnographic commentary, material and technical specifications, historical considerations, and information about the circulation of objects within a given community. Extensive quotations from the photographed artists are displayed prominently, but are largely unattributed, though they follow a certain convention: each quotation appears proximate to images of carvers, weavers, basket- and blanket-makers. It is as if the quotations did not require a speaker when the images could speak for them.

Stewart developed previous iterations of *Indian Artists at Work* in relation to the work of Tsimshian photographer Benjamin Haldane and the Cherokee painter Leon Polk Smith, who engaged in the emergent practices of their times rather than reproduce established traditions, thus complicating the framing of Indigenous cultural practitioners in Steltzer's book. Polk Smith, in particular, made geometric abstract paintings and images that are not easily understood in relation to his varied cultural identities and community belongings. Stewart has incorporated some of his works on paper for this new version of *Indian Artists at Work*. Untitled works from 1969, 1972, and 1979 accompany her coloured grid. Displayed individually, the works cycle through, in reverse chronological order, embodying the transformations of Stewart's ongoing engagements with Steltzer's book.

Negotiating transformations of a different sort, the multi-channel video installation *Gallup Motel Butchering* (2011), by the New Mexico-based art collective Postcommodity, documents the butchering of a sheep in a motel bathtub in Gallup, New Mexico, located on traditional Navajo lands—a

transitory space that contrasts with romantic assumptions about the observance of traditional subsistence activities within rustic wilderness or rural spaces. The woman in the video is relatively inexperienced at butchering. She is, however, a former candidate for *Miss Navajo*, a competition that requires contestants to butcher sheep as a display of their capacity to provide food for their families. *Gallup Motel Butchering* communicates her willingness to learn these processes and demonstrate them for others, circumstances that point to both cultural transference and survival.

*What is Good for the Future, What was Good for the Past?*, a new work by northern BC artist Tricia Livingston, is informed by attempts to regulate the production and consumption of alcohol in “dry” communities. Alongside a video demonstration of how to create a simple alcoholic beverage, the installation incorporates materials involved in the production of this illicit booze: yeast, a milk jug, blankets and a Rubbermaid container wrapped in blankets. The small-scale production of alcoholic beverages for personal consumption and limited sale results in complex cultural and economic practices. Yeast is bought and sold at inflated prices, the booze produced is sold for high sums, and a local vernacular concerning the production and consumption of these beverages is elaborated. Drawing on the means and conventions of communicating knowledge in online environments such as YouTube, the video tutorial mediates a localized practice typically taught in face-to-face encounters, and gives it a distributed life.

The works in *Screens and Thresholds* are engaged with the production of varied knowledges: cultural, political, social or scientific. Screens carry information from one place to another and function as an interface gesturing to a now knowable and somewhat contained entity. Our knowledge of the world is transformed by our sensory apparatus. To pass through this apparatus—in our encounter with a world

that exceeds it—articulates the mutable threshold of experience. Art is a way to exercise and renew our capacity to reflexively experience phenomena that have become habitual or that seem to function transparently. To knowingly mediate is to deliberately consider the ways knowledge or understanding may be produced, accessed or communicated. The challenge is in foregrounding these processes so as to understand them as a general condition of knowledge. Differing mediations bring differing encounters with what may be known. In all of these works, an encounter, with very real stakes, is staged.

Raymond Boisjoly

## Centre Gallery left to right

Scott Benesiinaabandan

*little resistances: mary| ezln*, 2015

inkjet on vinyl

Karthik Pandian

*Oversight II: Monk's Mound*, 2016

81 (35mm) slides, rammed earth, mason's line, costume wig,

one-way-mirror glass and powder-coated steel

Scott Benesiinaabandan

*little resistances: marykennethagnes| oka*, 2015

inkjet on vinyl

Mike MacDonald

*Butterfly*, 1996

C-print

Courtesy Jesse McKee

## East Gallery

Postcommodity

*Gallup Motel Butchering*, 2011

Four-channel video installation with sound, 6:05 min.

# West Gallery left to right

Scott Benesiinaabandan

*little resistances: homecoming* | charlottetown, 2015

inkjet on vinyl

Scott Benesiinaabandan

*little resistances: norman* | ipperwash, 2015

inkjet on vinyl

Krista Belle Stewart

*Indian Artists at Work*, 2016

acrylic paint and vinyl installation

with 3 Leon Polk Smith works rotated during the exhibition:

Leon Polk Smith

*Untitled*, 1979

Collage elements, graphite, and gouache on paper

Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery,

Gift of Ian Davidson (VAG 91.43.8)

*Untitled*, 1972

Collage elements, and graphite on paper

Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery,

Gift of Ian Davidson (VAG 91.43.9)

*Untitled*, 1969

Gouache and graphite on paper

Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery,

Gift of Ian Davidson (VAG 91.43.10)

Tricia Livingston

*What Is Good For the Future, What Was Good For the Past?*

2016

video, 42 min. 35 sec., 27 bricks of yeast, 4 L. milk jug, woven hunting bag, Rubbermaid bin, blankets

Scott Benesiinaabandan

*little resistances: inm* | mary, 2015

inkjet on vinyl

# Biographies

**Scott Benesinaabandan** is an Anishinabe intermedia artist living in Montreal, who works primarily in photography, printmaking, and video. His work has been included in group exhibitions such as *our land, together*, Harbourfront Centre, Toronto; *Fifth World*, Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatchewan; and *GHOSTDANCE: Activism, Resistance, Art*, Ryerson Image Centre, Toronto. He has had residencies in Australia and Ireland.

**Tricia Livingston** is an Indigenous artist currently living and working on her home territory in northern British Columbia. She holds a BFA in Photography and Art History from Concordia University and she participated in a thematic residency at the Banff Centre in 2014. Her work concerns itself with ideas of remoteness, displacement, recovery, and revitalization and the ways these concepts can be used to converse with institutional archives.

**Mike MacDonald**, of Mi'kmaq ancestry, lived in Vancouver for more than two decades in the 1980s and '90s. A multimedia artist, he was a video art pioneer whose works were featured in exhibitions worldwide, including the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Hull, Quebec; the Heard Museum in Phoenix, Arizona; the Walter Philips Gallery in Banff, Alberta; and the Canadian Cultural Centre in Paris, France. In 1994 he was awarded the prestigious Jack and Doris Shadbolt VIVA Prize. Many of his projects took inspiration from traditional Aboriginal medicine and focused on environmental issues. His ethnobotany research on butterflies resulted in a website, photographs, and numerous butterfly gardens, including one on Presentation House property.

**Karthik Pandian**, who works in moving image and sculpture, lives in Bennington, Vermont. He has had solo exhibitions at The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Bétonsalon, Paris; Midway Contemporary Art, Minneapolis;

and White Flag Projects, St. Louis, amongst others. His work was featured in the inaugural *Made in L.A.* biennial at the Hammer Museum; *La Triennale: Intense Proximity* at the Palais de Tokyo, Paris; and the 4th Marrakech Biennale, and in group exhibitions such as *Film as Sculpture* at Wiels Contemporary Art Centre, Brussels and Repertory at the Palazzo Cavour, Torino.

**Postcommodity** is an interdisciplinary arts collective based in New Mexico, comprising Raven Chacon, Cristóbal Martínez, and Kade L. Twist. Their work has been shown in recent exhibitions, including the 18th Biennale of Sydney; Adelaide International; Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art; Contour, the 5th Biennial of the Moving Image, Mechelen, Belgium; Nuit Blanche, Toronto; as well as the historic land-art installation Repellent Fence at the U.S./Mexico border near Douglas, Arizona, and Agua Prieta, Sonora.

**Krista Belle Stewart** has recently had solo exhibitions at the Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, Kelowna Art Gallery, and Mercer Union, Toronto, with group exhibitions at Artspeak, Western Front, and Esker Foundation, Calgary, amongst others. An iteration of Indian Artists at Work will be part of a group exhibition, Vancouver Special: Ambivalent Pleasures, opening at the Vancouver Art Gallery in December. She has an MFA from Bard College, New York. Stewart is a member of the Upper Nicola Band of the Okanagan Nation, and currently lives in Vancouver.

**Raymond Boisjoly** is an Indigenous artist of Haida descent based in Vancouver. He has presented solo exhibitions and projects in numerous galleries, museums and artist-run centres in Canada and elsewhere, including at Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver; Koffler Centre of the Arts, Toronto; VOX, Montreal. In 2016, he was presented with a VIVA award by the Shadbolt Foundation. Boisjoly is an Assistant Professor of Interdisciplinary Studio in the Department of Visual Art + Material Practice at Emily Carr University of Art + Design. He is represented by Catriona Jeffries Gallery.

# Public Programs

**Friday, October 7, 7 PM:** Introduction with Raymond Boisjoly, Tricia Livingston, and Krista Belle Stewart, followed by opening reception

**Thursday, October 13, 8 PM:** Sound performance by Postcommodity

**Screens and Thresholds** (October 7 - December 4, 2016)  
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## PRESENTATION HOUSE GALLERY

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