

# ARRIVE, REACH, REVISIT,

galan akin \ troy gronsdahl / christann kennedy \ melany nugent / dionne paul \ valérie tremblay blouin / trevor van den eijden

# TURN AND RETURN

charles h. scott gallery | july 16–27, 2015 | opening reception thursday july 16, 6:30–10:00 pm

emily carr university of art + design | low residency masters of applied arts thesis exhibition

## Galan Akin

A *revenant* is a ghost or animated corpse that has returned from beyond the grave to haunt the living. Recently, this character from European folklore has been resuscitated for a contemporary audience, resurfacing in film, books and board games. *Revenants* was one of many tongue-in-cheek suggestions we considered for the naming of this exhibition, although as a title that conjured up recent criticisms of various neo-art movements, it seemed like one we could easily place in our mounting pile of rejects. A little research into the origins of the term, however, provided an unexpected source of inspiration for thinking about this show.

*Revenant* is a conjugation of the French verb, *revenir*, which means to come back or return. *Revenir* was derived from the Latin word, *reveniens*, which is the past participle of the word *reveniō*, meaning to arrive or reach. Strung together, these words read a bit like a choreographic sequence: arrive, reach, revisit, turn and return.

A literal reading of each of word opens to a range of interpretations that can contextualize this exhibition. As a group, we arrive at another stage on our journey of artistic and professional growth. We test the reaches of our practices to present work realized through processes of invention, speculation, and reflection. Interpreted as a set of gestures, however, our title points to a way of thinking about contemporary art that is essentially performative,<sup>1</sup> both in the sense that art is open to inexplicit ways of knowing and sharing knowledge, and in the sense that art can affect reality.

If choreography provides a useful frame of reference for thinking about exhibitions of contemporary art,<sup>2</sup> then ours is a dance of continual reorientation. Our artistic movements respond to a shifting ground that is perpetually changing in ways that are only barely perceptible. The old dances cannot be perfectly replicated, as the foot can no longer find its corresponding position on the unstable surfaces where we situate our work.

Returning to the notion that the present is haunted by the ghosts of the past, we are reminded of the writings of American art historian Hal Foster, who has suggested that contemporary artists may seek to reconcile the condition of “coming-after” by evoking traces of this past. As Foster suggests, “maybe this living-on is not a repeating so much as a making-new or simply a making-do with what-comes-after, a beginning again and/or elsewhere.”<sup>3</sup> Which brings us to the final two directives of our title: turn and return (and arrive, reach, revisit, turn and return again).

*To discover one's own real naked interest requires probably the most convoluted and farfetched inquiry there is.*

—Bruno Latour

Using a variety of processes, Galan Akin blurs the line between what is made by hand and what is made by machine. He works with conventions of depiction and display in order to consider the shifting boundaries and frames that define the complex surfaces of objects in time. This represents a “convoluted and farfetched inquiry” into the surfaces that generate, enable and are determined by agency in the broadest sense.

*Manual* is a 198-page simulation of an art magazine from the turn of the millennium. As a reassembled collection of pages from multiple source issues, this work reflects the taste and agency of the artist, which were in turn partially shaped by these materials. The artist has provided a couch and coffee table so that the viewer may sit comfortably and gently leaf through the magazine if they wish. Please no food or beverages on the furniture.

*Something For the Left, Something for the Right* is a copy of an ad spread from *Manual* that was made through a combination of drawing, photography, and painting. It speaks to the artist's conception of the magazine work as a handbook for his own practice.

Also included in this exhibition are samples from a series of acid wash ‘text paintings’ which depict moments of language recovered from histories both local and global. *Still Life with Private Notes* appropriates a fragment of the notes made by real estate developer Bob Rennie during a speech in Hong Kong. *Still Life with Concrete Divider* depicts graffiti found in East Vancouver. *Still Life with One-Way Street* is taken from a film still of a monument dedicated to Walter Benjamin. *Still Life with Where Art Belongs* reproduces a chapter title from a book by Chris Krauss.

Galan Akin is an artist and video game designer who lives in Vancouver, BC. He attended the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and studied animation and Art History at the Emily Carr University of Art and design, graduating in 2011.

## Troy Gronsdahl

Operating strategically within dominant art historical narratives, Troy Gronsdahl seeks to create moments of estrangement to call forth new subjectivities. He works in and between modes of affirmation and dissent to move critique out of a place of negation and into one of creativity. Performativity, provisionality and humour are important aspects of his practice.

As part of an ongoing series of text-based works, Gronsdahl transforms historically significant texts about art through a process of remediation to create new forms. Stripping the source material of its semantic integrity, he generates new compositions that are deliberately ambiguous, contradictory and indeterminate. He aims to subvert the primacy of the text through artistic play to point to the contingency of knowledge.

In a recent series of cyanotype images, Gronsdahl draws on the historical associations of monochrome painting while playing in its ambiguous zones of interpretive possibility. By exposing paper treated with a cyanotype solution to natural light, this project proposes to capture an astrological event, yet the claim made by the title cannot be verified by the contents of its image. This creates a productive incongruity that is characteristic of Gronsdahl's work.

*Ways of Looking* is an ongoing series of self-portrait photographs conceived around notions of travel and disorientation. These photographs are taken in a variety of locations, including architectural landmarks, tourist destinations and cultural spaces. By giving equal treatment to important historical sites and more generic tourist destinations, Gronsdahl aims to expose gaps in understanding across historical and cultural contexts.

Troy Gronsdahl is a multidisciplinary artist. He exhibits his artwork nationally and creates independent hip hop music for release in Canada, Europe and Japan. Gronsdahl lives and works in Saskatoon where he also organizes exhibitions and programs at Remai Modern Art Gallery of Saskatchewan.

## Christann Kennedy

It has been roughly a hundred years since the advent of European abstraction. In her work, Christann Kennedy reanimates elements of this rich history, blending them with an irreverent sense of humour, a curiosity about the perceptual consequences of colour and pattern, and a commitment to material craft. She seeks to create moments of optical and phenomenological surprise in the form of drawings, paintings, sculptures, prints and hybrid forms that bridge such categories.

Recently, Kennedy has been working with a reductive formal vocabulary of curvilinear shapes and wonky stripes to activate visual rhythm and open a space for creative play between singular and serial modes of artistic production. By devising rule-based procedures to create sets of non-identical multiples in both painting and print, Kennedy invokes the near-infinite potential for variation that remains possible even within tight parameters of similarity.

*stripes and bumps (four prototypes)* is a modular composite that can be installed to respond to the architecture of its exhibition context. Conceived as the first panels of a larger series, these Pop-inflected abstractions resonate with various 20<sup>th</sup> century art movements, although their roots probably run deeper into the psychedelic pop culture, fashion and home décor of the artist's 1970's childhood.

*polychrome lozenges* is an array of cut paper forms that were made through an additive process of layering coloured inks over time. By curling away from the two-dimensional plane, these silkscreen printed shapes hover ambiguously between image and sculpture.

Christann Kennedy completed a BFA at Emily Carr University in 2012, earning the Governor General's Silver Medal for Academic Excellence and the Jake C. Kerr Chancellor's Award for Visual Art. She currently divides her time between her Vancouver studio and a tiny apartment on the Pacific Coast of Jalisco State, Mexico.

<sup>1</sup> As explored in Dorothea von Hantelmann's book, *How to Do Things with Art: The Meaning of Art's Performativity*. Zürich: JRP Ringier, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> As discussed by curator Ilaria Gianni in conversation with Cecilia Canziani in the book *Archiving, gathering, exhibiting, recounting, remembering, loving, desiring, ordering, mapping. A Performance Cycle*. Rome: Nero, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Hal Foster, “This Funeral is for the Wrong Corpse.” *Design and Crime (And Other Diatribes)*. London: Verso, 2003. 129.

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## Melany Nugent

Melany Nugent's practice is primarily concerned with the movements and patterns of individuals in public space. In her work, she investigates the interpersonal negotiations that individuals must undertake in order to build culture collectively. Taking inspiration from the French scholar Michel de Certeau, Nugent explores how play can stimulate opposition to the "disciplinary powers" that are embedded in the patterns and repetition of everyday routine. Walking practices and playfully ambiguous texts figure prominently in her work.

*You Just Never Quite Know (2015)* represents one point of intersection in the different streams of Nugent's research. By making use of the collective movements of individuals, this translation of the Emmett Williams poem *Four-Directional Song of Doubt for Five Voices (1957)* intends to create a playful experience that provides a counterpoint to our everyday shared spaces and routines. This work depends on happenings and actions, the flow of individuals in and out of defined space within the gallery, to determine when each word of the poem will be recited.

Play also underlies *Speech from the Throne (2015)*, which leverages formalized public texts against blank spaces to amplify what is said and what is not said. The repetition of words and phrases works to galvanize opinions around the original sentiments expressed, and the finished work functions as a tactic to increase interest and participation in a system that can be perceived as opaque and intimidating.

Melany Nugent is a Vancouver-based artist whose practice is heavily influenced by questions of power and privilege, and a curiosity about how institutions affect identity. Nugent holds a diploma in Digital Arts and Media from Grant MacEwan College in Edmonton, and a BA in Communications from Athabasca University.

## Dionne Paul

Dionne Paul's work explores the potential of traditional forms of First Nations art and ceremony to find new expression as living culture. In her research, Paul has discovered many traditional examples of special effects in potlatch performances. In particular, she has learned of a historical secret society within the Nuxalk Nation called the Kusuit society, who utilized string pulleys, trapdoors, sound effects and other visual illusions to heighten the intensity of their dances. There have been masks with the hidden ability to vomit, and rattles that spark embers, not to mention a beheading dance, a coffin burning dance, a drowning dance and a stomach-cutting dance. Paul has discovered that these fascinating elements of traditional performance functioned to elevate the status of the secret society members, who came to be viewed as possessing supernatural powers because of the amazing effects they could produce.

*Purging Medicine Woman* is the embodiment of Paul's research into traditional special effects in potlatch performances. As a sculptural installation composed of vinyl and glass, it can be understood as a visual diagram of the mechanisms underpinning traditional special effects and ceremonial purging. For this installation in the Charles H. Scott Gallery, Paul has also included a transparent ceremonial blanket entitled *Underneath it All* and a luminescent headdress that was created through thigh spinning, traditional Nuxalk weaving and fibre optic technology.

In Paul's own words:

"From a spiritual aspect, vomiting is not seen in a negative manner, but as part of the process of releasing bad spirits, negative energy or poisons from the body. In healing ceremonies such as ayahuasca it is called 'purging'. Participants may purge by crying, sweating, urinating, excreting or throwing up. In peyote ceremony these processes are not considered in a negative light, but are referred to as 'getting well.' I feel that the artwork called *Purging Medicine Woman* synthesizes my research into these traditions in an elegant gesture."

Dionne Paul is from the Sechelt Nation and the Nuxalk Nation. The mother of five children, she sculpts, weaves, paints and prepares traditional medicines with her husband William Baturin in Sechelt, BC.

## Valérie Tremblay Blouin

*We're gonna make some fun things, and then show everyone. That is called an art show.*  
—DJ Lance Rock, Yo Gabba Gabba

Valérie Tremblay Blouin's work is rooted in an auto-ethnographic investigation into the formation, performance and representation of personal identity. She is interested in the narratives that constitute personal history, and is involved in a critical examination of the hierarchies of value and the tensions that are generated by the juxtaposition of attraction and repulsion. Tremblay Blouin envisions playful artistic gestures, improvisation and messy installations as acts of casual rebellion, or transgressive ways of making that deliberately register her work outside the mainstream. Process is a central concern. She describes a practice of making things, shaping raw material, choosing and arranging existing objects with an awareness of their history, and performing nonsensical experiments.

Homemaking. House-baking. Accumulating, hoarding. Putting together cardboard & things & stuff. With tape, string, glue, hot glue, white glue, wheat glue. Nesting. Making a nest, a shelter, a fort, a house, a home. Mama bird and baby bird too. Covering the walls with pictures and stories of the everyday. Every day. Playing house.

—VTB

*Homemaking* is a sculptural installation that Tremblay Blouin has built on site specifically for this exhibition. This work is conceived as a provisional studio or workspace, which the artist will continue to transform every 48 hours for the duration of the show.

*Cake Queen* is a video work that playfully transgresses notions of appropriate female behavior by conflating the application of cosmetics with the icing of a cake.

Valérie Tremblay Blouin was born, lives and works in Montreal. She teaches art to cool brats in a private college. She is the co-founder and continuing member of a feminist art collective called RATS 9. She likes to make art with or without stuff and draws comix about herself and her feelings.

## Trevor Van den Eijnden

*#AnthropoceneTemple*  
*This future does not exist until you make it your own; please photograph and share.*

Trevor Van den Eijnden's work investigates referents of our current geologic epoch, the Anthropocene. Rooted in a deep concern for the immediate and future implications of human culture upon the Earth, Van den Eijnden's practice investigates the ways in which we structure and define our relationship to the natural world through design. In particular, he is involved in a critical investigation of stylized and conceptually flattened representations of minerals, flora and fauna in the repeating patterns of art and décor, and in researching Timothy Morton's concept of the hyperobject.

*Anthropocene Temple* is an installation work that combines Van den Eijnden's environmental concerns with his interest in wallpaper design since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. Rooted in the concept of ecumenopolis (pan-global city), the individual works within the *Temple* offer glimpses of landscapes patterned from the hyperobjects that will bear witness to our existence well into the future. In Van den Eijnden's words:

"Anthropocene Temple is a wallpapering for the future. Using a technique called regressive infinity, we can glimpse a metaphor writ infinite and inescapable that shows how we are patterning a world of our own making. The long shadows of the future are cast by a source in the present, so please come play in the dark of the *Temple* and look for some light."

Trevor Van den Eijnden is a visual artist and designer who lives and teaches in Vancouver. Originally from Nova Scotia, he received his BFA from NSCAD University in 2005. Van den Eijnden was raised near a coast frequented by hurricanes and sharp shifts in the weather, which influenced him to develop the desire to make sense of how we understand and impact the interdependent mesh of all living and non-living entities with whom we share the Earth.