Nadia Myre: 2016 Koerner Artist-in-Residence

The Koerner Artist in Residence Program is an annual professional residency in the Fine Art (Visual Art) Program at Queen’s University. In 2016-2017, the acclaimed artist Nadia Myre was the Artist-in-Residence. Myre is a visual artist from Quebec and an Algonquin member of the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg First Nation. Her multi-disciplinary practice employs collaborative processes as a strategy for engaging in conversations about identity, resilience and politics of belonging. In 2014, Myre was winner of the Sobey Art Award.

While in Kingston, Myre engaged in a series of artist talks and workshops with BFA students, as well as a lecture presentation at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre. Over the two weeks Nadia Myre was Artist-in-Residence, students had a chance to hear and see Nadia at work on her multifaceted practice, and engage with one of the most dynamic contemporary artists working in Canada. As Alexa Haley notes, “Nadia is an activist in her work, a public commentator as well as interventionist working gracefully in a delicate (cont’d)
balancing act of socio-political commentary and aesthetic creation for a rather elite market. As a producer of a commodity with the institutional backing of a whole culture industry which privileges certain forms of craftsmanship and self-expression over others, she incorporates an ancient crafts tradition with little institutional backing into the arena of high art productions, creating an exciting ground of tension.”

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Alexa Haley, MA English Queens. Interview with Artist.

*Note: A full-length feature essay on the work of Nadia Myer by Alexa Haley begins on page 3.

**Visiting Artists**

Nadia Myre was one of five visual artists who visited the Fine Art (Visual Art) Program. In Fall 2016, sculptor Emily Jan (Montreal) and interdisciplinary printmaker Tara Cooper (Toronto) gave presentations on their recent practices; and in Winter 2017, the Program welcomed painter and animator Chantal Rousseau (Kingston) and Howard Podeswa (Toronto). These talks are an excellent opportunity to hear the thoughts and ideas behind the artwork and are invaluable for understanding processes of making.

The Queen’s Fine Art (Visual Art) Program would like to congratulate 2012-2013 Koerner Artist-in-Residence Geoffrey Farmer on representing Canada at this years prestigious Venice Biennale. Titled *A way out of the mirror*, Farmer’s project will explore the damage that seeps through generations, and is likely to be as moving as it is mesmerizing.
A recent exhibit of a collection of Nadia Myre’s provocative work at the McLaren Art Gallery in Barrie, Ontario (Nadia Myre: Needle Works, 2014, Solo Exhibition) features a series of beaded works of imposing scale – 5x5 feet – reproducing the logos of mass corporations – some no longer in existence – implicated in the more socially acceptable forms of territorial rape, to use a strong word activists might not object to. Nadia is an activist in her work, a public commentator as well as interventionist working gracefully in a delicate balancing act of socio-political commentary and aesthetic creation for a rather elite market. As a producer of a commodity with the institutional backing of a whole culture industry which privileges certain forms of creative expression over others, she incorporates an ancient crafts tradition with little institutional backing into the arena of high art productions, creating an exciting ground of tension. The range of public exposure garnered, for example, by her installation at the National Gallery exhibit of 2013 (SAKAHAN: Light a Fire, 1st Contemporary Indigenous Global Art Exhibit) places the work of a ‘maker’ like Nadia on a very different plateau than, say, the work of her fellow Algonquins practicing ancient traditions of beading passed down faithfully within a marginalized cultural enclave of First Nations people, the Algonquins of Kitigan Zibi.

This ground of tension activated by Nadia’s medium and the stark realities of its historical and cultural reception within a settler community still resistant to recognizing the importance and vibrancy of its Indigenous communities is explored with unique conceptual sophistication by an artist who is as daring as she is visionary, hoping to build bridges: points of contact, resonance and transformation. Nadia, with her fusion of settler and indigenous culture backgrounds, mother native, father French Canadian, fuses with astute socio-critical awareness the traditions of her native backgrounds with the cultural artillery of the dominant white hegemony.

Works like Alcan or Camco in the series Journey of the Seventh Fire (2008–9) showcase the logos of corporations guilty of the capitalist rapacity our settler culture legitimizes with a whole arsenal of economic, social and legal buttresses. These canvases with their single design focus, reminiscent of the graceful curvature, linear definition and geometric purity of Indigenous designs raise with one charged expressive stroke a whole array of provocative questions. How can two cultural realities so violently opposed be united in such a vulnerable and precarious proximity? The voracity of corporate activity stands in stark contrast to the delicate beaded treatment of its logos, charged not with aggressivity but with a sense of quietude, spiritual labor, non-confrontational resourcefulness.

As a matter of fact, the geometric designs of these corporate logos lend themselves remarkably well to treatment in a beaded crafts tradition. While Nadia acknowledges that she herself did not consider this strategy during her work on the pieces, she is intrigued by my interpretation: the simplicity of geometric iterations and units of visual code in the native traditions allows for an organic embrace of the similarly pared down visual icons employed in the logos of mass corporations. This act of provocative ‘embrace’ throws into relief that an icon of such aggressive agency as corporate logos are for those harmed by their expansionist activities, an icon of such imperialist force is not worthy of treatment in an artistic medium, nor of the cultural leverage it possesses. Nadia’s work reframes and dislocates capitalist expansionist voracity by asserting a continuity of aesthetic form with those symbolic orders displaced by the corporate activity. With this twist, accomplished by largely formal means, the symbolic order of the aggressive settler culture is dislocated. A productive source of tension, a space of active contentions is opened up with the merging and juxtaposition of symbolic configurations so similar formally yet so opposed in their cultural resonance.
This trading of places, this momentary inhabiting of a site that allows for a non-confrontational, non-aggressive intervention in corporate and social or political repressions is a strategy Nadia employs in a number of recent projects in which the spaces of contact between Native and settler cultures are explored through vehicles which allow individuals to inhabit another voice, a different cultural space. Art, for Nadia, is first and foremost a vehicle to allow individuals to 'hold' – an important term in her practice –, to temporarily embrace and inhabit an experience not sustained by them, but universally meaningful because saturated with a sense of repression and political controversy and reach as with Indian Act (2002), its resonance, as an act, spreads. Indian Act, constructed with the help of 250 volunteers working at the Oboro Gallery in Montreal to bead all 56 pages of the Act with red and white glass beads, develops Nadia's intervention practice in directions that complement those of the Journey of the Seventh Fire series. The visual layout of the text becomes the blueprint for a linear configuration in stark geometric and chromatic contrasts – using red as background and white to mark the text, each white bead taking the place of a letter. Visual reductions draw attention formally to the reductive processes within the political mechanism legislating experiential realms and identity dynamics of some complexity. This visual distortion, this paring down of the visual cues offered by a document with extreme symbolic weight works productively to destabilize its symbolic force and its meaning as an act of exploitative or exclusionary social force. On a continuum with the conceptual issues raised by Journey of the Seventh Fire, the Indian Act series extends its interventionist reach by the fact that agency is given not only to the initiator of the work, Nadia, but to members of the settler nation to whom she is appealing. At the suggestion of Rhonda Meier, curator of the Oboro Gallery portions of the completed series of beaded reproductions of the document were completed by others, an idea that quickly appealed to Nadia and, after some negotiation of methodological challenges, was adopted to give the work added resonance and reach. Nadia's practice is thus inclusive with a vengeance. Her art invites others to take ownership of and inhabit, even if only briefly, the place of a non-aggressive intervention practice in which quiet manual labor within a spiritually resonant community practice is invoked as a place of resistance to the domination mechanisms of our corporate-driven, media-overloaded culture. The Indian Act series thus demonstrates that commentary on the limitations of settler culture symbolic and political systems can not only be launched at but launched by members of that community.

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displacement. The Scar Project, which grew out of the Indian Act’s participatory experience, was a collective work of self-expression attesting to the ubiquity of suffering and its potential to act as bridge point, expressive outlet and form and means of community. The initially 700, now 1400 canvases produced by individuals responding to the project’s call to offer testimonials of private grief were pared down to 250 in Nadia Myre: Skin Tissue (2010). Here Nadia attempted to find a language, an expressive format that would capture as much of the original impetus and range of responses as possible. Nadia was interested in “trying to see if there was a common language about how we describe wounds, if there was a global symbology.”

Scarscapes (2010), a series of five beaded works memorializing the principal visual cues offered by Skin Tissue, represents a further distillation and formal condensation of the entire collection of testimonials in Scar Project. This work also fed Oraison/Orison (2014, Solo Exhibition), which draws together the symbolic and expressive weight within these testimonials in a more condensed and expressively saturated form, a search light in the dark mediating between the collection of 200 testimonials in the basket and a breathing, expanding and contracting red net rising and falling in a rhythm reminiscent of the pulse of a heart or the beating of the surf. With such symbolic nodes Nadia fuses the disparate elements of an art practice that relies on contact with a public in a very direct and dramatic way.

In A Casual Reconstruction (2015, Video Installation) a space of contact is opened up between settler and indigenous cultures by a performance act in which ordinary conversations about painful subjects are shared and inhabited by strangers across cultural barriers, inviting and facilitating an experience of shared cultural dispossession, marginalization and identity repression. Expression of such experiences of grief, mediated through a practice of scripted reenactment, allows members of Nadia’s audience to experience a communal public and private space in which boundary is only a way to reach more deeply into the shared and deeply moving private spaces of the psyche caught in the same web of crisis, configuration and resolution. Identity is ultimately a shared commodity, we come to realize as we engage with Nadia’s work. Identity, coveted, elusive and misleading at once, is something that is exchangeable and becomes meaningful precisely in its quality as a shared space of experience, a reservoir of individuated but broad ranging connectivity. Rather than separating, its very act of exclusion can be productively and provocatively brought into play in an act of empathetic contact in which strangers meet on common ground. Nadia’s practice merges testimonial and ‘naive art’, gleaned through viewer participation, in an aesthetic whole of dynamic complexity and subtle symbolic reach.
Darryl Bank graduated from the Fine Art (Visual Art) Program in 2006, and completed a postgraduate certificate in Arts Administration at Humber College in 2007. In Spring 2016, Banks returned to Queen’s University as a student in the Bachelor of Education program.

Since graduating from the Fine Art (Visual Art) Program, Bank has had many notable exhibitions and curatorial projects, including Just Act Natural (Studio 22, 2010), Every Stratified Thing on Earth: John Anderson and the ‘Kingston Tapes’ (The Artel, 2008), Critical Conditions: Contemporary Art From Wayne, Michigan (in collaboration with John Murnaghan, The Union Gallery, 2006), Trickx of Light (part of the Vtape Curatorial Incubator, 2009), and Ghosts of Presence: International Emerging Artists’ Video (AGYU, 2007). His work is also in the collections of Stauffer Library and the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, in addition to many private collections.

Over the last 10 years, Bank has held curatorial and administrative positions with a number of Toronto cultural organizations, including the Art Gallery of York University, the Ontario Association of Art Galleries, The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, Artscape, The Toronto Arts Council, and OCAD University. He also served as the chair of the board of directors at YYZ Artists’ Outlet from 2008-2016.

Currently a board member of the Union Gallery, Bank participated as one of the MCs for the 2017 edition of Cezanne’s Closet, alongside Vicki Remenda. When recently asked about his experience in the BFA program, Banks explained:

“My time in the BFA program helped me develop specific skills in installation, artists’ video, printmaking, and other media, but more broadly (and more importantly), it pushed me to think critically and to learn how to work in a very interdisciplinary way.”

Upon graduation from the Bachelor of Education Program, Bank is weighing his options between: “teaching in the UK, pursuing supply teaching in the Toronto District School Board (high school), or work with a private school in the GTA. I’m really interested in pushing students to develop critical thinking skills and to develop cross-curricular partnerships with other educators.”
residency on Residency Unlimited,” she continues. “I’ve always wanted to travel. I was drawn to Gullkistan because of the accessibility of their accommodations and I liked the thought of working in such a beautiful area. I’m going to Gullkistan in October of 2017. During my time there I’d like to do oil painted landscapes on Mylar. I’m very excited to spend one uninterrupted month where I can work and focus in on my practice.”

**Student Trips**

**New York City, North Adams, Montreal and The Botanical Extravaganza Print Collaboration**

Every year the Fine Art (Visual Art) Program students partake in trips that prove both productive and eye-opening. In 2016-2017, there were four trips: one to NYC for four days, the second our highly successful annual trip to North Adams (Massachusetts), another to Montreal and the fourth, an exciting trip to McMaster University in Hamilton.

Each of these are opportunities for friendships to form, for a range of art to be taken in and memorable sights and sounds to experience. The NY Print Fair! Large scale printing! Pizza, and decadent poses on decadent street sofas! A musical here and a museum there!

“Four short days of art, food, and great company…” student Karen Law writes of the trip to New York City. It was “an amazing opportunity to see a concentration of both historical and contemporary art. The Whitney Museum and nearby ice cream bar, Ample Farms, were highlights for myself. The food and entertainment were a nice addition to the experience but the best take away was the artistic inspiration.”

This year, the Fine Art (Visual Art) Program also partnered with McMaster University for a new endeavor. The Botanical Extravaganza Print Collaboration saw the creation and printing of large scale prints from 4 x 8 foot wood blocks and utilizing the large format printing press.

The printing press itself is a unique printmaking tool designed and built by McMaster students in the department of Mechanical Engineering and Studio Arts. It was exciting to see the impressive artwork made by students, as well as the incredible collaborative spirit that took place.
Reflections on North Adams and Hamilton by 4th Year BFA students Nicole Emond and Kia Kortelainen

For many years the group residency at Gravity Press in North Adams, Massachusetts has been a staple of the printmaking experience in the Fine Art (Visual Art) Program at Queen’s. It has allowed upper-year students to gain critical fine art experience set in a real world application. It is a wonderful opportunity to partner with fellow students and practicing artists to collaborate on the creation and production of large-scale wood block prints-- which alone would be very difficult to accomplish. The residency reinforces not only exploration but also the sense of community within art making (more specifically printmaking). It implores students to be innovative and inspires them to seek out more opportunities to further their studies in the artist residency setting.

The recent workshop in Hamilton, new to both the Queen’s and McMaster fine art programs, was an invitation from the McMaster fine art community to collaborate on the production of large-scale woodblock prints. Demonstrating both exploration of ideas and collaboration, Queen’s students worked alongside McMaster students in the creation of large scale artworks which were then shown in an exhibition on the final day of the trip. Gaining not only technical knowledge and ability, but also connections to other students in the art community.

Ultimately these residencies celebrate creative people and process, and exhibit the importance of experimentation and collaboration within the artistic community.
Over the past year, faculty have been involved in a number of projects and in the upcoming months, many will undertake further research and exhibitions. Otis Tamasauskas (Printmaking) recently visited Nipissing University for an artists’ talk and studio visits, and both Ted Rettig (Sculpture) and Sarindar Dhaliwal (Teaching Fellow) are featured in the current exhibition *The Hold: Studies in the Contemporary Collection* at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre at Queen’s University (January 7 - April 9). Rebecca Anweiler (Undergraduate Chair) can be seen in two exhibitions over the spring and summer of 2017: *Passing Through* at the David Kaye Gallery in Toronto (April 7 – 30), and an installation *Animal/Séance* at Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre in Kingston (June 24 - August 8); and Sylvat Aziz (Painting) will undertake a two-month residency in North Cyprus to examine social justice within the “vexatious and present day condition of post-truth.”

On February 28th, the graduating students held a highly successful Art Auction at the Grad Club, with all proceeds going towards this final exhibition titled “Forward”. Scheduled for the week of April 24th to 29th, *Forward* will feature 24 artists. There will be an closing reception and celebration on Saturday, April 29th, from 7 to 10pm. We hope to see you there!

**Contact**

More information about the exhibition *Forward* and other activities of the Fine Art (Visual Art) Program, as well as archived newsletters can be found on our home website www.queensu.ca/bfa

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