Transcontinental Divide

The Helen Pitt Gallery Artist Run Centre is pleased to be hosting this exhibition in conjunction with Gallery 101 in Ottawa as part of BC Scene and gratefully acknowledges the participation of Raymond Besiojolly, Karina Bergmans, Jennifer Cook, Isabelle Pauwels, Minh Nguyen, Stefan Thompson and Ron Tran. The work in this show is tangentially informed by a history of correspondence art, which, from the point of view of Vancouver also includes the notion of the Eternal Network, work, Robert Filliou’s hopeful term for ideas. At best, artists do their work – what they want to do - without giving way under the pressure to fit easily into accepted categories. At worst, artist makes work that plays directly into the desires of a system that always seeks to categorize and control. Experimentation is displaced in favour of career stability.

In this case, the artists have been invited to participate in an exhibition that asks them to perform two tasks. Firstly, they have been asked to produce an instructional document for an artist who is unknown to them. These documents constitute the principal contribution of each artist to this show and they vary in their approach and authoritativeness. Some are poetic, setting impossible or loosely defined tasks. Others are almost excessively step-by-step and diagrammatic. It is typical in the working methodologies of many contemporary artists for the idea of an artwork to be sketched out before entering the production stage. Typically, such instructions are passed on to a crafts person or labourer who is usually expected to execute them exactly if not unquestioningly. (Consider the history of displayed or sculpture and the many instances in which industrial manufacture was absolutely essential to the materialization of an artist’s idea.)

The second role these artists have taken on is to evaluate and in some sense rescue each idea from the unadulterated labour of its execution. Granted the autonomy to reject, salvage, interpret or submit to the received instructions, what is finally produced in either exhibition space is not the result of co-operative collaboration. In fact, these pairings might more accurately be described as a form of criticism. The discrepancy between each set of instructional documents and the works they have spurred is an indication of the points of departure each artist has taken in making the idea align with their own artmaking process. The space between thought and materialization (or thinker and maker) allows each artist the room to negotiate a response that respectfully engages with what they’ve been asked to do.

It has not been our desire to force collaboration or correspondence upon incongruous subjects. The only communication we’ve facilitated between the artists as a component of this exhibition has been the transmission of their instructional documents. Neither have we wanted to flatten difference through idealistic unities. If distinct regional tendencies are visible in the approaches these artists have taken, then a space had to be made for the individuals participating in this show to misunderstand and reinterpret one another. We could not assume that these artists share much in common, apart from the need to approach artmaking exactly as they believe they should.

We would like to thank all participating artists for generously and perhaps nervously relinquishing some authorial control while simultaneously working so thoughtfully through this project. The complex responses they have contributed help to sustain rather than resolve the questions engendered by the conceptual parameters of this exhibition.

Paul Kajander
Director/Curator

Raymond Besiojolly works in Vancouver, BC. He has participated in recent group exhibitions at the Vancouver Art Gallery (Vancouver), Crawl Space Gallery (Seattle), the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery (Vancouver) and Organ Gallery (Chongqing, China). He has also published visual and written work in Pyramidal Power and Wos. Raymond studied at the University of British Columbia and Emily Carr Institute.

Steven Hubert is a Kokoema-born Vancouver-based artist who graduated from Emily Carr Institute in 2007. Baring the imprint of previous study in English literature, his work in painting, sculpture, drawing, photography, and video takes cues from poems with a backdrop of history that is partly logical, partly mystical, and perforated by alternat