

## Raymond Boisjoly

Unlike practitioners who are invested in (re)interpreting traditional West Coast forms and idioms, and whose work argues a priori for historical identification, most First Nations artists active in Vancouver's contemporary art scene are burdened by biography. Writing on Brian Jungen's work, for example, typically mentions his mixed Swiss/Dunne-za heritage, thus reiterating a cultural frame through which he and other First Nations artists are uniquely perceived. Raymond Boisjoly, whose Haida and Québécois parentage has led to similar positioning, has made this spatializing language a particular area of interest. Like Jungen, Boisjoly draws on the ways in which identification is tied to cultural, and therefore (in Vancouver and Canada) visual signification; his practice is grounded in literary frames that suggest links to earlier generations of Vancouver artists, and especially to Ken Lum. In one (unfinished) work made in art school in 2006, for instance, Boisjoly digitally altered pages from Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1967) to produce a red/blue colour separation that could then be viewed through 3D glasses, tying the text's (mythic) status as a work of Marxist critical theory to that of a hallucinatory visual object.

Like Lum, Ian Wallace and Jeff Wall, Boisjoly has (almost alone among his generation) taken on the disappearing role of critical respondent – not only in writing, but also through teaching Critical Studies at Emily Carr University. Boisjoly moves fluidly between mediums, producing photographic prints, installations, collage, murals, video and sculpture. However, this eclecticism is conceptual at heart, as his choice of material centres on the particular adaptability of mediums to marry distinct cultural associations with formal or visual

effects. Nylon tarps, for example, have appeared in works as a ground, as in *The Writing Lesson: Spuzzum* (2011), where black vinyl-cut letters applied to the back of a white tarp show through faintly when viewed from the front; and as a lighting scrim, as in *The Ever-Changing Light* (2010), where a video projection shines onto a gallery wall through block letters of a phrase cut from tarp. In both cases, the material recalls – in addition to flags and commercial signage – its practical value in rural settings (like Spuzzum<sup>5</sup>), in providing shelter or securing a truck's contents.

A new, ongoing work follows the artist's attempt to compile an image inventory of all the petrol stations on First Nations reserves in British Columbia, picturing each through the most rudimentary photographic means: by laying a crudely produced negative (a photocopy on acetate) over black construction paper, then bleaching the paper under bright sunlight. The process provides an indexical link to the locale in which the photograph is made, emphasizing the complex relationship between Aboriginality and place. The titles of these photographs – rural British Columbia addresses – refer to the station listings on rezgas.com, a website that names the locations where a First Nations status card can be used for a discount fill-up. While the series references Ed Ruscha's photographs of American gasoline stations, Boisjoly's provisional methodology also resonates with the fieldwork of early frontier photographers, which often featured First Nations subjects. In constructing this 'ethnographic' portrait, Boisjoly strategically returns, through the lens of conceptual seriality, a cultural specificity rendered largely invisible by western stereotyping.



← 6336 Vedder Rd, Chilliwack,  
BC V2R 1C8, 2012, sunlight,  
construction paper, acrylic  
glass, 61 x 51 cm (left)

← Ir 10 Rd, Squamish-Lillooet C,  
BC V0N 2K0, 2012, sunlight,  
construction paper, acrylic  
glass, 61 x 51 cm (right)

↑ *The Writing Lesson: Spuzzum*,  
2011, tarpaulin and vinyl text  
274 x 366 cm

↓ *The Ever-Changing Light*, with  
Julia Marshburn, 2010, broken  
television, tarp screen, video  
projector, camera and stools,  
dimensions variable

