

## Human imperfection permeates Raymond Boisjoly art

by [Robin Laurence](#) on Mar 5, 2013



### Raymond Boisjoly

At **Catriona Jeffries Gallery** until April 13, and the **Contemporary Art Gallery** until April 7

Language—written, spoken, and sung—is a significant force in Raymond Boisjoly's art. So is photography's ability to register fleeting conditions of light, history, and cultural expression. In September 2011, the last time I covered a solo show by this fast-rising Vancouver based artist, he had created text works by exposing construction paper to sunlight. His use of the thorny and tangled fonts associated with Scandinavian black-metal bands to spell out indigenous place names of this region added layers of thematic complexity to the seemingly rudimentary photo process.

More recent text works are on view in the windows of the Contemporary Art Gallery. The poetic sentences composed on overlapping sheets of brightly coloured paper are drawn from three aboriginal "as told to" autobiographies: *Black Elk Speaks*, *Yellow Wolf: His Own Story*, and *During My Time* by Florence Edenshaw Davidson (Boisjoly's Haida great-grandmother). Threads of colonial history, bicultural authorship, and individual agency are unravelled and rewoven in unexpected ways.

"Intervals", a new series of photographic images on view at the Catriona Jeffries Gallery, employs visual rather than verbal language to take apart the ways electronic technologies affect the construction of identity and persona. Boisjoly has created medium- and large-scale inkjet prints by playing YouTube versions of 1960s and '70s televised musical performances on his iPod, then dragging the device across a flat-bed scanner to capture digitally re-mediated popular-culture moments in still images.

In each colourful semi-abstraction, repeated fragments of recognizable imagery are broken up by zigzag bars of eye-popping digital static. In a few places, we can see scratches, fingerprints, and dust particles, introducing an element of human imperfection into the otherwise immaculate digital realm. The artist's physical presence is also registered in the smeared and disrupted effects created by his dragging the iPod horizontally or vertically across the scanner.

That Boisjoly's images have been altered and disrupted by multiple electronic processes speaks to the ways that digital media affect the production, dissemination, and reception of musical experience. For me, however, the more interesting subject here is how these mediated images speak to the assertion or erasure of cultural identity. That focus is achieved through the charged nature of the performers and performances that Boisjoly has chosen to represent. "Intervals" reviews shifting attitudes towards marginalized peoples during the counterculture revolution of the 1960s and '70s.

The two most legible of the 10 photos here are derived from a 1965 performance of "Write Me, Baby" by Pat and Lolly Vegas, originally televised in black and white. Not many viewers will have heard of the Vegas—born Vasquez—brothers, but a few will recall Redbone, the Native American rock group they cofounded in 1969. Born in Southern California of mixed Mexican, Shoshone, and Yaqui descent, they established themselves in 1964 as part of the house band for the ABC-TV music show *Shindig*. With their slick, short hair, grey suits, and seemingly inconsequential lyrics, they successfully mimicked mainstream pop musicians of the time. By the 1970s, however, they had fully embraced their Native American heritage, growing their hair long, dressing in beads and buckskins, and producing protest songs.

In these prints and others (Buffy Sainte-Marie in a 1969 performance, Sly and the Family Stone in 1970), Boisjoly uses electronic replication and interference to crack open his found images, and the songs associated with them. Running somewhere beneath the smooth surface of pixels and pop music, he shows us, are the currents of cultural presentation and performance persona.