

## Distorted identity

Vancouver artist uses, misuses technology to highlight period of rapid change for indigenous people

By: **Steven Leyden Cochrane**

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Though we rely on film and video to provide a record of events, every technology has its vulnerabilities and limitations. There are inevitably gaps between frames. Film degrades. Equipment malfunctions. Resolution deteriorates and digital data get corrupted.

In a pair of concurrent exhibitions at Platform Centre and Urban Shaman, Vancouver-based Haida/Quebecois artist Raymond Boisjoly exploits these limitations, widening the gaps, magnifying irregularities and interjecting new ones. Through the deliberate, "creative" misuse of technology, Boisjoly looks for new possibilities and new insight in film and TV footage from the 1950s and '60s, a period of rapid change for indigenous identity and representation.

At Platform, *Station to Station* comprises a series of austere photographic works, prints of heavily distorted stills captured from black-and-white video. The warped, stuttering images are hard to parse, but through the pixilated banding and curtains of rainbow-hued digital artifacts, we occasionally make out a group of young people at a gas station.

The imagery comes from *The Exiles*, a documentary-style film by Kent MacKenzie shot in the Bunker Hill neighbourhood of Los Angeles in 1959. The film follows a Friday night out among a group of Native American 20-somethings, first-generation transplants making their way off-reservation in an unyielding postwar urban landscape.

To make the photographs, Boisjoly played MacKenzie's film on an iPad, recording images of the screen with a flatbed scanner. Condensing a five-minute scene into 11 photographs, the scanner's inability keep up with the moving image results in prismatic distortions and slippages between cuts, slurring the actors' movements and the passage of time in unpredictable ways. Constellations of magnified dust (another scanner artifact) add a further disorienting layer.

At Urban Shaman, Boisjoly's video installation *Silent Transformation* also employs degraded imagery to subtle but striking effect. Projected on a makeshift screen, a soundless black-and-white video shows a pair of sharply dressed male singers performing on *Shindig!*, a mid-'60s variety show. The video is a low-resolution Internet capture, blurred and pixillated almost to the point of illegibility, and the "screen" is a creased black plastic tarp that dims and scatters the projected light, further muffling the image. Into the tarp, Boisjoly has cut a brief, evocative text in bold block letters: "Always finding ourselves amidst changes already underway."

It's a condition at the heart of both exhibitions.



*Silent Transformation*

Art Review

Raymond Boisjoly

STATION TO STATION

PLATFORM CENTRE FOR  
PHOTOGRAPHIC + DIGITAL  
ARTS,

òè 121-100 Arthur St.

òè Until May 17

*Silent Transformation*

URBAN SHAMAN CONTEMPORARY  
ABORIGINAL ART, MARVIN  
FRANCIS MEDIA GALLERY

òè 203-290 McDermot Ave.

òè Until June 7

echoes its subjects' frustrations -- even the scanner mechanism can't keep up with the pace of change.

Both Station to Station and Silent Transformation stand on their own as compelling esthetic investigations: even without any background information, the work is haunting, evocative and strange. More remarkable, however, is Boisjoly's ability to embed complex histories and experiences -- of indigenous identity and representation, of the struggle to find one's place, of attempting to hold one's own against the passage of time -- in the very failure of the technologies we entrust with recording them.

Sonny Assu: There Is Hope, If We Rise opens at Urban Shaman Main Gallery Friday, May 2, at 8 p.m., with an artist talk at 9 p.m.

*Steven Leyden Cochrane is a Winnipeg-based artist, writer and educator.*

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