

CANADIANART

Duane Linklater: The Julian Assange of Native Art?

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Duane Linklater "Beothuck Building" 2012 Installation view Courtesy the artist / photo Jonathan Middleton

Duane Linklater's exhibition at the [Or Gallery](#) was a minimal effort, in the nicest sense: with only a few elements (a video, a vitrine, a framed photograph), the artist emerged as a pest, a collagist, the Julian Assange of Native art.

The show took its title, "Beothuck Building," from [an actual office building in St. John's](#); the Cree artist was riffing on the problem of reducing a vanished Native tribe to an adornment for commercial signage—but also, as Or curator Jonathan Middleton suggests, on "building" as both noun and verb. We have a video (which [you can watch an excerpt from on Linklater's website](#)), *Sunrise at Cape Spear Newfoundland* (2011). Cape Spear is the easternmost point in North America (according to *Wikipedia*); the digital video presumably shows not simply sunrise, but also what the Beothuk and other Native peoples might have seen before Europeans landed in North America.

Linklater, however, is not just making a digital pastoral—or perhaps he is—for he has also tried to post the video to [Wikipedia's entry for Cape Spear](#) (along with comments like "I have been there"); indeed, in the editing history for the page, you can find evidence of Linklater attempting

to post and being deleted dating back to May 2011. So we have an artist's video documentation of Canadian geography and history, inserted into the most up-to-date (and globalized) Internet community.

This history or conceptual structure also contextualizes the framed photograph in the exhibition, which depicts the work of [Joanna Malinowska as it appeared in the Whitney Museum of American Art's biennial](#) last spring. For that show, Malinowska hung a painting by imprisoned American Indian Movement activist [Leonard Peltier](#); in the photograph, we also see a video monitor showing Malinowska in a performance.

The photograph in the Or is large, but not very high-resolution (it comes from a JPEG emailed to Linklater). In email documentation in the vitrine, Linklater critiques Malinowska's appropriation of Peltier's painting, likening it to [Joseph Beuys's *I Like America and America Likes Me*](#), the 1974 performance with a coyote. Thus, Linklater suggests, Malinowska has tamed and institutionalized the Indian activist in an attempt to co-opt his critique of US hegemony. But, of course, Linklater has himself appropriated Malinowska (and perhaps Peltier, too, whose badly reproduced painting hung in Linklater's exhibition).

This formal practice can be connected to Linklater's own [Untitled \(Blueberry Garden for Bard College\)](#) (2012), in which he planted 12 blueberry bushes outside the college's Center for Curatorial Studies/Hessel Museum and exhibited the turf at a student gallery, emphasizing the proximity of the project to the contemporary art museum and the place where students learn about the curation of art.

This nature/culture exchange, in turn, calls to mind [Edward Poitras's 1988 work *Offensive/Defensive*](#), in which he exchanged strips of earth between the Gordon Indian Reserve and the lawn of the Mendel Art Gallery in Saskatoon. Linklater wrote on Poitras's work for his thesis at Bard, and this past summer [released a film made with Brian Jungen](#): he is keenly aware of his antecedents and colleagues.

But like the *Wikipedia* correspondence ([a sample of which is, again, on Linklater's website](#)), the email and other documents that surround the Linklater/Malinowska/Peltier appropriations provide a great example of this artist's wily enfolding of postconceptual structure, postcolonial critique and post-Internet art.