

Radul lenses odd auditions

VISUAL ARTS

JUDY RADUL: DOWNES POINT AND SO DEPARTED (AGAIN)

At the Presentation House Gallery until October 30

It's best not to take things too seriously when viewing Judy Radul's work. Consider the enigmatic title of her new show, *Downes Point and So Departed (Again)*. On the surface, it seems to require a researcher's footnote, some explanation. Upon closer inspection, however, it is deceptively straightforward, incorporating the names of the two works in the show—2005's *Downes Point* and 2003's *And So Departed (Again)*—into one idiosyncratic grammatical entity. Even before we see the work, Radul confounds our expectations of a familiar structure (in this case, language and our ability to understand it).

It's a manoeuvre that will be familiar to those who know her practice. Radul's roots are in performance art, but over the years, the Lillooet-born artist has spent time and effort interrogating the limits of genre. When not writing critically about the nature of live performance versus

mediated representation, or teaching at the interdisciplinary SFU School for the Contemporary Arts, Radul creates intricate, mind-bending video installations that mightily confound the conventions of theatre, performance art, and film. Her exhibition's title, like her work, demands some mental elasticity from the viewer. Assessing it purely for decipherable meaning omits a key ingredient in the artist's investigations: play.

Downes Point is Radul's newest work. Filmed in an arbutus grove on Hornby Island this past summer, it requires five separate video projectors—to match the number of cameras it took to film—to present. It is viewed as two panoramic screens facing one another on opposite walls, and the narrative focuses on interactions between a director and a group of actors. The director occupies one side of the projection, and addresses the actors on the other wall. Both projections incorporate two or more camera angles (masterfully pieced together in postproduction to give the appearance of a single screen), and each is synched to the other so that figures leaving one frame are immediately picked up in the next. The effect is strangely disorienting:

the traditional distinctions of on- or off-camera no longer apply, and the West Coast pastoral setting refers more to a landscape painting than a Hollywood casting call. The director addresses the actors one by one with audition scenarios like "You have been looking for me everywhere," or even "Lately there's a larger gap between our similar thoughts." Depending on their responses to these verbal cues, the actors are sorted into two different camps where they wait, idly. The director's basis for assessment never becomes clear, and he gives each actor the role of an inanimate object ("You are cardboard," he says to one, and simply "Water vapour" to another). His ambiguous instructions refer to theatre and performance practice but at the same time they confound our expectations of it.

These are lofty themes, to be sure, but there is also a playfulness to the work, a kind of absurdist indulgence that, like Radul's teaser of a show title, allows viewers to consider the new directions and unexpected narratives that arise from genre-crossing. And that's preferable to just the headache-inducing theoretical rationalizations of it.

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