

Canadian Voices at the Venice Biennale

The Production of a Canadian Image through the Venice Biennale between 1988 and 2005

Jean-François Bélisle

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ABSTRACT

Canadian Voices at the Venice Biennale The Production of a Canadian Image through the Venice Biennale between 1988 and 2005

Jean-François Bélisle

This thesis assesses the image of Canada that has developed through the Canadian presence at the Venice Biennale from 1988 to 2005. By examining the exhibitions, as well as their dissemination through the Canadian and foreign press, this study isolates trends that have proven influential in the production of a Canadian national image within the context of the international contemporary art scene. The time period includes exhibitions by Roland Brener and Michel Goulet, Geneviève Cadieux, Robin Collyer, Edward Poitras, Rodney Graham, Tom Dean, Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, Jana Sterbak, and Rebecca Belmore. Data has been collected from over eight hundred printed sources and through interviews with key participants. Three major models emerge from the dissemination of these events: the universal exposition; the Olympics of visual art; and a wonderland of visual arts. These persistent models transform the content of the exhibitions into nationalistic manifestations. A careful reading of the exhibitions, however, isolates three less obvious, but more significant trends that apply specifically to Canada: a preoccupation with the unstable distinction between fiction and reality; a concern with contradictory cultural production processes; an emphasis on the reconstruction of Canadian history. These three trends contribute to a revisionist project that effectively revisits and deconstructs the construction of a Canadian national image. The Canadian presence can thus be read as a voice of dissent in a forum where national participation is generally equated with unified national representation.

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This thesis is concerned with how Canada has defined itself culturally on the contemporary international art scene during the past two decades. The art scene is a polymorphic entity which manifests itself through countless events and exhibitions around the world, be it in museums, commercial galleries or ephemeral events. As such, it is impossible to grasp it in its entirety. However, a number of these events and exhibitions occur regularly and attract sufficient attention internationally to have become defining moments of the art world. The Venice Biennale has been ongoing since 1895 and is commonly regarded as one of the most important events on the world stage of contemporary art. The recent official Canadian entries in the Venice Biennale have therefore played key roles in defining the Canadian image on the contemporary international art scene.

This study of the past two decades of Canadian representation at the Venice Biennale sets 1988 as its starting date. That year holds a particular importance since it was then that the current system of choosing artists was implemented. Prior to 1988, all Canadian exhibitions in Venice had been under the complete control of the National Gallery of Canada. Following a wave of contestation in the early 1980s, the National Gallery decided to release its control. A system was then set up through which Canadian art professionals were invited to submit proposals for the Biennale. The reasons for extending this opportunity to the rest of Canada were manifold. First, it was intended to acknowledge the anachronism of a centrally-governed system in a country that had

dozens of professional art museums and galleries fully capable of handling the responsibility of mounting a exhibition such as the Canadian presence at the Venice Biennale. Second, it was hoped that having different institutions from different parts of the country would bring a more pluralistic view of contemporary Canadian art to Venice. Finally, the new system was meant to do away with the presentation of a monolithic conception of Canadian identity at the Venice Biennale.¹

Diana Nemiroff and Jessica Bradley, two key players who, between 1986 and 1988, supervised the transition process from within the National Gallery to other institutions, both placed special emphasis on this last aspect of the transformation.² In their opinion, the presentation of a monolithic Canadian identity was not to be replaced with a more pluralistic identity, but done away with entirely, so that the art might be appreciated outside of any consideration of national identity. Nineteen years have elapsed since the administration of Canada's presence at Venice was transformed; enough time for the new system to establish itself as the norm. In the present document, I will assess the tangible results of this new system. Focusing on the nine Biennales since the transformation allows us to see how these aims actually unfolded, and what their consequences were for the contemporary expression of a Canadian identity through the Venice Biennale.

Concretely, this thesis intends to report on the Canadian image as perceived in the international art scene through recent Venice Biennales. In addition to its historical function, it may also prove a useful tool for Canadian art professionals to assess their

¹ Telephone interview with Diana Nemiroff on April 20th 2006.

² Ibid. And interview with Jessica Bradley on April 25th 2006

next moves on the political and cultural chessboard that is the contemporary art world at the international level.

Prior to launching into a detailed survey of the Canadian exhibits at the Venice Biennale between 1988 and 2006, it seems important to briefly revisit the history of the event. My study of the contemporary Canadian image in Venice is only made possible because prior scholarship exists on the Canadian presence in Venice before 1988. I am indebted to Carol Harrison Reesor for her excellent Master's thesis on the National Gallery at the Venice Biennale.³

Canada's first presence at the Venice Biennale dates back to 1903, when a painting by James Wilson Morrice was exhibited in an international section of the event. Sporadic Canadian presences in Venice continued throughout the first half of the twentieth-century. In 1950, Donald Buchanan, acting at the request of H. O. McCurry, then director of the National Gallery of Canada, went on a mission to Venice to look into the possibility of "sending artists to showcase their art at the international [Venice] biannual."⁴ As a result of this mission, an exhibition of Canadian art was organized for the 1952 edition of the Biennale. Curated by McCurry, this first independent Canadian national presence grouped works by Emily Carr (4 paintings), David Milne (8 paintings), Goodridge Roberts (5 paintings), and Alfred Pellán (5 paintings) and was accompanied by a short text written by Robert Hubbard, then Curator of Canadian Art and Associate Director at the National Gallery. In this text, Hubbard states that "a young nation is

³ Carol Harrison Reesor, "The Chronicles of the National Gallery of Canada at the Venice Biennale," Master's Thesis: Concordia University, 1995.

⁴ Ibid., 1.

sensitive to what is said of her abroad.”⁵ Though Canada can hardly be called a ‘young nation’ in the international circuit of contemporary arts any more, what is said of the country internationally still is a predominant factor in its defining process.

This first independent Canadian exhibition in Venice in 1952 and the three subsequent ones were hung in a Biennale building which housed the exhibitions of all countries without national pavilions. In 1958, the Canadian government, through the National Gallery of Canada, inaugurated its own national pavilion. Located in the south-east corner of the common grounds of the Biennale (*i giardini del castello*), the pavilion was built according to plans drawn by Enrico Peressutti from the Milanese firm Belgiosa, Peressutti and Rogers. With a floor plan based on Archimedes spiral and an exterior shape which resembles a teepee, the pavilion would house all future Canadian national exhibits in Venice.

Between 1958 and 1986, all the exhibits mounted in this pavilion were entirely organized and curated internally by the National Gallery of Canada. These exhibitions were centrally concerned with the idea of presenting a national Canadian identity to the world. When the curatorial responsibility was transferred away from the National Gallery of Canada, the other two partners in the Canadian Venice Biennale program, namely the Canada Council for the Arts and the Canadian Department of External Affairs (since renamed “Foreign Affairs”) took on more important roles.⁶ However, the maintenance of the Canadian pavilion in Venice remained the responsibility of the National Gallery of Canada.

⁵ Robert Hubbard, cited by Reesor, 1.

⁶ Heretofore referenced to as “Canada Council” and “Foreign Affairs,” respectively. The latter’s name was changed to the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade in 1993 (formalized 1995).

In 1988, the Canada Council and Foreign Affairs decided to form a committee of three art professionals who would invite pre-selected curators to submit exhibition proposals for Venice. This committee met in Ottawa to discuss the applications and select a winning proposal. The committee was different for each edition of the Biennale. This selection process is still being used today, though curators no longer need to be invited to submit proposals. Since the early 1990s, anyone can submit a proposal, be they acknowledged art experts or not. However, to ensure the quality of the proposals and resulting exhibition, Canada Council and Foreign Affairs require that all proposals be sponsored by a recognized Canadian art institution. This sponsor will supervise the project, fundraise for it, and be held accountable for any time delays and financial issues which may occur prior to, or during, the Venice exhibition.

Parallel to the national participations at the Venice Biennale, the event's Italian organizing committee organizes large thematic exhibitions that feature works by artists from various countries. Mounted by a head curator nominated specifically for each installment of the Biennale, these exhibitions are not structured along national lines. They cover a specific topic and are housed in two large exhibition venues: the Italian pavilion and the *Arsenale*. The Italian pavilion is the original Biennale building on the Biennale grounds and bears that name because it previously housed the Italian exhibitions. The *Arsenale* is a transformed rope factory in the vicinity of the Biennale Grounds that owes its name to the fact that it was previously part of an Italian military complex (see Figures 1.1 and 1.2 for reference maps of the Biennale layout). These

exhibitions are outside the scope of this study which focuses on the notion of national presence, and specifically on Canada's use of its pavilion.

My study of the recent articulation of a Canadian identity in Venice is divided into three sections. In Chapter One, I survey the Canadian exhibitions which were mounted at the Venice Biennale between 1988 and 2005, so as to better understand the Canadian representations that took form after the National Gallery had relinquished its control. Simultaneously, I report on the press coverage that surrounded these exhibitions. Each Venice Biennale is attended by approximately 100,000 people, but much larger audiences are reached via the plethora of articles published every year about the event.⁷ The findings in this first chapter are used in Chapters Two and Three to propose a more theoretical study of the nature of recent Canadian representations in Venice as they pertain to the expression of national identity.

The information about the Canadian exhibits in Venice was compiled through a meticulous study of dozens of exhibition catalogues, as well as interviews with individual curators and artists who took part in the exhibits. I saw three of these exhibitions first-hand (1995, 1997 and 2005). The information about the reception of the Canadian performances in Venice was gathered through a careful reading of eighty international art publications and nineteen Canadian newspapers. These publications were selected for their continuous coverage of the Venice Biennale over the time span studied for this thesis. These documents offer an understanding of the reception of the Canadian exhibitions on the international scene and within Canada. They have been carefully

⁷ Interview with Alessandra Santerini, press liaison officer for the Biennale, on June 15, 2005.

combed for relevant information or opinions pertaining to the direct or indirect construction of a Canadian image in Venice. I make a distinction between direct and indirect contributions in order to clearly differentiate between contributions that emerge from the actual artworks (direct) and those that stem from the press reception of the art (indirect).

In Chapter Two, I study the literature surrounding the Canadian presences in Venice since 1988. This is done through a careful reading of some 558 articles for signs of a national discourse. My findings are articulated in a thematic fashion to draw out the major interpretations of the international media when reporting on Canadian exhibitions in Venice. Three main lines of thought emerge from my reading of these sources: the Venice Biennale is generally approached by writers as a form of universal exposition, as an artistic Olympic competition, or as a wonderland of the arts. Each of these approaches has direct consequences on the way the art is presented to readers of print media.

The universal exposition model subliminally equates the art in the pavilion with the country it represents. Simply put, the art becomes the country. Individual exhibitions are read for signs of 'Canadian-ness' and are presented as such. The Olympic model places the emphasis on the Biennale prizes (*Leone d'oro* – Golden Lions) awarded at each installment. The competitiveness produced by this model encourages viewers and writers alike to rally behind artists of their own nationality. Though this model does not suggest that these artists accurately 'represent' the identity of their countries, they nevertheless come to represent them in a race for gold. If a Canadian artist wins a

medal, then Canada has won a medal. Through the wonderland of the arts model, the Venice Biennale is transformed into an arena where artistic spectacle produces a fantastic environment detached from reality. This model expresses the writer's enjoyment of the magical context of the Biennale (the festive mood of Venice in summer; the gathering of art professionals from around the world in one city at one time; the enchanting grounds of the Biennale). In the wonderland model, national representations are fictional constructions similar to myths: they are mixtures of fact and fiction that evade discussion about the accuracy of their foundations. When used in articles, these mythical constructions reinforce the basic assumption that artistic national representations reflect the country for which they stand.

These three models for writing about the Venice Biennale, combined with the general assumption that each nation's presence is in some way (literally, but also symbolically) representative of the nation as a whole, result in the active production of national identities. My thesis thus argues that a considerable portion of the national imagery found in the Canadian exhibits in Venice is contextual; it is projected onto the art through its reception by art writers rather than embodied in the artistic works and the artists' intentions.

To make this argument, I devote Chapter Three to a thorough study of the individual exhibitions for signs of a national identity discourse. By revisiting the individual Canadian exhibits in Venice, I discern three themes in the artworks. These themes are interrelated as they are linked to a revisionist approach to history and the production of national representations. Four exhibitions question the line between fiction and reality, inviting

viewers to reflect on the (falsely) constructed nature of their environment. Three exhibitions contribute to the revisionist attitude through a questioning of production processes. And finally, two exhibitions revisit the construction of the Canadian history. I then argue that these themes can be understood as contributing to a discourse about a Canadian image in the international art circuit. This contribution can be best appreciated as a questioning approach that is set up in opposition to the stable monolithic approach that prevailed prior to 1988.

In my conclusion, I single out the 2001 exhibition of *Paradise Institute* in the Canadian pavilion as a paradigm of how the various trends and ideologies embodied in and surrounding the Venice Biennale have affected the dissemination of the art in the Canadian and international press. As demonstrated in Chapter Two, the press readings of the Canadian exhibitions of the past two decades have tended to project stereotypical views on Canada onto the artworks. References to the rough Canadian landscape, the northern climate and the amicable and orderly Canadian people reoccur regularly in the press. However, these traits are not nearly as present in the actual artworks exhibited in the Canadian pavilion. Rather, what emerges from the exhibitions is a constant desire to question parts of the historical and contemporary national image production process as it is embodied in the Venice Biennale. The models and trends developed in this thesis all emerge clearly in the 2001 official Canadian presence in Venice.

Given the wide time span covered by this thesis, a large number of artists and artworks will be discussed. Among its readers, only a fortunate few will have seen all the exhibitions first-hand. However, most contemporary art professionals and academic specialists can claim some familiarity with the Venice Biennales of the last two decades because they have been exposed to these nine exhibitions through press coverage of the event in the Canadian and international media. The literature surrounding each Biennale, therefore, plays a major role in the dissemination of the Canadian presences in Venice. It must be said, however, that the extent of the press coverage of Canadian participations in the Biennale greatly varies from one exhibition to the next. Depending on a number of factors – the popularity of the exhibits, the winning of an award or the international acclaim of the artist prior to the event – the number of articles about the exhibitions varies between a handful and a few dozen. Between 1988 and 2006, an average of twelve newspaper articles were published in the Canadian press for each edition of the Venice Biennale, while, on average, three articles were printed in the specialized international art press for each installment of the event.

In the following pages, I make a distinction between articles printed in Canadian publications and those published in international ones. The first group includes newspapers and specialized publications that are primarily sold and read in Canada. These publications are of great importance when discussing Canada's self-image: the way Canadians imagine themselves as a nation. Publications that belong in this group

include *The Globe and Mail*, *Canadian Art* and *Vie des Arts*, to name but a few. The second group is constituted of specialized publications that are sold and read in countries around the world. These publications are central to the international dissemination of a Canadian image. *Art Forum* and *Flash Art* are two examples of publications belonging to this group. Both groups are equally important in the construction of a Canadian image. By dissociating the two groups, I make it possible to trace the perspectives on Canada to either Canadian or foreign sources.

Common to the two groups is a vocabulary that refers to stereotypical views of Canada. Expressions such as 'the little Canadian house in the woods,' 'Tom Thomson's wilderness shack,' the 'orderly and friendly Canadians,' or the 'rawness of the New World' can be found in both groups. This vocabulary most often sets up the discussion of Canadian art within a context of familiar stereotypes about the country. While the articles sometimes reject these views, and other times encourage them, references to these so-called Canadian motifs and traits are consistent across the majority of publications.

Also consistent in all writings about the Venice Biennale, Canadian or foreign, is an emphasis on success. At the core of almost every article is an appraisal of the popularity of the artist or artists who are portrayed as competitors in an international contest. In the Canadian press, reporting on the Canadian artists most often takes the form of explaining a record of success or criticizing a lack of success. A hint of pride (or shame) can be read in the various articles. A number of Canadian articles even proudly refer to coverage obtained by individual exhibitions in the international press as a sign of

ultimate success. The national press most often appears to be championing its own country's participants.

The aim of this chapter is twofold. First, it presents the ten artists and nine curators who have created Canada's official presence at Venice since 1988. Second it offers a quantitative study of the press coverage each of these exhibitions received. While references to the specific content of the press coverage are made in this chapter, they are included essentially to contextualize the coverage. A more thorough study of the content of this coverage and the actual forms of the exhibitions is offered in Chapters Two and Three respectively.

The 1988 Biennale

The 1988 Canadian participation to the Venice Biennale was the first to be mounted by a curator and an institution unrelated to the National Gallery of Canada. Independent curator France Gascon submitted the successful proposal, which was sponsored by the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. The announcement was made in early 1987.⁸

The resulting exhibition was comprised of sculptural works by Roland Brener (1942-2006) and Michel Goulet (b. 1944). As Gascon explains in the exhibition catalogue, both Brener and Goulet were making work that dealt with architecture using a visual and material vocabulary generally associated with industrial fabrication (figures 2.1 – 2.5).

⁸ France Gascon, *Roland Brener, Michel Goulet* (Montreal: Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, 1988): 16.

She links the two artists by noting their usage of "various procedures generally related to labour as such." Construction (in Goulet's case) and operation (Brener's case) are aspects of the work that remain visible for viewers to acknowledge. Gascon writes: "in the final product, [these procedures] become almost as perceptible as the objects that manifest them."⁹ She understands these references to labour as central to the artists' practices. They simultaneously draw the viewers in (because the constituting parts are easily recognizable yet intriguing due to having been modified) while suggesting additional references and content that superimpose multiple levels of meaning.

While exhibited in Venice, the two artists' works generated a fair amount of interest in the Canadian press. A total of five newspaper articles and three art magazines articles mentioned the exhibition. The most positive article, entitled "Canada's star rises at Venice Biennale," was by Ann Duncan in the Montreal *Gazette*.¹⁰ However the specialized press, in and outside of Canada, was more critical of Canada's performance. No articles mentioned the Canadian exhibition in the international press, and a Lisa Balfour Bowen article in *Art Post* noted that "the Canadian pavilion [is] offering carefully conceived but often gimmicky conceptual sculptures."¹¹ This, as well as other similar comments in the Canadian press, suggest that, though interesting enough to mention, the Canadian exhibition did not measure up to the other national representations at the Venice Biennale. It was a gentle tap on the shoulder, but no more.

⁹ Ibid., 27.

¹⁰ Ann Duncan, "Canada's star rises at Venice Biennale; Montrealer's sculptures attracting attention," *The Gazette* (August 13, 1988): D5

¹¹ Lisa Balfour Bowen, "Venice: Sculpture Dominates the 43rd Venice Biennale," *Art Post* 6, no. 1 (Fall 1988): 29.

In the *Gazette* article mentioned above, Duncan describes Canada's exhibition as "attracting a great deal of interest" and reflecting "a newfound maturity, strength and intelligence."¹² Compared to other articles published about the Canadian exhibition in Venice (or lack thereof), Duncan's comments seem overly optimistic. Rather than reporting about an acknowledged success, her article comes across as a mixture of wishful thinking and national pride. This Canadian approach to Canadian art in Venice frequently reoccurs over the next nineteen years.

The 1990 Biennale

For the second non-National-Gallery-mounted Canadian exhibition at the Venice Biennale, the selection committee chose curator and editor-in-chief of the Montreal publication *Parachute*, Chantal Pontbriand, to organize an exhibition sponsored by the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. The exhibition was constituted of a single work by Montreal artist Geneviève Cadieux (b. 1955). This was the first solo show of a Canadian woman artist in Venice. From 1990 onwards, all Canadian exhibits in Venice would feature a single artist or an artist team.¹³

Cadieux's sole work for Venice, entitled *La Fêlure, au cœur des corps* (The Crack on the Choir of Bodies),¹⁴ consisted of a large-format photographic triptych that was displayed through the tall windows of the Canadian pavilion (figure 3.1). These windows

¹² Ann Duncan, "Canada's star rises at Venice Biennale; Montrealer's sculptures attracting attention," *The Gazette* (August 13, 1988): D5.

¹³ The only artist team shown in Venice between 1988 and 2005 was Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller in 2001.

¹⁴ My translation.

look out onto a small courtyard situated in front of the building. The works were therefore only visible from outside the pavilion, with the inside of the pavilion remaining empty. Cadieux's work interacted with the brick and metal architecture of the pavilion and the surrounding trees. The triptych depicted close-up photographs of the human body.

When displayed at the Venice Biennale, *La Fêlure, au chœur des corps* attracted definite interest from Canadian and international art professionals alike. Magazines such as *Canadian Art* and *Art Press* ran feature articles on Cadieux while distant publications such as *Arte en Columbia* noted the "powerful and electric sensuality" of the piece.¹⁵ Sixteen newspaper articles were printed about it in Canada and seven pieces were written about it in international art magazines. This press coverage noted the quality and originality of the work, as well as the importance of having women artists in both North American pavilions (Jenny Holzer occupied the United States pavilion).

Two of the Canadian writers were quick to report on the success of Cadieux's exhibition in the international press. In the Montreal *Gazette*, Ann Duncan praised the inclusion of a discussion of Cadieux's work in the French *Libération* and *Le Monde*. She states that "the very fact that Cadieux was mentioned in such newspapers, let alone so favorably, is no mean feat."¹⁶ In the Montreal *La Presse*, Jocelyne Lepage wrote:

Geneviève Cadieux did not win a prize at the Venice Biennale. However, her participation was exceptional. Publications such as *Le Monde*, *Libération*, and the *New York Times* noted her exhibition, which rarely happens for an artist from Canada, a country without much political and

¹⁵ Régis Durand, "Donner un corps à la raison," *Art Press*, no. 147 (mai 1990): 36.

¹⁶ Ann Duncan, "Canadian Artists Are Reaping Praise in Venice's Biennale," *The Gazette* (July 21, 1990): J2.

economical influence in the art world and whose humility is most noticeable in the limited size of its pavilion in Venice.¹⁷

In both of these articles, the authors' decision to celebrate the fact that foreign writers had noted the Canadian exhibit appears as an expression of national pride for the Canadian representative. Cadieux is described as a hero who has succeeded against overwhelming odds forced upon her by Canada's reputation abroad and the national pavilion's modest quarters. Perhaps the best summary of the Canadian writers' attitude towards the Cadieux success in Venice came in Bojana Pejic's exclamation in *Art Forum*: "It made me proud. In Venice this year, the Canadians rule."¹⁸

The 1993 Biennale

At the beginning of the 1990s, the Venice Biennale was briefly converted into a triennial event. The aim of this delay from 1992 to 1993 was two-fold: to straighten financial issues related to the overall event, and to reset the clock so that the next edition would coincide with the centennial anniversary of the institution (1895).¹⁹ For this edition of the Biennale, the Canadian selection committee chose a proposal by curator Phillip Monk. His exhibition was sponsored by the Art Gallery of Ontario and showcased the sculptures of British-born, Toronto-based artist Robin Collyer (b. 1949).

¹⁷ Jocelyne Lepage, "Geneviève Cadieux: doux souvenirs de Venise," *La Presse* (July 7, 1990): I6. My translation.

¹⁸ Bojana Pejic, "What will become of our sensitive skin...," *Art Forum*, vol. 19, no. 1 (September 1990): 131.

¹⁹ The first edition of the Venice Biennale was held in 1895.

Collyer's works exhibited in Venice were seven industrially formed sculptures representing, in the curator's words, a "sustained commentary on architecture and urban planning, and on the commodification of our lived experience, as evidenced in the built environment around us or in the media images that bombard us"²⁰ (figures 4.1 – 4.2). Monk's observation is clearly illustrated by Collyer's use of industrial products as his raw material and in his inclusion of photographs which allowed for an exploration of image-text-context relationships in contemporary society.

The 1993 Canadian presence in Venice resulted in limited press coverage. Only three Canadian newspapers published article related to it. Collyer's works had been exhibited at the Art Gallery of Ontario just a few months earlier. There, they had been better received. But they seem to have made no impression, either positive or negative, on the international contemporary art scene in Venice, and a very limited impression on Canadian critics. An anonymous author in *Canadian Art* suggested that "artists whose work is more obliquely political, like Robin Collyer from Canada [...] suffered in this politically charged atmosphere. Their representations, so convincing back home, couldn't sustain themselves here. Modest, coy and elliptical, they seemed unable to compete with the great themes."²¹ Going further, Bruce Ferguson stated in *The Gazette*:

In Canada, his works have always been interpreted as critiques of the media and of the social worlds to which they refer. In the context of today's conditions, particularly the daily déjà vu scenes of war-torn Bosnia and the strong conceptual work from other countries being shown in the Biennale, the question might be whether Collyer's works are too little and too late to be effective in this sort of exhibition.²²

²⁰ Phillip Monk, *Robin Collyer: Idioms of Resistance* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario): 14.

²¹ "Venice Biennale," *Canadian Art*, vol. 10, no. 3 (fall 1993): 78.

²² Bruce Ferguson, "Biennale is Tough Venue: Canada's Entry Modest," *The Gazette* (June 26, 1993): 15.

This critical reception of Collyer's works in the Canadian press suggests that his artistic intention was either inaccessible or uninteresting to foreign writers and viewers. Ferguson's comments on the pieces also imply a certain distancing between himself and the Canadian art scene, a distance that permits Ferguson to judge Collyer's work as insufficient for the international context of the Venice Biennale. By stating that Collyer's work could be "so convincing back home," and simultaneously "too little and too late" in Venice, he indirectly equates Canada's art scene with Collyer and throws the baby away with the bathwater. Far from nationalistic pride, or even indifference, Ferguson and the most-likely Canadian contributor to *Canadian Art* are expressing nationalist shame.

The 1995 Biennale

The 1995 edition of the Biennale marked the hundredth anniversary of the event. The Canadian representation for this edition was curated by Gerald McMaster and sponsored by the Canadian Museum of Civilization. It showcased Métis artist Edward Poitras (b. 1953).

This exhibition featured sculptures and installations, as well as printed works which were based on Canadian anthropological documents dealing with First Nations populations (figures 5.1 – 5.5). These works offered a very personal and poignant foray into questions of identity as it pertains to the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. The accompanying catalogue featured two in-depth theoretical texts on these questions by McMaster. In these texts, the image of the First Nations was described as a European

invention. Retracing the contorted relationship between Europeans and North American Aboriginals to American showman Buffalo Bill's visit to Venice in 1893, the catalogue placed ample emphasis on the process of producing identities (both Aboriginal and European).

When exhibited in Venice, Poitras's works generated a fair amount of press. Canadian newspaper art critics produced a total of eleven articles (seven written by Ann Duncan from the Montreal *Gazette*), while the international and foreign press printed four articles about the show (*Art and Australia*, *Arte*, *D'Ars* and *La Repubblica*).²³ Most of these articles were primarily interested in the central piece of the exhibition, which was an assemblage of animal bones into a sculpture entitled, *Coyote* (figures 5.4 – 5.5). In *D'Ars*, Michele Cladarelli saw in this work a unifying factor between the various nationalities present at the Biennale: he envisioned it as embodying humans' "animal" nature and destiny.²⁴ This is very much the writer's projection on the work, rather than a reading influenced by the artist's thoughts, since Poitras produced *Coyote* as a trickster, specifically intended to disrupt people's understandings of cultural identity, not to unify them through a common denominator.²⁵

²³ Ann Duncan, "100 years up to date," *The Vancouver Sun* (June 10, 1995): C12, Ann Duncan, "Métis artist's coyotes are hit of Venice Biennale," *The Gazette* (June 17, 1995): H1, Ann Duncan, "Intensity of Biennale is infectious," *The Gazette* (June 23, 1995): G6, Ann Duncan, "Verve and champagne in quantity at Venice Biennale," *The Gazette* (June 10, 1995): I5, Ann Duncan, "Métis artist picked for Venice Biennale," *The Gazette* (October 29, 1994): H4, Ann Duncan, "Betty Goodwin will exhibit at Venice Biennale," *The Gazette* (March 18, 1995): I3, Alfano Miglietti, "Svendita di fino ano," *D'Ars*, vol. 146 (August 1995): 20-23, Judy Annear, "Bad Weather," *Art and Australia*, vol. 33, no. 2 (summer 1995): 180-182, Lucio Cabutti, "Biennale '95," *Arte*, no. 263 (June 1995): 56-71.

²⁴ Michele Calderelli, "Il corpo della Biennale," *D'Ars*, no. 146 (August 1995): 35.

²⁵ Robert Enright, "The Incomparable Rightness of In Between," *Border Crossings*, vol. 14, no. 4 (November 1995): 31.

The interest of the international press in Poitras's work was duly noted in the Canadian press. In the *Vancouver Sun*, Duncan celebrated the televised feature on his work, broadcast "in a lengthy spot on a major Japanese television network"²⁶ And in the Montreal *Gazette*, she expressed her joy that "it is [...] *Coyote* that *La Repubblica*, one of Italy's largest-circulation dailies, chose to illustrate a story about the Biennale on June 7."²⁷ The recognition of Canadian artists by non-Canadian critics seems to consistently bring pride to Canadian writers such as Duncan.

The 1997 Biennale

The official Canadian representation to the 1997 Venice Biennale was curated by Loretta Yarlow and sponsored by the Art Gallery of York University. Her exhibition showcased a work by Rodney Graham (b. 1949). This was a one-work exhibition. The piece shown was a looped video projection entitled *Vexation Island* (figures 6.1 – 6.5). This video, shown in continuous projection, records the futile attempts of an eighteenth-century shipwrecked bourgeois to feed himself while trapped in a tropical paradise.

A number of international art publications took to Graham's piece rapidly. Six articles mentioned it during the Biennale, including a feature article in *Art Forum* and a lengthy section by Marcia E. Vetrocq in *Art in America*.²⁸ Scores of other articles about the piece – and exhibitions featuring it – emerged in the following months and years. However,

²⁶ Ann Duncan, "100 years up to date," *The Vancouver Sun* (June 10, 1995): C12.

²⁷ Ann Duncan, "Métis artist's coyotes are hit of Venice Biennale," *The Gazette* (June 17, 1995): H1.

²⁸ Marcia E. Vetrocq, "The 1997 Venice Biennale: A Space Odyssey," *Art in America*, vol. 85, no. 9 (September 1997): 76.

when exhibited in Venice, this work resulted in only four articles in the Canadian press. One of these articles was a cover piece for *Canadian Art* entitled "Graham's Sleeper." This title was a reference to a previous work by Rodney Graham (entitled *The Sleeper*), however, it seemed ironically appropriate for the Canadian response to their own representative in Venice.

Canada also claimed another representative from the thematic exhibition of that year. In 1997, national press attention was directed toward the Canadian-born artist Agnes Martin who received a *Leone d'oro* for her life-time achievement. Eight articles were published across the country about this award recipient. The celebration of Martin's prize took the form of national pride in Canadian newspapers. Publications from across the country trumpeted this honour with articles announcing that "a Canadian-born minimalist painter has won the Venice Biennale's top award, [it's] the first time in its history the *Leone d'oro* has gone to a living artist."²⁹

This first wave of articles was, however, quickly followed by a second wave which pointed out that Martin had left Canada in 1931, had since renounced her Canadian citizenship and consistently declared herself an American artist. In an article by Paul Gesell printed in the *Vancouver Sun*, Martin is even quoted saying "Well, I'm very patriotic as regards America."³⁰ Still, the desire to claim this award-winner as Canadian was too great and Gesell states in the very same article that "with our patriotism restoked by Canada Day, we should pause to toast the achievements of Saskatchewan-

²⁹ "Venice Honors Prairie-born artist Agnes Martin," the *Toronto Star* (June 17, 1997): E6.

³⁰ Paul Gesell, "Canada – US vie for claiming internationally renowned artist," *The Vancouver Sun* (July 12, 1997): H7.

born, Vancouver-raised Agnes Martin, often described as the most celebrated painter ever born in Canada."³¹

Another form of national pride can be detected in the press coverage of the 1997 Graham exhibition. The few Canadian publications that mentioned the show noted the attention it was getting outside of Canada. Kerry Gold, in the *Vancouver Sun*, wrote that "luckily for Graham, [*Vexation Island*] was touted a Biennale highlight by the international art media," though he "enjoys [...] scant recognition within [Canada]."³²

The 1999 Biennale

The Canadian exhibit at the 1999 Venice Biennale was curated by Jessica Bradley, who already possessed a fair amount of knowledge of the Venice Biennale since she had helped curate earlier exhibits there while working at the National Gallery of Canada prior to 1988.³³ The 1999 edition of the Canadian representation in Venice was sponsored by the Art Gallery of Ontario and featured the sculptures and wall-mounted works of artist Tom Dean (b. 1947) in an exhibition entitled "The Whole Catastrophe."

The body of works showed by Dean in this exhibition consisted of bronze-cast figures (female dogs, babies, women, and odd body parts) and mounted wall-works that combined the Ten Commandments with a polka-dot Wonder Bread logo (figures 7.1 – 7.4).

³¹ "Venice Honors Prairie-born artist Agnes Martin," *Toronto Star* (June 17, 1997): E6.

³² Kerry Gold, "Multitalented artist enjoys view," *The Vancouver Sun* (July 19, 2003): D1.

³³ Phone interview with Jessica Bradley on April 20, 2006.

The Whole Catastrophe was covered by two national art publications: *C Magazine*, with two articles, and *Canadian Art*, which devoted the cover of its summer 1999 issue to the exhibition. The national newspaper industry produced thirteen articles on Tom Dean's Venice exhibition. The articles were either of a descriptive nature or were printed prior to the exhibition. Falling into the latter category, a piece published by Murray Whyte in the *National Post* notes that "the Biennale has, in the past, been a launching pad for some artists' careers (at the 1997 Biennale, for example, Vancouver artist Rodney Graham was able to make a huge international splash [...], high-profile in many of the world's most important art journals followed)."³⁴ During the Biennale itself, this allusion to possible international success remained largely a dream. The *National Post* itself published one more article right after the official opening of the event, yet in this article John Bentley Mays barely mentions the Canadian exhibition.³⁵ It seemed that the Canadian press had given up all hopes of international success for this exhibition.

The international press did not take much notice of Dean's presence at the Biennale. A single brief mention of the exhibition appeared in a foreign art publication. The Italian magazine *D'Arts* noted only that the "Canadian pavilion was invaded by bronze pieces of poop that resembled soft pennes and accompanied the Ten Commandments of Tom Dean."³⁶ While any discussion of Canadian art in foreign specialized publications is

³⁴ Murray Whyte "The Dichotomy Machine: artist Tom Dean is a master of the paradox, carefully creating a perceptible tension between impossibly dissimilar elements," *National Post* (March 18, 1999): B5.

³⁵ John Bentley Mays, "A new path for the old Biennale: The 48th Venice art fair focuses on emerging artists," *National Post* (June 29, 1999): B8.

³⁶ Pierre Rastany, "La Biennale de Szeeman ha cambiato pelle," *D'Arts*, vol. 39, No. 158 (July 1999): 8. My translation.

usually proudly celebrated as a partial success, this ambiguous descriptive reference to Dean's work was not acknowledged in the Canadian press, nor anywhere else.

The 2001 Biennale

The Canadian pavilion at the 2001 Venice Biennale was curated by Wayne Baerwaldt under the aegis of Winnipeg's Plug-In and the Banff Center for the Arts. The pavilion hosted the artist team – husband and wife – Janet Cardiff (b. 1957) and George Bures Miller (b. 1960).

Entitled *The Paradise Institute*, the exhibition bore the name of a single work of art that occupied the entirety of the Canadian pavilion (figures 8.1 – 8.7). The work consisted of a model movie theatre with room for sixteen viewers. These viewers put on headphones and watched a movie entitled *Dragon's Nightmare*, which had been shot especially for the piece by the two artists. This movie combined a thriller-genre plot with a binaural soundtrack. This audio technology had been pioneered by Cardiff and Miller in earlier works such as their walking tours.

This exhibition was acclaimed as an important manifestation on the international contemporary art scene right from its premiere. During the opening days of the Biennale, the line to access the pavilion ran as long as two hours.³⁷ The exhibition won a special *Leone d'oro* award from the Venice Biennale jury and resulted in a total of thirty-

³⁷ Sarah Milroy, "How to wow the merchants of Venice," *The Globe and Mail* (June 9, 2001): R4.

four articles in Canadian newspapers. Most Canadian art publications ran feature-length pieces about the work and a considerable number of international publications noted the quality and originality of the work in their reports on the Venice Biennale. Art critics of the Western world seemed to be in agreement that this was an exceptional work, the like of which was needed in contemporary art. The American magazine *Bomb* published a feature length interview with the artists³⁸ and publications such as *Art in America*, *Art Forum* and *Art News* praised the quality of the Canadian exhibit. Thirteen articles mentioning the Canadian exhibit were printed in the foreign press.

Numerous writers in Canada were quick to report on this large number of articles being published about the Cardiff-Miller partnership in the international press. The *Daily News* noted that *The Paradise Institute* "created a buzz amongst international art experts,"³⁹ while Gregory Elgstrand proudly recalled in *Artichoke* that during the opening days he "overheard 'Canada,' and 'Cardiff and Miller' mixed into conversations in every language."⁴⁰

The 2003 Biennale

In 2003, Canada was represented in Venice in an exhibition mounted by curator Gilles Godmer and sponsored by the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. Entitled *From Here to There*, this exhibition was by the Czech-born, Montreal-based artist Jana Sterbak (b. 1955). For the occasion, she produced a video-installation entitled *From Here to*

³⁸ Atom Egoyan, "Janet Cardiff," *Bomb*, no. 79 (Spring 2002): 65.

³⁹ "Canadian Artists Win Major Award," *Daily News* (June 10, 2001): 15.

⁴⁰ Gregory Elgstrand, "The Paradise Institute," *Artichoke*, vol. 13, no. 3 (Fall/Winter 2001): 16.

There that filled the Canadian pavilion by taking advantage of its odd architectural shape (figures 9.1 – 9.3). The installation consisted of six video screens which were set at different angles along the outer walls of the Fibonacci floor plan of the pavilion. On the screens were projected thirteen-minute edited and looped videos that had been recorded by a miniature camera strapped onto a dog. This dog, Stanley, had roamed the shores of the Saint-Lawrence River in the winter and also walked the sidewalks of Venice. The video footage, altered and edited by Sterbak, was projected so as to increase the discomfort produced by the lowered angle of vision, instability and rapid motions of the camera-dog.

Exhibited in Venice, *From Here to There* resulted in considerable press coverage in Canada. Sixteen newspaper articles covered it, along with four articles in Canadian art magazines, one of which was a pre-exhibition feature in *Canadian Art* by Jessica Bradley.⁴¹ Most of these articles were very positive about the Canadian exhibition, however Nicolas Mavrikakis in the Montreal *Voir* and Terry McConnell in the *Edmonton Journal* were skeptical about the content of the video piece, the former judging the images as rather 'banal' and the latter describing the high point of the piece as an "encounter with a porcupine that is apparently fairly bustling with mirth and merriment."⁴²

An important number of Canadian articles about *From Here to There* noted that Sterbak's international career was developing rapidly, with the artist "increasingly

⁴¹ Jessica Bradley, "Stanley in Orbit," *Canadian Art*, vol. 20, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 62-62.

⁴² Nicola Mavrikakis, "Biennale de Venise: le regard de son maitre," *Voir* (July 17, 2003): 23, and Terry McConnell, "Canadian Art is Going to the Dogs," *Edmonton Journal* (June 29, 2003): D2.

present in Europe, where she is represented by three galleries."⁴³ However, the international press remained largely silent about it except for an interview with the artist published in *KunstForum International* and a brief mention in the French publication *L'Oeil*.⁴⁴ This limited coverage in the foreign media largely failed to produce Canadian pride for Sterbak's contribution to the 2003 Venice Biennale. Two years later, the *Toronto Star* even declared that Canada "was daunted by [Sterbak's] appearance at the 2003 Biennale."⁴⁵

The 2005 Biennale

The most recent edition of the Venice Biennale was mounted by Scott Watson and sponsored by the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery of Vancouver. First Nations artist Rebecca Belmore (b. 1960) was the sole occupant of the Canadian pavilion with an exhibition entitled "Fountain" (figures 10.1 – 10.4).

Fountain is a performance-based video installation that was shot at Iona Beach, outside Vancouver. In this one-minute looped video, Belmore is seen interacting with the natural environment. The video ends with a vision of the artist staring at her viewers through a curtain of dripping blood. At Venice, the rear-projection of the video onto a wall of falling water distorted the images and accentuated the dripping effect.

⁴³ Jérôme Delgado, "Jana Sterbak: un chien cameramen, une artiste fantôme," *La Presse* (April 2, 2003): C8.

⁴⁴ Doris von Drathen, "Es Geht Mir Darum, Mit Den Augen Eines Anderen Zu Sehen," *KunstForum International*, no. 166 (August/September 2003): 258-261, and Benedicte Ramade "Sélection de pavillons étrangers," *L'Oeil*, no. 548 (June 2003): 58-59.

⁴⁵ Peter Goddard, "The Fountain of Truth," *Toronto Star* (June 12, 2005): C9.

Belmore's exhibition generated twelve articles in the Canadian newspaper world and two pieces in specialized magazines (*Canadian Art* and *Border Crossings*).⁴⁶ Most of these articles remained on a descriptive level. One journalist who dared to voice his negative opinion about the piece was Philippe Dagen in *Le Devoir*. He found that the "projection of a video on a curtain of water [...] did not improve her work of a woman by the seashore."⁴⁷ Nicolas Mavrikakis in the Montreal *Voir* also found that the "form of Belmore's commentary [on aboriginal identity] lacks originality."⁴⁸

At the international level, only two art critics wrote about *Fountain* during the Biennale: *KunstForum International* and *Flash Art*.⁴⁹ These articles were mainly of a descriptive nature, with a certain emphasis placed on the artist's identity as an aboriginal woman. Nevertheless, the curator of the exhibition was rejoicing at the international attention Belmore was getting: "she's getting international recognition. Other Biennales want her."⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Robert Enright, "The Poetics of History; Interview with Rebecca Belmore," *Border Crossings*, vol. 4, no. 3 (August 2005): 62-69; and Lee Ann Martin, "The Waters of Venice; Rebecca Belmore at the 51st Biennale," *Canadian Art*, vol. 22, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 48-53.

⁴⁷ Philippe Dagen, "Le Grand Art des petites nations," *Le Devoir* (June 16, 2005): B7. My translation.

⁴⁸ Nicola Mavrikakis, "Rebecca Belmore: une belle mort à Venise ?," *Voir* (June 30, 2005): 16. My translation.

⁴⁹ Doris von Drathen, "Rebecca Belmore," *KunstForum International*, no. 177 (September/October 2005): 228-232; and Clint Burnham, "Rebecca Belmore," *Flash Art*, vol. 28 (May/June 2005): 148-149.

⁵⁰ Peter Goddard, "The Biennale is a sprawling smorgasbord of art and intrigue," the *Toronto Star* (June 18, 2005): H1.

Between 1988 and 2005, a total of ten artists and nine curators represented Canada within the walls of the national pavilion at the Venice Biennale. Each of these artists was selected by committees of nationally recognized art professionals. The result was a series of exhibition that was quite diversified in terms of artistic content and curatorial approach. Exhibitions such as those by Geneviève Cadieux and Jana Sterbak employed the architecture of the Canadian pavilion to their advantage, while Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller turned their back to it. Some artists, such as Michel Goulet and Roland Brener, produced exhibitions unrelated to Canadian specifics while others, such as Edward Poitras, focused on Canadian situations. This diversification was one of the goals behind opening the curating of these exhibits to non-National Gallery of Canada employees. It would therefore seem appropriate to judge the 1986-1988 changes a success.

But the question posed at the beginning of this chapter was whether or not this curatorial diversification has resulted in a less monolithic Canadian representation in Venice. This question is somewhat harder to answer as it depends on numerous factors extraneous to the actual exhibitions. These factors include their reception in the Canadian and international press, the influence of this reception, and the construction of the exhibitions. All national exhibitions at the Biennale are tributary to the framework that has grown up at Venice over the past century.

As stated in countless art publications around the world in the last two decades, the Venice Biennale, since its inception in 1895, has been as concerned with nationalistic international politics as with contemporary art. The construction of the first national pavilion in 1907 (Belgium) instigated a structural transformation of the Biennale which quickly came to be based on World Fairs such as *World's Columbian Exposition* held in Chicago in 1893 or the *Exposition Universelle de Paris* of 1900. Participating countries erected pavilions on the fairgrounds, and used these to display independently mounted exhibits which were supposed to represent their country. Though the nature of the exhibits at other World Fairs differed greatly from that at the Biennale, both types of events contributed to the construction of national identities by presenting coherent – though superficial and problematically subjective – images of nations or parts thereof. This past has resulted in a contemporary exposition model which infuses all of its editions, and the individual exhibitions contained therein, with political nationalistic implications. These implications have been duly noted by art critics and journalists when writing about the various editions of the Venice Biennale of the past two decades. I will address this construction of national identities in greater depth in Chapter Two, where I will also revisit the various press reactions to the Canadian exhibits in Venice.

We're not supposed to believe in master narratives, those handy political or religious or cultural theories of everything, any more; instead we have learned to emphasize marginal, partial and fragmented accounts. We know better, so the theory goes, than to seek for truth, or to depend on definitive positions.⁵¹

The press coverage of the Venice Biennale by the world's media stems from the event's importance within the international contemporary art circuit. However, this coverage also results in a further boost in the importance of the event. This self-sustaining cycle is at the heart of this study on national image construction. It is through this cycle that various perspectives on Canada are formulated and disseminated. Art professionals who write about the Venice Biennale in a book, journal, magazine or newspaper offer more than a quality judgment on that year's edition; they participate in the production of the nationalistic traits understood to be embodied in the Venice Biennale. In this second chapter, I look further into this production process by examining the literature which surrounded the Venice Biennales between 1988 and 2005. Correlating some 558 texts written about the Biennale during those seventeen years with the official Canadian exhibitions, I evaluate attitudes toward Canada produced by this literature.⁵²

In its focus on literature, rather than the art itself, this chapter is primarily concerned with the reception of the Biennale model by viewers, art writers, and subsequently their

⁵¹ Daniel Jewesbury, "Reviews, Dreams and Conflicts: 50th Venice Biennale," *Art Monthly*, no. 268 (July-August 2003): 24.

⁵² See bibliography for complete list of sources consulted.

readers. As such, it will follow lines of inquiry known as reception theory, following concepts formulated by Roland Barthes.

The vast majority of articles published about the Venice Biennale fits into one of three categories, which I will address individually. Each of these has specific, though complementary, consequences on the type of national images relayed to the readers. The first of these approaches is the often reoccurring comparison between Biennales and universal expositions such as the Columbian World Exposition of 1893. For the purpose of this study, I will refer to this approach as the *universal exposition model*. The second approach favoured by art writers stresses the similarities between the Venice Biennale and the Olympic Games. In the following pages, I will refer to this approach as the *Olympian model*. And lastly, the third approach common to most writings about the Biennale draws similarities between the event and a form of fantastic amusement park for art professionals and enthusiasts of the world. I will refer to this last aspect as the *wonderland model*. All three approaches, with their connections to social, political and economical constructions, contribute to the dissemination of a political perspective on the Venice Biennale.

These three critical approaches primarily refer to the exhibitionary framework of the Biennale: the concept of national pavilions; the physical organization of the Biennale grounds; the Biennale as a political institution. However, they also commonly appear in published critical readings as a way of contextualizing the actual artworks displayed in the national pavilions. Art writers and viewers tend to approach the artworks as emblematic or critical of national images along one of these lines. Though these

approaches to the Biennale are well established, they are refreshed with every edition, sometimes introducing political overtones. The nine Canadian editions have also been contaminated by this sometimes political contextualization.

A Layered Production

The first chapter of this thesis shows that the impact of the Biennale on Canadian audiences is felt through its coverage in the Canadian and international press. While an average of 100,000 visitors go through each edition of the Biennale,⁵³ the array of articles published about them in Canada can reach over 2,611,400 people.⁵⁴ The importance of this coverage could hardly be overstated. It is precisely because of its extent that the Canadian government decided to build a pavilion in Venice in 1952 and has steadily funded a national presence there ever since.⁵⁵ It is thus logical to look at this literature to obtain an understanding of the nature of the Canadian identity produced at the Venice exhibition.

Reading the literature surrounding nine curated exhibitions for signs of a national image raises a number of issues. If we start from the idea that any such image would have to originate in the art being exhibited, then a study of the surrounding literature would seem to be twice removed from the emitter because it is mediated through the

⁵³ Agence France Presse, "Futur, présent et passé à Venise," *Le Devoir* (June 10, 1997): B7.

⁵⁴ Cumulative average daily circulation of twelve of the principal newspapers in Canada which have regularly published articles about the Venice Biennale: the *Calgary Herald*, the *Edmonton Journal*, the *Globe and Mail*, the *Halifax Daily News*, the *Montreal Gazette*, the *National Post*, the *Ottawa Citizen*, the *Regina Leader Post*, the *Toronto Star*, the *Vancouver Sun*, the *Victoria Times Colonist* and the *Windsor Star*. Source: http://www.micromedia.ca/products_services/CdnNewsstandDailies_0404.htm

⁵⁵ Phone interview with Douglas Sigurdson from Canada Council for the Arts, on April 13, 2006.

subjectivities of the literature's authors. But the layers between the actual art and its dissemination through art publications around the world are precisely what is at stake in this chapter. These layers are all meaningful subjective components of what is ultimately disseminated about the Venice Biennale. From the art itself to the curatorial standpoint, the political nature of the Biennale exhibitionary framework and the subjectivity of art writers, including my own perspective on the topic, the Canadian presence in Venice becomes a multi-layered cultural production where the various components and players (yourself, as reader, included) influence one another.

Reporting on the Biennale in *Art Press*, Bernard Lamarche-Vadel endorsed this view by stating: "the critic must be aware that he or she is an active contributor in a cultural system; in this system, naturally, artists are the instigators."⁵⁶ This is what Barthes was referring to when he wrote that "The unity of a text is not in its origin but in its destination."⁵⁷ However, the concept of a destination is complicated when working with the literature surrounding an art exhibition. The destination of the artworks is the exhibition (curator-mounted); the destination of the exhibition is its viewers (including art critics); and the destination of art criticism is its readership in the world press. Each of these layers (re)produces the artworks, transforming them every step of the way; and each of these (re)productions is unique to its reader/viewer. The individual layers which constitute this cultural mille feuilles are stages in the reinvention of the exhibitions.

⁵⁶ Bernard Lamarche-Vadel, "La Biennale des differences," *Art Press*, no.181 (June 1993): 25. My translation.

⁵⁷ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986): 54.

The individuality of each new text resides in the subjectivity of each reader/producer. Individual memories and experiences inform each one of us and ensure that no two human beings are alike. However, these memories and experiences are acquired in social environments. They are therefore connected to the various milieus we belong to. Because no memory is fully connected to only one milieu, memory can at times seem to be disconnected from all milieus. According to Maurice Halbwachs,

We see each milieu by the light of the other (or others) as well as its own. [...] the confrontation of these milieus gives us a feeling of no longer being involved in any of them. What becomes paramount is the 'strangeness' of our situation, absorbing individual thought enough to screen off the social thoughts whose conjunction has elaborated it. This strangeness cannot fully be understood by any other member of these milieus.⁵⁸

Halbwachs makes it clear that the individual thoughts and memories are elaborated in conjunction with various milieus. These points of intersection are paramount because they are the ones that make individual memories intelligible. Memories disconnected from everything cannot hold any meaning since meaning resides in the capacity of memories to connote something other than themselves. Meaning always points elsewhere, and therefore cannot exist on its own.

The national images produced through the literature surrounding the Venice Biennale exist in the connectedness of the individual thoughts and memories of viewers and readers. They operate with the aid of shared, sometimes stereotypical, national images such as the Canadian wild forests and the First Nations teepees. These shared images

⁵⁸ Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, trans. Francis J. Ditter Jr. and Vida Yazdi Ditter (New York: Harper and Row, 1980): 45.

function within what Benedict Anderson has called "imagined communities,"⁵⁹ constraining and structuring Canadian identity for all members of the community. Barthes envisions the constraints of shared experiences and thoughts as the true site of meaning. As he states,

The production of meaning is subject to certain constraints; this does not mean that constraints limit meaning, but, on the contrary, constitute it; meaning cannot appear where freedom is absolute or non-existent: the system of meaning is that of a supervised freedom. Actually, the deeper we enter into semantic structure, the more it appears that it is the sequence of constraints, and not that of freedoms, which best defines this structure.⁶⁰

National images emanating from the Venice Biennale and its surrounding literature exist, and can be disseminated beyond the limits of the Biennale grounds, because they are supported by such constraints. They employ and perpetuate signs which already exist in imagined communities in Canada and elsewhere. Canadian critic Gregory Elstrand is a good example. About his visit to the 2001 *Paradise Institute* exhibition, Elstrand wrote that while waiting in line to enter the pavilion he caught himself "acting as we imagine others to imagine us acting Canadians; orderly and friendly."⁶¹ Here orderliness and friendliness become Canadian signs. Another sign, frequently mentioned, is the pavilion's idiosyncratic architecture: its odd shape and encasement of a living tree in the middle of the exhibition space.

The nature of the actual Canadian exhibitions in Venice originates in the art displayed and the way it is displayed, specifically the curatorial component of the exhibition. This

⁵⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006).

⁶⁰ Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System*, trans. Matthew Ward and Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983): 161.

⁶¹ Gregory Elstrand, "The Paradise Institute," *Artichoke*, vol. 13 no. 3 (Fall/Winter 2001): 13.

creates a whole which is then absorbed by the visitors, critics and authors at large who view it. When they subsequently talk or write about what they have seen, they produce a new text which mixes the actual exhibitions with a number of other factors which include what could be called circumstantial elements; the Biennale as a whole, the weather on the day they visited it, their mood, and so forth. As will be seen in the following pages, the majority of readings of the Canadian exhibitions in Venice suggested by art professionals are mainly rooted in the larger context of the Venice Biennale and its history.

The Universal Exposition Model: the Origin That Persists

The first of the contextual influences which permeates critical readings of the Venice Biennale is the very origin of the event: the universal exposition model. The Venice Biennale's first edition opened its doors in 1895 as an international fair in which foreign nations were invited to participate, very much as universal expositions operated. While universal expositions were extremely well received in the nineteenth century, they were less favourably seen by the end of the twentieth century. As a model for the Venice Biennale, the structure of these fairs has raised considerable attention in the international art press. Numerous art critics have picked up on this through the years, as these lines from a 1993 article in *Canadian Art* attest: "the Biennale [...] is a grand public tradition anachronistically tied to the nineteenth-century expositions and thus to the high moments of European imperial nationalism."⁶²

⁶² "Venice Biennale," *Canadian Art*, vol. 10, no. 3 (Fall 1993): 78.

International world fairs were extremely popular events during the second half of the nineteenth century. After the first exhibition in London in 1851, fifteen more were organized in the following forty-five years, culminating in the 1893 Columbian World Exposition in Chicago.⁶³ The international success of the fair was such that it was reported on in newspapers throughout Europe. It was undoubtedly present in the minds of the member of the Venice City council when they first conceived of the Venice Biennale, also during the summer of 1893.⁶⁴ It seems that a number of traits of the Biennale were based on late nineteenth-century World fairs. As had become the norm since the 1867 Paris Exhibition, the Biennale was constituted of a number of thematic pavilions and independent pavilions built by the participating countries. These pavilions were situated in a purpose-built garden crisscrossed by paths and roadways. Paid for by their respective countries, the pavilions were built in an architectural style typical of the commissioning country.⁶⁵ In Venice, the Great Britain pavilion is a colonial villa atop a hill, and the United States building is a red brick Jeffersonian-Palladian winged pavilion complete with white columns and classical pediment. Though it was only built in 1958 and designed by Italian architects,⁶⁶ the Canadian pavilion also uses architectural elements which are closely linked with the country's image in popular culture around the world. It has been described by various Canadian art critics as a "teepee [which] has a tree included in the structure,"⁶⁷ a Wigwam⁶⁸ or a "hunter's shack lost in the bush near

⁶³ Norm Bolotin, *The World's Columbian Exposition: the Chicago's World Fair of 1893* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002).

⁶⁴ For further information on the Columbian World Exposition, see *ibid*: Norm Bolotin, *The World's Columbian Exposition: the Chicago's World Fair of 1893*.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*.

⁶⁶ Carol Harrison Reesor, "The Chronicles of the National Gallery of Canada at the Venice Biennale," (Montreal: Concordia University Master's Thesis, 1995): 17.

⁶⁷ Pascale Beaudet, "La Biennale de Venise: art et responsabilité" *Le Devoir* (July 3, 1993): B2. My translation.

Algonquin Park.”⁶⁹ An anonymous Canadian author from the *Toronto Star* has even likened the building’s floor plan to the country’s flag motif: the maple leaf.⁷⁰ For the summer 2001 issue of the Italian publication *D’Ars*, editor Pierre Restany projected an echo of this Canadian sign onto a portion of the artwork exhibited in the pavilion. He suggested that one of the principal highlights of *Paradise Institute* was the “burning down of the little typical Canadian house”⁷¹ (figure 8.7).

Both in the case of the Columbian World Exposition and the Venice Biennale, the construction of these independent national pavilions encouraged viewers to conceive of the buildings themselves, and whatever products they contained, as typical of that country. When these products are art and the pavilions house ‘official national representations’, the art itself automatically takes on a nationalistic tint.

The nationalistic tint stems from the context, but permeates all the exhibits and events taking place at the Biennale. This is most notable on the Biennale grounds, where viewers consistently refer to the different national exhibitions solely by the name of the country. Conversations on the Biennale grounds often start with comments such as: “Have you seen France yet? I was just in Holland, it’s very interesting.” For the sake of simplicity and for the want of memorizing all artists’ names, such terminology is commonly employed by Biennale visitors. It is important to note here that this terminology unconsciously implies a relationship of equality between countries and their

⁶⁸ Hélène de Billy, “Venise en folie,” *L’Actualité*, vol. 28, no. 13 (September 1, 2003) : 70.

⁶⁹ Regina Gleeson, “Venice Biennale heavy on banal,” *Toronto Star* (June 28, 2003): H9.

⁷⁰ “Venice Biennale eye-opener; Toronto artist’s nightmare dogs met with smile,” *Toronto Star* (June 10 1999): 1.

⁷¹ Pierre Restany, “La Bienale del Banale,” *D’Ars*, vol. 41, no. 166 (July 2001): 12. My translation.

national artists/representations. Individual artists come to stand for entire nations, much like ambassadors do in embassies.⁷²

This way of referring to individual exhibitions as entire nations is also common in articles published in Canada. Writing for the *National Post*, John Bentley Mays has referred to the fact that "you still hear 'New York painting' or 'British sculpture' being talked about as though each was an expression of mystical volkish 'genius.'"⁷³ In an article published in *L'Actualité*, Hélène de Billy compared the syndrome to that of "children in a candy store: have you seen Denmark? What do you think of Australia?"⁷⁴ Whether the exhibiting artists actually are representative of the art from their country or not, the Biennale model encourages viewers to envision them as national emblems.

Throughout the 1990s, the validity of this nationalizing model has been criticized by art professionals from around the world. In 1990, the Italian foreign minister described the Venice Biennale as an "archaic event" which should be done away with entirely.⁷⁵ In the eyes of many, the Biennale was archaic for one principal reason: it was believed that individual national representations were no longer valid due to the multicultural nature of modern states. Reflecting this critical line, writers such as Marcia E. Vetrock, editor of *Art in America*, asked whether "the principle of national participation retains any significance given the racial and ethnic mixture of many nations today and the ever-growing mobility of individual artists worldwide?"⁷⁶ In the words of Irish critic Regina

⁷² Information gathered through conversation during the 2005 Venice Biennale.

⁷³ John Bentley Mays, "A New Path for the Old Biennale: the 48th Venice art fair focuses on emerging artists," *National Post* (June 29 1999): B8.

⁷⁴ Hélène de Billy, "Venise en folie," *L'Actualité*, vol. 28, no. 13 (September 1, 2003): 70.

⁷⁵ Marcia E. Vetrock, "Vexed in Venice," *Art in America*, vol. 78, no. 10 (October 1990): 152.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 159.

Gleeson in *Circa* magazine: "Patriotism is passé in these global times. Nationalism is naff. If identity is [...] a set of relationships instead of a set of rules torn out of a chapter in history, then we must choose our fragmentary identities."⁷⁷ This point of view stems from the idea that national representations in Venice are too static and therefore simply can not reflect accurately the inter-relational nature of modern fragmented identities. The internationalism of nineteenth-century World Fairs was praised because of its display of extensive accumulations of distinct national presences, or pavilions, on the same grounds. By the 1990s, such a collection of distinct nationalistic manifestations was no longer equated with a valid form of internationalism.

One reason why the national representations were seen as univocal by most critics is that they are usually constituted of one-artist shows. Interestingly, these single artist representations only became the norm at the beginning of the 1990s. Up until then, Canada, as well as numerous other participating countries, was in the habit of sending two or more artists for each edition until then.⁷⁸ Multiple-artist national representations produced more varied and pluralistic exhibition constructions. Since 1990, Canadian exhibitions at the Biennale have consistently featured a single artist or collaborative team. This more recent univocal format was encouraged by the Biennale management team in the early 1990s in order to reduce the number of artists participating in the Biennale and make each pavilion more distinctive.⁷⁹ The switch to single-artist representations can also be linked to the competitive nature of the *Leoni d'oro* awarded at each Biennale, increasing the impact of each exhibition.

⁷⁷ Regina Gleeson, "Dislocate, Renegotiate and Flow," *Circa*, no. 107 (Spring 2004): 67.

⁷⁸ In Canada's history at the Biennale, the 1970 edition was an exception, as Michael Snow was then the sole Canadian representative.

⁷⁹ Information obtained during a conversation with Alessandra Santerini from the Biennale organization press office on June 8, 2005.

The criticism of the Biennale exhibition model peaked in the middle of the 1990s. During the hundredth anniversary of the event in 1995, head curator Jean Clair indicated that national pavilions were "an expression of a nationalistic system already surpassed, linked to the illusionary nostalgia of Western cultural imperialism."⁸⁰ Two editions later, head curator Harold Szeemann went even further in his criticism of the universal exposition model and stated that the national pavilions represent a

[...] vestige of the spirit which animated the Universal Exhibitions [...] in 1894 [but it has] done its time. Their founding principle, which is to present the best of a single country's artistic production, is entirely surpassed and can only encourage the survival of a form of local cultural nationalism. In time, the national pavilions will have no choice but to give themselves over to biennale curators or be abandoned.⁸¹

Between 1990 and 2000, the vast majority of articles published about the Biennale echoed this point of view. A multitude of Canadian and international critics had already been advocating the abandonment of the universal exposition model for the event. Specialized magazines such as *Canadian Art* saw it as "tied to [...] high moments of European imperial nationalism,"⁸² and *Art Monthly* wrote that "pavilions are [...] an anachronism, national schools being a thing of the past,"⁸³ while daily newspapers such as the *National Post* stated that "such chauvinism is officially out of fashion."⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Pierre Restany, "La Biennale del centenario: Venezia e la syndrome Jean Clair," *D'Ars*, no. 146 (August 1995): 7. My translation.

⁸¹ Pierre Restany, "La Biennale de Szeemann ha cambiato pelle," *D'Ars*, vol. 39, no. 158 (July 1999): 7. My translation.

⁸² "Venice Biennale," *Canadian Art*, vol. 10, no. 3 (Fall 1993): 78.

⁸³ Marcus Verhagen, "Biennale Inc.," *Art Monthly*, no. 287 (June 2005): 1.

⁸⁴ John Bentley Mays, "A new path for the Old Biennale: The 48th Venice art fair focuses on emerging artists," *National Post* (June 29, 1999): B8.

Sustained criticism of the nationalistic nature of the Biennale's universal exposition model resulted in a slightly altered format for the 1993 edition. Months prior to the event, the Biennale's curator, Achilles Bonito Oliva encouraged the various national commissioners and curators to exhibit foreign artists, including immigrants, visitors or anyone selected at large. This was a "recommendation to which only a fraction of the participants responded, and these to varying degrees."⁸⁵ Under his stewardship, the Biennale was to place curatorial emphasis on "nomadism, and the fluid and searching movements of the creative energies." Entitled *The Cardinal Points of Art*, this edition was to "celebrate border crossings and cross-influences, to displace nationalism and even internationalism with 'transnationalism.'"⁸⁶

Despite these efforts by Oliva, the event was nevertheless heavily criticized for the survival of the universal exposition model. Bruce Ferguson (Canada) proclaimed that it was "again composed of shows within national pavilions that seem a bit like nationalism itself – tired and anachronistic, going through the motions."⁸⁷ Though authors like Andrew Renton from *Flash Art* rejoiced of Oliva's "most significant (and necessary) decision to allow countries to invite artists from elsewhere,"⁸⁸ the universal exposition model clung, creating considerable pressure to do away with it entirely.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Canada, which exhibited works by Robin Collyer, did not go along with Oliva's recommendation. However countries that did include Hungary (Joseph Kosuth), Germany (Nam Jun Paik and Hans Haacke), United States (Louise Bourgeois), Japan (Yayoi Kusama), Rumania (Damian), and Venezuela (Miguel von Dangel). Marcia E. Vetrocq, "Identity Crisis," *Art in America*, vol. 81, no. 9 (September 1993): 106-107.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*: 103.

⁸⁷ Bruce Ferguson, "Rising above the fray; Best part of Venice Biennale is that art that surpasses tired old nationalist agendas," *The Gazette* (July 2, 1993): 15.

⁸⁸ Andrew Renton, "Venice Biennale: Antidote or Double-Bluff?," *Flash Art*, vol. 26, no. 172 (October 1993): 41.

⁸⁹ Michel Nuridsany, "Biennale de Venise: vers l'explosion?," *Beaux Arts Magazine*, no. 113 (June 1993): 88.

Criticism of the universal exposition model only increased throughout the 1990s and resulted in a special meeting of curators and national commissioners in Venice following the opening days of the 1999 Biennale. During this meeting, the relevance of the exhibitionary model was discussed. Participants were rather divided on the model's value, arguing both pros and cons convincingly. In the end, "no definitive conclusions were reached" and the model was not altered in any significant manner.⁹⁰

Participating in the 1999 meeting was Jessica Bradley, the Canadian commissioner for that year's edition. Bradley is among the most knowledgeable people when it comes to the Venice Biennale since she also curated the Canadian exhibits in Venice from within the National Gallery in 1982 and 1984.⁹¹ Bradley voiced her own position on the Venice exhibitionary model during a curatorial summit at the Banff International Curatorial Institute only a few months later.⁹² A version of her participation to this summit was published in an essay included in an anthology entitled *Beyond the Box: Diverging Curatorial Practices*. In this essay, Bradley celebrates the "recent proliferation of biennial exhibitions [which] has provided a context for invaluable exchanges and opened opportunities for international visibility to a wider range of artists."⁹³ However, she is rather more critical of the exhibitionary model employed at the Venice Biennale. According to Bradley, the Venice Biennale's "indelible imprint of imperial Europe" results

⁹⁰ Jessica Bradley, "International Exhibitions: A Distribution System," *Beyond the Box: diverging cultural practices* (Banff: Banff Cultural Center, 2000): 91.

⁹¹ Paterson Ewen, *Paterson Ewen : Biennale di Venezia, 1982* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1982) and Jessica Bradley, *Ian Carr-Harris and Liz Magor : Biennale di Venezia, Canada, 1984* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1984).

⁹² *Beyond the Box: Diverging Curatorial Practices*, Banff Cultural Center, Banff, 2000.

⁹³ Jessica Bradley, "International Exhibitions: A Distribution System," *Beyond the Box: diverging cultural practices* (Banff: Banff Cultural Center, 2000): 88.

in a monolithic construction of national images which no longer reflect the world we live in.⁹⁴

Subsequent editions of the Venice Biennale maintained the status quo, retaining the universal exposition model for the national participations, though juxtaposing it with sprawling international thematic exhibitions. This might suggest that a large proportion of art professionals involved in Venice is content with the existing model, or possibly that the sponsoring governments are. Also testifying to the popularity of this model is the fact that a number of countries which do not have permanent pavilions on the Biennale grounds have repeatedly asked for the permission to build one during the last twenty years.⁹⁵ As noted by Michele Caldarelli (Italy) in a 1995 article published in the Italian magazine *D'Ars*:

Some find the nature of national pavilions constrictive and obsolete but it must be noted that beyond the artistic maquillage-installation outside the Japanese and Israeli pavilions, the updating of the Austrian pavilion, the ephemeral work by Luxemburg artists and the construction of a new Korean pavilion, the centrifugal and expensive necessary development of the event is taking shape on the urban territory of Venice.⁹⁶

The Canadian transformation of its national curating process, the slightly altered version of the Biennale in 1993, the Biennale-sponsored discussions after the 1999 edition and the Banff summit in 2000 all indicate that serious criticism of the universal exposition model continued throughout the 1990s. However, simultaneous developments ensured the present system's survival, and even development. The awarding of prizes for national presences was reestablished permanently in 1986 – after a hiatus of eighteen

⁹⁴ Ibid., 90.

⁹⁵ Information obtained during a conversation with Alessandra Santerini from the Biennale organization press office in June 2005.

⁹⁶ Michele Caldarelli, "Il corpo della Biennale," *D'Ars*, no. 146 (August 1995): 25. My translation.

years – and the number of national pavilions partaking in the event has steadily increased over the years. Previously unrepresented countries such as Ireland, Wales, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Thailand and Kenya joined the event in 2003⁹⁷ and a new pavilion for South Korea was built in the *Giardini* in 1995.⁹⁸ China also established a new presence in Venice with a national pavilion built behind *Arsenale* as recently as 2005.⁹⁹ To inaugurate this last pavilion, curator Cai Guo Jiang mounted an exhibition that was “an investigation into the nature of national pavilions and, in the context of a multinational arena, how to represent the inaugural China pavilion in 2005 or any national pavilion in the 21st century.”¹⁰⁰ Perhaps the most telling sign of the surviving popularity of the universal exposition model is statistical: forty-four countries had national exhibitions at the Biennale in 1986; by 2005, this number had climbed to seventy-three.¹⁰¹

The literature surrounding the Biennale between 1988 and 2005 strongly suggests that the art professionals’ opinions about its universal exposition model has always been divided and will likely remain so in the foreseeable future. This has led many art critics, such as one Irish critic, to think of the Biennale as an “intertwining of national politics, national identity, and national showoff [which makes it] as much a place where foreign affairs and international diplomacy come to the fore as one for seeing art on its own

⁹⁷ Hélène de Billy, “Venise en folie,” *L’Actualité*, vol. 28, no. 13 (September 1, 2003): 70.

⁹⁸ Biennale di Venezia, *La Biennale di Venezia: 46 esposizione internazionale d’arte* (Milan: Marsilio, 1995).

⁹⁹ E-Flux. “China Pavilion at 51st Biennale di Venezia,” http://www.e-flux.com/displayshow.php?file=message_1114017878.txt

¹⁰⁰ WPS1 MoMA. “WPS1 Venice Biennale.” <http://www.wps1.org/include/shows/venice.html>.

¹⁰¹ 1986 number: Derek Guthrie, “Tide Turns to Europe in Venice Biennale,” *New Art Examiner*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (October 1986): 21, and 2005 number: Emmanuelle Lequeux, “Biennale de Venise: le temps de la réforme,” *Beaux Arts Magazine*, no. 252 (June 2005): 84.

terms."¹⁰² However, the most important aspect of this ongoing debate about the validity of the universal exposition model is that it is constructed on the idea that nationalistic representations do exist. By debating their validity and accuracy in today's multicultural world, art professionals merely reasserted this underlying idea. As previously stated, this discourse is unconsciously transferred from the context of the Venice Biennale exhibitionary model to the content of the national exhibitions.

Carrying the Torch

The Venice Biennale is to art what the Olympics are to sports. Like the glorious sport competition, the Biennale is today synonymous with deep pockets, publicity and national pride.¹⁰³

Universal expositions of the nineteenth century were inherently competitive events. Various prizes were awarded in different categories, and the acknowledged aim of most participants was to be recognized internationally as the best producer of whatever goods they were exhibiting.¹⁰⁴

The competitiveness of nineteenth-century World Exhibitions is also present in the format of the Venice Biennale. The *Leone d'oro* prizes awarded in various categories appeared in 1938, while the overall Biennale was under the control Italian National

¹⁰² Luis Camnitzer, "A New Spectacle of Nationalism," *New Art Examiner*, vol. 16, no. 3 (November 1988): 33. Camnitzer repeated this comment in Luis Camnitzer, "La XLIII Bienal de Venecia en sus 93 años," *Arte en Colombia*, (1988): 55.

¹⁰³ Catherine Szacka-Marier, "Rêves et conflits: là où l'art rencontre la politique," *La Presse* (August 16, 2003): D15. My translation.

¹⁰⁴ Norm Bolotin, *The World's Columbian Exposition: the Chicago's World Fair of 1893* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002).

Fascist government.¹⁰⁵ The Biennale's organizing committee has awarded its version of the Olympic medal intermittently since. These prizes are traditionally awarded according to a varying number of medium-based and age-based categories.¹⁰⁶ In 2005, five *Leoni d'oro* were awarded in the following categories: painting, sculpture, life-time achievement (2 awards) and "best national participation." This last category officially transforms the national pavilions into an "Olympics of contemporary visual art," in which each pavilion is fighting for the golden medal of that edition.¹⁰⁷

Leoni d'oro are sought after for the prestige they embody, but also for the economic gains they generate. A Venice Biennale award ensures a unique level of visibility on the international art scene for its recipient. This visibility promises future exhibitions and ultimately sales (or curatorial contracts) around the world for years to come. As stated by Janet Cardiff, who with George Bures Miller, won an award for her work exhibited in the Canadian pavilion in 2001, winning a *Leone d'oro* "means a lot more recognition for [artists], and recognition is very important in the art world."¹⁰⁸

Over the years, the market realities and stresses attached to winning awards at the Biennale, or just doing well, have forced participating countries to adopt particular exhibition models. As noted, at the beginning of the 1990s, the majority of pavilions decided to mount exhibitions showcasing single artists. French critic Michel Nuridsany from *Beaux Arts Magazine* in 1993 explained this shift in terms of efficiency: "Each

¹⁰⁵ Wikipedia. "Venice Biennale," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venice_Biennale.

¹⁰⁶ The number of Golden Lions awarded, as well as the categories in which they are awarded, vary from one edition to the next.

¹⁰⁷ "Couple first Canadian to scoop top art prize," *Edmonton Art Journal* (June 10, 2001): A8.

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in "Canadian artists win major prize in Venice," *Leader Post* (June 11, 2001): C6.

country has its own champion, as in the Olympic Games.”¹⁰⁹ Having a single athlete/artist fill the relatively small space of a national pavilion allows that artist to mount a show with more impact, thereby increasing that project’s chances of attracting the attention of art professionals. However, this shift comes at the considerable expense of doing away with pluralistic national representations. As pointed out by Jean-Philippe Uzel in *Le Devoir*, “how can the [artistic] production of a whole country be represented by one or two artists?” Indeed, it simply can not. But as he continues, “we astonish ourselves by partaking in the game. Visiting the *Giardini*, we make our own list [of favorite countries].”¹¹⁰ For viewers to produce a favourites list of countries based solely on single-artist manifestations is problematic and can only lead to simplistic views of the contemporary art world. Most viewers are no doubt aware of this, however, as Uzel suggests, they willingly take part in the game. *Leoni d’oro*, and the market forces they embody, actively contribute to dictating the rules.

The *Leoni d’oro* have had a tumultuous history at the Venice Biennale. Following socialist student uprisings in 1968 which protested the awards’ inherent elitism, they were revoked only to be reinstated in 1986.¹¹¹ In *Studio International*, English critic Paul Overy linked the reappearance of the prizes to the fact that “nationalism – as opposed to the internationalism promoted by modernity – was once again an issue in the arts.”¹¹² This reinstatement of the awards also testifies to the renewed competitiveness of Venice. Every opening of the Biennale is attended by anywhere from 5,000 to 10,000 art

¹⁰⁹ Michel Nuridsany, “Biennale de Venise: vers l’explosion?,” *Beaux Arts Magazine*, no. 113 (June 1993): 87.

¹¹⁰ Jean-Philippe Uzel, “49e Biennale de Venise: L’humanité dans la lagune,” *Le Devoir* (September 1, 2001): D6. My translation.

¹¹¹ Michel Nuridsany, “Biennale de Venise: vers l’explosion?,” *Beaux Arts Magazine*, no. 113 (June 1993): 87.

¹¹² Paul Overy, “Can the Venice Biennale Survive?,” *Studio International*, vol. 200, no. 1016 (May 1987): 29.

professionals.¹¹³ Among them are directors and curators of contemporary art museums around the world, critics, as well as serious art collectors. These are the people who can make or destroy the international careers of artists and curators.

Participating countries do everything in their power to ensure that their exhibition is seen in a favorable light by as many art professionals as possible. No expenses are spared, from intricate curatorial displays, global publicity campaigns and luxurious exhibition catalogues to extravagant opening parties in lavish Renaissance villas thrown nightly around Venice.¹¹⁴ These manifestations are calculated machinations to get the herds of art professionals to focus on one national exhibition in the overwhelming confusion of dozens of exhibitions opening simultaneously throughout Venice. Such social events could seem frivolous, but as Wayne Baerwaldt, curator of the 2001 prize-winning Canadian exhibition in Venice stated, it is "all business."¹¹⁵ And the motivation to do so is more financial than anything else. Good reviews in Venice and the marked interest of key players in the world of contemporary art will ensure future exhibitions and sales for the artist (and curator) around the world. In this sense, the *Leoni d'oro* merely symbolize the competitiveness that would be part of the Biennale even if the prizes were again to be abolished.

Canada's history with the *Leoni d'oro* is a strange one. Between 1988 and 2005, two prizes were awarded to Canadian artists. The first of these two instances occurred in 1997 when contemporary painter Agnes Martin was awarded a *Leone d'oro* for her life-

¹¹³ Conversation with Alessandra Santerini from the Biennale organization press office on June 8, 2005.

¹¹⁴ Information gathered during the official opening of the 2005 Venice Biennale.

¹¹⁵ Quoted in Adrian Chamberlain, "Venice Team shows Victoria how it's done," *Times – Colonis*, (August 25, 2001): C5.

time achievement. Canadian newspapers rushed to announce this international victory, and Martin pointed out that she had left Canada in 1931. Refusing to renounce ties to this award-winning athlete/artist, certain Canadian curators and critics nevertheless attempted to read signs of Canadian-ness in Martin's work. Saskatoon-based curator Cindy Richmond read Martin's usage of horizontal lines in her works as being rooted in the artist's childhood in the Canadian Prairies: "these are the landscapes one sees from an airplane flying over Saskatchewan in the winter."¹¹⁶ Even American art critics have attempted to link Martin with a Canadian national image. An article published in the *New Yorker* magazine mentioned that "[the painting of] the barn, flat white against a bright-blue sky, painted on the Gaspé peninsula in 1932, is one of Martin's favorite works by [Georgia] O'Keeffe and serves as a reminder of the shared origins of the two artists."¹¹⁷ The fact that O'Keeffe was born in Wisconsin makes this comparison even more strained.

In an odd transfer of connotations, the celebration of the prize winner's Canadian-ness comes quickly to mean the victory of the country over all other representations in Venice. The correlation with Olympic Games is clear and straightforward: a country's athlete/artist carrying off the *Leone d'oro* implies that the winning country is the best in the world in that discipline/medium. Such a transfer is only possible if the people who rejoice unconsciously make the link between the single athlete/artist and the country. The artist becomes the country, even if the artist, as in the case of Martin, has turned her back on it.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., H7.

¹¹⁷ Quoted in Paul Gessell, "Canada, U.S. vie for claiming internationally renowned artist," *The Vancouver Sun* (July 12, 1997): H7.

The second award claimed by Canada during the period under examination was in 2001 for *Paradise Institute* by Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller. This work attracted everyone's attention from the very first day it was on view. As Sarah Milroy put it for the *Globe and Mail*, "the buzz was out that *The Paradise Institute*, the new piece by Canadian husband-and-wife team Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, was A-list material. By five minutes after opening on the second press day, the Canadian pavilion had a 2½-hour lineup."¹¹⁸ The winning of this prestigious prize was of course celebrated in Canada. No less than twenty-six articles were published in Canadian newspapers and magazines during the month that followed to inform Canadians of the artists' success in Venice. Ironically, the majority of these articles cited the Biennale press-release which congratulated the Cardiff-Miller duo for "involving the audience in a new cinematic experience where fiction and reality, technology and the body converge into multiple and shifting journeys through space and time."¹¹⁹

A more grounded Canadian image was asserted in numerous articles published in foreign newspapers and magazines about *Paradise Institute*. In a feature interview with Atom Egoyan for the American magazine *Bomb*, Cardiff described her treatment of fiction and reality as rooted in the "special relationship to personal medias [that] Canadians [have]."¹²⁰ Here Cardiff suggests a causal link between her home country and her art. Such links have proved very popular over the years with art critics covering the Biennale. Finding Canadian-ness in the works of Canadian artists shown in Venice is

¹¹⁸ Sarah Milroy, "How to wow the art merchants of Venice," *The Globe and Mail* (June 9, 2001): R4.

¹¹⁹ Text from the Biennale press release quoted in "Alberta artists win over jury at Venice Biennale," *Calgary Herald* (June 10, 2001): C3.

¹²⁰ Atom Egoyan, "Janet Cardiff," *Bomb*, no. 79 (spring 2002), 65.

simultaneously a consequence of the nationalistic nature of the Venice exhibits and a justification for the validity of the Biennale exhibitionary model.

Both in 1997 and in 2001, the awarding of *Leoni d'oro* to Canadian-born individuals transformed these artists into Olympic celebrities – overnight symbols of national pride in the press. As is often the case with true Olympic athletes, they were immediately perceived as embodying the qualities of the country. The context in which these awards were won rallied Canadian art writers to see the artists as Canadian symbols. This is most evident in the way art critics attempted, successfully or not, to read signs of a Canadian-ness in their works.

The competitiveness engendered by the financial stakes linked to the *Leone d'oro* awards has encouraged artists and curators to view the overall Biennale as Olympiads where the comparison between participants takes precedence over discussions of the validity, or appropriateness of the various national images displayed. In this sense, the Biennale continues as a self-sustaining and closed competitive event.

Wonder(ful) Land of Contemporary Arts

Articles about the Venice Biennale often compare the exhibition grounds to a wonderland of the contemporary arts. A number of factors are responsible for this popular comparison: the festive atmosphere which reigns over the event during the opening days; the beauty and exoticism of the Venetian context; the unsurpassed

quantity of contemporary art regrouped in one location; and the presence of architectural styles from different geographical areas and historical times. All of these factors result in a fantastic environment which greatly influences viewers in their reception of the exhibited artworks.

A strong euphoria fills the *Giardini* during the opening days. As quoted earlier from Hélène de Billy in *L'Actualité*, these "visitors resemble children in a candy store."¹²¹ In a 1986 article, Michael Shepherd attempted to further describe this feeling by listing all things that made this event so magical and enjoyable to him. Filling half a page, he lists features such as:

cosmopolitanism, internationalism, supra-nationalism, [...] hype that swells only to burst, sunshine, [...] fantasy architecture, sea-food, fresh pasta eaten in the open air, Harry's Bar, coffee and booze in the open air while watching rentacrowd's International ABC mix, Bellini, [...] making international contacts, dressing up, dressing down so exquisitely that everyone notices you, [...] art groupies and art whoopees, quality, great art, the real made unreal and the unreal made real, [...] a non-stop contemporary carnival held in the world's greatest living museum of architecturally placed art.¹²²

The Biennale grounds serve as a backdrop against which these festivities occur; however, they also contribute to the fantastic nature of the festivities. Michael Shepherd combines two models when he writes that "the Giardini are an Olympic Village of national pavilions in "folklorique, warm weather, amusing, self-image styles of architecture."¹²³ Shepherd describes the pavilions as "amusing" because of their juxtaposition in the *Giardini*. The American pavilion would go by unnoticed in the United

¹²¹ Hélène de Billy, "Venise-en-folie," *L'Actualité*, vol. 28, no. 13 (September 1, 2003): 70.

¹²² Michael Shepherd, "Venice Just About Preserved the Venice Biennale," *Arts Review*, Vol. 38, No. 7 (April 11 1986): 198.

¹²³ Ibid.

States (as so many Jeffersonian houses do), but it is striking placed right next to the sleek design of the Scandinavian pavilion and within a stone's throw of the German neo-classical pavilion. This concentration of greatly varied styles creates an environment which seems fantastic at first; a wonderland where one can visit great portions of the globe merely by walking a few steps.

The Biennale's wonderland architecture is projected on the art exhibited in the pavilions. This transfer is possible precisely because pavilions and artists are seen as iconic. Icons are not meant to accurately fully represent what they stand for but rather constitute symbolic images. The word icon comes from the Greek word *εικον*, which means image.

In the case of the Canadian pavilion, the symbolic nature of its architecture - the hunting cabin, the teepee, the tree included in the architecture - are mythical icons which have been inextricably linked with Canada's image over the years. I intentionally use the word 'mythical' because iconographic national representation is mythical in nature. The dictionary definition of a myth is "a popular belief or tradition that has grown up around something or someone; *especially* : one embodying the ideals and institutions of a society or segment of society , an unfounded or false notion [or] a person or thing having only an imaginary or unverifiable existence."¹²⁴ The iconographic national representations in Venice stem more from popular beliefs than from serious studies of the concerned countries; the accuracy and authenticity of these notions is almost always unverifiable.

¹²⁴ Myriam-Webster Online dictionary: <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/myth>

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the question of whether national representations are accurate is circumvented in Venice due to the exhibition context. Comparison between countries, or even between editions is encouraged, but the scope of the task makes comparing the art in a pavilion to the art of that country almost impossible. The art exhibited in Venice, therefore, relies on the Biennale system to make nationalistic meaning. Roland Barthes's study of myths in books such as *Mythologies* and *The Fashion System* is most enlightening when studying this aspect of the mythical construction of national images at the Biennale. As he states, "myth is a peculiar system, in that it is constructed from a semiological chain which existed before it: it is a second-order semiological system. That which is a sign (namely the associative total of a concept and an image) in the first system, becomes a mere signifier in the second."¹²⁵ As suggested by Barthes, the signs which are produced by the Biennale exhibitionary model, such as the idea of national representations and the importance placed on the country of origin of each artist, become largely unquestioned signifiers when looking at the actual artworks of the participating artists.

I do not mean to imply that the first-order signs remain completely unquestioned, but rather that they escape definitive answers. This is a quality which Barthes finds particular to myths. In his book *Mythologies*, he studies the photograph published in the mass-media of a young black soldier in full army gear saluting. This image, according to Barthes, signifies something about the French nation (cultural diversity). But it can simultaneously be read as a photograph of a single individual. Since the signifier of the myth points in two directions, it is maddeningly difficult to criticize. If we attempt to

¹²⁵ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972): 114.

criticize the imperialistic mythical nature of the photograph, its signifier can simply be turned back to its first-order literal meaning: an individual soldier salutes. And if we attempt to find the literal level of the image's meaning, we find that this level has been contaminated since the point is not the actual soldier, but what he stands for, what he signifies. Barthes describes myths as alibis which say "I am not where you think I am; I am where you think I am not."¹²⁶ Similarly, the validity of the nationalistic biases read by art critics and viewers in the art exhibited in Venice escapes any serious discussion. Yet the consequences of these biases remain, and the Biennale is still conceived of as an event which proposes an overview of the contemporary art world, country by participating country.

Setting and populating the stage

The three aspects of the Venice Biennale exhibitionary model outlined in this chapter are most influential in the production of nationalistic meaning for the artworks exhibited in the national pavilions. Their importance and relevance to this discussion stem from the fact that meanings read into any artworks are pluralistic. Artworks are "readerly," to use Barthes' term, in that they are produced through their consumption by viewers.¹²⁷ The Venice Biennale's coverage in the world press, and the subsequent consumption of that coverage by readers entail meaning that is plurally produced and re-produced through multiple layers: the artist, the critic, the reader. All of these various layers are contaminated by the nature of the exhibitionary model of the Venice Biennale.

¹²⁶ For more information on this topic, please refer to Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972): 123.

¹²⁷ Roland Barthes. *S/Z: An Essay* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974): 4.

The universal exposition aspect of the Venice Biennale affects any readings of the artworks (or subsequent reporting on them) by encouraging a nationalistic, even if critical, reading when consuming them. The competitive nature of this model, and the usage of an Olympic model when writing about the Biennale increases the intensity of the exhibits and pushes nationalistic readings further away from any discussion of whether national representation can even exist. And lastly, the reporting on the Biennale along lines of a wonderland of contemporary arts removes the entire event (and any meaning it might produce for the artworks exhibited therein) from reality, yet without completely severing its links to reality, as myths do.

Canadian exhibitions at the Venice Biennale have played an important role in the production of a Canadian image on the international contemporary arts scene. Since 1988, the construction of that image has been considerably influenced by the nature of the Venice Biennale. However, the originality of each Canadian exhibition in Venice has developed a new side to that construction. What remains of these individual contributions if we steer clear of the context-based biases found in the dissemination of the art through the national and international press? In this chapter, I will construct such an alternate reading of the Canadian exhibitions in Venice between 1988 and 2005. The aim of this study being to clarify the overall contribution of the last nine Biennale to a Canadian national image, I look at these exhibitions as a whole.

The nine Canadian exhibitions that occurred in Venice since 1988 were much diversified in both their content and form. However, upon close inspection, a particular attitude emerges from all of these exhibitions. The artists and curators responsible for these Canadian exhibitions at the Biennale have all adopted one form or other of a revisionist attitude towards the construction of images. Within the context of the Venice Biennale, this probing and questioning of images is tantamount to questioning the construction of national images. This revisionist attitude has manifested itself in three principal approaches.

The first approach is mainly concerned with the fictional nature of all constructions. By questioning the line between fiction and reality, four of the nine exhibitions encouraged viewers to think of the constructed nature of any national image and revisit the fictive parts of these constructions. Belonging to this group are the exhibitions by Geneviève Cadieux (1990), Rodney Graham (1997), Tom Dean (1999) and Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller (2001).

The second approach revisits production processes in such a manner that presents viewers with contradictory, hidden or forgotten parts of these processes. This approach encourages a critical stance towards all constructions presented as 'whole' and 'natural,' national identity constructions included. Two exhibitions contributing to this revisionist project are Michel Goulet and Roland Brener (1988) and Robin Collyer (1993).

The third approach is more directly concerned with the construction of a Canadian image. By revisiting various parts of the Canadian history, three of the exhibitions raised issues pertaining to the inherent instability of any national image when dealing with Canada. This final group is constituted by exhibitions of the artworks of Edward Poitras (1995), Jana Sterbak (2003) and Rebecca Belmore (2005).

The aim of this chapter is not to unveil some 'true' Canadian national image, unspoiled by the successive subjective filters of the world's medias. Rather, it is to highlight similarities between the various editions of the event. These similarities do not delineate a fixed Canadian national image, but rather point towards shared concerns amongst recent Canadian artists and curators in Venice. Through their reoccurrence and

consistency, these concerns are likely to permeate the critical reception of the works by the world's media. The Canadian image, within and without its borders, is constructed through what is said, and thought of, the country. I therefore argue that such concerns are in the process of being incorporated into the larger Canadian image. I do not, however, wish to debate the validity or accuracy of this image. I will leave that task to more politically inclined studies.

Fiction or Reality?

Artworks are fictional productions in that they are all subjective productions. However, their production processes are influenced by, and ultimately influence, reality. It is therefore safe to assert that all artworks occupy a place situated somewhere between reality and fiction. Four of the last nine Canadian participations in the Venice Biennale encouraged viewers to reflect on the fine line separating these two realms. Through various artistic means, four artists or artist-partners have pondered whether this line is also a fiction, and have explored some of the tell-tale signs through which fictions can be read and understood.

In 2001, the Canadian pavilion housed a single work of art: *The Paradise Institute*. It consisted of a full scale 17-seat movie theater balcony contained in a sound-proof construction (figure 8.1), complete with a hyper-realistic model of the parterre below and cinema screen in the distance (figure 8.2). To heighten the illusion of space inside the construction, the individual seats were equipped with binaural headphones (figure

8.3).¹²⁸ Binaural sound systems, as perfected by Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, are stereo recordings which, when listened to through head phones, recreate the three dimensionality of sounds in the real world. Operating along a similar principle to that of stereo views, individual headphones (left and right) simulate what individual ears (left and right) would have heard in the recording environment. This intricate sound system plays the soundtrack of the 10-minute original video projection which was produced for *The Paradise Institute*. The system creates a convincing illusion that viewers are listening to the sound track through normal movie-theatre speakers located on either side of the screen, rather than through headphones.

Cardiff and Miller filmed and produced the video. It reconstructs the story of a man in a hospital bed, Drogan (figure 8.4), struggling against an Evil One who seems intent on killing him (figure 8.5). There is also a nurse who seems to be debating whose side to join (figure 8.6). The narrative, which is fairly linear in its progression, is interspersed with scenes that appear disconnected from the plot, such as images of a house burning (figure 8.7), or figures singing in a cabaret. However they are all connected through Cardiff and Miller's ingenious binaural soundtrack. Fully utilizing the technology, this soundtrack incorporates both the normal elements of any movie soundtrack – dialogues, background noises, music, etc – and ambient sounds from a movie theatre. These last sounds and voices appear extremely real. A man in a row behind each viewer coughs; a cell phone rings (quite common everywhere in Italy); another man offers viewers popcorn.¹²⁹ Eventually, the actors' voices merge with the pre-recorded sounds from the viewers' side of the screen, resulting in complete bewilderment on the spectators' part.

¹²⁸ Janet Cardiff, *The Paradise Institute* (Winnipeg: Plug In Editions, 2001).

¹²⁹ Ibid, 9-15.

This gives viewers the odd feeling of having entered the liminal space of the movie, or vice-versa.

As pointed out by curator Wayne Baerwaldt in his introduction to the exhibition catalogue, viewers are invited to enter “sequenced stages of illusion.”¹³⁰ The soundproof compartment, the space-producing audio system and the hyper-realist perspective are all stages that confound the viewers. As the narrative of the film unfolds and the characters insinuate themselves into the ‘real’ space occupied by the viewers, the line between reality and fiction quickly fades. If fiction enters reality, then reality becomes fiction as well. This results in viewers questioning the constructedness of their own reality. When they emerge from the artwork and step back into supposed reality, they find themselves in an even larger, and arguably more deceptive, construction: the Venice Biennale. After *Paradise Institute*, the exterior appearance of the overall Biennale tended to appear as stage props and reality manipulations.

Two of the declared goals of *Paradise Institute* were to question the opposition between fiction and reality, and to explore (and expose) the power and workings of narratives.¹³¹ Through this work, Cardiff and Miller wove an improbable narrative that merged itself into the reality of the viewers through deceitful tactics. While the content of the work was not meant to speak openly of national identities, Canadian or otherwise, its approach to narratives and the medium of film finds an echo in the construction of national identities that is the Venice Biennale.

¹³⁰ Wayne Baerwaldt, “Phantoms of the Paradise,” *The Paradise Institute* (Winnipeg: Plug In Editions, 2001): 9.

¹³¹ Janet Cardiff, *The Paradise Institute* (Winnipeg: Plug In Editions, 2001): 9-15.

Throughout the history of the Biennale, individual countries have presented and constructed their national identities as narratives. Each edition represented a little story which informed the international perception of that country. Due to the structure and political nature of the event, this tended to occur whether desired by the individual countries or not. These stories were, and still are, constructed in a fashion that refers to the individual country's histories – or official narratives. Similar to *Paradise Institute*, they also are forms of fiction that enter and ultimately influence reality. Within the context of this study of the Venice Biennale, the 2001 Canadian exhibition can be seen as a critique of political and cultural constructions such as national identity.

In 1997, the Canadian exhibition in Venice explored the construction of images in a manner that tackled the exterior appearance of the Venice Biennale. Vancouver artist Rodney Graham and curator Loretta Yarlow modified the exterior of the pavilion by keeping the wooden panels normally installed to protect windows during the Venetian winters (figure 6.1). These crude wooden panels give the pavilion a rough look somewhat reminiscent of a Canadian country cottage.¹³² They also serve the purpose of darkening the interior exhibition space. In this space, a single sixteen-minute looped 35mm film entitled *Vexation Island* was played continuously through the exhibition.

Diametrically opposed to the rough northern exterior of the pavilion, *Vexation Island* tells the brief history of an eighteenth-century shipwrecked bourgeois on a beautiful tropical island. The film opens with a slow zoom onto the unconscious man who has a bloodied bruise on his forehead and a mumbling parrot at his side. Regaining

¹³² Loretta Yarlow, "Foreword," *Island Thought; an archipelagic journal published at irregular intervals* (Toronto: York University Press, 1997): 3.

consciousness, the man seems bewildered to find himself alive on a tropical white-sand beach. Hungry, he spots a coconut atop a nearby palm tree. He goes to the foot of the tree and shakes the trunk in the hope of making the coconut fall. When it does fall it hits him on the forehead, throwing him backwards into unconsciousness again. In this narrative, the camera zooms out to a view of the overall island and the video seamlessly loops back to its beginning (figures 6.2 – 6.5). The bourgeois sailor is trapped in an endless nightmare set in a tropical heaven, doomed to remain conscious for no more than ten minutes at a time.

The interior and exterior of the pavilion generate a stark contrast. This contrast was intended by the artist and curator Loretta Yarlow as the piece was designed to “interact with the idiosyncratic architecture of the Canadian pavilion.”¹³³ The Canadian country cottage is fictionalized by the tropical video and vice-versa. In the context of the Biennale *Giardini*, where pavilions are fashioned to accentuate national representation, this appears as a defiant note, as though Canada were challenging the established order of national representations by complicating it.

The looped nature of the catastrophic predicament of the main character produces an odd combination of pessimism and untiring determinism. In a brief text by Graham in the exhibition catalogue, he states that he wishes to place “the clinomatic or catastrophic instant [...] at the exact centre of *Vexation Island*.”¹³⁴ The catastrophic moment is the moment when the wayward seafarer falls back into unconsciousness as a result of his being hungry. But Graham refers to this moment as being “clinomatic,”

¹³³ Ibid, 3.

¹³⁴ Rodney Graham, “Sitting Vexation Island,” *Island Thought; an archipelagic journal published at irregular intervals* (Toronto: York University Press, 1997): 15

which stems from the word *clinamen*. As originally coined by Epicure and later redefined by George Perec, the term refers to elements that unpredictably escape a system of constraints.¹³⁵ The fall of the coconut is unpredicted by the character, and it alters his experience of the island, turning it into a never-ending repetition of brief moments of consciousness separated by unconsciousness; an infinite carbon-copy of the *clinamen* itself. In a catalogue text, Shep Steiner describes *Vexation Island* as an “endless and repetitious” fiction that “escapes any and all of the former meanings that we might give to it. [It is] the incessant imperative toward the carbon-copy, a text always already written by the self.”¹³⁶ Steiner’s understanding of Graham’s piece describes it as an unstable work: one which is never more than a copy of an idea, and always in the process of becoming yet never actually whole. As the official Canadian representative in Venice, this work refutes any stable national image.

Within the context of the Venice Biennale, *Vexation Island* seems to be emitting a double signal about the country it officially represents. First there is the stark contrast between the rustic northern feel of the exterior of the pavilion and its warm tropical images exhibited within. In a comical way, Graham is suggesting that facades can lie. Both the insides and outside of the pavilion are gross stereotypes of Canada and the Tropics. Neither are close to a Canadian reality, so it is difficult to read them for signs of a Canadian-ness. Second, there is the futility of the never-ending task that consumes the main character. The repetition of the *clinamen*, and nothing else really, opposes the construction of a nationalistic reading of this artwork/exhibition. Just as Graham’s seafarer is trapped, the Canadian image in Venice is left in limbo.

¹³⁵ Claude Bergulin, *George Perec* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2002).

¹³⁶ Shep Steiner “X, The Island Tale of A Sylvan C-Fearer,” *Island Thought; an archipelagic journal published at irregular intervals* (Toronto: York University Press, 1997): 68.

Discrediting commonly-accepted social conventions such as the link between the northern climate and the identity of Canadians is a way of shifting the line separating fiction and reality, even if only temporarily. For the summer of 1999, Tom Dean employed a similar approach in his exhibition. The works he presented encouraged viewers to revisit largely unquestioned aspects of reality. These works transformed the interior of the Canadian pavilion at the Biennale into an "apocalyptic scene of carnal havoc dominated by prowling heavy-breasted dogs with snakelike tails."¹³⁷ This was achieved through the presentation of forty fantastical bronze sculptures (figure 7.1).¹³⁸ Hung on the walls around this scene, were ten printed wall works that proclaimed the Old Testament's Ten Commandments in a graphic design style usually associated with such mass-marketing and commercials packaging as that used by WonderBread® (figure 7.2 – 7.3). The polka dot design, religious Commandments such as 'You Shall Not Kill,' and ferocious creatures tearing apart human limbs mutually fictionalize each other.

In curator Jessica Bradley's words, the pack of cast-bronze sculptures speak of a "surrender to unfettered desire and the breakdown of law and order,"¹³⁹ the same law and order that is framed just above the sculptures. The overall scene is quite unsettling. In this Biennale installation, the Ten Commandments are transformed into consumer objects. This new layout employed for the commandments arrested and intrigued

¹³⁷ "Canada," *La Biennale di Venezia. 48 esposizione internazionale d'arte; D'apertutto* (Venice: Marsilio, 1999): 26.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

viewers.¹⁴⁰ It therefore encourages viewers to reflect upon them, the same way consumers regularly pose a judgment on the quality or validity of a brand. Enhancing the frivolity of the layout applied to the commandments, the hostesses tending the pavilion during the summer 1999 wore light summer dresses in a fabric printed in the same polka dot design (figure 7.4).¹⁴¹

According to Bradley, Dean's career has been characterized by an interest in "the ubiquitous power of the media whose presence is seen as a mutating life form with its own self-perpetuating imperatives."¹⁴² This description of the media seems also to fit the beasts Dean produced for the Biennale exhibition. Could these vicious-looking, yet materially inert, animals be personifications of the media? This reading would further support an understanding of the Biennale as an exhibition in which viewers are encouraged to re-evaluate their relationship with imposed ideologies perpetuated through the media.

The grounds of the Venice Biennale are filled with imposed ideologies dating from various moments in the event's long history. The classical and severe architectural styles of the United States or German pavilions, for instance, reflect and employ specific ideologies linked to a desire – past or present - by those countries to be seen in a particular manner. The German pavilion was re-designed in 1938 by Ernst Haiger to

¹⁴⁰ Merisa Marr, "'Big bang' or 'banal'?: At Venice Biennale, curator and some critics beg to differ," *The Gazette* (June 19, 1999): J6.

¹⁴¹ Gerald Hannon, "Excerpts from a description of Tom Dean who has done the same thing for the universe," *Canadian Art*, vol. 16, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 58-64.

¹⁴² "Canada," *48a esposizione internazionale d'arte : la Biennale di Venezia : dAPERTutto : aperto over all* (Milan: Marsilio, 1999): 26.

disseminate the National Socialist propaganda.¹⁴³ The austerity of its architecture was meant to convince other countries of the seriousness and respectability of the German Third Reich. Whether visitors are aware of this history, or not, they are more likely to enter the German pavilion in a serious mood versus, say, entering a circus tent. The architecture of the pavilions strategically influences the behavior of its users. Dean's Commandments encourage viewers to look beyond the medium of the message and judge the quality and validity of the message for themselves. In an environment such as the Venice Biennale, this is tantamount to telling the viewers not to trust the national images they see around themselves.

The three exhibitions by Cardiff, Miller, Graham and Dean encouraged viewers to revisit fictions and established conceptions to ascertain their accuracy and biases. They did this through a plethora of means that called on the viewers' personal experiences and knowledge. The 1990 Canadian participation to the Venice Biennale employed a similar approach. For this exhibition, Montreal artist Geneviève Cadieux modified the facade of the Canadian pavilion by exhibiting a single-work on the exterior windows of the building. Entitled *La Fêlure, au cœur des corps* (1990), this piece was a large photographic montage constituted of twenty-two panels, each over three meters tall. They covered the entirety of the zigzagging window wall facing the small garden in front of the pavilion (figure 3.1). To view the piece, visitors were forced to enter the walled-in garden, at which point they were no more than three meters away from the work.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Armand Gruentuch and Almut Ernst, *Convertible City, 2006 Venice Biennale*. (Berlin: Gruentuch Ernst Architekten, 2006): 13.

¹⁴⁴ Based on a visit of the Canadian pavilion in June 2005.

The close quarters of the viewing area played on the content of the photograph montage to overwhelm the visitor. The twenty-two panels were arranged into a triptych. The middle section of the work showed two mouths interlocked in a kiss and was flanked by a close up of a human scar split in two sections (left and right panels). The three sections were aligned so that the scar and joined lips formed a diagonal line which ran across the whole work (figure 3.2).¹⁴⁵ The piece was bewildering and disquieting mainly on account of the transformation of an ugly scar into a lustful embrace and back into a scar.

These images are very rich in emotional content; they evoke painful memories of lost loves and the hurt which tends to follow failed relationships. In the exhibition catalogue, however, curator Chantal Pontbriand employs another approach to discuss the artwork. In her text, she is mainly concerned with the ambiguity of the scar and the artist's treatment of skin.¹⁴⁶ Due to the extreme close-up of the photographs on the lateral panels, it is very difficult for viewers to identify their content as a scar and impossible to locate it on the human body.¹⁴⁷ The resulting bewilderment is accentuated through the fact that the skin above the scar is hairy while that below it is as smooth as a baby's skin. When viewing the work, a certain amount of time must be devoted to figuring out what those panels are. A twisted human joint? A photo-montage? The mere idea of playing with the human body is disquieting, and the realization that this is a blown-up human scar is not reassuring. The various phases of the viewing process outlined above also speak of the way in which viewers identify images and attempt to uncover what's

¹⁴⁵ Gilles Godmer, *Geneviève Cadieux* (Montreal: Musée d'art contemporain de Montreal, 1993): 55.

¹⁴⁶ Chantal Pontbriand, *Geneviève Cadieux : Canada XLIV Biennale di Venezia* (Montreal: Éditions parachute, 1990).

¹⁴⁷ Ann Duncan, "Montreal artist's powerful images bound to conjure range of reactions," *The Gazette* (April 21, 1990): H5.

behind them. Presented with an ambiguous image, we tend to look for tell-tale details to explain it.

The work's impact on individual viewers was, similarly to scars, very poignant and personal. As stated by Ann Duncan in the *Montreal Gazette*, "For most viewers this image is bound to conjure up feelings of pain, suffering, torment and even of disgust and revulsion."¹⁴⁸ Formed from intimate images, this work had very personal connotations for individual viewers, calling back past experiences of emotional scarring and healing. Cadieux and numerous art writers have linked these personal memories to photography's capacity to record the past. In *Canadian Art*, Peggy Gale wrote that "skin is a sensitive surface, fragile and susceptible to age or disfigurement, recalling too the light-sensitive paper and chemical baths of photography. All are memory traces, recording the passage of time and events."¹⁴⁹ The form and content of this work refers to the recording of history and brings to the forefront the hurt which is usually kept hidden.

In Cadieux's work, the past is enlarged and framed into an art object that resides in the present. The past produces the present, and the present embodies the past. In the context of the Biennale, this art object may also be seen as representing the present of an entire country. By showing disquieting images of the past, Cadieux is inviting viewers to reevaluate the content of the image with which they are presented. Within this exhibitionary context, an invitation to reflect on the content of images is an invitation to reflect on the content of national images. Can (hidden) traces of the past be located in

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, H5.

¹⁴⁹ Peggy Gale, "Skin Deep: The Beauty and Resonance of Geneviève Cadieux's Installations come from her Mixing of Memory with Desire," *Canadian Art*, vol. 7, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 62.

the images presented to the viewer? The work therefore questions national images, suggesting that things may not be as they appear and that upon close inspection they may contain valuable traces about their own past.

La Fêlure, au chœur des corps introduces a novel element into the questioning of fictive constructions. Whereas the artworks by Cardiff, Miller and Dean stopped at questioning fictions that pose as reality, Cadieux's piece encourages viewers to study them for traces of what they represent and how they were produced.

Modus Operandi Revealed

Two of the last nine Canadian exhibitions at the Venice Biennale placed a special emphasis on the *modus operandi* of fictional constructions. Through a highlighting of the constituting parts – and the way these parts operate – the exhibitions by Roland Brener and Michel Goulet (1988) and Robin Collyer (1993) invited viewers to reflect on nature and the consequences of specific constructions.

For the 1988 Biennale, Brener and Goulet produced sculptural works assembled from ready-made objects and industrial-looking contraptions. In the case of Brener, the three works he showed – *The Satellite*, *Small Talk* and *The Gate* – were automated devices that performed futile actions while drawing attention to their operating mechanisms. *The Gate* was constituted of a vertically swinging gate which was spun on its hinges by a small vehicle rolling on a pair of rails. This vehicle's simple motor was encased in a

transparent Plexiglas casing, allowing viewers to see/study the piece's inner workings (figures 2.4 - 2.5).

Employing a similar approach, Goulet produced three works – *Motifs/Mobiles*, *Table de Travail* and *Faction Factice* – which were assemblages of industrially-produced items. *Faction/Factice* consisted of ten shotguns, each resting on an assortment of items and reclined against a wall with muzzles pointing upward. A leather-bound book was resting on the end of each gun, and on each book was deposited another industrially-produced found-object such as a roll of string and a hair brush (figures 2.1 – 2.2). In Goulet's works, as in Brener's, the fact that each constituting element remains visible and identifiable is important. As stated by curator Manon Blanchette in the foreword to the exhibition catalogue, "Roland Brener and Michel Goulet render tractable and tame unknown dimensions of objects which have perhaps become too familiar to be valued at their real worth or have been eclipsed by our hectic industrial world."¹⁵⁰ By ensuring that the constituting elements remained visible, the artists emphasize their now-useless utilitarian nature, suggesting new meanings for them. New dimensions for these items are produced and highlighted through their incorporation into works of art. The inclusion of a gun and books draws a link between violence and literature, or between wars and written history. *Faction/Factice* therefore appears as a commentary on what produces history, while drawing attention to the constituting parts rather than the resulting whole.

¹⁵⁰ Manon Blanchette, "Foreword," *Roland Brener, Michel Goulet* (Montreal: Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, 1988): 13.

In the catalogue, Blanchette repeatedly refers to “keeping the various stages of technical production evident in the works.”¹⁵¹ Her insistence on the display of production processes also gains in importance when one thinks of it within the context of the Venice Biennale. This is a forum where national identities are produced. While seemingly mute about a Canadian image, this exhibition stresses the relevance of understanding production processes when looking at finished constructions. Perhaps, as was the case in *Faction/Factice*, unsuspected, even opposite, elements might be found working hand in hand toward a falsely unified product. A study of identity through production processes is even alluded to in the exhibition catalogue when essayist France Gascon states that “it is as if a significant dialogue could emerge only from a confrontation of autonomous, well-defined entities totally disengaged from another, sometimes at the cost of an obsessive quest for identity.”¹⁵²

Each national participation in the Venice Biennale constructs an image whose production remains invisible to the majority of viewers. The exhibition of the works of Goulet and Brener sends a message to visitors that these national constructions are falsely unified wholes.

Deconstructing unified wholes was also at the heart of Robin Collyer’s 1993 exhibition in Venice. The works selected for this exhibition were constructed of pre-fabricated industrial parts assembled with ready-made commercial signs into architectonic wholes. His appropriation of commercial signs as building blocks for his sculptures inverts meaning. Buildings usually support commercial signs, and not the other way around.

¹⁵¹ France Gascon, “Michel Goulet,” *Roland Brener, Michel Goulet*: 61.

¹⁵² France Gascon, “Introduction,” *Roland Brener, Michel Goulet*: 26.

Works included in the exhibition catalogue, such as *Take Care* (1990), can be seen as critical reflections on the advertising world and the built environment (figure 4.1). The usage of a Molson sign as part of the base of a diving board suggests that the built environment not only displays advertisement on its outside, but also embodies it in its very structure. Most viewers have become accustomed to seeing commercial advertising displays in cities. Few people would take these messages for the unbiased truth: they influence viewers to the extent that viewers allow them to. However the built environment is not necessarily seen along the same lines. As suggested by Michel De Certeau in his book *The Practice of Everyday Life*, the built environment has a strategic quality which enables it to direct the population's use of space.¹⁵³ Individuals rarely stop to reflect on this quality, either to decide to go along with it or adopt a tactical approach to subvert it. Yet, the built environment is largely a political construction: it is the result of political decisions by ruling governments. With these works, Collyer seems to suggest that individuals should further reflect on the political content of architecture and its strategic consequences on their lives.

Another work included in the Venice exhibition, *Vent* (1991), tackles related issues about Western medias. This sculpture combines collectible playing cards, photographs of the American White House at night and an industrial air ventilation unit (figure 4.2). Organized into three horizontal bands that circumscribed the entire piece, the collectible cards were in fact "trading cards that were quickly generated from the [American conflict in Iraq] and were modeled on the renewed phenomenon of sports trading cards, itself the manufacture of a false need for economic profit."¹⁵⁴ Physically these cards

¹⁵³ Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984): 91-130.

¹⁵⁴ Philip Monk, Robin Collyer: *Idioms of Resistance* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1993): 53.

formed the base of the sculpture, with pictures of the White House resting on them. The cards show people, scenes, maps or army vehicles which were related to the 1991 American war on Iraq. Souvenirs of the war, the cards were produced to be collected and traded, much like baseball or hockey cards. Removed from their original context, these cards appear extremely nationalistic, a form of state propaganda. Stacked into a round platform, they form building blocks. Their nature as state propaganda was emphasized through their juxtaposition to the image of the seat of American political power.

Through this juxtaposition, Collyer draws a link between military propaganda maneuvers and the political and economical machinations employed to gain support for the war in Iraq. The military playing cards were not actually produced by the American government; rather they were the product of the American media industry. In the exhibition catalogue, Philip Monk describes Collyer's criticism of the American media by stating that:

offering neither the realities nor effects of the war to its viewers, the media was complicit with the military powers in relying on images and symbols to deliver the message that the American government and military wanted its citizens to see and hear. The usual word for this is propaganda.¹⁵⁵

In this artwork, Collyer highlights the propagandistic quality of a commercial, political and military *démarche*. By representing this *démarche* through architectural constructions, Collyer draws a link between propaganda and the built environment. Buildings are not only supports for commercial or propagandistic message, but are

¹⁵⁵ Philip Monk, *Robin Collyer: Idioms of Resistance* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario): 51.

actually built from them. Collyer's views on the commercial, political, and military implications of the built environment became even more telling when these works were exhibited at the Venice Biennale. In 1993, the nationalistic nature of the various pavilions in the *Giardini* found a critical echo in each of Collyer's works. The exaggerated propagandistic nature of his building materials appeared as an invitation for viewers to acknowledge similar traits in the plethora of architectural styles found within the Biennale grounds.

The Venice exhibitions by Brener, Goulet and Collyer all shared a concern for the modus operandi of fictional constructions. By peeling back the covers and showing selected aspects of these production processes, they encouraged viewers to identify and understand the ideologies in the fictive constructions surrounding them. Within the context of the Venice Biennale, this results in a questioning of the ideologies embodied in and disseminated by the various national representations.

A Constructed History

One third of the Canadian exhibitions in Venice since 1988 have directly tackled the concept of a constructed Canadian image. Jana Sterbak did so by revisiting and destabilizing Canadian history, while Edward Poitras and Rebecca Belmore produced artworks about the various identities at play within any Canadian image. Intrinsic to all three exhibitions was the notion that a Canadian history is really a fictional construction.

In 2003, artist Jana Sterbak produced a one-work exhibition entitled *From Here to There*. This installation work was a six-screen video projection which incorporated the idiosyncratic architecture of the Canadian pavilion (figure 9.1). As described earlier, the video was an edited sixteen-minute loop that had been digitally recorded by a miniature camera affixed to a dog's head as he walked along the shores of the Saint Lawrence River (Canada) and on the pedestrian streets of Venice (Italy) (figure 9.2).¹⁵⁶ This jerky and low-to-the-ground way of filming gave viewers a new perspective on the world (figure 9.3). At Venice, *From Here to There* was projected on six screens that were purpose-built along the outside brick walls of the spiral-shaped Canadian pavilion, but placed in a manner which echoed the seesaw inside glass walls. Viewers located in the center of the pavilion could see all six screens as a jagged environment which took up 180 degrees of their fields of vision.

This viewer-centered construction was entirely deconstructed in the videos themselves. All six screens displayed the same video, but at different intervals. Because this video was shot by a camera attached onto a dog's head, the recording lens was located only thirty centimeters above the ground.¹⁵⁷ This resulted in a moving perspective onto the world that humans never experience. The awkwardness of this perspective was accentuated by the dog's rapid and jerky movements and his short attention span. The images are rarely still for more than a few fractions of a second.¹⁵⁸ The combination of

¹⁵⁶ This link between Canada and Italy is a recurrent theme throughout the Canadian exhibitions at the Venice Biennale. In 1995, Edward Poitras had established such a link through his reference to First Nation's soldiers whom had fought in Italy during the Second World War. In 2003, Jana Sterbak links the northern Canadian landscape seen by settlers upon their arrival with the cityscape of one of the cities many of them came from: Venice. In 2005, Rebecca Belmore stresses the link between the sea-shore environment of her video piece and the sea-city of Venice.

¹⁵⁷ Gilles Godmer, *Jana Sterbak : from here to there : Canada L Biennale di Venezia* (Montreal: Musée d'art contemporain de Montreal, 2003): 26.

¹⁵⁸ Observations based on viewing the work in Venice in July 2003.

all six screens showing an unusual perspective onto the world in blurry and shaky images is so foreign to the human eye and brain that it is quite disturbing.

The human viewer-centered form of this piece and the non-human perspective of its content are placed in direct opposition to highlight differences in perspectives and to encourage viewers to recognize the specificity of their own perception. But what are viewers looking at in this video? Sterbak had the dog walk and run along the shores of the upper Saint Lawrence River. In article published in the *National Post*, she stated that she chose this specific landscape because she believed it to be the first piece of land that Europeans set eyes on when they colonized Canada.¹⁵⁹ This represents an effort to incorporate the notion of the construction of Canada.

In an essay of 1966 on Canadian nationalism, historiographer Carl Berger affirms the link between the Canadian people and their landscape and climate. According to him "Canada's unique character [was] derived from her northern location."¹⁶⁰ He traces the idea of Canada as a strong country – shaped by its northern location, rough terrain and cold climate – back to the beginning of the nineteenth-century, arguing that this idea, while muted, is still present in the second half of the twentieth-century.¹⁶¹ This link between Canada and its northern location remains in stereotypical concepts of the country. In a forum such as Venice, these stereotypes influence visitors' perspectives on the exhibitions. By including the Canadian landscape, Sterbak is referencing these historic preconceptions in her art practice and encouraging viewers to rethink their

¹⁵⁹ Mary Vallis, "Sterbak's latest will give art world paws," *National Post* (April 4, 2003): PM 13.

¹⁶⁰ Carl Berger, "The True North Strong and Free," *Nationalism in Canada*, ed. Peter Russell (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 4.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, 4-5.

perspective on the construction of the Canadian nation. She is not proposing a viable alternative perspective; she is merely questioning the dominant perspective's validity by showing a different perspective. Within the context of the Venice Biennale, such questioning also effects the ongoing construction of national images through the official representations. The Canadian participations in the Venice Biennale since 1903 are an integral part of the constructed Canadian image. Sterbak is employing her role as the official representative to undermine that construction.

Over Canada's recent history, the colonization of the untamed northern landscape by European settlers has acquired an air of naturalism. It is now closely linked to the Canadian image around the world. The latest Canadian exhibition in Venice played on the familiarity and naturalism tied to aspects of Canada's image. In 2005, artist Rebecca Belmore devised a video installation that featured a looped projection of a performance piece. Entitled *Fountain*, this work was rooted in performance art, raising questions of identity within the political and historical context of Canada's and the First Nations' contested landscape. As stated by Jessica Bradley,

[Belmore] disturbs familiar images to reveal their false premises, unsettling any presumed naturalism as she gives presence to her people's struggles for their own identity.¹⁶²

The content of the video was a one minute sequence of a performance Belmore enacted at Iona Beach, located outside of Vancouver in an industrial area. In this film, Belmore is first seen walking on a shore by a pile of logs that self-ignites into a large camp-fire. She is then seen immersed waist deep in the Pacific Ocean, struggling feverishly against the

¹⁶² Jessica Bradley, "Rebecca Belmore: Art and the Object of Performance," *Rebecca Belmore: Fountain* (Vancouver: Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, 2005): 44.

ocean with a metal bucket in her hands. A few seconds later, she is peacefully kneeling, almost meditating, in the water. She serenely fills the bucket with water, stands and walks onto the beach. When she reaches the camera, she briefly pauses and proceeds to throw the content of the bucket onto the camera lens. However what emerges of the container is not water. It has mysteriously transformed itself into blood. The blood covers the camera lens and slowly drips down. Through this red veil, viewers are looking at Belmore, who is staring back at them with a defiant look (figures 10.2 – 10.4).¹⁶³

Produced as a video installation, *Fountain* was looped and projected onto a wall of falling water (figure 10.1). Cascading into a narrow and shallow pool, this water-wall was a source of considerable discomfort for the viewers of the piece since it filled the cavernous space of the Canadian pavilion with a continuous gushing sound which competed with the already high volume of the video's soundtrack. Furthermore, the overall piece produced droplets of water and a fine mist which covered any viewer who dared to approach within five meters of the piece. The floor was also wet and slippery.¹⁶⁴

A recurring theme of *Fountain*, as with most of Belmore's previous work, is the construction of her own "First Nations identity."¹⁶⁵ In this particular piece, her identity is articulated along the lines of her changing relationship with her natural environment and her ultimate confrontation with European viewers (the audience at the Venice Biennale) through a wall of blood. Her struggle with the ocean at the beginning of the video, and the ritual-like peace she later finds is strongly linked to her relation with First Nations

¹⁶³ Based on viewing the work in Venice in June 2005.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Jessica Bradley, "Rebecca Belmore: Art and the Object of Performance," *Rebecca Belmore: Fountain*. 46.

myths about the underwater world. "Traditionally the world is thought to rest on water and the underwater world is full of spiritual powers that need to be respected." Belmore warns that she did not grow up on these traditional stories, but that when she "came to them as an artist they were already familiar because their effect is present throughout First Nations culture."¹⁶⁶

Connectedness with nature is fundamental to European and foreign perceptions of First Nations people. As noted earlier, Canadian identity is often understood as rooted in the northern landscape. By placing herself on the shore of the great Canadian landscape, Belmore is referencing old stereotypes about Canadian identity. She depicts herself as surrounded by and immersed in nature, however the concluding segment of her video complicates that reading. Her full-frontal defiant look at the end of the piece questions the viewers about their own perspective on the topic, as though she were asking: is this so? Is this what you see in me? Through the years, as these stereotypes have been constructed and maintained, blood has been shed, the very same blood she is throwing back in the face of her spectators. In the overall work, Belmore revisits her own identity construction as a First Nations individual and therefore also questions accepted biases about the roles of the First Nations throughout Canadian history. While she does not offer a clear alternative view of history, the defiant conclusion to the video piece invites viewers to reevaluate their own stereotypical views of identity and history.

By reflecting on the specificity and false premises of the First Nations perceived identity, Belmore produced a work that spoke of identity in a manner pertaining to Aboriginal and

¹⁶⁶ Scott Watson, "Interview," *Rebecca Belmore: Fountain* (Vancouver: Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, 2005): 26.

non-Aboriginal people alike. This approach to issues of identity had been employed ten years earlier by Edward Poitras. His 1995 exhibition focused primarily on issues pertaining to the First Nations identity within Canada. Poitras, who is a Métis (Métis father and Plains Cree/Saulteaux mother),¹⁶⁷ was the first Aboriginal artist selected to represent Canada in Venice. His selection as the Canadian representative at Venice attests to the selection committee's desire to incorporate the multicultural aspect of the Canadian contemporary art scene.¹⁶⁸

Poitras's works for Venice employed the setting of the Canadian pavilion, as well as the overall context of the Biennale, to advance a dialogue about First Nations identity. To mount such an exhibition within the walls of the Canadian pavilion in Venice is politically complicated. It implies official Canadian acknowledgement of a pluralistic Canadian image, while also featuring discordant issues about the identity of various Canadian citizens.

On entering the pavilion, viewers were confronted with a dark olive-green wall inscribed with the names of First Nations soldiers who died in the European theatres of the two twentieth-century World Wars (figure 5.1). According to Poitras, these soldiers represent a tangible link between the First Nations populations of North America and Europe.¹⁶⁹ This wall piece incorporates Europe into a discourse about Canada's First Nations.

¹⁶⁷ "The Métis are one of three recognized Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Their homeland consists of the Canadian provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario, as well as the Northwest Territories. The Métis Nation consists of descendants of marriages of Woodland Cree, Ojibway, Saulteaux, and Menominee aboriginals to French Canadian and/or British/Celtic settlers." Source: Wikipedia. "Métis people (Canada)," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M%C3%A9tis_people_%28Canada%29.

¹⁶⁸ This intention was corroborated by Doug Sigurdson of the Canada Council during a phone interview on April 20, 2006.

¹⁶⁹ Gerald McMaster, *Edward Poitras: Canada XLVI Biennale di Venezia* (Hull: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1995).

Further establishing such a link, the first text in the exhibition catalogue concerned itself with the 1890 appearance in Venice of Buffalo Bill and his troupe of Amerindian performers. This text, along with the artwork, launched the identity discourse central to the exhibition.

Directly to the left of this wall was the glassed-in living tree which is a permanent fixture of the Canadian pavilion. Rather than working around it, Poitras decided to include it in his exhibition. He wrapped it in blood-red fabric and rested on its branches a humanoid form which was wrapped in black fabric (figure 5.2). In Canada, as abroad, the First Nations population is perceived as being closely connected with its natural environment. Playing on this preconception, Poitras seems to be commenting on the repercussions on humans of exploiting the natural resources of Canada. The dark-clothed figure resting on the tree branches resembles a mummified cadaver and cannot be taken as a positive sign. Its juxtaposition with a wall filled with the names of dead First Nations individuals gives the overall piece a rather lugubrious overtone.

The historical component of both of these works is something which is not new to Poitras's work. In a 1991 work entitled *Treaty Card*, he modified an identity card which had been produced by the Canadian Federal government to attest to his Indian status (figure 5.3). Wearing lipstick and makeup in the identity picture, he pokes gentle fun at this identity card since it labels him as something which he feels he is not: an Amerindian. As a Métis, he feels he was constantly marginalized by both sides. On his native Reserve, he "was seen as a Métis; but in the city (he) was being called an

Indian."¹⁷⁰ In works such as *Treaty Card*, he revisits history and official documents to position himself outside the system, self-marginalized. In the Venice Biennale catalogue, he is quoted as saying "I think more about the recovery of history, looking at history again, reeducating whoever happens to be exposed to it."¹⁷¹ But his revisiting of history is not merely to show parts, or points of view, that were previously unknown or downplayed. Rather, his aim, as expressed in this text, is to play with history, to do what no one expects of it. He believes that only through such a renegotiation of history can a positive dialogue space about differences be created.¹⁷² To personify this act of renegotiation, he has produced a sculpture entitled *Coyote*. Included in the Venice exhibition, *Coyote* is fashioned from coyote bone remains which have been assembled in a chaotic fashion to resemble the animal (figures 5.4 – 5.5).

In an interview included in the exhibition catalogue, Poitras likens *Coyote* to his own role as an artist. Going further, he stated that "we all do coyote."¹⁷³ *Coyote's* role is to rattle preconceived ideas and encourage people to reevaluate their established truths or biases. The Venice Biennale is filled with such biases and incomplete truths. Poitras's installation in the Canadian pavilion not only complicates any unified image of Canada, but also destabilizes neighbouring national representations by suggesting that forgotten soldiers abound in every country's history. His proposition is not as simple as re-incorporating them into the history text books however. His role as a Trickster is to

¹⁷⁰ Edward Poitras, cited by Gerald McMaster, "Nomads Are Always Elsewhere: The Art of Edward Poitras," *Edward Poitras: Canada XLVI Biennale di Venezia* (Hull: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1995): 82.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.: 85.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Robert Enright, "The Incomparable Rightness of In Between," *Border Crossings*, vol. 14, no. 4 (November 1995): 31.

constantly destabilize history, not simply modify it.¹⁷⁴ What matters is not a 'better', or 'truer' history, but rather one which is never fixed, which is constantly re-evaluated and judged for its biases and omissions.

Manufacturing Dissent

Both in content and form, the exhibitions mounted in the Canadian pavilion in Venice between 1988 and 2005 have varied greatly. Curatorial decisions on how to best utilize the architecture of the pavilion, as well as the changing nature of the exhibits over the years, make it clear that no single person or grand plan was behind these nine official Canadian representations. This diversity is directly opposed to any form of arrested conception about Canada; it shows a multiplicity of images, or identities, contained within the political and historical construction that is Canada. In fact, this fluctuation of representation is not only suggested through the changing nature of the exhibits; it was also pushed forward in the content of each exhibition. An image of Canada as a country whose identity is never stilled has been suggested through the post-1986 revisionist projects at Venice.

One revisionist approach questioned constructed images, or fictions. Geneviève Cadieux (in 1990), Rodney Graham (1997), Tom Dean (1999) and the partnership of Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller (2001) all produced artworks that belong in this last grouping. Cadieux's *La fêlure, au coeur des corps* invited viewers to read the images

¹⁷⁴ Edward Poitras, cited by Gerald McMaster, "Nomads Are Always Elsewhere: The Art of Edward Poitras," *Edward Poitras: Canada XLVI Biennale di Venezia*: 92.

for signs of what was purposefully left out. Graham's *Vexation Island* produced an unstable fiction that also questioned the honesty of images. Dean constructed sculptural and wall works that encouraged viewers to question accepted truths and media-sponsored messages the same way we are accustomed to judge the validity of marketing campaigns. *The Paradise Institute*, by Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller was a case study into the workings of narratives and the line between fiction and reality. By introducing fiction into perceived reality and vice-versa, this artwork encouraged viewers to reflect on the fictional aspects of their everyday lives.

A second revisionist approach was mainly concerned with production processes. Michel Goulet and Roland Brener (1988), and Robin Collyer (1993) produced sculptural artworks that placed considerable emphasis on hidden production processes and the way they operate. Revisiting such common items as chairs, rifles, books, motorized trolleys or other utilitarian objects, Goulet and Brener suggested alternative conceptions of their function in our world. Collyer tackled more complex constructions, from architecture and the media, to show their political roles in the production of the North American society. Though not necessarily speaking overtly of a Canadian identity, these exhibitions encouraged a reconsideration of all production processes. Within the context of an institution that has mainly been concerned with producing national images over the past century, these exhibitions can be seen as revisionist contributions.

A third revisionist approach was mainly concerned with the production of a Canadian history. Edward Poitras (1995), Jana Sterbak (2003) and Rebecca Belmore (2005) produced artworks that shared this approach. Poitras's exhibition revisited the role

played by First Nations soldiers in the two World Wars; Sterbak suggested a new perspective on first contact between European settlers and the Canadian landscape; and Belmore's work revisited a number of historically produced stereotypes about First Nations people in Canada.

The cumulative effect of these revisionist approaches has fostered the production of a fluctuating image for Canada at the Venice Biennale. These revisionist attitudes can be read as a conscious effort by artists and curators to avoid the task of 'representing' their country. As suggested by Rebecca Belmore in her 2005 exhibition catalogue, accurately representing a nation is impossible – individuals can only represent themselves.¹⁷⁵ However, as was seen in the previous chapters, the Venice Biennale, as an institution, and its surrounding media circus have the capacity to project onto individuals' artworks manifestations of national identities. Seemingly aware of this, the artists who represented Canada in Venice since 1988 appear to have made a conscious effort to produce exhibitions that rendered such projections all but impossible. The result is an image of Canada as a nation that is perpetually redefining itself in the face of new information and shifting perspectives.

¹⁷⁵ Scott Watson, "Interview," *Rebecca Belmore: Fountain* (Vancouver: Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, 2005): 26.

As set out in the introduction, the aim of this study has been to assess the Canadian image that has developed through national participations in the Venice Biennale between 1988 and 2005. This was done through an assessment of the exhibitions themselves and their dissemination through the Canadian and foreign press. Reading the Canadian manifestations at the Venice Biennale and their media reception is a considerable endeavour that raises a very wide range of issues. In this conclusion, I propose to focus on a single Biennale exhibition: the 2001 exhibition of *Paradise Institute* by Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller. This will allow me to summarize the findings of this thesis while delineating the role and consequences of these thematic approaches in the exhibition and in its press coverage. I should state, however, that any of the Canadian exhibitions in Venice could be studied in such a manner since they all contain elements relevant to a discussion of these themes and trends.

The *Leone d'oro* won by *Paradise Institute* in 2001 assured it a press coverage well beyond that obtained by any other Canadian exhibition discussed in these pages. Winning a medal at these Olympics of the arts secured it thirty-four articles in Canada and thirteen in the foreign press. This large number of printed articles promised a new international recognition for the Sudbury artists. Furthermore, as acknowledged by Cardiff in the *Edmonton Journal*, this "recognition is very important in the art world."¹⁷⁶ This medal allowed the artists' voices, as official Canadian representatives in Venice, to

¹⁷⁶ "Couple First Canadian to Scoop Top Art Prize," *Edmonton Journal* (June 10, 2001): A8.

be heard above the cacophony of the hundreds of other artists whose works were exhibited at the same time. The warm reception accorded by the world press generated a palpable sense of pride in Canadian journalists and art critics. Rallying behind their flag-bearers, many writers celebrated the artists' victory as a Canadian victory, and with this pride came a direct equation between Canada and *Paradise Institute*. For the duration of the 2001 Biennale, Canada was *Paradise Institute* in the international contemporary art world.

In the process of being disseminated through newspapers and magazines around the world, the artists' voices were interpreted, and therefore modified, by the various biases of the writers and the contextual influences of the Venice Biennale as a political construction. True to the universal exposition model behind the Venice Biennale, writers read the piece for a sign of Canadian-ness and found it in the inclusion of a burning farmhouse that some saw as typically Canadian.¹⁷⁷ This seems odd when one knows that other portions of the film, such as the hospital scenes, actually refer to Germany, where the artists lived at the time. In a pre-Biennale interview, Robert Enright asked the artist about the importance of shooting part of their film in Toronto. Miller answered: "We're shooting here because we're here."¹⁷⁸ As stated by Cardiff in an interview that was reproduced in the exhibition catalogue:

[the piece uses] German songs and North American landscape. Using this type of combinational, cultural mix makes sense for us since we are from the West Coast of Canada and we are living in Berlin. We take the sense of German music and actors with a German accent and juxtapose them with a North American landscape and we know that people in the

¹⁷⁷ Pierre Restany, "La Biennale del Banale," *D'Ars*, vol. 41, no. 166 (July 2001): 12.

¹⁷⁸ Robert Enright, "Pleasure Principals: the art of Janett Cardiff and George Bures Miller," *Border Crossings*, vol. 20, no. 2 (May 2001): 34.

audience because of their different backgrounds will have all different subconscious responses to this.¹⁷⁹

Here Cardiff seems to be aware of and playing with the cultural differences that embodied her public at the Venice exhibition. Perhaps in an attempt to connect with the cultural biases of the diverse audience in Venice, she has even revisited her own cultural baggage. By including images of the North American landscape (woody, winterish background in the scene of the burning house), she is referencing the political and cultural connotations of the Great North in the historical definition of Canada. The importance of the northern landscape and climate in forming the Canadian character – as argued by Berger – are subtly referenced in this work. However, the artists' definition of the video's content as fiction simultaneously discredits this understanding of the Canadian character.

Nevertheless, the 2001 exhibition of *Paradise Institute* occurred in a politically and culturally-charged context. The Biennale-induced pressures to read the national participations as being 'representative' of their respective countries ultimately led Cardiff herself to think of her work as Canadian. In an interview, she suggested that her creative relationship with audio-visual productions, such as the media, is somewhat Canadian since she believes that:

Canadians have a special relationship to personal media as [they] are a nation of people cut off through distance and weather as well as being attached to the largest pop culture machine in the world. Media is a first language for us, but at the same time we have an ironic or intellectual distance from it by being outsiders.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ Janet Cardiff, *The Paradise Institute*. 13.

¹⁸⁰ Atom Egoyan, "Janett Cardiff," *Bomb* (no. 79, Spring 2002): 67.

However, nothing in the piece's content or form speaks openly of Canada or a Canadian identity. In fact, the piece even turned its back entirely to the emblem of Canada in Venice, the Canadian pavilion. The piece is a blind and sound-proof container that has no link to the pavilion in which it sat during the summer months of 2001.

The various articles that were published about the piece also placed considerable emphasis on the wonderland aspects of the exhibition. With its queue to enter the piece, its rows of seats, and the exact duration of a 'ride,' some critics thought it related more to an amusement park attraction than to an art festival.¹⁸¹ This reading of the piece has at least two roots. On one side, it echoes the general perception that the Venice Biennale is a wonderland of the arts. Yet it is simultaneously rooted in the artists' own influences. As George Bures Miller stated in the exhibition catalogue, there is a "Disneyland or Theme Park [...] entertaining aspect" to this work.¹⁸²

The wonderland quality of *Paradise Institute* was produced on purpose to destabilize viewers and encourage them to enter a fictional world. The miniature hyper-realistic parterre between the viewers and the screen, as well as the real theatre seats they occupy, draws viewers into the (recognizable) fictional world of cinema. Once in, the binaural sound system slowly introduces fiction into their perceived reality. This intrusion is meant to "push people a little further awake, to make their senses more vivid."¹⁸³ This sensory awakening comes with a recognition that the line separating fiction and reality is permeable. It is this awareness that makes visitors look differently at their perceived reality differently once they emerge from the Canadian Pavilion. At the Venice Biennale,

¹⁸¹ Marcia E Vetrocq, "Biennale Babylon," *Art in America* (vol. 95, no. 9, September 2001): 111.

¹⁸² Janet Cardiff, *The Paradise Institute* (Winnipeg: Plug In Editions, 2001): 13.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 15.

this perceived reality includes the dozens of national emblems that are the individual pavilions, as well as the political and cultural messages that each exhibition disseminates. After experiencing *Paradise Institute*, it is easier to see fiction as present everywhere at the Venice Biennale. All national images become parts of this fiction.

The binaural sound system employed by Cardiff and Bures Miller plays another important role in the message that is transmitted to viewers. It introduces a new reality made up of sound, but it also functions as a tangible trace that this new reality is an artificial construction. Experiencing the piece, it is difficult to forget you have just put on a pair of heavy and cumbersome headphones; the equipment is a reminder that the sounds you hear are not truly occurring in three-dimensional space around you. As such, these headphones are traces of the production process that inserts fiction into reality. This emphasis on production processes echoes Goulet's and Brener's preoccupations when they mounted the 1988 Canadian exhibit in Venice. The content of the Cardiff/Bures Miller video does not draw attention to the production process of the work, yet the traces are there for those who wish to acknowledge them, and some knowledge of them is subconsciously noted by all viewers. These traces of the work's *modus operandi* also bring to mind Cadieux's treatment of fiction and reality in her 1990 exhibit. When viewers of *Paradise Institute* later reevaluate the fictional parts of their perceived reality, traces of production processes become departure points for a new assessment of the world they inhabit. These tell-tale signs are also there to be noted in the fictional constructions that are the national images presented in the Venice Biennale through architecture, such as the National Socialist ideology embodied in the German pavilion built in 1938.

The *Paradise Institute* is an intricate work of art that embodies the voice of its artists. Through various means, such as the content of the video projection, the hyper-realistic miniature movie theatre space, and the binaural sound system, the work elaborates the artists' ideas about the way fiction works. However, none of these components seem at a glance to be aimed at constructing a national identity. The work does not speak openly of Canadians, Canadian culture or Canada in general. John Bentley Mays once wrote in the *Toronto Star* that "one reason post-war Canadian art has failed to make a splash in the big world, perhaps, is the failure of its promoters to demonstrate what's Canadian about it."¹⁸⁴ His opinion was thoroughly challenged in 2001 since Cardiff and Bures Miller were able to make a big splash without producing a work that is obviously concerned with its Canadian-ness. The exhibition catalogue also steered clear of any such readings of the work. The nationalistic reading of the piece surfaced only once exhibited, and originated in the interpretation of the work by art writers working for various press institutions.

Rather than speaking of anything Canadian, the voice that emerges from the *Paradise Institute* and its accompanying catalogue is one of questioning, or revisiting, established conceptions about fiction, reality, and their respective roles in our lives. This questioning ultimately effects the construction of a national identity only because a nationalistic discussion was imposed upon it by the political and cultural context of the Venice Biennale.

¹⁸⁴ John Bentley Mays, "A New Path for the Old Biennale: The 48th Venice Art Fair Focuses on Emerging Artists," the *Toronto Star* (June 29 1999): B8.

A similar questioning attitude is present in the nine Canadian participations to the Venice Biennale since 1988: only when the artworks were exhibited in Venice did they take on a nationalistic meaning and role in the construction of a Canadian image. Over the past eighteen years, the reoccurrence of these questioning voices within the walls of the Canadian pavilion has modified the Canadian image on the international art circuit. Rather than being envisioned solely as a relatively young and modest northern country shaped by its rough geography and climate, Canada is now partly seen as a questioning nation that constantly revisits its identity, tirelessly reevaluating the processes that produce it as a nation. The monolithic image that prevailed prior to 1988 has been replaced by a multiple and unstable image. However, the survival of the political nature of the Biennale has ensured that the biannual Canadian exhibitions in Venice are still being read within the context of a Canadian image. Canadian voices in Venice are voices of dissent resolutely anchored within a system of national representations.

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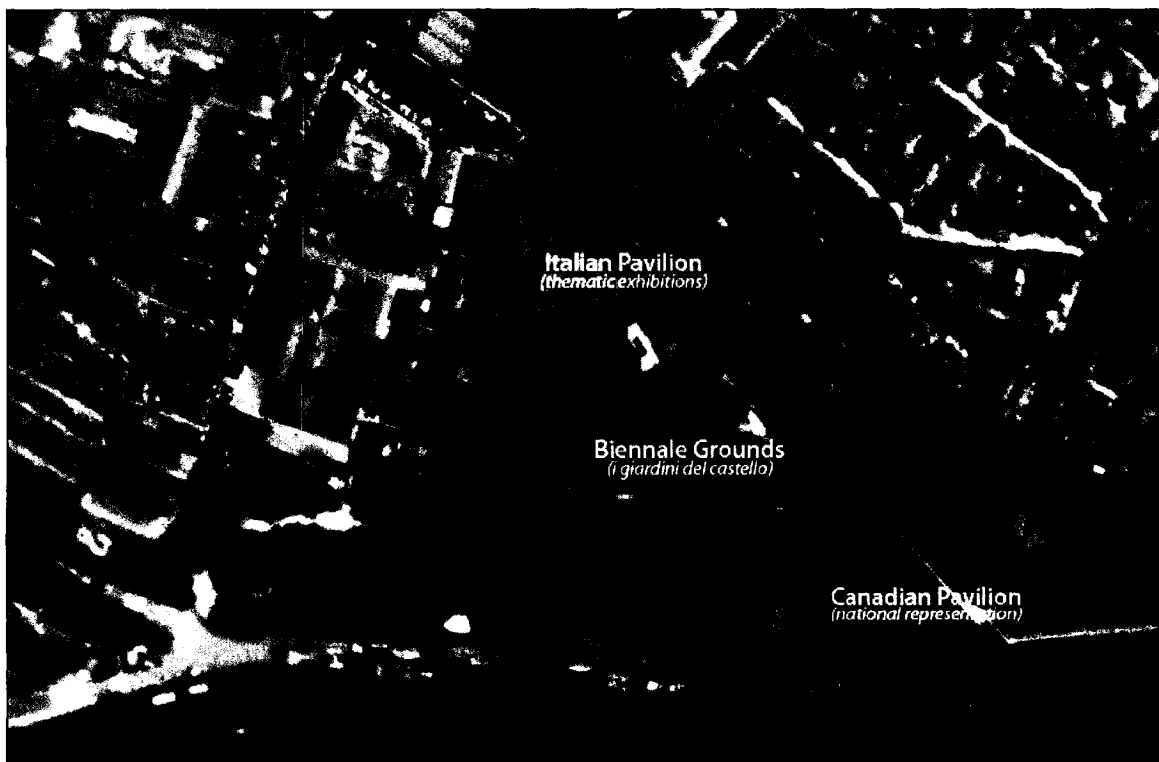
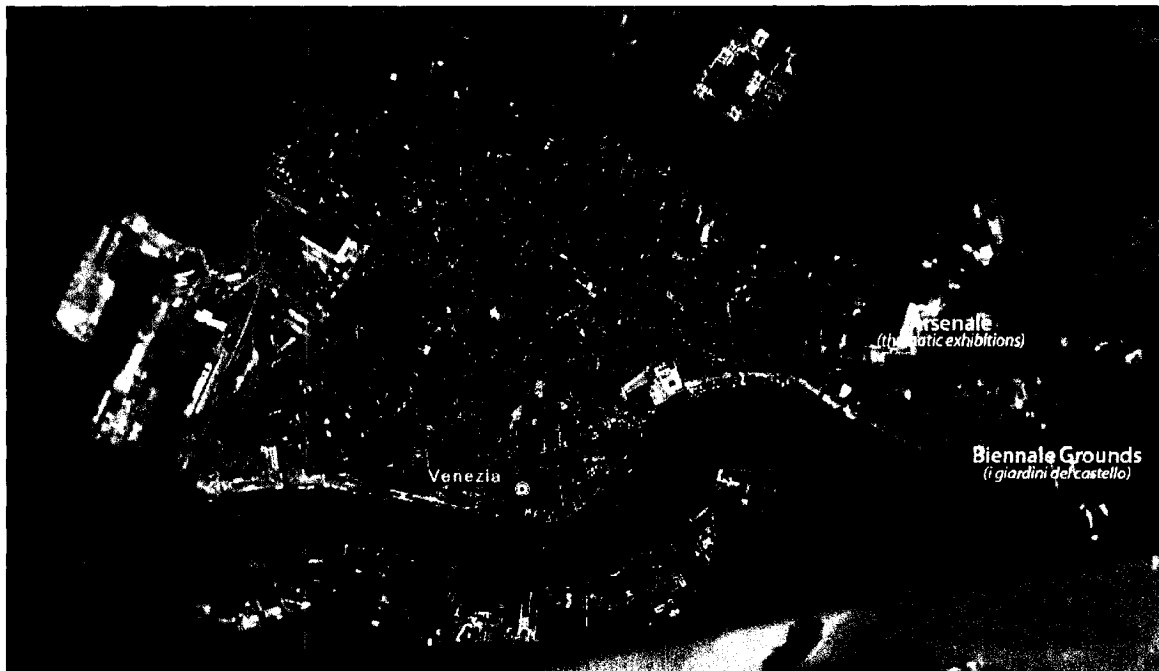
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Figures 1.1 - 1.2
Maps of Venice and Biennale Grounds

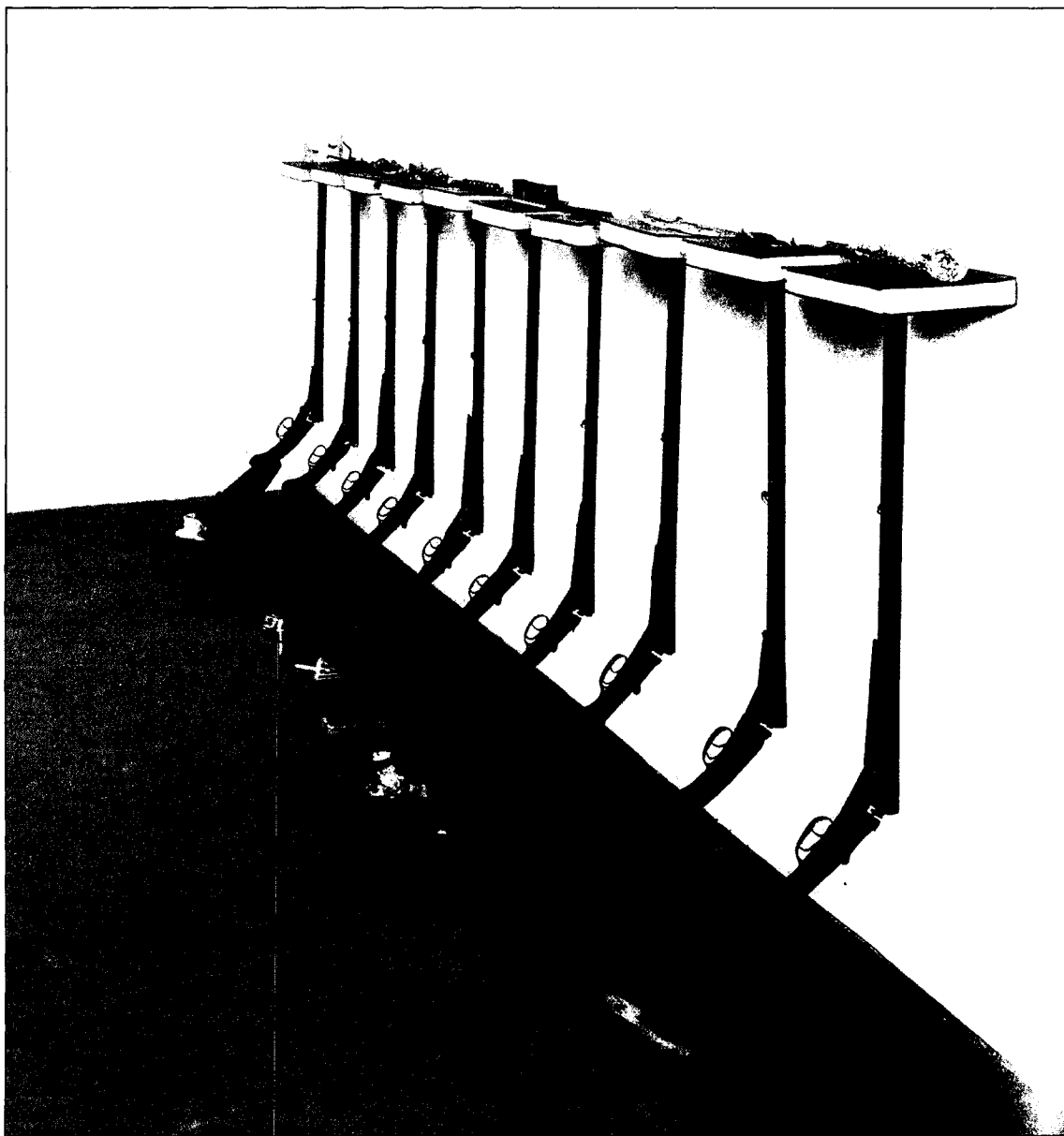


Figure 2.1
Michel Goulet
Faction / Factice, 1988
Mixed Media
122 x 457 x 51 cm
Courtesy of Galerie Christiane Chassay, Montreal

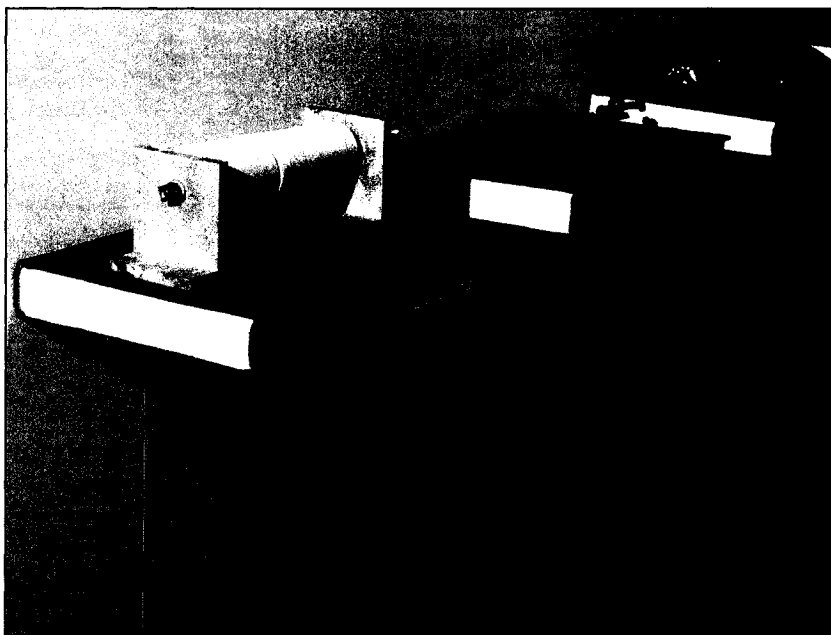


Figure 2.2
Michel Goulet
Faction / Factice, 1988 (detail)
 Mixed Media
 122 x 457 x 51 cm
 Courtesy of Galerie Christiane Chassay, Montreal

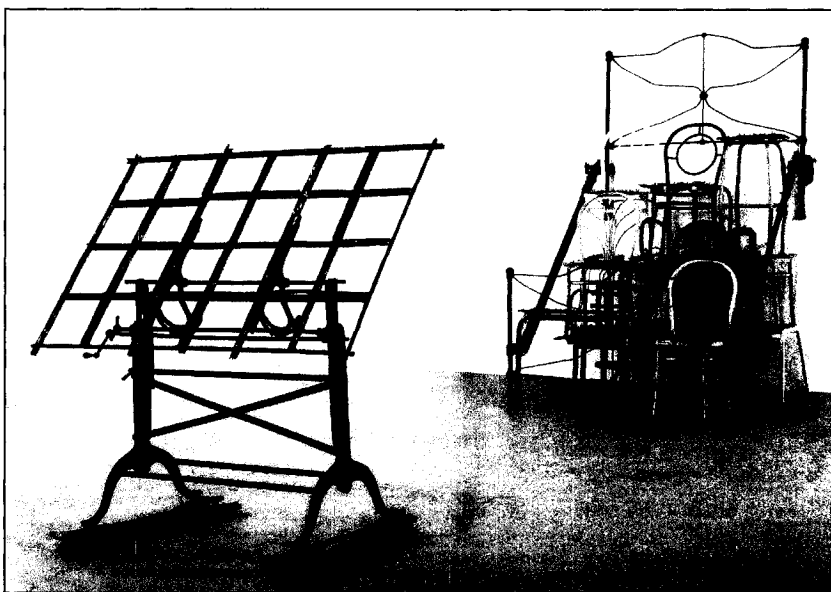


Figure 2.3
Michel Goulet
Motifs / Mobiles, 1987
 Mixed Media
 203 x 137 x 610 cm
 Courtesy of Galerie Christiane Chassay, Montreal

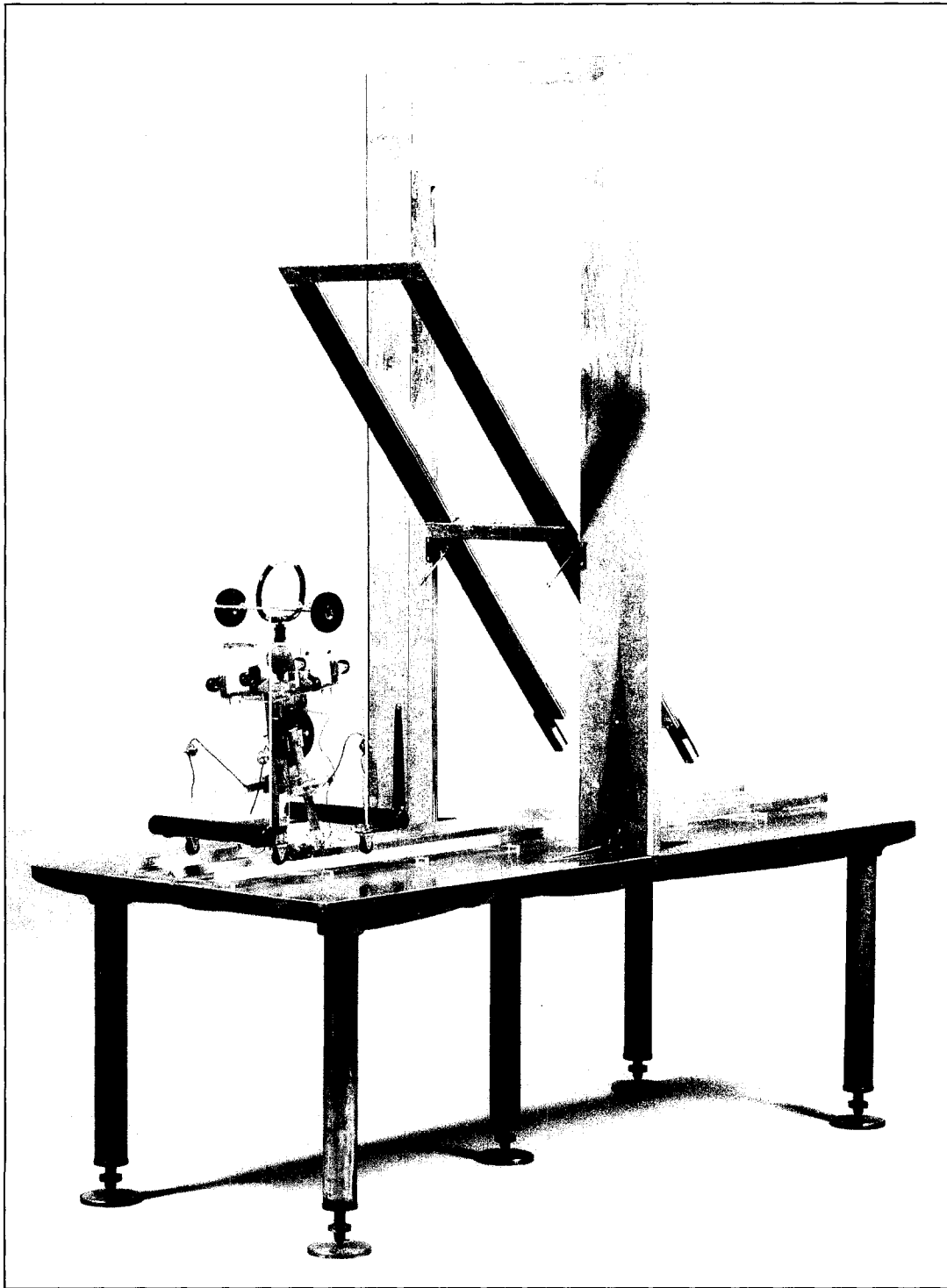


Figure 2.4
Roland Brener
The Gate, 1988
Mixed media
260 x 240 x 92 cm
Courtesy of Olga Korper Gallery, Toronto

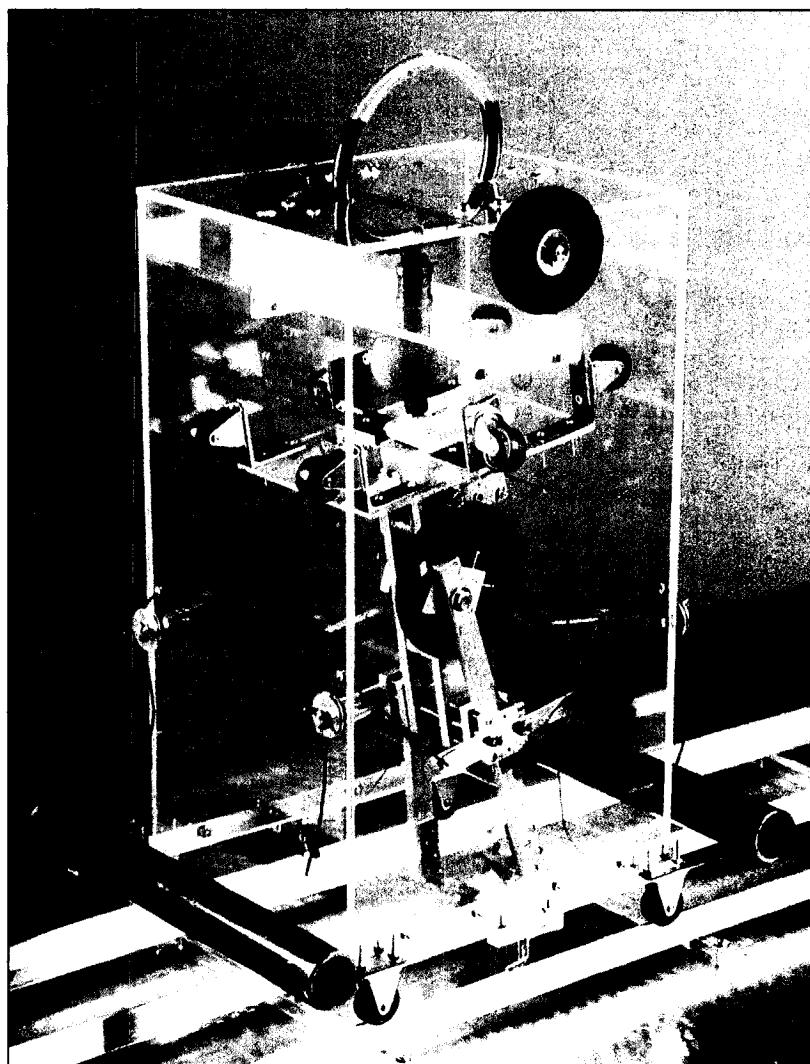


Figure 2.5
Roland Brener
The Gate, 1988 (detail)
Mixed media
260 x 240 x 92 cm
Courtesy of Olga Korper Gallery, Toronto

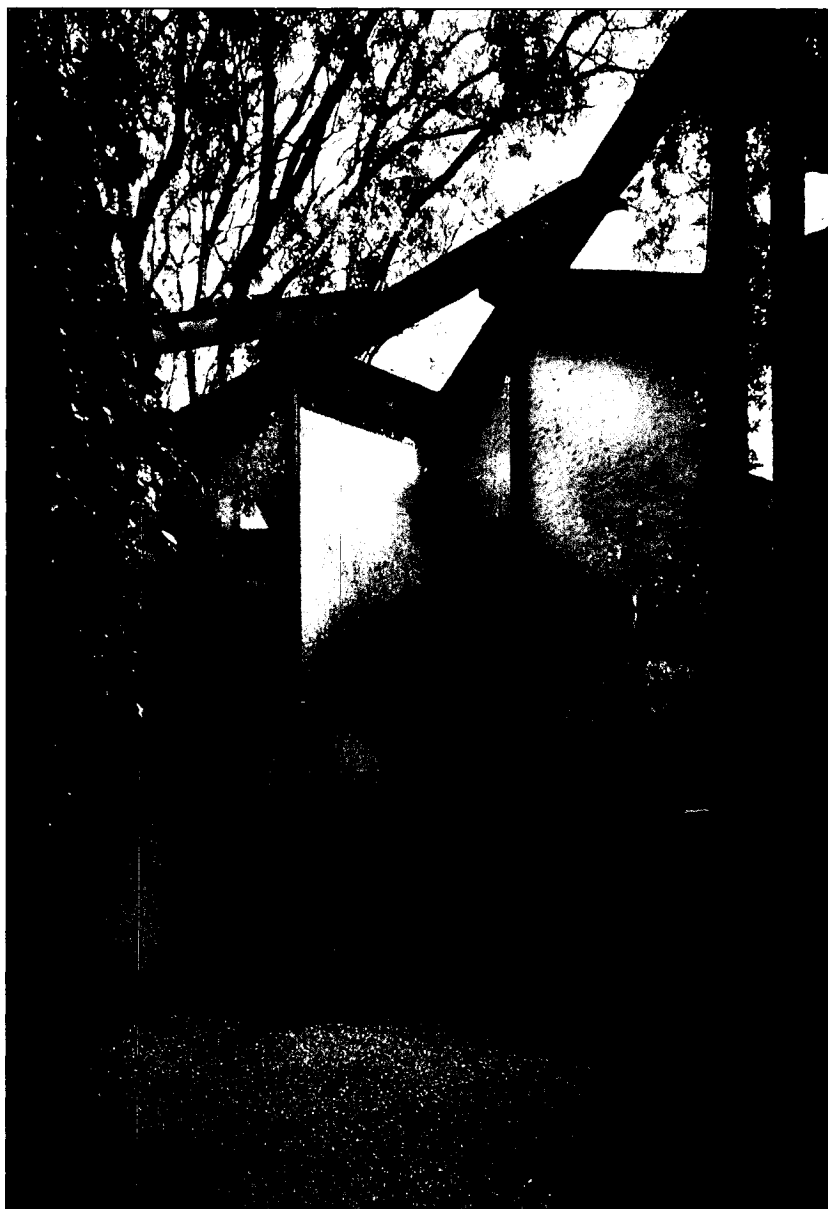


Figure 3.1
Geneviève Cadieux
La Fêlure, au Choeur des Corps, 1990
Color print mounted behind glass
600 x 1300 cm
Courtesy of Galerie René Blouin, Montreal



Figure 3.2
Geneviève Cadieux
La Fêlure, au Choeur des Corps, 1990
(mural version)
Color print
152 x 579 cm
Courtesy of Galerie René Blouin, Montreal



Figure 4.1
Robin Collyer

Take Care, 1990

Diving Board, plastic sign, color photograph, plexiglass
245 x 140 x 41 cm

Courtesy of Robin Collyer / Susan Hobbs Gallery, Toronto



Figure 4.2
Robin Collyer
Vent, 1991

Aluminium ventilator, color photographs, color photocopy
89 x 114 x 114 cm
Courtesy of Robin Collyer / Galerie Gilles Peyroulet, Paris

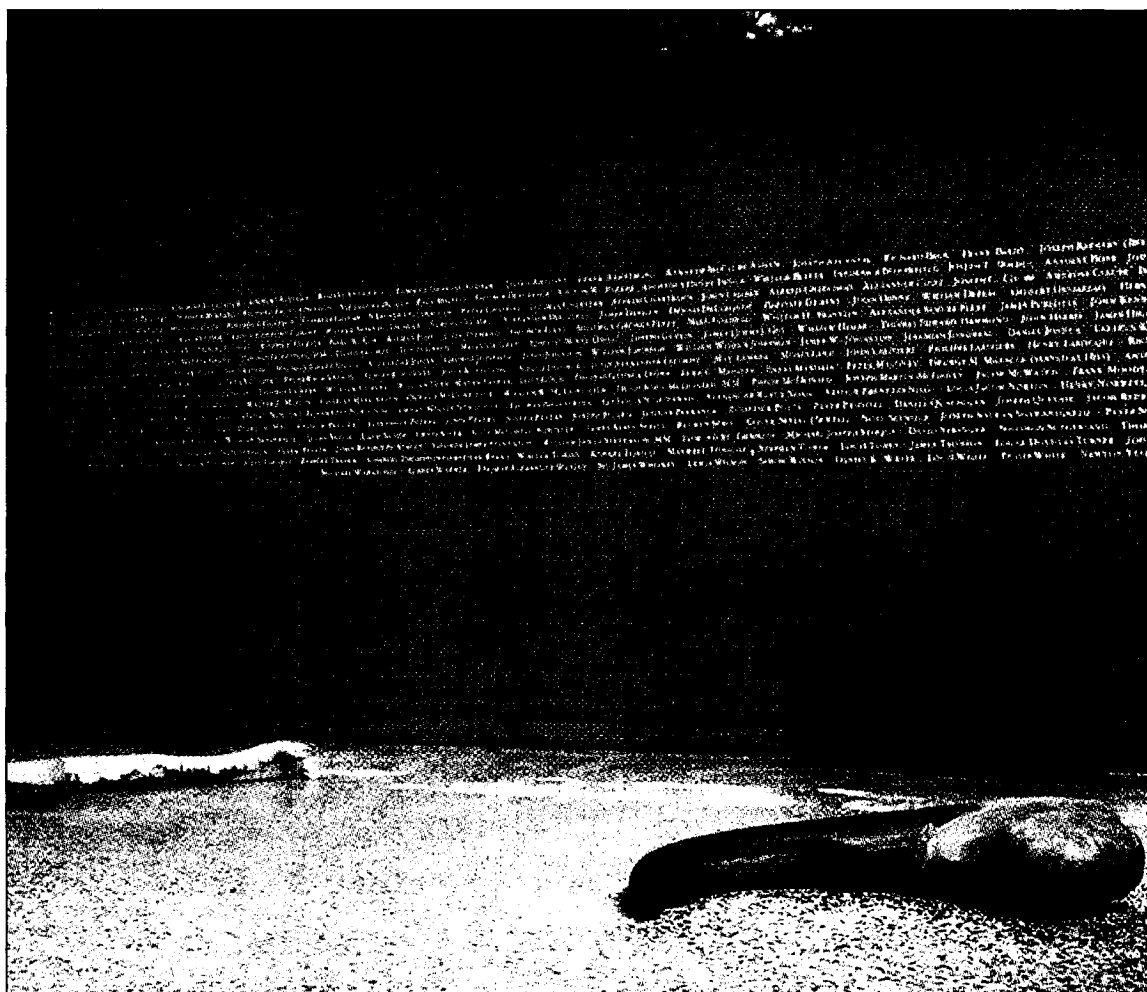


Figure 5.1
Edward Poitras
 Venice Biennale Exhibition, 1995 (installation view)
 Mixed media
 Varying dimensions



Figure 5.2
Edward Poitras
Venice Biennale Exhibition, 1995 (installation view)
Mixed media
Varying dimensions

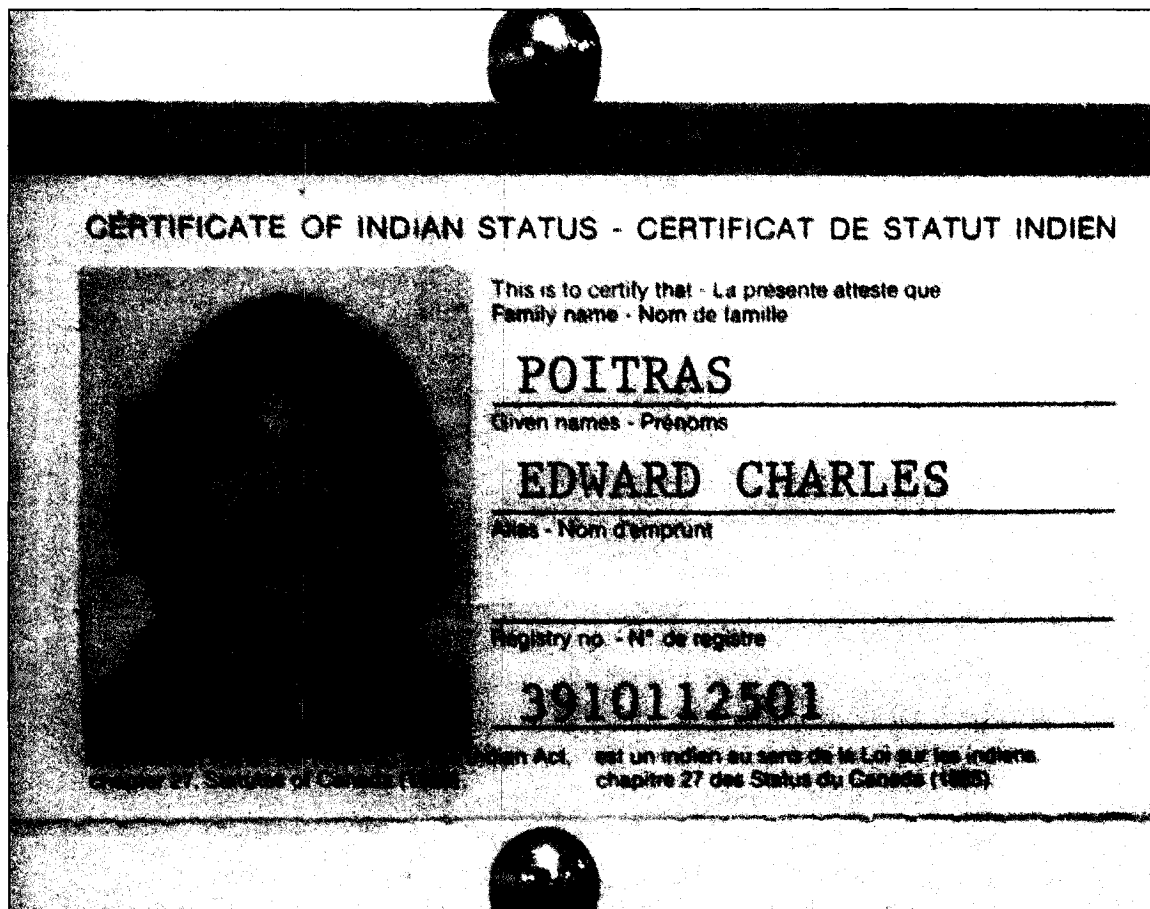


Figure 5.3
Edward Poitras
Treaty Card, 1991
Mixed media



Figure 5.4
Edward Poitras
Coyote, 1995
Bones and glue
41 x 71 x 78 cm
Courtesy of Neil Nevitt, Regina



Figure 5.5
Edward Poitras
Coyote, 1995 (detail)
Bones and glue
41 x 71 x 78 cm
Courtesy of Neil Nevitt, Regina



Figure 6.1
Exterior of Canadian pavilion at the Venice Biennale for the
Rodney Graham exhibition of *Vexation Island*, 1997



Figure 6.2
Rodney Graham
Vexation Island, 1997 (film still)
35mm film transferred to video; looped projection
16 minutes
Varying dimensions

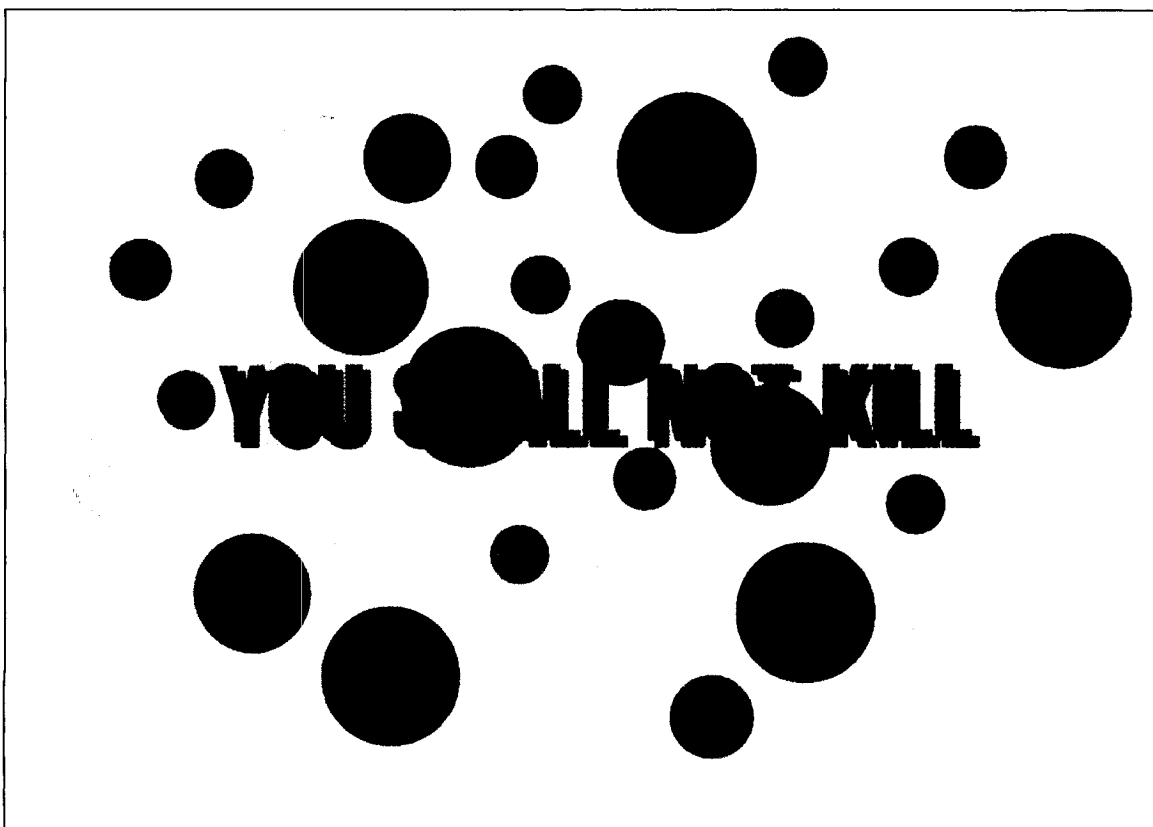
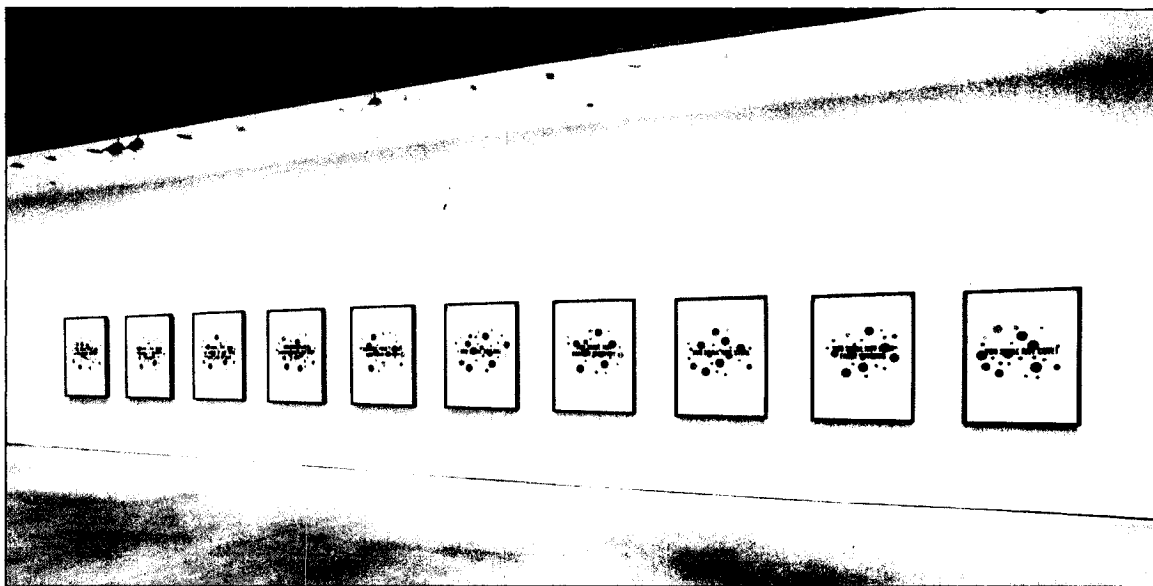


Figures 6.3 - 6.5
Rodney Graham

Vexation Island, 1997 (images from the set)
35mm film transferred to video; looped projection
16 minutes
Varying dimensions



Figure 7.1
Tom Dean
The Whole Catastrophe, 1999 (detail)
Cast bronze
Varying dimensions



Figures 7.2 - 7.3
Tom Dean
The Whole Catastrophe, 1999 (overview and detail)
 Printed wall works



Figure 7.4
Hostesses at the Canadian pavilion wearing dresses designed by Tom Dean.
June 1999



Figure 8.1

Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller

Paradise Institute, 2001 (exterior installation view)

DVD player, video projector, electronic controls, amplifier, film screen, 16 headsets, 13:00 minute digital video disk (DVD), 16 theatre seats, synthetic carpet, halogen and incandescent lamps, wood, plywood, retail trade oil paint, polystyrene and fabric

300 x 1200 x 5100 cm

Courtesy of National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

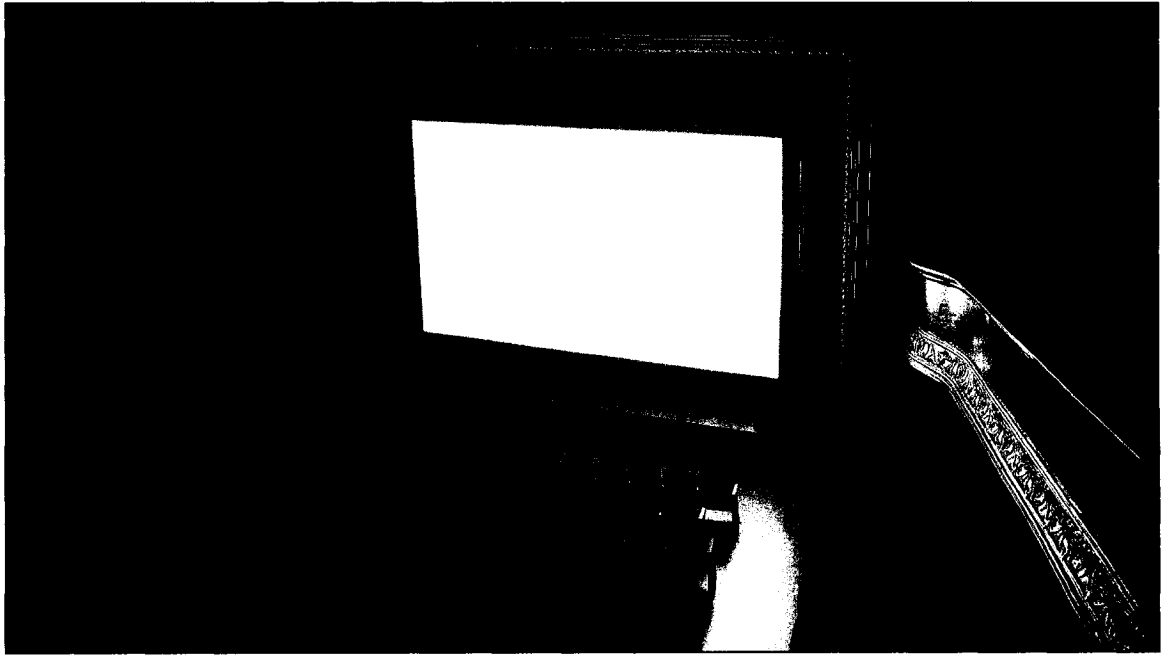


Figure 8.2

Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller

Paradise Institute, 2001 (interior installation view)

DVD player, video projector, electronic controls, amplifier, film screen, 16 headsets, 13:00 minute digital video disk (DVD), 16 theatre seats, synthetic carpet, halogen and incandescent lamps, wood, plywood, retail trade oil paint, polystyrene and fabric

300 x 1200 x 5100 cm

Courtesy of National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa



Figure 8.3

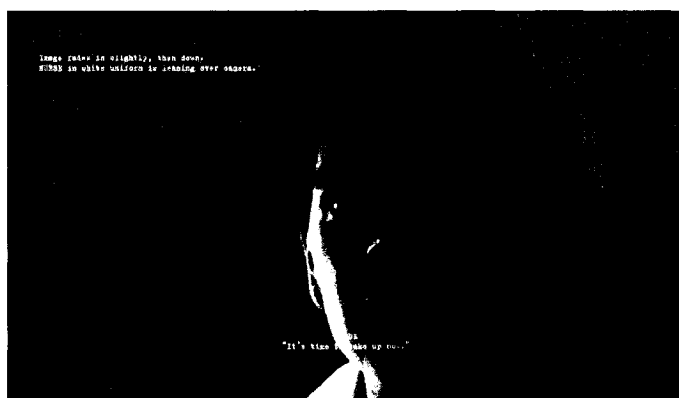
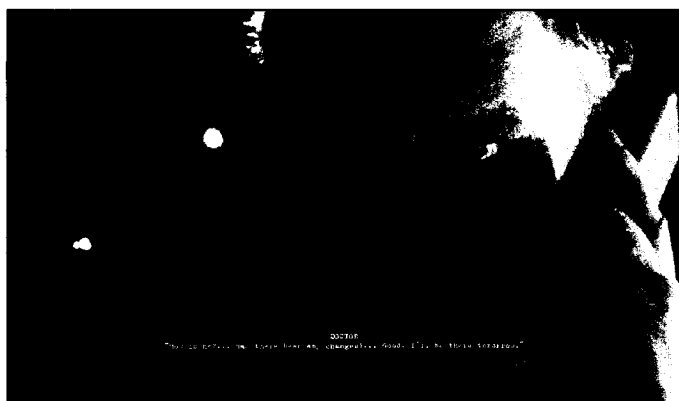
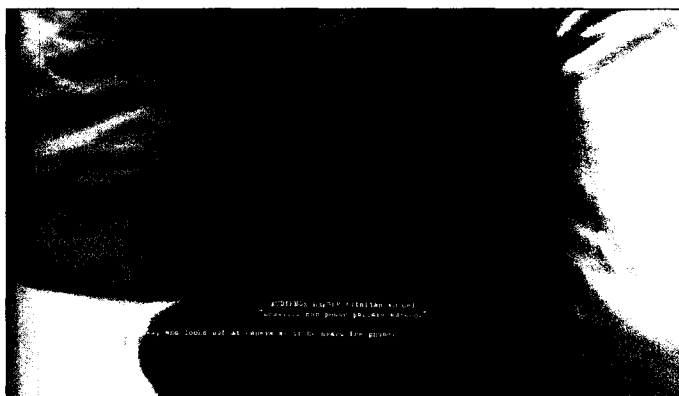
Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller

Paradise Institute, 2001 (interior installation view)

DVD player, video projector, electronic controls, amplifier, film screen, 16 headsets, 13:00 minute digital video disk (DVD), 16 theatre seats, synthetic carpet, halogen and incandescent lamps, wood, plywood, retail trade oil paint, polystyrene and fabric
300 x 1200 x 5100 cm

Courtesy of National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

Figures 8.4 - 8.7
Janet Cardiff and George Bures
Miller
Paradise Institute, 2001
 (video stills with soundtrack
 inscribed on images)
 DVD player, video projector, electronic
 controls, amplifier, film screen, 16
 headsets, 13:00 minute digital video disk
 (DVD), 16 theatre seats, synthetic
 carpet, halogen and incandescent lamps,
 wood, plywood, retail trade oil paint,
 polystyrene and fabric
 300 x 1200 x 5100 cm
 Courtesy of National Gallery of Canada,
 Ottawa



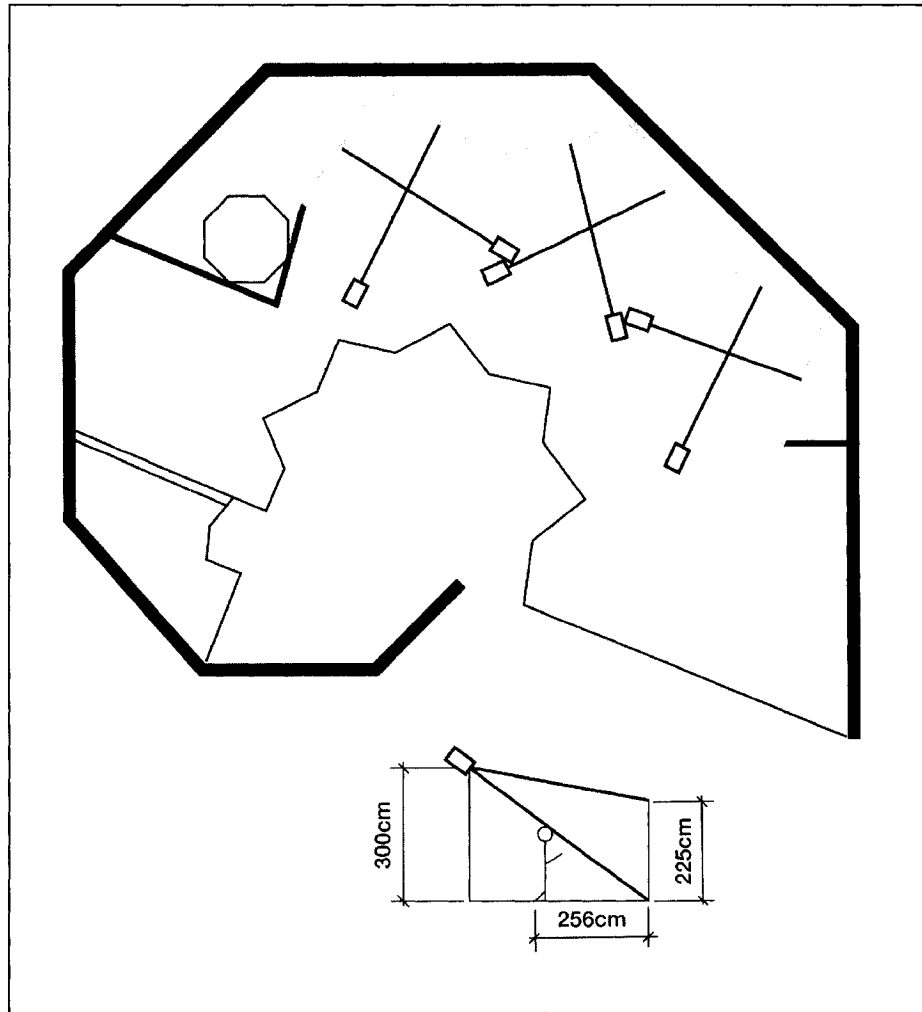


Figure 9.1
Jana Sterbak

Floor plan for the installation of *From Here to There* in the Canadian pavilion, 2003.

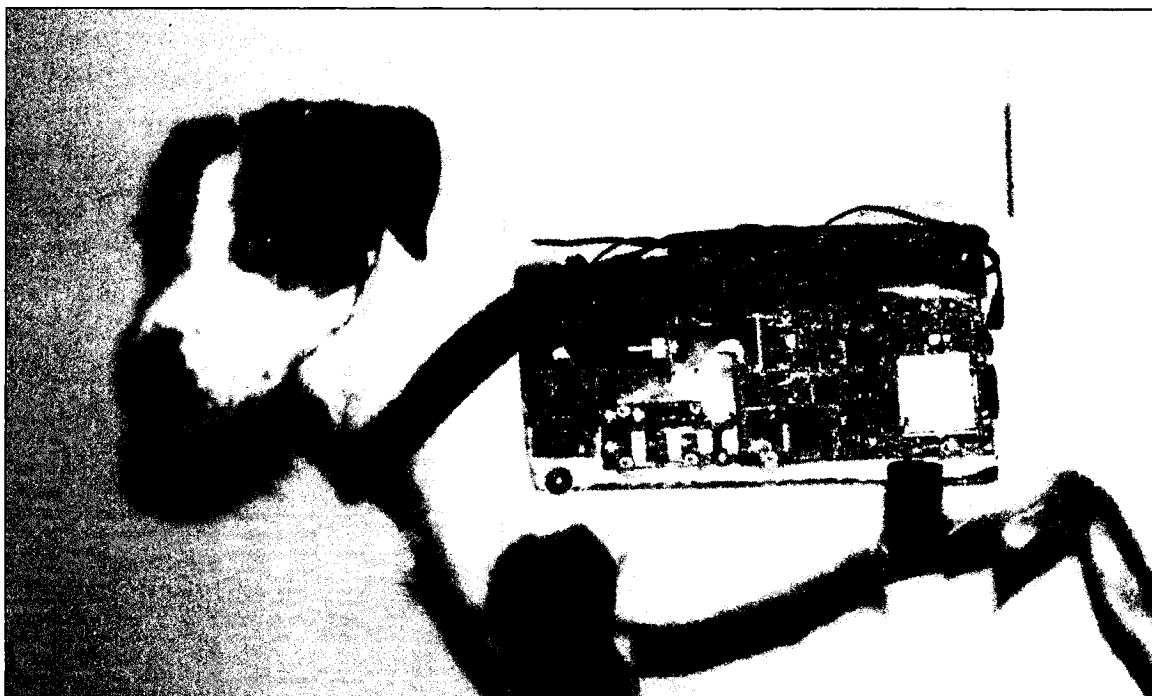


Figure 9.2 - "Stanley"

The Jack-Russell camera-dog utilized to film Jana Sterbak's *From Here to There*, 2003.

Figure 9.3
Jana Sterbak
From Here to There, 2003
(video stills)
Multi-screen video projection
Variable dimensions

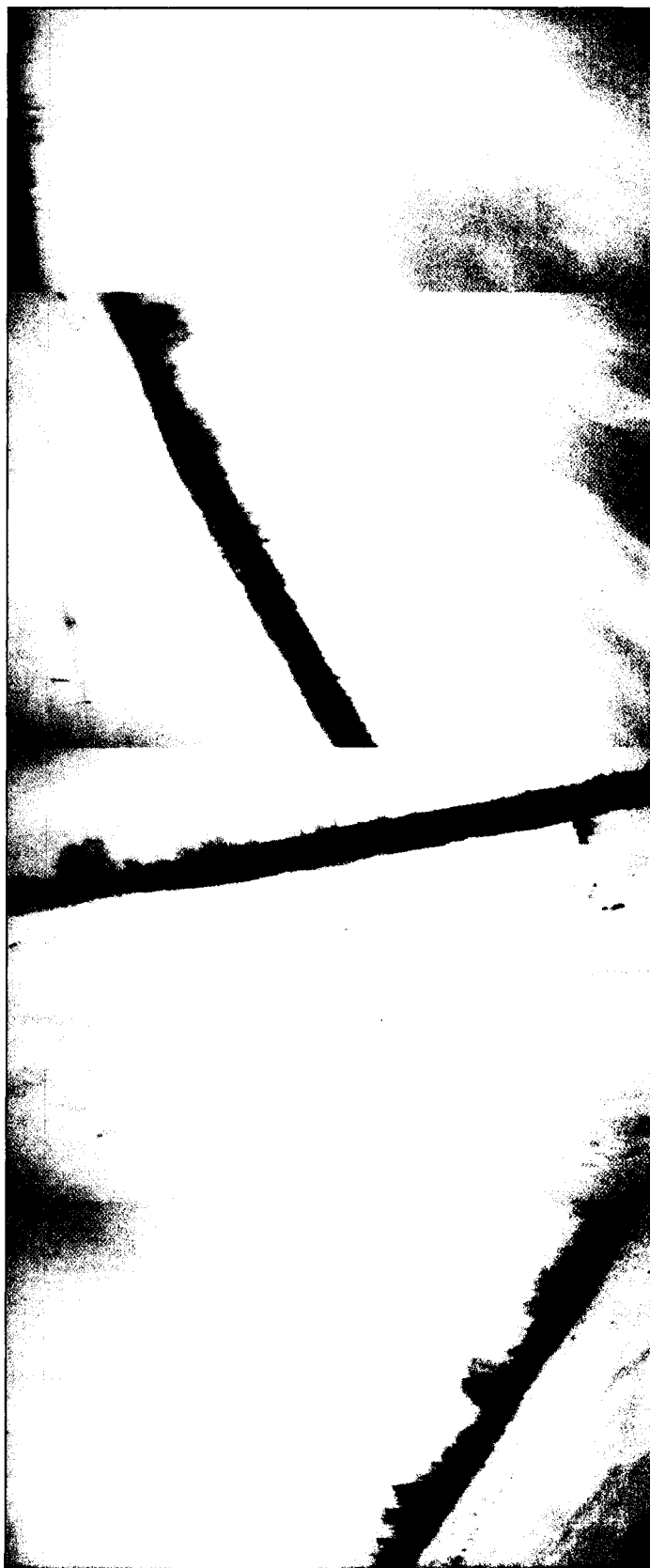




Figure 10.1

Rebecca Belmore

Fountain, 2005 (installation view)

60 seconds 35mm film loop projected on wall of water

Variable dimensions

Courtesy of Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, Vancouver



Figures 10.2 - 10.4
Rebecca Belmore
Fountain, 2005 (film stills)
 60 seconds 35mm film loop projected on
 wall of water
 Variable dimensions
 Courtesy of Morris and Helen Belkin Art
 Gallery, Vancouver