

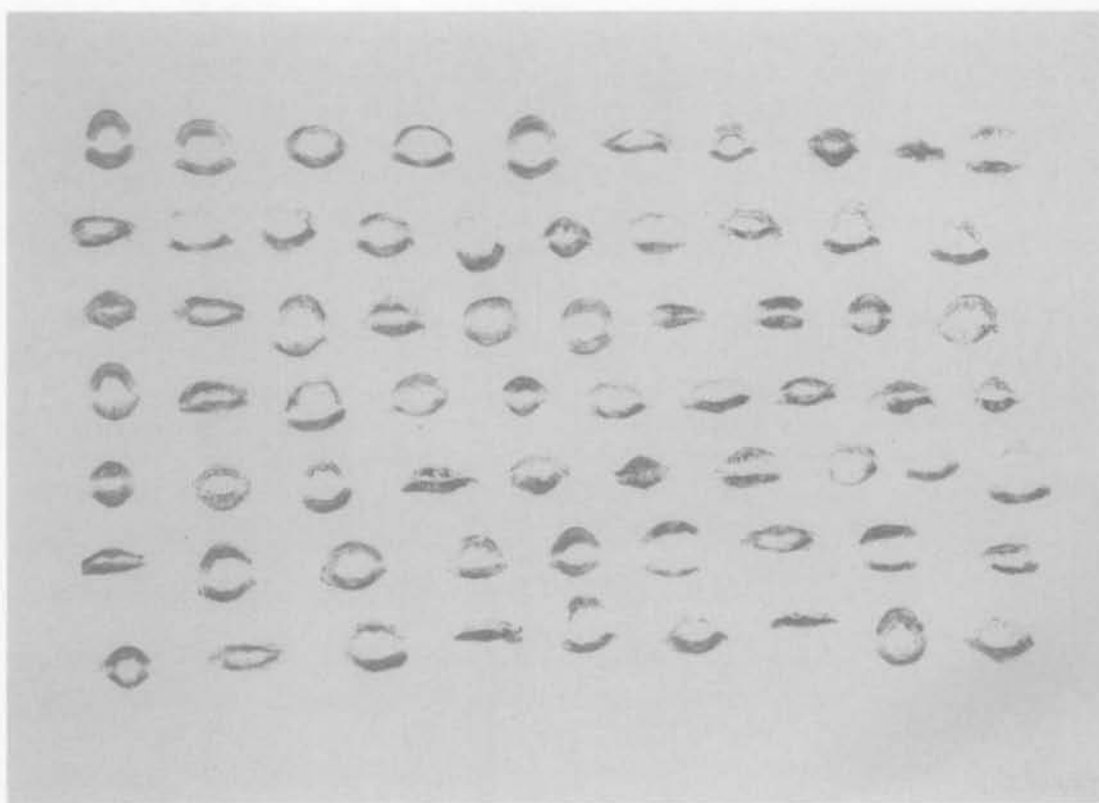


fig.1 Joyce Weiland, *O Canada*, 1970, lithograph, 57 x 76 cm, Fogg Art Museum, Margaret Fisher Fund. (Photo: The Estate of Joyce Weiland)

ANTHEM LIP-SYNC

In 1998, Marjorie B. Cohn, curator of prints at the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard University, announced she was including *O Canada* (fig.1) by Joyce Wieland in *Touchstone: 200 Years of Artists' Lithographs*, which investigated the history of lithography since its invention in 1798. Cohn declared *O Canada* from 1970 to be her favourite print in the exhibition.¹ "For *O Canada*, the artist sang her national anthem and pressed her lipsticked mouth to the lithographic stone at each syllable," Cohn wrote; "the array of kiss marks was printed in lipstick pink."² Cohn gave Wieland's print pride of place in the exhibition, installing *O Canada* on the title wall. As far as I can tell, for I did not see the exhibition, the juxtaposition served a double purpose. On the one hand, it reinforced the theme of the show — the capacity of the lithographic process to reproduce unmediated the autographic touch of the artist. (What could be more autographically tactile, more intimate, even erotic, than warm lips drawing life out of cold stone?) On the other hand, it signalled Cohn's deep affection for the medium in question, an affection she wished viewers to share by, as it were, blowing lithographic kisses in their direction. In this essay, I want to examine Wieland's lipstick imagery from 1963 to 1971, especially those images in which she is blowing kisses at Canada, and to consider how her expression of a feminized patriotism has been differently read by audiences.³

When Wieland made *O Canada* in 1970, she had been living in the United States for eight years.⁴ In 1962 she and her husband, the artist Michael Snow moved from Toronto (where she was born) to New York City. She stayed in New York for ten years before returning to Toronto. During the decade away from Canada — away from her "home and native land!", as the first line in the Canadian national anthem exclaims — she developed a multipartite practice as a visual artist. Among the early paintings executed in New York was *West 4th* (fig.2), a 1963 Pop-phallic painting of filmstrip frames displaying red-tipped cigarettes and lipsticked mouths, with the frames running unevenly up and down the vertical length of the canvas.⁵ Wieland was a painter, collagist, embroiderer, photographer, quilter and mixed media artist, not to mention filmmaker. She produced experimental work in all these disciplines, though film was the medium for which she received the widest recognition at the time; among her best-known films were (and still are) *Patriotism, Part II* (1964), *Rat Life and Diet in North America* (1968), and *Reason Over Passion/La Raison avant la passion* (1967-1969).⁶ Given her willingness to experiment across media, it may seem surprising that printmaking and bookmaking

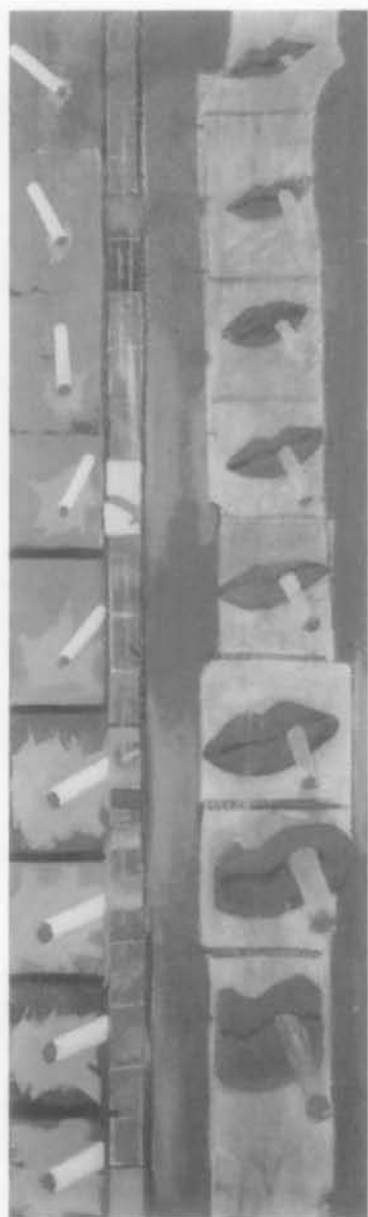


fig.2

Joyce Weiland, *West 4th*,
1963, oil on canvas, 77 x
30 cm, Private collection,
Toronto. (Photo: The Estate of
Joyce Weiland)

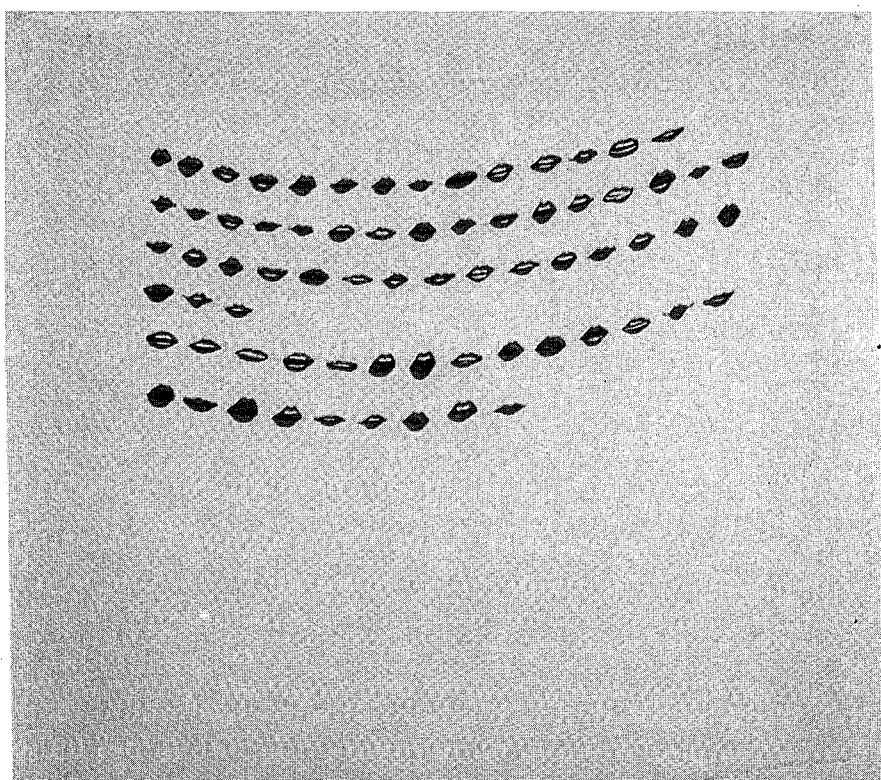


fig.3 Joyce Weiland, *O Canada Animation*, 1970, embroidery on cloth, 107 x 114 cm, private collection. (Photo: The Estate of Joyce Weiland)

escaped her interest until the end of the period. Even then they engaged her attention only sparingly. She has made just one artist's book, *True Patriot Love: Véritable amour patriotique*, a pièce d'occasion to accompany her 1971 retrospective exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa (the first accorded a female artist by that institution).⁷ And she has made just one lithographic print, *O Canada*, executed in Halifax, at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, where she was a visiting artist and teacher for a semester in 1970.

It is worth emphasizing that both the book and the print are one-offs. In the book, Weiland interleaved her own hand-written texts and photographs among the facsimile pages of another book, the *Illustrated Flora of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago*.⁸ The resulting hybrid — arctic plants intertwined with “planted” art, so to speak — functioned as an exhibition catalogue, though Weiland doubly con-

founded the identity of the publication by disguising it as a parliamentary report, an official document, encasing the contents between severe maroon covers stamped with a gold Government of Canada seal. In the middle of the book, Wieland inserted the typed text of the first stanza of the national anthem, along with a photograph of *O Canada Animation* (1970), a version of the *O Canada* lithograph in which the red lips (and added gleaming white teeth) are represented by embroidery on cloth (fig. 3).⁹ The embroidered version of *O Canada* was not the only version of the lithograph executed in another medium in the exhibition; nor was it the only medium associated with so-called women's work. *O Canada* — the quilt — placed each letter in the first stanza of the Canadian anthem on a gridded red ground of quilted cloth. The letters stitched onto the red cloth were white, a direct allusion to the red and white colors of the Canadian flag. Instead of producing a series of works in one medium on the theme of the Canadian anthem, Wieland produced a series of individual works in *several* media on that theme.

In the introduction to *Touchstone*, Cohn points out that artists have drawn (or scratched or mouthed) lithographs, but have rarely printed them.¹⁰ Lithography has traditionally segregated the production of prints on paper from the process of creating an image on the printing matrix, because of its technical complexities and the necessity of substantial capital investment. Cohn argues that the division of labor has had the salutary effect of freeing up the artist to experiment with different options for mark-making, with results that are often startlingly immediate — a registration of the artist's tactile presence. The opportunity for Wieland to make a lithograph on the "O Canada" theme was provided by the Nova Scotia School of Art and Design Lithography Workshop. Founded in 1969, the workshop was a direct consequence of the Tamarind Lithography Workshop's success in reviving the medium by drawing prominent artists to Los Angeles.¹¹ The art-school enterprise hoped to attract contemporary artists to Halifax and the east coast in much the same way that Tamarind had attracted artists to Los Angeles and the west coast; it even hired one of Tamarind's former employees as a master printer. The school's initiative paid off and before the workshop closed down in 1976, it had produced 186 editions of prints by leading artists in Europe and North America. Many of the prints registered the kind of tactile immediacy of interest to Cohn.

In *O Canada* Wieland gives us the fragile tactility of her own skin. The repeated kiss of her lips stamps the print 68 singing times, each kiss a sexualized syllable of the Canadian national anthem. As both a feminist and a nationalist, Wieland played with the fact that the anthem was composed in the masculine case. The second line of the first stanza requires an audience to sing the words "true patriot-love in all thy sons command," regardless of the niceties of gender. The print ironically conflates male patriotic love with female erotics, while refusing to collapse the tension between the two. For Dennis Young, who purchased the print

for the Art Gallery of Ontario soon after it was executed, *O Canada* was "an engaging *mélange* of [Wieland's] major themes: erotic and patriotic love."¹² Cohn observed, rather more sharply, that "It is a feminist's acid satire against dominant macho patriotism, and at the same time it is an affectionate patriotic affirmation."¹³ Notwithstanding Thomas Crow's observation that the art object is mute, the lithograph seemed to speak with bite and humor to both these observers.¹⁴

But how does it speak? Crow's observation about the silence of the art object points to a vexing contradiction, for it is the peculiarity of art to resist interpretation as well as to beckon it. In trying to figure out exactly what sounds are being emitted from the lipstick traces of *O Canada*, and to whom the lithograph is beckoning for interpretation, what "glowing hearts" (to pull another phrase from the national anthem) are there to respond, it would help to know more about contemporary audiences for the print. Wieland believed, like Prime Minister Trudeau who was a fan of the artist's work,¹⁵ that a national program of bilingualism had the potential to hold Canada together internally in the face of Quebec's growing desire for independence, and at the same time to fend off cultural incursions and blandishments from the United States of America. If both French and English were equal as languages, so the logic went, then the "founding nations" (a construction that conveniently ignores the preceding aboriginal nations within the Canadian geographical landmass) would also be equal.

Pace Foucault and his insights into the complexities of power as a discursive formation, the idea was that a language balance would induce a power balance within Canada. That is one reason why Wieland uses English and French side by side in many of her titles, and why "O Canada," which does not need translation from French to English or English to French, suited her purposes so well. There is little doubt Wieland hoped that in the best of all possible worlds, which is to say a world in which Canada remained united as "The True North, strong and free" (another phrase from the anthem), both a *sovereigniste* francophone Quebecer and a federalist British Columbian of similar age and class might look at *O Canada* during the 1971 retrospective exhibition and read the print in a comparable manner. She imagined that, if the bite and humour registered for both viewers in the same way, then Trudeau's policy of bilingualism and reconciliation might succeed. But would the bite and humor have, in fact, registered in the same way? Make no mistake, *O Canada* is a political statement.¹⁶ To the *sovereigniste* Quebecer in 1971, who had just undergone the depredations and anxieties of the FLQ crisis that culminated in the imposition of the repressive War Measures Act by the Trudeau government, might not the antheming lips in *O Canada* have seemed to be singing from the wrong songsheet? Might they not have seemed to be a substitute, a gross caricature, for the incantatory lips featured in Leni Riefenstahl's films of the 1930s? Wieland herself admitted as much. During an interview in 1972, she stated that she sometimes "felt like Leni Riefenstahl ... a government propagandist."¹⁷ Even



fig.4 Vito Acconci, Kiss off, 1971, lithograph on paper, 76 x 58 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario. (Photo: Art Gallery of Ontario)

as she was producing her most political work, she recognized that politics amuses and bites differently for different audiences. Like irony, it cuts more than one way.

During the same interview, Wieland said "I think of Canada as female. . . . All the art I have been doing or will be doing is about Canada. I may tend to overly identify with Canada."¹⁸ One of the products she bottled and sold at the time of her retrospective was "Sweet Beaver" perfume, a concoction that was part false advertising, part sexual innuendo and part patriotism, not unlike the elements comprising *O Canada*. More than humor and female erotics, however, separate the patriotism of *O Canada* from the patriotism expressed by the Canadian anthem or by the Canadian flag. The bombast of the flag, with its snow whites and Mountie reds, is contradicted in the print by the employment of an off-white paper stock and slightly muted reds in the repeating lips. The high chroma of Madison Avenue lipstick and toothpaste advertisements is likewise contradicted, subduing the color protocols of both Ottawa and Madison Avenue.

In 1971 Wieland's lipstick semiphore attracted the attention of Vito Acconci. When Acconci was at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design as a visiting artist, he used the Lithography Workshop to print *Kiss Off* (fig.4). Like the print that inspired it, *Kiss Off* functions as both homage and satire. Following Wieland's lead, Acconci applied lipstick to his mouth (as shown in the photo-transfers at the top of the print), but instead of imprinting the lithographic stone with his lips he kissed his own hands and then manually smeared the stone.¹⁹ By this act of displacement, he wiped away the female identity he had just put on and, of course, violently wiped away the lipstick traces produced by Wieland in the name of a feminized patriotism.

Acconci's erasure was prophetic. Thirty years have passed since Wieland executed *O Canada*, and during that time most versions of Canadian patriotism, feminized or not, have subsided. A few years ago the Canadian government even sold reproduction rights to the emblems of the Canadian Mounties to the Disney Corporation, a transaction that would have been unthinkable in the 1960s and 1970s. Although Canada itself is not yet a brand name, and "O Canada" not yet reduced to a promotional jingle, patriotic feeling now registers uncertainly in Canada. Recently a student at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, familiar with Wieland's print as well as with Acconci's, worked on her hands and knees planting lipstick kisses across an entire gallery floor. It took her days to cover the space and, figuratively speaking, to move Wieland's kisses off the gallery wall and underfoot.²⁰ At Harvard, Cohn chose to put Wieland's kisses back on the wall as a centrepiece of her lithography exhibition — but she did it to tell a different story than the one promoted by the artist, and to pleasure an American audience.

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Notes

- 1 Marjorie B. COHN, *Fogg Print Fans' Newsletter* (Cambridge, Mass.), 15 Aug. 1998, n.p. Cohn's declaration that *O Canada* was her favourite print in the show was not disclosed in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition. See Marjorie B. COHN and Clare I. ROGAN, *Touchstone: 200 Hundred Years of Artists' Lithographs* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Art Museums, 1998).
- 2 COHN, *Fogg Print Fans' Newsletter*, n.p.
- 3 In particular, I wish to examine how the multiple codes structuring *O Canada* have been differently interpreted by audiences possessing a range of cultural competences. See Pierre BOURDIEU, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984).
- 4 For information about Wieland and her work, I have relied principally on Lucy LIPPARD, Marie FLEMING and Lauren RABINOVITZ, *Joyce Wieland* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario and Key Porter Books, 1987), and on the bibliographies and chronologies appended to the catalogue. I also consulted the Joyce Wieland archives, at York University.
- 5 The words "causes cancer" are pencilled across one of the filmstrip frames, pointing to Wieland's acidulous engagement with health and later ecological issues in her art. But that is another story.
- 6 See Kathryn ELDER, ed., *The Films of Joyce Wieland* (Toronto: Toronto International Film Festival Group, 1999).
- 7 Joyce WIELAND, *True Patriot Love: Véritable amour patriotique* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1971). Johanne Sloan investigated some of the complexities of *True Patriot Love: Véritable amour patriotique* in a paper delivered at the annual conference of the the Universities Art Association of Canada, Toronto, 5 November 1999.
- 8 *Illustrated Flora of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago* was first published as *Bulletin*, no. 146 by the National Museums of Canada in 1964.
- 9 WIELAND, *True Patriot Love*, 140.
- 10 COHN, "Introduction," *Touchstone*, 12.
- 11 A brief history of the workshop is recounted in Robert STACEY and Liz WYLIE, *Eighty/Twenty: 100 Years of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design* (Halifax: Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, 1988), 80-81. See also Eric CAMERON, "The Lithography Workshop" *NSCAD: The Nova Scotia College of Art and Design Prints and Books* (Halifax: Press of NSCAD, 1982).
- 12 Dennis YOUNG, "Introduction," *Recent Vanguard Acquisitions* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1971), 19. In his assessment of *O Canada*, Young added that the lithograph was a "candidate for the most brilliantly conceived Canadian print of the year."
- 13 COHN, "The Artist's Touch," *Touchstone*, 28.
- 14 Thomas CROW, *The Intelligence of Art* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 1.
- 15 Margaret Trudeau may also have been an admirer of Wieland, but in a fit of exasperation at her husband's preference for "reason over passion" she is reported to have torn the hand-stitched letters off a Wieland quilt of the same name and to have "flung them in his face." Olivia WARD TAYLOR, "Artist Joyce Wieland," quoted by LIPPARD, FLEMING, RABINOVITZ, "Watershed: Contradiction, Communication and Canada in Joyce Wieland's Work," *Joyce Wieland*, 181, note 18.

16 "O Canada" was adopted by Parliament as the official national anthem in 1967, the year of the country's centennial. The music was composed by Calixa Lavallée and the verses written by Judge Adolphe-Basile Routhier in 1880. For most of the period following its composition, the song was associated with French-speaking Québec.

17 See "Kay Armitage Interviews Joyce Wieland," *Take One* 3 (February 1972): 23.

18 WIELAND, *Take One*, 24.

19 STACEY and WYLIE, *Eighty/Twenty*, 81. I am grateful to the artist Gerald Ferguson, who was instrumental in the success of the Lithography Workshop in Halifax, for first drawing my attention to *Kiss Off*.

20 Sarah Hollenberg, *Sarah, You Just Can't Have 50,000 Perfect Kisses*, installation piece, Gallery II at the Nova Scotia School of Art and Design, 1999.

L'O CANADA Entre féminisme et patriotisme

Cet essai étudie les images de rouges à lèvres de Joyce Wieland, de 1963 à 1971, spécialement celles où elle envoie des baisers au Canada, et examine les différentes manières dont son expression d'un patriotisme féminisé est interprétée par le public. Lorsque l'artiste a créé la lithographie *O Canada* en 1970, elle habitait aux États-Unis depuis huit ans. Elle a demeuré à New York pendant dix ans avant de revenir à Toronto. Pendant la décennie passée loin du Canada — loin de son «foyer et de sa terre natale!», comme le dit le premier vers de la version anglaise de l'hymne national du Canada — elle a développé une technique multipartite. Mais elle n'a fait qu'une seule lithographie, *O Canada*, exécutée à Halifax, au Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, en tant qu'artiste invitée et professeur durant un semestre en 1970.

Dans *O Canada*, Joyce Wieland nous livre la fragile tactilité de sa propre peau. Un baiser de ses lèvres se répète 68 fois sur la lithographie, chaque baiser représentant une syllabe sexualisée de l'hymne national canadien. En tant que féministe et nationaliste, Wieland a joué avec le fait que l'hymne a été composé au masculin. Le deuxième vers du premier couplet demande à l'auditoire de chanter «un véritable amour de la patrie anime tous tes fils», sans se préoccuper des distinctions de genre. La lithographie marie ironiquement l'amour masculin de la patrie à l'érotisme féminin tout en refusant d'évacuer la tension entre les deux. En dépit de la remarque de Thomas Crow que l'objet de l'art est muet, la lithographie semble parler avec mordant et humour. Mais comment parle-t-elle? La remarque de Crow sur le silence de l'objet de l'art montre une fâcheuse contradiction, car c'est le propre de l'art que de résister à l'interprétation tout en l'invitant. En essayant de trouver exactement les sons émis par les traces de rouge à lèvres dans «O Canada» et à qui la lithographie demande une interprétation, quels «cœurs ardents» (pour reprendre une autre expression de l'hymne national) pourraient y répondre, l'essai mène une enquête auprès des publics contemporains de la lithographie, y compris le premier ministre Trudeau. Il enquête aussi auprès des publics d'aujourd'hui.

Il y a plus que de l'humour et de l'érotisme féminin qui distingue le patriotisme de *O Canada* du patriotisme exprimé par l'hymne ou par le drapeau canadiens. La grandiloquence du drapeau, avec le blanc de la neige et le rouge de la Gendarmerie royale, est contredite, dans la lithographie, par l'emploi de papier blanc cassé et de rouges légèrement atténués pour les lèvres. Le fort con-

traste chromatique des rouges à lèvres de Madison Avenue et de la publicité pour dentifrices est également contredite, atténuant aussi bien les couleurs d'Ottawa que celles de Madison Avenue. *O Canada* est un manifeste politique qui ne touche pas de la même manière différents publics. Comme l'ironie, cette lithographie a plusieurs façons de mordre.

Traduction: Élise Bonnette