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Detail, Lorraine Malach, *The Story of Life*, panel 2, "The Cambrian." (Photo: Susan Surette) | Détail, Lorraine Malach, *The Story of Life*, panneau 2, « The Cambrian ». (Photo : Susan Surette)

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Le quatrième Colloque international Max et Iris Stern, ART+RELIGION, et ce numéro spécial ont été subventionés grâce à l'*Aide aux ateliers et aux colloques de recherche* du *Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada*.

The artistic expression of religious beliefs and sentiments is a recurrent topic in art historical research. The corpus is enormous and open to interpretation. Readings may be mystical, spiritual, institutional, iconographic, psychoanalytical, linguistic, anthropological, or ideological … the list of viable approaches is very long. As fascinating as these lines of inquiry have been, and continue to be, the blowback phenomenon – iconoclasm – has been equally productive of scholarship, and promises even more in a culture attuned to unwritten histories, the encoding of forbidden knowledge, and the art of ekphrasis. All such investigation is about history, however, and contemporary religious art, in Canada and elsewhere, remains a delicate and sometimes contentious subject. Its chroniclers, curators, critics, and practitioners often camouflage their studies in the secularisms of identity politics and material culture.

But religion matters to many people, whether it actively guides their lives or haunts their memories and imaginations, just as art matters. It should not be surprising that art and religion continue to feed each other, to be complicit in their shaping of contemporary words and images. And it is no wonder that much of this imagery is wondrous and worthy of contemplation and analysis.

Nor am I surprised that the guest editor of this thematic issue has taken on such a challenging topic. Loren Lerner has looked closely at expressions of memory in art, with a focus on the traumas of the twentieth century. Mindful of social actors and their agency in times of trial, and with great empathy, she has also attended to ordinary human experience, the visual representation of life passages such as childhood and aging, and the intensification of being that occurs within certain activities, such as reading or drawing. In all her research projects, Loren Lerner has focused on art that forms bridges between individuals and spans diverse communities.

The springboard of this particular project was ART+RELIGION, the fourth Max and Iris Stern International Symposium organized by the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, in collaboration with Concordia University. With the generous support of an Aid to Research Workshops and Conferences grant of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Loren Lerner has developed the findings of that conference into this special issue of the *Journal of Canadian Art History*.

Martha Langford

L'expression artistique des croyances et sentiments religieux est un sujet qui revient périodiquement dans la recherche en histoire de l'art. Le corpus est énorme et sujet à interprétation. On peut en faire une lecture mystique, spirituelle, institutionnelle, iconographique, psychanalytique, linguistique, anthropologique ou idéologique … la liste d'approches possibles est très longue. Aussi fascinantes que puissent avoir été et continuent à être ces pistes de recherche, le phénomène contraire – l'iconoclasme – a été également fertile en littérature savante, et promet encore davantage dans une culture attentive aux histoires non écrites, à la codification des connaissances interdites et à l'art de l'ekphrasis. Cependant, toute recherche de ce genre sur l'histoire, et l'art religieux, au Canada et ailleurs, demeure un sujet délicat et parfois litigieux. Ses chroniqueurs, conservateurs, critiques et praticiens dissimulent souvent leurs études derrière le paravent laïque des politiques identitaires et de la culture matérielle.

Mais la religion a de l'importance pour beaucoup de personnes, soit qu'elle guide activement leur vie ou qu'elle hante leur mémoire et leur imagination, tout comme l'art a de l'importance. Il n'y a rien d'étonnant à ce que l'art et la religion continuent encore de se nourrir mutuellement, d'être complices dans le développement des mots et des images. Et il n'y a rien d'étonnant, non plus, à ce qu'une grande part de cette imagerie provoque l'émerveillement et mérite contemplation et analyse.

Je ne m'étonne pas non plus de voir la rédactrice invitée de ce numéro à thème s'attaquer à un sujet aussi provocateur. Loren Lerner a étudié avec attention les expressions artistiques de la mémoire, particulièrement ce qui concerne les traumatismes du XX^e^ siècle. Attentive aux acteurs sociaux et à leur action en temps d'épreuve, et avec une grande empathie, elle s'est aussi intéressée aux expériences humaines ordinaires, à la représentation visuelle des étapes de la vie, comme la jeunesse et la vieillesse, et à l'intensification de l'être qui accompagne certaines activités comme la lecture ou le dessin. Dans tous ses projets de recherche, Loren Lerner s'est concentrée sur l'art qui construit des ponts entre les individus et qui s'étend sur plusieurs communautés.

Le tremplin de ce projet particulier a été ART+RELIGION, le quatrième Colloque international Max et Iris Stern organisé par le Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, en collaboration avec l'Université Concordia. Grâce à une généreuse subvention d'Aide aux ateliers et aux colloques de recherche du Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada, Loren Lerner a pu développer les résultats de colloque pour ce numéro spécial des *Annales d'histoire de l'art canadien*.

Martha Langford

Traduction : Élise Bonnette

The papers I selected for this special issue on contemporary art and religion are significant in that they bring some order to a theme that has arisen persistently in Canadian art-making, sometimes against the grain of critical and curatorial interpretation. By discussing work that takes place in a Canadian context, these essays look at a culture that has fostered fascinating developments in this area. Given the importance of freedom of expression in Canada's pluralistic society, it is significant that contemporary visual expressions of religious feeling have flourished largely outside religious institutions. Understanding such expressions becomes particularly relevant when one considers Canada as a nation of immigrants with different religions and recognizes that matters related to identity politics and its visible manifestations are fundamental to the study of the Canadian social fabric. Moreover, Canada's current socio-political climate is strongly affected by a new type of far-reaching conflict that is increasingly interpreted not only according to national parameters but through the post-colonial lens of religious and cultural identity. This discussion of Canadian art and religion thus also provides a forum for reacting against the campaigns of religious organizations that create internal conflict within societies.

My essay on art and religion in Canada from 1926 to 2010 serves as an introduction to this subject. In considering works by artists and writings on art in Canada during this period, I explore motivations and imperatives, desires and prejudices, and themes and approaches. In recognition of the importance of presenting diverse viewpoints, insights, and analyses, the other essays, briefly contextualized below, treat parallel and complementary as well as different and contrasting topics.

Religious symbology can take the form of religious texts, rituals, or works of art.[1] As dogma was being rejected and culture re-examined after the Second World War in light of the weakening of Christian hegemony, Native American beliefs became an important spiritual reference in North America.[2] Carmen Robertson discusses several of the iconic images of thunderbird transformation produced by Norval Morrisseau in the 1960s and 1970s and examines the ways in which Morrisseau's shamanistic beliefs around healing and transformational revelation, consistent with Anishinaabe ways of knowing, are also influenced by Christian and Eckankar religious images and beliefs.

Today, many artists who, like Morrisseau, subscribe to a particular belief system are determined to express their religious traditions using a compelling, innovative visual language.[3] This is clearly seen in the work of Lorraine Malach, who created ceramic relief murals for Catholic religious institutions throughout Western Canada. Susan Surette discusses Malach's last major mural, entitled *The Story of Life* and donated to the Royal Tyrrell Museum

Les articles que j'ai choisis pour ce numéro spécial sur l'art et la religion sont significatifs en ce qu'ils apportent un certain éclairage sur un thème qui surgit de façon persistante dans la production d'art au Canada, parfois à contre-courant de l'interprétation des critiques et des conservateurs de musées. En traitant du travail qui se fait dans un contexte canadien, ces essais étudient une culture qui a favorisé des développements remarquables dans ce secteur. Étant donné l'importance de la liberté d'expression dans une société canadienne pluraliste, il est significatif que les expressions visuelles contemporaines de sentiments religieux se soient développées en grande partie en dehors des institutions religieuses. Comprendre ces expressions devient particulièrement pertinent lorsqu'on considère que le Canada est un pays d'immigrants qui appartiennent à différentes religions, et qu'on reconnaît que les questions reliées aux politiques identitaires et à leurs manifestations visibles sont essentielles pour l'étude du tissu social canadien. De plus, le climat socioculturel canadien actuel est fortement affecté par un nouveau genre de conflit largement répandu et de plus en plus interprété non seulement selon des paramètres nationaux, mais à travers le prisme postcolonial de l'identité religieuse et culturelle. Cet examen de l'art et de la religion au Canada fournit aussi une tribune pour réagir contre les campagnes menées par des organisations religieuses qui créent des conflits internes entre les sociétés.

Mon essai sur l'art et la religion au Canada de 1926 à 2010 sert d'introduction au sujet. En examinant des œuvres d'artistes et des écrits sur l'art durant cette période, j'explore les motivations et les impératifs, les désirs et les préjugés, ainsi que les thèmes et les approches. Comme il est important de présenter divers points de vue, perceptions et analyses, les autres essais, brièvement contextualisés ci-dessous, traitent de sujets parallèles et complémentaires aussi bien que différents et opposés.

La symbolique religieuse peut prendre la forme de textes religieux, de rituels ou d'œuvres d'art[1]. Alors qu'après la Deuxième Guerre mondiale les dogmes étaient rejetés, et que la culture était réexaminée dans la foulée de l'affaiblissement de l'hégémonie chrétienne, les croyances des Autochtones d'Amérique sont devenues une importante référence spirituelle en Amérique du Nord[2]. Carmen Robertson traite de plusieurs des images iconiques de la transformation de l'oiseau-tonnerre produites par Norval Morrisseau dans les années soixante et soixante-dix, et examine comment les croyances chamaniques de Morrisseau sur la guérison et la révélation transformationnelle, en lien avec les modes de connaissance anishinaabe, sont aussi influencées par les images et croyances du christianisme et d'Eckankar.

Aujourd'hui, plusieurs artistes qui, comme Morrisseau, souscrivent à un système de croyances particulier sont déterminés à exprimer leurs traditions religieuses par un langage visuel attrayant et novateur[3]. Cela est évident dans

in Drumheller, Alberta. Integral to Surette's analysis is an exploration of how this work contributes to the concept of Ecotheology through its focus on the interrelations of religion, nature, and the environment. Malach's art reveals the ongoing capacity of religious systems to inspire explorations that are highly individualistic and subjective, showing that artists need not reject orthodox assumptions, particular interpretations of truth, or specified ways of being in and seeing the world to be innovative and provocative.

Religious beliefs and practices have been challenged over their approach to gender, in large measure through discussions shaped by feminist and post-colonial discourse. Valerie Behiery, in her study of Arwa Abouon, a Muslim artist, examines how Abouon addresses questions pertaining to identity, selfhood, belonging, and spiritual practice in works that convey a relationship to Islam. A recurring feature of present-day Islam is the tension between interpretations of faith that are intent on controlling religious and secular life and a decentred vision characterized by acceptance of difference and a multiplicity of identities. Profoundly aware of these two perspectives, Behiery situates Abouon within the diverse social, cultural, and religious expressions of Islam.

The reality in today's secular culture is that religion has an effect even on those who do not see themselves as religious. In Canada, as in the United States and Europe, with more and more people shifting their religious outlook and trading one religion for another, there is less continuity from one generation to the next. Among those who call themselves Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, or Hindu are large numbers of people who are only nominally part of their inherited religion. My own essay looks at the prevailing phenomenon of people who situate themselves at some distance from the religion of their forebears, yet maintain a productive relationship with it. Taking as an entry point Wassily Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1911) and his interest in ethnographic practice, I argue that Kandinsky's approach to art resonates with the ethnic and religiously inspired video works of Sylvia Safdie, Marisa Portolese, Marielle Nitoslawska, and Sarindar Dhaliwal and serves as an important way to understand their complex relationship of art and religion.

Religious expressions are dynamic reconfigurations that can change over time and in different places.[4] In many societies, the presence of competing religions makes the public appearance of religion difficult for religious communities.[5] One of the significant problems of our age is how to live together in a world where religious differences have become more widespread. Nadia Kurd examines the construction of mosques in Canada and shows that these buildings not only reveal tensions in the cultural makeup of Canadian cities but challenge the historical framework of mosque

l'œuvre de Lorraine Malach, qui a créé des murales de céramique en relief pour des institutions religieuses catholiques à travers l'Ouest canadien. Susan Surette traite de la dernière murale importante de Malach, intitulée *The Story of Life* et offerte au Royal Tyrrell Museum de Drumheller, Alberta. Un élément essentiel de l'analyse de Surrette, consiste à voir comment cette œuvre contribue au concept d'écothéologie à travers sa focalisation sur l'interrelation entre la religion, la nature et l'environnement. L'art de Malach révèle la capacité persistante des systèmes religieux d'inspirer des explorations hautement individualistes et subjectives, démontrant que les artistes n'ont pas besoin de rejeter des théories orthodoxes, particulièrement les interprétations de la vérité, ou des manières spécifiques d'être et de voir le monde pour être novateurs et provocateurs.

Les croyances et pratiques religieuses ont été remises en question à propos de leur relation au genre, principalement dans des débats élaborés par le discours féministe et postcolonial. Valerie Behiery, dans son essai sur l'artiste musulmane Arwa Abouon, considère comment Abouon traite des questions relatives à l'identité, au soi, à l'appartenance et aux pratiques spirituelles dans des œuvres qui communiquent une relation à l'islam. Un aspect récurrent de l'islam contemporain est la tension entre une interprétation de la religion qui cherche à contrôler la vie religieuse et séculière et une vision décentralisée caractérisée par l'acceptation des différences et de la multiplicité des identités. Profondément consciente de ces deux perspectives, Behiery situe Abouon à l'intérieur des diverses expressions sociales, culturelles et religieuses de l'islam.

C'est une réalité de la culture séculière d'aujourd'hui que la religion a un effet même sur ceux qui ne se considèrent pas comme religieux. Au Canada, comme aux États-Unis et en Europe, alors que de plus en plus de gens changent de perspective religieuse et de religion, la transmission d'une génération à l'autre se perd. Parmi ceux qui se définissent comme chrétiens, juifs, musulmans, bouddhistes ou hindous, un grand nombre ne sont que de nom associés à la religion dont ils ont hérité. Mon propre essai étudie le phénomène largement répandu de gens qui se situent eux-mêmes à une certaine distance de la religion de leurs ancêtres et qui, pourtant, conservent avec elle une relation productive. Prenant comme point de départ l'ouvrage de Wassily Kandinsky *Du spirituel dans l'art* (1911) et son intérêt pour l'ethnographie, je soutiens que l'approche de Kandinsky à l'art trouve un écho dans les œuvres vidéographiques d'inspiration ethnique et religieuse de Sylvia Safdie, Marisa Portolese, Marielle Nitoslawska et Sarindar Dhaliwal, et qu'elle est un moyen important de comprendre leur relation complexe à l'art et à la religion.

Les expressions religieuses sont des reformulations dynamiques qui peuvent changer au fil du temps et dans des lieux différents[4]. Dans plusieurs sociétés, la présence de religions rivales rend difficile, pour les communautés religieuses,

architecture. While these buildings do not generally conform to the aesthetic or symbolic conventions of Islamic architecture, they employ visual strategies that articulate the lived realities of Muslims and the practice of Islam in Canada.

Artists who criticize the concepts and practices of organized religion may believe that such religion is not only outdated but damaging to the individual and detrimental to the community due to its political and social implications. This position need not mean that the artists themselves do not hold deeply felt religious beliefs. This dichotomy is perhaps best explained by the philosopher Jacques Derrida, who became preoccupied with religion during the last decades of his life. He recognized that religion is impossible without uncertainty – for Derrida, belief that is not qualified by doubt poses a moral and ethical danger. Louis Kaplan discusses Derrida's concept of hauntology and his idea of deconstruction, in which every structure that organizes experience represses something that returns. With hauntology in mind, Kaplan considers the important questions about traditional Jewish religious practices, laws, and commandments raised by Simon Glass's *The Ten Commandments/Prohibited Weapons* (2005), Melissa Shiff's outdoor sculptural installation *ARK* (2006) at the Jewish Museum in Prague, and Frédéric Brenner's *Diaspora: Homelands in Exile*, a collection of photographs from forty countries (including Canada) taken over a period of twenty-five years.

Each of the essays in this collection examines various religious and secular paradigms. Core methodological issues related to these interactions are addressed de facto, as they pertain, for instance, to phenomenology, postmodern philosophy, and theology. The confrontations between new artistic modes and iconographic traditions as well as the survival of religious symbolic structures also constitute crucial areas of inquiry. In this spirit, six Canadian artists were invited to present contemporary works that address the subject of religion. Curated by Denis Longchamps, this gallery of images contains works by Goota Ashoona, Thérèse Chabot, Robert Houle, Ed Pien, Ted Rettig, and Mitch Robertson.

Within this conceptual framework, the keynote address at the ART+RELIGION symposium in Montreal in 2010, delivered by AA Bronson, is presented as the artist's reflections on his life and work. His address took its structure from the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians, a letter of grave concern written to exhort believers to stand firmly with Jesus in their faith and to adhere to the right use of their Christian freedom. Bronson, situating himself as a survivor of trauma and, as a gay man, as a witness to the violence, sickness, and death that has affected his community, discusses his rebellion against notions of individual and artistic identity, and tells how he came

la manifestation publique de la religion[5]. Un des problèmes importants de notre époque est la vie en commun dans un monde où les différences religieuses sont maintenant répandues. Nadia Kurd étudie la construction de mosquées au Canada et montre que non seulement ces édifices révèlent des tensions dans la composition culturelle du Canada, mais qu'ils interpellent le cadre historique de l'architecture des mosquées. Bien que ces édifices ne soient généralement pas conformes aux conventions esthétiques ou symboliques de l'architecture islamique, ils utilisent des stratégies visuelles qui expriment la réalité vécue par les musulmans et la pratique de l'islam au Canada.

Les artistes qui contestent les concepts et pratiques des religions organisées peuvent croire que ces religions sont non seulement démodées, mais nuisibles à l'individu et préjudiciables à la communauté à cause de leurs implications politiques et sociales. Cette position ne signifie pas que les artistes eux-mêmes n'ont pas de croyances religieuses profondes. C'est le philosophe Jacques Derrida qui a peut-être le mieux expliqué cette dichotomie, alors qu'il s'est posé des questions sur la religion au cours des dernières décennies de sa vie. Il reconnaissait qu'il n'y a pas de religion sans incertitude. Pour Derrida, la foi qui n'est pas tempérée par le doute pose un danger moral et éthique. Louis Kaplan examine le concept derridien d'hantologie et son idée de la déconstruction, où chaque structure qui organise l'expérience réprime quelque chose en retour. En pensant à l'hantologie, Kaplan examine les importantes questions sur les pratiques, les lois et les commandements juifs traditionnels que soulève l'œuvre de Simon Glass *The Ten Commandments/Prohibited Weapons* (2005), l'imposante installation extérieure de Melissa Shiff *ARK* (2006) au musée juif de Prague, et *Diaspora: Homelands in Exile* de Frédéric Brenner, collection de photographies prises dans quarante pays (y compris le Canada) sur une période de vingt-cinq ans, en lien avec Derrida.

Chacun des essais de la présente collection étudie divers paradigmes religieux et séculiers. Par le fait même, des questions méthodologiques centrales reliées à ces interactions sont abordées dans la mesure où elles appartiennent, par exemple, à la phénoménologie, à la philosophie postmoderne et à la théologie. Les confrontations entre nouveaux modes artistiques et traditions iconographiques ainsi que la survivance de structures symboliques religieuses constituent également des secteurs cruciaux de recherche. Dans cet esprit, six artistes canadiens ont été invités à présenter des œuvres contemporaines qui abordent le sujet de la religion. Cette galerie d'images, organisée par Denis Longchamps, contient des œuvres de Goota Ashoona, Thérèse Chabot, Robert Houle, Ed Pien, Ted Rettig et Mitch Robertson.

C'est à l'intérieur de ce cadre conceptuel qu'est présenté le discours d'ouverture du colloque ART+RELIGION qui s'est tenu en 2010, à Montréal.

to find his theological voice in a world where art was uncomfortable with religion and religion was uncomfortable with art.

In their informative and interpretive aspects, the essays and art works in this special issue of *JCAH* are meant to stimulate research into the art historical developments and recent intersections of art and religion. By examining the ways religion has interacted with contemporary art, these explorations set the stage for further inquiries that recognize the multi-faceted nature of religious belief and its many manifestations in Canadian contemporary art.

Loren Lerner

NOTES

1 Mircea ELIADE provides an extensive multi-faith analysis of the meaning of religious visual symbols in *Images and Symbols*: *Studies in Religious Symbolism*, trans. Philip Mairet (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961). Robert CUMMINGS, in *The Truth of Broken Symbols* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), offers a cross-cultural study of the ways that symbols function from a theological and philosophical perspective.

2 The impact of Native American art and shamanistic beliefs has been well documented in discussions on the British painter Alan Davie and the American abstract expressionists Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Adolph Gottlieb, and Barnett Newman, who saw the art of indigenous peoples through the lenses of exoticism and primitivism.

3 See, for example, Maurice HALBWACHS, *On Collective Memory* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1950). Halbwachs examines how we use our mental images of the present to reconstruct our past, in the same way pilgrims to the Holy Land over the centuries have evoked very different images of the events of Jesus's life. In *Religion as a Chain of Memory* (Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), Daniele HERVIEU–LÉGER argues that religious belief involves a shared understanding of collective memories gleaned from the past.

4 See *Religion: Beyond a Concept,* edited and with an introduction by Hent DE VRIES (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008). This text consists of forty-four articles by scholars from nine countries and diverse disciplines that consider how religion is being reconfigured in the twenty-first century. In the introduction Vries examines the question, "Why Still 'Religion'?" and argues that religion will continue to have a crucial role in human existence, both individually and communally, because of its social, intellectual, and experiential possibilities.

5 Some of the more comprehensive publications on religion, pluralism, and transnational religious expressions include: *Religious Pluralism, Globalization, and World Politics,* ed. Thomas BANCHOFF (New York and Oxford: Oxford University

Donné par AA Bronson, ce discours exposait les réflexions de l'artiste sur sa vie et son œuvre. Il tirait sa structure de la lettre de Paul aux Galates, texte qui exprime de sérieuses inquiétudes et exhorte les croyants à demeurer fermes dans la foi en Jésus et à adhérer à un juste usage de leur liberté de chrétiens. Bronson, se situant lui-même comme survivant d'un traumatisme et, en tant qu'homosexuel, comme témoin de la violence, de la maladie et de la mort qui ont affecté sa communauté, parle de sa rébellion contre les notions d'identité individuelle et artistique et raconte comment il est arrivé à trouver sa voix théologique dans un monde où l'art est mal à l'aise avec la religion, et la religion mal à l'aise avec l'art.

Par leur aspect informatif et interprétatif, les essais et œuvres d'art présentés dans ce numéro spécial des *Annales* veulent stimuler la recherche sur les développements historiques de l'art et les récents points de rencontre entre l'art et la religion. En examinant les modes d'interaction de la religion avec l'art contemporain, ces explorations jettent les bases de recherches futures qui reconnaîtront la nature multiforme des croyances religieuses et leurs nombreuses manifestations dans l'art canadien contemporain.

Loren Lerner

Traduction : Élise Bonnette

NOTES

1 Mircea Eliade fournit une analyse multireligieuse étendue du sens des symboles visuels religieux dans *Images et symboles. Essais sur le symbolisme magico-religieux*, Paris, Gallimard, 1979 ; Robert Cummings, dans *The Truth of Broken Symbols*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1996, présente une étude transculturelle des manières d'agir des symboles d'un point de vue théologique et philosophique.

2 L'impact de l'art et des croyances chamaniques des Premières Nations a été bien documenté lors de discussions à propos du peintre britannique Alan Davie et des expressionnistes abstraits américains Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Adolph Gottlieb et Barnett Newman, qui voyaient l'art des peuples autochtones selon une optique d'exotisme et de primitivisme.

3 Voir, par exemple, Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, New York, Harper Colophon, 1950. Halbwachs étudie comment nous utilisons nos images mentales du présent pour reconstruire notre passé, de la même manière que les pèlerins qui sont allés en Terre Sainte, au cours des siècles, ont évoqué différentes images des événements de la vie de Jésus. Dans *La religion pour mémoire*, Paris, Cerf, 2008, Danièle Hervieu-Léger soutient que la foi religieuse suppose une compréhension commune de souvenirs collectifs glanés du passé.

Press, 2008); Scott M. Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations: The Struggle for the Soul of the Twenty-First Century* (New York and Basingstoke, uk: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Peter Beyer, *Religion and Globalization* (London: Sage, 1994); José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994).

4 Voir *Religion: Beyond a Concept,* édité par Hent DE VRIES, New York, Fordham University Press, 2008. Ce texte se compose de quarante-quatre articles par des universitaires de neuf pays, appartenant à diverses disciplines, qui considèrent de quelle manière la religion est reformulée au XXI^e^ siècle. Dans son introduction, Vries pose la question : « Pourquoi toujours la religion ? » et soutient que la religion va continuer à jouer un rôle crucial dans l'existence humaine, à la fois individuellement et communautairement, à cause de ses possibilités sociales, intellectuelles et expérientielles.

5 Parmi les publications les plus complètes sur la religion, le pluralisme et les expressions religieuses transnationales on note : *Religious Pluralism, Globalization, and World Politics,* ed. Thomas BANCHOFF, New York et Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008 ; Scott M. THOMAS, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations: The Struggle for the Soul of the Twenty-First Century,* New York and Basingstoke, UK, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005 ; Peter BEYER, *Religion and Globalization,* London, Sage, 1994 ; José CASANOVA, *Public Religions in the Modern World,* Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1994.

Rejection and Renewal: Art and Religion in Canada (1926–2010)

LOREN LERNER

In 1979, as part of a series of performances by members of the artist-run centre Véhicule Art in Montreal, Tim Clark (1943–) performed *A Reading of "On Obedience and Discipline" from The Imitation of Christ, by Thomas à Kempis* (Fig. 1).[1] The chosen text, by the German monk Thomas à Kempis (ca. 1371–1479), contrasts the fleeting nature of earthly joy with the eternity of happiness to be found in God, the mystery of Redemption, and the love of Jesus Christ. Clark stepped before the camera, removed his shirt, slipped a black leather gauntlet onto his right hand, knelt before the book, and, raising his right hand to cover his face, began to yell the words. When the reading was over, he removed the glove and walked away.

The gloved hand in Clark's performance was a reference to Dr. Strangelove, a character played by Peter Sellers in Stanley Kubrick's satirical film *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964), based on former Nazi rocket scientist Dr. Werner von Braun who, like many former Nazis, worked in the American nuclear defence industry in the Cold War era. At the conclusion of the film, as Dr. Strangelove outlines the suicidal logic of the "Doomsday" device and his thoughts on survival underground after the end of the world, his mechanical right arm rises in an unintentional Nazi salute. Clark appropriated the gesture, using it to signal pain, violence, and the persistence of fascism.

Clark's performance dramatizes the problem of evil and the concept of theodicy. He attempts to show that, as Thomas à Kempis argues in *The Imitation of Christ*, it is possible to affirm both the omnipotence and love of God and the presence of evil in the world without being contradictory. His argument is based on the premise that if there is a world, and moreover a good one, evil is probably one of its features, but its existence does not impugn either the power or goodness of God. The question of apophatic theodicy has been a constant in Clark's work since the late 1970s, but after his 1979 reading of Thomas à Kempis and his performance of a companion piece,

Detail, Joanne Tod, *Flag for a State of Perpetual Motion*, 1988, oil on canvas, 213.4 × 269.3 cm, private collection. (Photo: Peter MacCallum)



1 | Tim Clark, *A Reading of "On Obedience and Discipline" from The Imitation of Christ, by Thomas à Kempis*, commissioned by Véhicule Art as part of Art Montreal for Cable TV, 1979, black leather gauntlet, text. (Photo: Tim Clark)

A Reading from the Lord's Prayer, later that year at Mercer Union in Toronto, he ceased directly addressing religion in his art.[2]

Tim Clark stopped quoting religious texts when he realized that artists who focused on religiosity or identified with traditional religious practices faced the possibility that teachers, fellow students, and art critics would either refuse to address their interests or be openly hostile to them. This was his experience, and for years it was also the experience of his students at Concordia who created religiously inspired art.[3] Visual artists desiring avant-garde status saw fit to cast aside religion and experiment with different ideas of art with the goal of establishing a new distinctiveness.

Art that had anything to do with religion was considered inappropriate for Canadian museums or galleries, despite the fact that some of the artists whose works were owned or exhibited had been involved in the interior design and decoration of the many churches and synagogues built between the 1950s and 1980s. For example, in 1964, Charles Daudelin (1920–2001) completed a baptismal font, tabernacle, and sanctuary lamp, all in bronze, for the Église Saint-Jean-l'Évangéliste in Montreal. In 1980, Eric Wesselow (1911–1998) created the Scroll of Ruth windows, a series of seven large-scale stained windows, for Temple Sinai in Toronto. In general, however, artists refrained from accepting public commissions of a religious nature.

The most dramatic and influential Canadian example of this turning away from religious art is that of Paul-Émile Borduas (1905–1960),[4] who led the Groupe Automatiste in Quebec and was the principal author of the manifesto *Refus global*. In 1922, Borduas began an apprenticeship with Ozias Leduc (1864–1955) during which he worked on church decoration, notably for the Pauline Chapel of Saint-Michel Cathedral in the diocese of Sherbrooke,

the Chapel of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart in Halifax, and the baptistry of the Notre-Dame Basilica of Montreal. His interest in non-religious art began with the cool reception to his religious art projects as a result of the economic crisis of the Great Depression. It accelerated with his discovery of modern art in Paris and in 1938 after he read André Breton's text on surrealism, "Le château étoilé." In an abrupt departure from religious paintings, the form and content of his compositions became landscape-like, closer to dreams and unconscious visions than to external reality.

Like many intellectuals of that period, Borduas detested the hold that the Catholic Church had on the people of Quebec, convinced that Quebec's petty nationalism and closemindedness had cut its people off from positive developments in the world. With fifteen members of the Groupe Automatiste, he wrote *Refus global*, a manifesto released on 9 August 1948, which denounces Quebec's Catholic-centric collective identity.[5] His involvement with *Refus global* cost Borduas his job at the École du Meuble, where he had worked since 1937.[6]

Borduas's rejection of organized religion mirrored the philosophy of many Canadian painters between the 1920s and 1950s, some of whom were also art educators. This was a particular problem in Quebec: Alfred Pellan's (1906–1988) experience provides an example. In 1943, he was hired to teach art at the École des Beaux-Arts de Montréal, but its director, Charles Maillard (1876–1973), seeing Pellan's art and ideas as a threat to his own belief that religious and historical artworks were the cornerstones of art practice, rejected his work as too progressive. Their clash resulted in Maillard's resignation in 1945 and the development of a somewhat more liberal teaching atmosphere at the school.[7]

In 1946, to counteract the perceived distancing of art from religion at the École des Beaux-Arts and other teaching institutions in the province, Father Wilfrid Corbeil (1893–1979) and Abbot André Lecoutey (1890–1974), art teachers at the Séminaire de Joliette, founded the group Le Retable with artists Cécile Chabot (1907–1990), Sylvia Daoust (1902–2004), Marius Plamondon (1919–1976), Gilles Beaugrand (1906–2005), and Bertrand Vanasse (fl. 1940s).[8] Dedicated to the renewal of religious art in Quebec and Canada, the organization sponsored exhibitions and founded the journal *Arts et Pensée* to disseminate writings more consistent with a conservative understanding of modern art.

Father Julien Déziel (1907–1990) and the artist Maurice Raymond (1912–2006), both professors at the École des Beaux-Arts, where the tensions that Pellan had experienced continued to simmer, were sympathetic to the ideas of Le Retable. In 1948, Pellan and likeminded artists at the school responded. Pellan formed the group Prisme d'Yeux with Léon Bellefleur (1910–2007),

Jacques de Tonnancour (1917–2005), Albert Dumouchel (1916–1971), Jeanne Rhéaume (1915–2000), and Goodridge Roberts (1904–1974). Their main accomplishment was the publication of a manifesto written by Jacques de Tonnancour that called for an art free of restrictive ideology. It appeared a few months before the much more radical *Refus global*.

Art educators in the anglophone community experienced no such conflicts. Arthur Lismer (1885–1969), principal of the Victoria School of Art and Design in Halifax (1916–19), vice-president of the Ontario College of Art and Design (1920–27), and head of the Montreal Children's Art Centre at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (1941–67), believed that the individual was a self united in body and spirit. He contended that the modern world's obstruction of the individual's aesthetic and spiritual development could be overcome through art instruction that stressed creativity and the student's response to beauty.[9]

J.W. Beatty (1896–1941), a teacher at the Ontario College of Art, also favoured attention to personal feelings, and his teachings emphasized meaningful expression, especially in the depiction of Canadian landscapes.[10] Exceptions to this approach were J.E.H. MacDonald (1873–1932)[11] and Lawren Harris (1885–1970). MacDonald was a transcendentalist who espoused the teachings of Walt Whitman and Henry David Thoreau, turning to nature as a way to reach a higher spiritual plane. Harris was a theosophist who believed in mysticism, the divine forces of nature, and the ability of all religions to help humankind reach greater perfection. He often explained that these ideas offered him access to a world of pure abstract form that gave his landscapes a timeless, spiritual feeling.[12]

For the most part, however, educators believed that religion had no place in the instruction of Canada's artists. One of the most vocal in this regard was John Lyman (1886–1967), who established the Contemporary Arts Society in Montreal in 1939. In 1949 he became an art professor at McGill University, and, three years later, director of the Fine Arts Department. Concerned that students were being given formulas and preconceived concepts rather than learning how to experience art, Lyman aligned himself with various European art schools and freethinkers' associations and in his numerous writings for Canadian newspapers and magazines insisted that students be exposed to international modernism and the formal properties of painting. He was opposed to art whose content was driven by spirituality and the fixation on representing the nation's spirit through landscape paintings.[13]

Some of the most innovative Canadian painters between 1920 and 1940, such as Kathleen Munn (1887–1974), Bertram Brooker (1888–1955), Emily Carr (1871–1945), Jock Macdonald (1887–1960), Fred Varley (1881–1969), and David Milne (1882–1953),[14] were motivated by spiritual ideas. In the 1930s

2 | Miller Brittain, *Sermon on the Mount*, 1947, pastel and gouache and pencil on paper, 63.5 × 47.9 cm, Beaverbrook Art Gallery, bequest of Dr. Paul Toomik. (Photo: Beaverbrook Art Gallery)

and 1940s, however, religious, metaphysical, mystical, and occult beliefs became increasingly suspect, largely because of their political association with the Nazi theory of Aryan supremacy. In the aftermath of the Second World War there was a pressing need to try to comprehend why things had gone so very wrong. The philosopher Theodor Adorno, in "Theses against Occultism" (1949), equated occultism with fascism and made a case that it was antagonistic to the healthy progress of Western culture.[15] In his reflections on ethics and metaphysics, he emphasized that, "after Auschwitz," philosophers had to find ways to explain meaning, truth, and suffering that neither denied nor confirmed the existence of God or a transcendent world.[16]

By creating paintings that image a more humane world, the artist Miller Brittain (1914–1968) exemplifies one approach to Adorno's challenge, though no direct connection to his philosophical ideas can be assumed. Brittain was a bomb aimer in the Royal Canadian Air Force before becoming an Official War Artist[17] and for him, the struggle for moral meaning was played out in his attempts to reconcile the horrors he had seen during his bombing missions over Germany with Christian thinking. A letter to his parents describes the apocalyptic-like destruction he witnessed as "an enormous lighted Christmas tree twenty miles away but straight beneath … I have seen of the mouth of hell."[18] He reveals his struggle in only one painting, *Night Target Germany*, otherwise concentrating on the humanity of his fellow airmen in realistic conté drawings of their day-to-day activities in the barracks and close-up portraits that evoke the traumatic after-effects of battle.

For several years following his return to Saint John, New Brunswick, after the war, Brittain produced dramatic paintings of biblical imagery taken from the New Testament. The depiction of Christ's faith and that of his followers and the juxtaposition of the sacred and profane in these figurative works resonate with the art and poetry of William Blake. Paintings such as *At the Foot of the Cross* (1947) and *Sermon on the Mount* (Fig. 2) demonstrate the artist's intense feeling for Blake's religious cosmology.

The artist Gershon Iskowitz (1921–1988), a Holocaust survivor who immigrated to Toronto in 1949, took a different approach to Adorno's challenge by endeavouring to arrange his thoughts and actions so that "Auschwitz would not repeat itself, nothing similar would happen." Although best known for his bold and luminously coloured abstract paintings, which represented Canada at the Venice Biennale in 1972, the appellation "Holocaust artist" pursued him throughout his life.[19] After the war, Iskowitz made many attempts to communicate his version of the Shoah, experimenting with styles, techniques, and pictorial devices in his search to find the right way to express his experience. The most poignant of these works have a religious subject.

In *Yzkor* (Fig. 3) sorrowful figures in a burial mound hold on to one another in death. Here, the artist visualizes a line from the Yzkor prayer for the dead – "bound up in the bundle of life, with the souls of all the righteous men and women" – and in this way mourns the loss of his entire family and the people of Kielce, Poland, murdered in the Shoah. Iskowitz was influenced by Cabbalist beliefs as a child and thus the abstract landscape paintings that followed *Yzkor* can also be interpreted religiously, as a visualization of the colours and light crystals that manifest the Godhead and an expression of the union of the artist's spirit with those who were killed.

For many Canadian artists during the 1950s and 1960s, modern art meant abstract painting and a dedication to purely aesthetic issues. This gave rise

3 | Gershon Iskowitz, *Yzkor*, 1952, watercolour, coloured ink, pen and black ink on illustration board, 30.9 × 40.9 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, no. 39915. Gift of Joey, Toby, and Alan Tanenbaum, Toronto, 1998. (Photo: © National Gallery of Canada)

to very different regional movements: Montreal's Plasticiens were principally oriented towards France and Europe in their singular interpretation of geometric abstraction, the Painters Eleven in Toronto looked south to the Abstract Expressionists artists of New York City, Vancouver painters favoured landscape-based lyrical abstraction strongly influenced by the British artist Graham Sutherland, the Prairies' Regina Five created bold, nonfigurative paintings,[20] and the Maritimes became a centre for Magic Realism with Alex Colville (1920–), Christopher Pratt (1935–), Mary Pratt (1935–), and Tom Forrestall (1936–).[21]

In the course of these developments many artists purposefully turned away from religion. Oscar Cahén (1916–1956), for example, who became a member of Painters Eleven, abandoned his somber figurative works of

religious subjects, such as *Praying Man* (1947) and *Praying Family* (1948), for vibrantly coloured abstractions.[22] Other members of Painters Eleven made similar changes. Jack Bush (1909–1977) produced expressionistic paintings with emotional and religious themes in the 1940s before developing a cubist-like approach to abstraction.[23] Harold Town (1924–1990) shifted between figurative and abstract works before producing his erotic *Enigma* drawings in 1964. These were published in a limited edition with a short accompanying text in which he took issue with Protestantism for asserting that sexual pleasure was evil and with Catholicism for its stranglehold on Quebec society.[24]

Interestingly, even as overt expressions of Judeo-Christian beliefs were being rejected, Roy Kiyooka (1926–1994),[25] an artist from Saskatchewan whose parents came from Japan, as well as three of the artists of the Regina Five – Kenneth Lochhead (1926–2006), Arthur McKay (1926–2000), and Ronald Bloore (1925–2009) – sought spiritual sustenance in the Japanese *wabi-sabi* appreciation of the transitory in nature.[26] These ideas, derived from Buddhist beliefs surrounding beauty, impermanence, and the integrity of natural processes, can be seen in pictures by these artists that are reminiscent of Zen Buddhist scroll paintings.

The categorical rejection of religion in modern art has been connected to the American art critic Clement Greenberg, one of the most influential art critics of the twentieth century.[27] For Greenberg, the reasons for a work's creation, its historical background, or the life experience of the artist were of little significance. His views, in conjunction with the tendencies of modernism, which encouraged the rejection of tradition, conservative values, and religious beliefs, were significant throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century. His influence was felt by Canadian artists most directly on three occasions: in 1956, when he praised the Painters Eleven at the Riverside Gallery in New York City, where the artists were exhibiting with the American Abstract Artists; on his visit to Toronto in 1957, when he particularly admired the direct simplicity of Jack Bush's (1904–1977) watercolours; and in the summer of 1962, when he was invited to lead the Emma Lake Workshop in northern Saskatchewan.[28]

Yet on closer inspection one discovers that spiritual concerns did not completely disappear from abstract art during this era. Jack Shadbolt (1909–1998), in 1955 the first instructor at the Emma Lake Workshop, continued to express the influences of his formative years in British Columbia: the symbolic mythology and material culture of the Northwest Coast Indians, Emily Carr's (1871–1945) paintings of abandoned Indian villages, and, most importantly for his abstract inventiveness, the concept of the artist as a shaman whose freedom to form imagery was akin to a creator of magic.[29]

Ronald Bloore (1925–2009), a member of the Regina Five, was instrumental in inviting Barnett Newman, an Abstract Expressionist painter from New York, to lead the Emma Lake Workshop in 1959,[30] the year after Newman embarked on the first of his *Stations of the Cross*, a series of black and white paintings (1958–66) subtitled "Lema Sabachthani" – "why have you forsaken me" – the words spoken by Christ on the cross.[31] Bloore, who appreciated the colours and forms of Byzantine paintings, identified with Newman's interest in the sacredness of art and his belief in the use of symbolic elements such as light, shadow, textured surfaces, and a limited palette to communicate ethical and religious values.

Although abstract painting dominated the Canadian art scene in the 1950s and 1960s, representational art continued to have a prominent presence. Ernest Lindner (1897–1988), a Saskatoon artist and participant in the Emma Lake Workshop, was a realist painter who specialized in landscape painting. Nonetheless, he respected the works of the abstract artists who led the workshops and wrote in his assessment that "There is no question that the artists' seminars at Emma Lake have caused the most important upsurge of creative work in those who participated. The intimate contact with contemporary New York artists of first rank and especially with the eminent art critic Clement Greenberg has been simply invaluable to all of us who took part in these seminars. I for one am deeply grateful for this 'window' to the larger contemporary art world."[32] Lindner's paintings, often associated with the colour field works of the American artist Jules Olitski, who led the Emma Lake Workshop in 1964, are strongly connected with the transcendentalist artists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This is particularly evident in his emphasis on the mystical qualities of nature and his visual meditations on the life cycle of decay and renewal.

In his book *High Realism in Canada* (1974), Paul Duval considers Ernest Lindner to be a realist painter, significantly leaving out any reference to the spiritual characteristics of Lindner's paintings. For Duval, "High Realism," a term he coined to describe the works of such artists, had as its principal features "objectivity of vision, sharpness of definition, precision of technique, accuracy of detail, and excellence of craftsmanship." While he grants that the artists bring to nature "a highly personal vision, style and technique," religious, mystical, or spiritual intent is considered antagonistic to the realistic approach.[33]

Duval brings the same limited viewpoint to the art of Jack Chambers (1931–1978), a realist painter and filmmaker who returned to London, Ontario, in 1961 after studying at the San Fernando Academia de Bella Artes in Madrid from 1954 to 1959 and travelling in Europe. Through the 1960s Chambers produced paintings that contained surrealistic images and fused personal

4 | Jack Chambers, *Olga and Mary Visiting*, 1964–1965, oil paint and mixed media on Douglas fir plywood, 125.1 × 193.7 cm, Collection of Museum London, Purchase, Art Fund, 1965. (Photo: Courtesy the Chambers Estate and Loch Gallery)

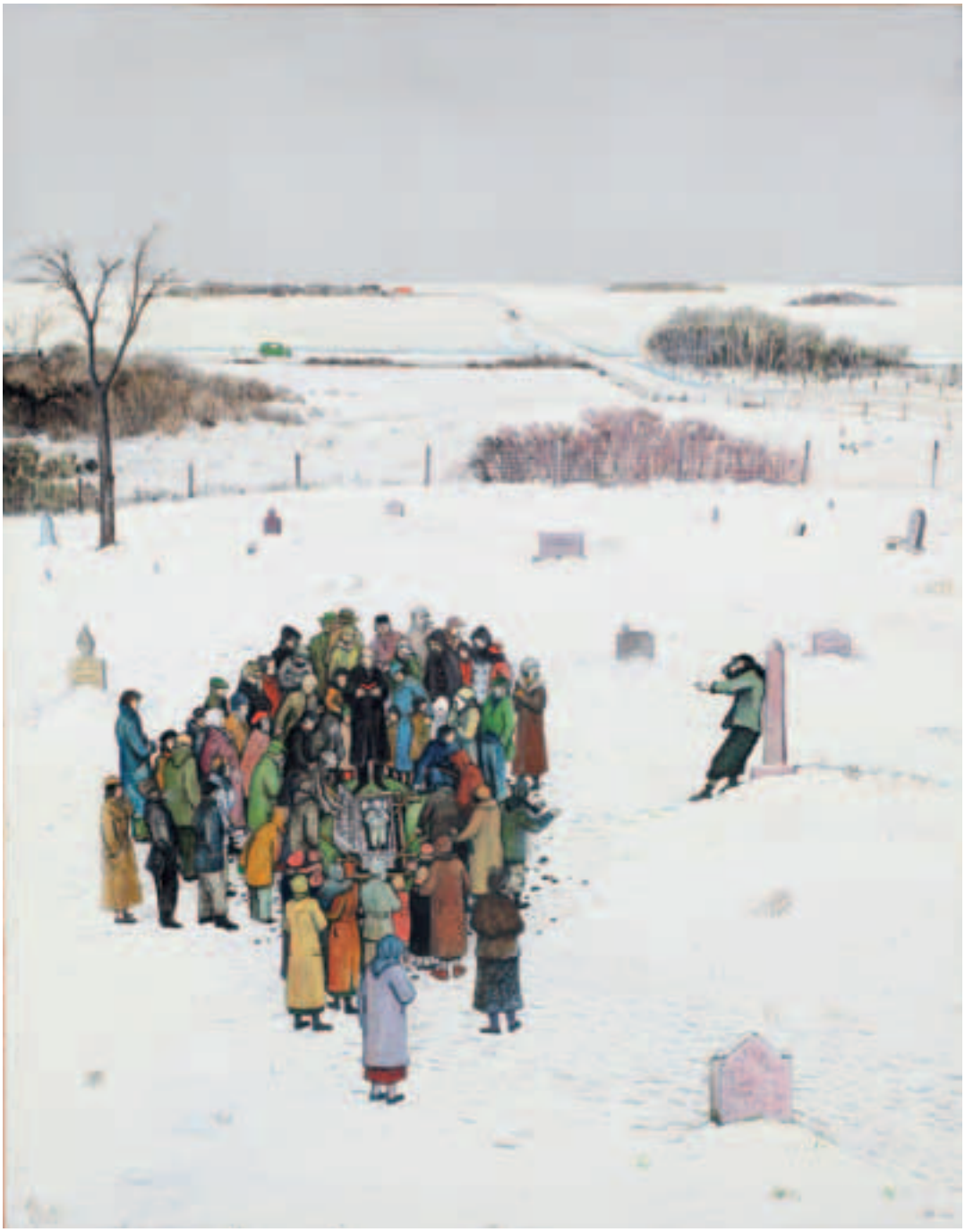
experience and memory. In *Olga and Mary Visiting* (Fig. 4), for example, the pale tones, discontinuity between subject and background, and the handling of light and colour as spatial elements give the painting an otherworldly sense of interiority.[34] In 1969, the year he was diagnosed with leukemia, a dramatic change took place in his paintings – the visionary qualities of his earlier works were supplanted by intensely precise representations of family, home, the city of London, and the surrounding rural landscape. Although there is nothing specifically religious in Chambers's works, the fact that he converted to Catholicism following his return from Spain, was very interested in Catholic iconography,[35] and drew on significant religious thinkers such as Johann Baptist Metz, Carl Rahner, Charles Webster Leadbeater, and Martin Buber in "Red & Green," a manuscript on art and perceptual realism he worked on between 1971 and 1978,[36] denotes a profound religious sensibility. The manuscript, which includes a scrapbook of photocopied excerpts from philosophers of religion, as well as writings by mystics, saints, poets, novelists, prophets, and artists, is persuasive evidence of the spiritual credo and mystical aesthetic that energized Chambers's art practice.

In fairness to Duval, it is possible that he failed to mention religious aspects because the artists were not ready to divulge such personal information. Only recently has Tom Forrestall, another artist in Duval's book, been forthcoming about his lifelong Christian sensibility. As Tom Smart writes in *Tom Forrestall: Paintings, Drawings, Writings*, which accompanied the retrospective exhibition organized by the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia in 2008, "More and more, as Forrestall probed the nature of his creative process, he came to understand that his art 'served God.' "[37]

An overview of writing on Canadian art from the 1960s and 1970s reveals an attitude towards art and religion that was typical of the secular climate of the period. In 1963, in the magazine *Canadian Art*, George Wallace, in his review of two exhibitions – one at Regis College in Toronto, the other at the Jesuit Graduate Faculty of Theology at the University of Toronto – writes that he does not see a religious art of any great significance developing in Canada, though the fact these exhibitions were held indicates that the subject had not been forgotten.[38] In fact, most exhibitions on religious art during this period were held in religious institutions or sponsored by religious associations.

In 1966, Regis College hosted *Canadian Religious Art Today: An Exhibition of Contemporary Art/L'art religieux canadien d'aujourd'hui: une exposition d'art contemporain*, which consisted mainly of works produced expressly for the exhibition. Among the artists represented were Ronald Bloore (*Untitled*), Bruno Bobak (1923–) (*Lazarus*), Alex Colville (*Woman and Terrier*), Tom Forrestall (*The Twelfth Station* and *The Lost Souls*), Jack Humphrey (1901–1967) (*In the Beginning*), Ernest Lindner (*Forest Cathedral*), Kazua Nakamura (1926–2002) (*Inner Structure*), Claude Roussel (1930–) (*Descent of the Spirit* and *Crucifix*), Harold Town (*Mechanical Nativity*), and Jack Shadbolt (*Ritual Blue*). In short texts accompanying the exhibition, which included laudatory comments by William Bothwell from the Christ Church Deanery in Montreal and Rabbi Gunther Plaut from Toronto's Holy Blossom Temple, Guy Viau, director of the Musée du Québec, lamented the state of contemporary religious art: "Our imagery suffers either from affectation, languor, wooliness, or from crudeness of expression and an aggressive bad taste." In the exhibition's new works he saw "the signs of a renewal of sacred art, a renewal which ought to concern all of us, artists and faithful."[39]

Despite this call to action, the exhibition had little consequence. By this time art criticism had relegated religious sentiment to the realm of "folk" or "primitive" art. In 1974, in a text written for the National Gallery of Canada's exhibition *People's Art: Naïve Art in Canada/L'art populaire : l'art naïf au Canada*, J. Russell Harper links the religious paintings and carvings of "artisans" from Quebec's past to the works of Simone Mary Bouchard (1912–1945), an artist active in the 1930s and 1940s who had no formal



5 | William Kurelek, *Lest We Repent …*, 1964, oil on pressed board, 68.60 × 53.30 cm, Agnes Etherington Art Centre, no. 09-006, George Taylor Richardson Memorial Fund, 1966. (Photo: Agnes Etherington Art Centre)

training.[40] Bouchard was considered to have an unsophisticated approach to representation in her genre scenes, which were imbued with religious feeling and featured the people and scenery in and around the Charlevoix region.

William Kurelek (1927–1977) was also seen from this perspective, despite having studied at the Ontario College of Art and the Instituto Allende in San Miguel, Mexico. In many of the articles published in the 1960s and 1970s about Kurelek, whose paintings recorded life on the Prairies, the religious messages they contain were attributed to his lack of concern for technique, his love of Ukrainian folklore, and his stay at a British mental institution, which precipitated his becoming a devout Catholic. Robert Ayre came to his defence in his 1974 review of Kurelek's books *A Prairie Boy's Winter*, *O Toronto,* and *Someone with Me*. He argues that the artist is actually an innovator because of "his rather antiquated notion that art should *say* something."[41] A year later, in the article "Kurelek: Artist or Propagandist," Donald DeMarco agrees with Ayre in dismissing the oft-repeated criticism that Kurelek compromised his artistic purity by favouring religious symbolism, proposing instead that the artist, although a "religious painter," retained his integrity because he believed in the primacy of aesthetic values.[42] Indeed, Kurelek conveyed some very difficult religious messages, as exemplified by *Lest We Repent …* (Fig. 5). Kurelek believed that the artist was a messenger for God's word, revealing sin and corruption and encouraging people to follow a life of salvation. In this painting Kurelek chastises the grieving mother, set apart from the community of mourners in the cemetery, for refusing to accept a life dedicated to God. Her state of disbelief prevents her from recognizing that her dead child will have everlasting spiritual *life* after bodily *death*.

Similar to the attitude toward Kurelek as a "folk" artist, an anthropological approach prevailed when considering the "primitivism" of First Nations artists. In 1969, *Masterpieces of Indian and Eskimo Art from Canada*, the first major exhibition of Aboriginal Canadian art, was initiated by the Musée de l'homme in Paris.[43] None of the works were contemporary. In his review of the exhibition, Ronald Bloore pointed out that twentieth-century artists were interested in primitive art forms and suggested that contemporary Native art should be collected not by ethnographic institutions but by art galleries.[44] Nevertheless, the mythic view of primitivism, in the sense of a search for original supernatural sources, persisted even as contemporary Native artists began to be recognized. This is exemplified in writing about Northwest Coast artist Bill Reid (1920–1998), who was born to an American father and a Native mother. Encouraged by the anthropologists Edmund Carpenter, Wilson Duff, and Claude Lévi-Strauss, Reid relearned the Haida traditions of jewellery-making and sculpture. In the sculpture *The*

6 | Bill Reid, *The Raven Discovering Mankind in a Clamshell*, 1970, boxwood, overall: 7.6 cm × 7 cm × 6.2 cm, Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Nb1.488. (Photo: Ulli Steltzer)

Raven Discovering Mankind in a Clamshell (Fig. 6), Reid depicts the Haida story of human creation.[45]

In Reid's retrospective exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1974, the accompanying texts by Carpenter and Lévi-Strauss emphasized anthropology's achievements in relation to Reid's work, particularly its promotion of the historical study of cultural forms and the meanings of religious symbols and concepts.[46] Lévi-Strauss saw in Reid's accomplishments the spiritual reawakening of a dying people: "our debt to Bill Reid, an

incomparable artist, is that he has tended and revived a flame that was so close to dying."[47]

On 3 May 1971, a tape of a symposium on the relevance of religious subject matter in art and the meaning of sacredness for contemporary artists was aired on CBC Television; a transcript of the broadcast was edited by John Noel Chandler for publication in *artscanada*.[48] The participants were Father Benedict Ashley, a Catholic theologian and philosopher from the United States; Ronald Bloore, an abstract artist and university art teacher; Edmund Carpenter, an anthropologist well known for his Inuit and First Nations fieldwork and interest in visual media; Gregor Goethals, an American artist and art historian interested in the religious implications of secular images and rituals in popular culture and high art; Gary Lee-Nova (1943–), a Vancouver artist and experimental filmmaker; and Gene Youngblood, a theorist of media arts and politics and a founding member of the Faculty of Film and Video at the California Institute of the Arts.

Ashley insisted that for religious art to be sacred it had to raise questions. Characterizing modern artists as creators, he explained that inventiveness – the possibility of creating something new in the world – was what constituted the sacred questioning aspect of art. Bloore emphasized that the "function of art has been to really communicate ethical, religious values and it can be done with a landscape or it can be done with a portrait. It doesn't have to be the face of a saint or Christ or Buddha or what have you." Carpenter argued that it is the "thought association" that makes works sacred and explained that he avoids words such as art and sacred, as do Native people, who have no word for art or religion, though they treat the environment as largely supernatural. Emphasizing the importance of creating images that evoke a sense of ethical action, Goethals said that "this would be a very wide kind of imagery and could be created by artists who have no particular association with a special religious community but would give a sort of common sense of humanity." Lee-Nova contended that sacred artefacts such as a Tibetan prayer wheel contributed to the "maintenance of order in the universe" and that art, to be re-associated with sacredness, had to be removed from the context of the museum and gallery and be reintegrated into the world to create a "sacred environment." Youngblood focused on the "incredibly destructive" concept of a "man-made world" and, in agreement with the other participants, pointed out that sacredness requires communication and the fundamental knowledge that as human beings we need to bring integrity to our relationships with nature and one another.

Significantly, not one of the participants referred to Judeo-Christian belief systems. The rediscovery of the divine came instead from the subtle influences of Aboriginal, African, Asian, and other non-European religions,

7 | Pat Martin Bates, *Stars Beyond Stars for Rumi in the First Silent Place*, 1971, 118.1 × 67.9 cm, perforated, embossed, print on paper, University of Lethbridge Art Gallery. (Photo: University of Lethbridge Art Gallery)

the artist's experimentation with art-making, and art-making that was responsive to the community and environment. Learning from images associated with the "primitive" world, in which life, art, and religion cohere into a sense of oneness, was a recurring theme in the discussion.

These opinions were consistent with notions circulating at the time about art theory and criticism. In the same issue of *artscanada* were related articles by P.K. Page and Dorothy Cameron. Page's "Darkinbad the Brightdayler: Transmutation Symbolism in the Work of Pat Martin Bates" focused on the artist's perforated paper works.[49] Analyzing *Stars Beyond Stars for Rumi in the First Silent Place* (Fig. 7), Page makes it clear that the non-Christian religious influence in these works by Bates (1927–) is permissible because the artist's orientation is mystical and unique. She writes: "It is by relating Bates' work to the art, architecture and literature of the Middle East that it reveals its deepest meanings … the pierced domes of Muslim mosques and the writing of Jalaludin Rumi, twelfth-century Persian poet to whom many of her works are dedicated." That Bates felt a connection to Rumi, a theologian and Sufi master who believed passionately that music, poetry, and dance were ways of reaching God, was acceptable. On the other hand, Christian sources were not. In Cameron's interview with Tony Urquhart (1934–), the artist explains that some of his favourite works of art are the "dark age" churches of Ireland, the Baroque and Rococo churches of Bavaria, and the graves of French and Spanish cemeteries. Cameron quickly qualifies his statement by interjecting that "the theme of Urquhart's art is of course, not religion, but the paradox and process of metamorphosis" even though *Rocamadour I* (Fig. 8), referencing a church-like building with wings, was clearly inspired by a visit the artist made to this pilgrimage town in France.[50]

In 1973, Terrence Heath published an article in *artscanada* about Otto Rogers (1935–), who had adopted the Baha'i faith.[51] "The Cosmic Landscapes of Otto Rogers" opens with an expression of Heath's discomfort with religion, even when the artist indicates its influence in straightforward terms:

> The difficulty of talking to Otto Rogers about art is that he does not think that painting should be discussed in terms of form but rather in terms of content. He speaks of paintings as messages, and that pulls the carpet out from under any art critic's feet, and of a good number of artists as well. If you let him have his way you end up talking about God and the spiritual life; if you fight to keep the paintings central, you begin to think of yourself as an idolater or crass materialist.

After "several bouts" Heath was finally able to discover "a pivotal point" at which it was possible "to stand with some certainty and face both Rogers's

8 | Tony Urquhart, *Rocamadour 1*, 1970, wood, oil, plexiglass, found objects, 162.6 × 50.8 × 40.6 cm (wings closed); 162.6 × 74.9 × 40.6 cm (wings open), National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, no. 16892. (Photo: © National Gallery of Canada)

paintings and his words without distortion – or at least with a minimum of distortion." Only by removing the artist from the works of art and focusing on the fact that paintings revolved "around an observer" could Heath dismiss the artist's spiritual beliefs and detach the works' meaning from their religious context to provide an objective formal analysis.

Since the 1980s, contemporary artists working with religious subject matter have found this domain to be a place of experimentation and challenge compatible with transgressions of traditional aesthetics and also of political, cultural, and social norms. Possibly the best examples of this development in Canadian art can be found in Father Daniel Donovan's eclectic collection of more than 150 works by over sixty Canadian artists.[52] Donovan, a professor of theology at St. Michael's College of the University of Toronto, kept his collection in his living quarters until 1999, when it was installed in the college's newly renovated Odette Hall. The works differ in style, technique, and medium, with some deploying traditional religious symbols and others evoking a more personal visual language.

The titles of the works in the collection attest to the wide spectrum of religious references used by Canadian artists since the 1980s. We find allusions to Christian theology in *Twelfth Station* (1996–97) by Michael Amar (1948–) and *Schriftbilder: Gothic (Wulfila: The Gospel of Saint Mark)* (1999) by Angela Grauerholz (1952–), and to Judaism in *Moses* (1998) by John Scott (1950–) and *Yahweh* (1994) by Simon Glass (1956–). The title of *Noche oscura (à St-Jean de la Croix) #1* (1992) by Roland Poulin (1940–) translates as "the dark night of the soul," the metaphor used to describe a period of loneliness and desolation in a person's spiritual life. *Akedah (The Sacrifice of Isaac)* (1994) is an abstract work by Leopold Plotek (1948–) that expresses a primal, almost incomprehensible drama (Fig. 9). Here, daytime has been transformed into nocturnal darkness and terror. Hints of physical forms reveal the hand of Abraham lit by a powerful current of red light and the head of Isaac lying immobile beneath a stack of boards. The fluttering of a blue bird-like shape hovering above Isaac's head specifies the intervention from above that prevented Abraham from plunging the sacrificial knife into his son. Sorel Cohen's (1936–) *Gothic Lament* (1988) combines two iconic images, a photo of the Brooklyn Bridge from the 1930s and a colour reproduction of the sixteenth-century crucified Christ at the centre of the Isenheim Altarpiece by Matthias Grünewald,[53] bringing to mind the suffering inflicted by modern industrial society as well as Christ's hidden presence in this secular world. It also contains Cohen's response to the revelation of the fourteenth-century visionary Saint Catherine of Siena that Christ is the soul's bridge to God.

The existence of such works does not necessarily mean that the artists want to be understood as embracing specific beliefs or the practices of a

9 | Leopold Plotek, *Akedah (The Sacrifice of Isaac)*, 1994, oil on canvas, 227.3 × 172.7 cm, The Donovan Collection at St. Michael's College, University of Toronto. (Photo: Leopold Plotek)

particular religion. Many artists continue to resist being categorized as religious adherents and dislike having their work analyzed from a religious point of view. The works in Father Donovan's collection, which range from figurative and landscape to abstract images and contain subjects that reference biblical, theological, and religious philosophy, do, however, signify a new

10 | Joanne Tod, *Flag for a State of Perpetual Motion*, 1988, oil on canvas, 213.4 × 269.3 cm, private collection. (Photo: Peter MacCallum)

perspective. This standpoint is most readily defined as postmodernism, a concept generally believed to have become important in the early 1970s.[54] It has been interpreted as an intentional departure from modernist approaches that developed as a revolt against the "traditional" forms of art, religious faith, and conventional society. Characterized by an interest in revisiting beliefs, periods, and styles from the past and an emphasis on being attentive to the countless individual and community stories of different people and their cultures, postmodernist thought holds that realities are social constructs that are changeable over time and in different places.

In *Remembering Postmodernism: Trends in Recent Canadian Art* (1991) Mark Cheetham and Linda Hutcheon examine the manifestations of postmodernism as "reactions to art's history, the construction of the subject, and the social uses of memory."[55] Through a detailed analysis of works by a diverse selection of Canadian artists the authors also reveal some of the

11 | Jennifer Macklem, still images, *L'Histoire de l'albatross*, 7:40 min, stop animation/video, 2008. (Photo: Jennifer Macklem)

ways that Canadian artists have responded to religious themes. For instance, Evergon (1946–), a photographer whose identity as a gay male is central to his work, mocks the art historical tradition of the male nude in religious art.[56] *Boy with Ingrown Tattoo* (1971), a photograph of a well-built young man in an outdoor setting, transforms the classical and Baroque renditions of Saint Sebastian by using ironic connotations that both inscribe and disrupt the memory of its Christian message. By bringing the homoerotic sexuality implicit in this religious image to the fore, the artist transforms parts of the time-honoured representations of Saint Sebastian.

Much of the visual discourse in contemporary art is associated with satire, irony, paradox, provocation, and playfulness. Artists who work with religious subjects have discovered that these same elements can be part of their own explorations, even if the resulting artworks cannot be designated as straightforward religious art. Others have dared to rediscover making a place for investigating the hidden dimensions of reality and self in ways that are consonant with the traditional purposes of religion. Joanne Tod (1953–), Jennifer Macklem (1960–), and Adrian Gorea (1979–) are Canadian artists who take new and different approaches to religion.

Joanne Tod's realist paintings confront key social issues such as power, racism, and cultural imperialism.[57] She focuses on the "re-presentation" of images appropriated from popular media, using devices such as improbable composites of subjects and peculiar texts and titles that contain alternative meanings to prompt her viewers to question the picture's artifice and its underlying significance.[58] When religious imagery infiltrates these paintings,

the context is unsettling and problematic. In *Flag for a State of Perpetual Motion* (Fig. 10), the collective religious vitality of a crowd of praying Muslim men appears to summon up an oriental vase in the form of a huge boulder that hovers in mid-air. Two strangely striped Stars of David sit on either side of the boulder, almost like rivets that are preventing it from exploding on the men. The overhead perspective is reminiscent of images seen on television in Asia and the Middle East. Tod suggests that electronic media systematically categorize the "other" with emblematic fragments that connote fanaticism and conflict.

In our daily lives, through media of all kinds, we are confronted with questions about faith. A wide array of concerns, from the personal and social to those dealing with science, nature, and the environment, are often characterized as religious or spiritual. This is the issue Jennifer Macklem addresses in her video short, *L'Histoire de l'albatross* (Fig. 11).[59] Reflecting on the environment from a spiritual stance, she challenges the notion that religion is an unacceptable subject of discourse for the artist. The narrative is loosely based on Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798), which contains the phrase "Instead of the cross, the Albatross/ About my neck was hung." The mariner kills an albatross, a bird that is often interpreted as a symbol of the Christian soul, and is forced to wear it around his neck as a sign not only of his suffering as a result of killing the bird but also his regret. The video shows layers of Macklem's hand-drawn stop-motion animation superimposed onto the artist's photographs of the coast of Newfoundland, which she later altered. The artist re-envisions Coleridge's

12 | Adrian Gorea, *My dear baby, do you know my name?*, 2010, gold leaf, acrylic, on wood panel, 21 × 28 cm, private collection. (Photo: Adrian Gorea)

poetic references to transcendence, redemption, guilt, and penance to evoke anxiety about the environment and fears of a technology-driven eschatological collapse.

Adrian Gorea's decision to appropriate Byzantine icons for new purposes arose from his experience as a Byzantine iconographer in Romania, where he painted religious murals and icons for a number of churches.[60] Following the Byzantine techniques of symbolic realism, in particular the use of light, inverse perspective, gesture, and colour, his icons reframe the methods of the Orthodox icon painters in order to establish an aesthetic inquiry that is an alternative to consumer aesthetics. Through the strategic use of popular culture images, such as Walt Disney's Looney Tune characters, selected because of the cultural influence of the Disney corporation, he creates unusual icons intended to precipitate self-exploration and analysis, in much the same way traditional icons are expected to affect the viewer. For example, in *My dear baby, do you know my name?* (Fig. 12), the head of baby Jesus has been replaced with the face of Hector the Bulldog and the bottom part of the Virgin Mary's face is wrapped tightly with rope, covering her mouth like a veil, a reference to Byzantine iconography in which the mouth symbolizes speaking holy wisdom. The Virgin Mary's hands are monster-like, provoking fear, which is also invoked by the hellish expressions on the two grim angel-faces of Bugs Bunny and Marvin Martian situated in the top corners of the icon. Gorea does not consider that his work either affirms or disavows religion. Rather, his artistic direction is driven by the complex meaning of the icon as a sacred narrative and its power for change and renewal.

Despite the opposition to religion in art and the resistance to writing about art from this perspective, religion in its different expressions, approaches, and interpretations appears to have once again become a recognized part of contemporary art practice. Artists in Canada are interested in producing works of art that explore, criticize, and counteract what they see and experience as the diverse manifestations of religion in a changing society.

NOTES

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Rejet et renouveau : l'art et la religion au Canada (1921–2010)

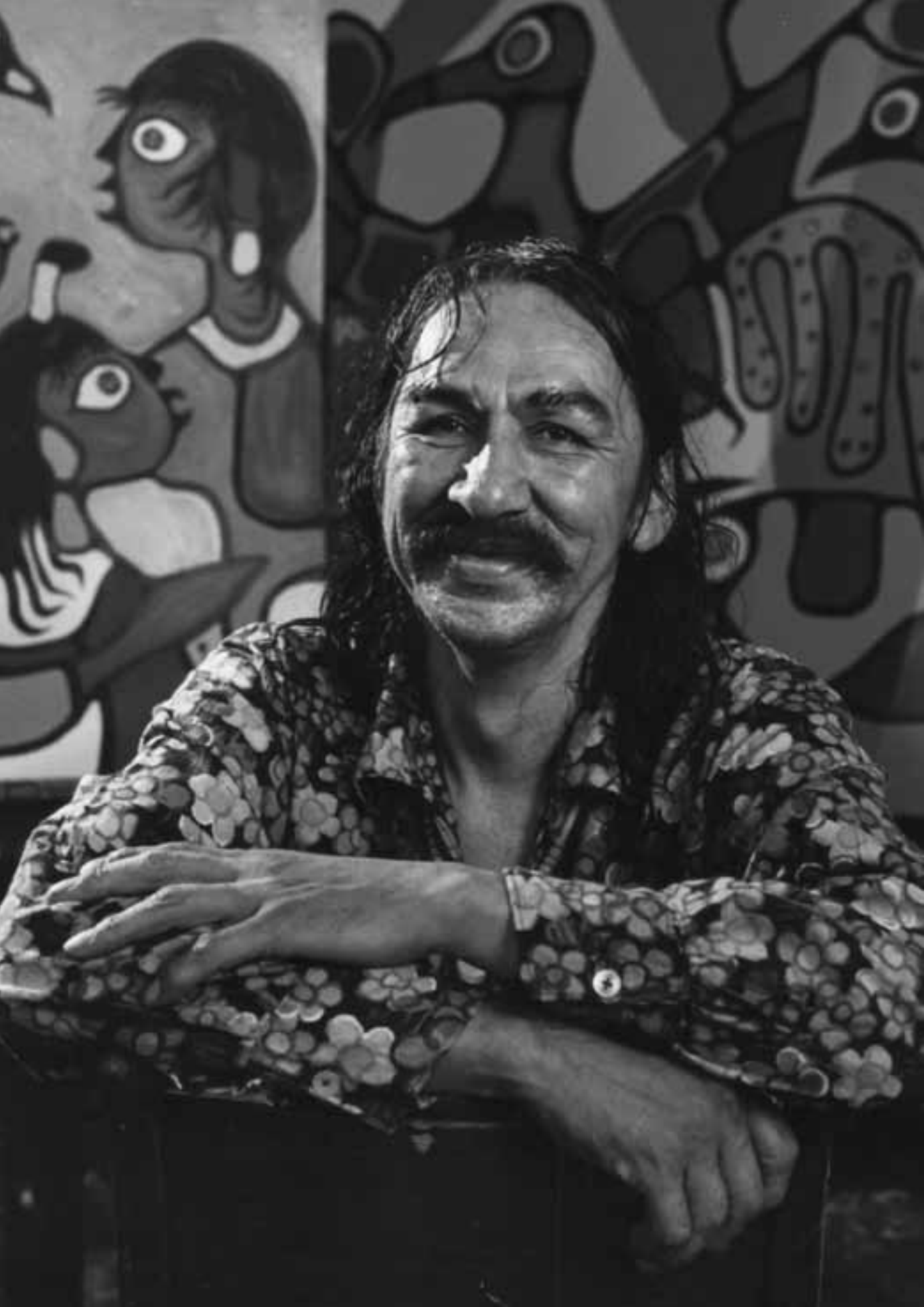
LOREN LERNER

En 1979, Tim Clark (n. 1943) a interprété *A Reading of "On Obedience and Discipline" from The Imitation of Christ, by Thomas à Kempis* (« Sur l'obéissance et la discipline, de *L'Imitation de Jésus Christ* par Thomas à Kempis »). La main gantée, dans la performance de Clark, était une référence au Docteur Folamour, personnage interprété par Peter Sellers dans le film satirique de Stanley Kubrick, *Docteur Folamour ou comment j'ai appris à ne pas m'en faire et à aimer la bombe* (1964). Clark a cessé de citer des textes religieux quand il s'est rendu compte que les artistes qui focalisaient sur la religion risquaient de voir les enseignants, les autres étudiants et les critiques d'art refuser de s'y intéresser, quand ils n'étaient pas ouvertement hostiles. Le premier exemple canadien d'un rejet de l'art religieux, et le plus influent, est Paul-Émile Borduas (1905–1960), chef de file du mouvement automatiste au Québec et auteur principal du *Refus global* (1948), qui dénonçait l'identité collective catholicocentriste du Québec. Le rejet de la religion organisée, chez Borduas, reflétait la philosophie de nombreux peintres canadiens entre les années vingt et cinquante, parmi lesquels des enseignants en art. Au cours des années trente et quarante, les croyances religieuses, métaphysiques, mystiques et occultes sont devenues de plus en plus suspectes, généralement à cause de leur association avec la théorie nazie de la suprématie aryenne. Le philosophe Theodor Adorno, associe l'occultisme au fascisme et soutient qu'il est contraire à un sain progrès de la culture occidentale. Miller Brittain (1914–1968), bombardier dans la Royal Canadian Air Force avant de devenir officiellement artiste de guerre, en créant des tableaux qui représentent un monde plus humain offre l'exemple d'une approche au défi d'Adorno. Gershon Iskowitz (1921–1988), survivant de l'Holocauste émigré à Toronto en 1949, a pris un chemin différent en cherchant à communiquer dans de nombreux dessins sa version de la Shoah. Pour plusieurs artistes canadiens au cours des années cinquante et soixante, l'art moderne signifiait se consacrer exclusivement à des questions d'esthétique. Pourtant, en y regardant de plus près, on découvre que les questions spirituelles n'ont pas entièrement disparu de l'art canadien durant cette époque. Roy Kiyooka (1926–1994), artiste de la Saskatchewan dont les parents étaient originaires du Japon, cherchait un

soutien spirituel dans l'esthétique japonaise du *wabi sabi* et sa compréhension du transitoire dans la nature. Jack Shadbolt (1909–1998) continuait d'exprimer les influences de ses années d'apprentissage en Colombie-Britannique, la mythologie symbolique et la culture matérielle des Amérindiens de la côte nord-ouest. Ronald Bloore (1925–2009) appréciait les couleurs et les formes des peintures byzantines et croyait à l'utilisation d'éléments symboliques tels la lumière, l'ombre, les surfaces texturées et une palette restreinte pour communiquer des valeurs éthiques et religieuses. Ernest Lindner (1897–1988) mettait l'accent sur les qualités mystiques de la nature, Jack Chambers (1931–1978), sur son intérêt pour l'iconographie catholique, et Tom Forrestall (n. 1936), sur son fort attachement à une sensibilité chrétienne. Un survol de ce qui s'est écrit sur l'art canadien depuis les années soixante et soixante-dix, révèle que la critique d'art a relégué le sentiment religieux au domaine de l'art « populaire » ou « primitif ». Les messages religieux dans les peintures de William Kurelek (1927–1977) sur la vie dans les Prairies étaient généralement attribués à son amour pour le folklore ukrainien et à son séjour dans une institution pour malades mentaux, en Angleterre, qui aurait précipité son choix de devenir un fervent catholique. De la même manière que l'on considérait Kurelek comme un artiste « populaire », un point de vue anthropologique prévalait concernant le « primitivisme » des artistes des Premières Nations, comme on peut le voir dans les écrits à propos de l'artiste de la côte nord-ouest, Bill Reid (1920–1998). Le verbatim d'un symposium de la CBC dans le numéro de 1971 d'*artscanada* sur la pertinence des sujets religieux en art et le sens du sacré pour les artistes contemporains, révèle qu'aucun des participants n'a fait référence au système de croyances judéo-chrétien. La redécouverte du divin est plutôt venue des subtiles influences des religions aborigènes, africaines, asiatiques et autre religions non européennes. Dans le même numéro d'*artscanada*, P.K. Page dit clairement que l'influence religieuse non chrétienne dans l'œuvre de Pat Martin Bates (n. 1927) est permise parce que l'orientation de l'artiste est mystique et uniquement reliée à l'art, à l'architecture et à la littérature islamiques du Moyen-Orient. De même, dans l'interview de Dorothy Cameron avec Tony Urquhart (n. 1934), lorsque l'artiste explique que certaines de ses œuvres d'art préférées sont les églises irlandaises du haut moyen-âge, les églises baroques et rococo de Bavière et les tombes des cimetières de France et d'Espagne, Cameron se hâte d'apporter des réserves à sa déclaration en déclarant que « le thème de l'art d'Urquhart est, naturellement, non pas la religion mais le paradoxe et le processus de la métamorphose ». Dans un article de 1973 d'*artscanada* à propos d'Otto Rogers (n. 1935), qui s'était converti au bahaïsme, Terrence Heath a dit ressentir un profond malaise lorsque l'artiste discutait de religion. Depuis les années quatre-vingt, cependant, les artistes contemporains qui s'inspirent de sujets

religieux ont trouvé que ce domaine est un lieu d'expérimentation compatible avec les transgressions de l'esthétique traditionnelle ainsi que des normes politiques, culturelles et sociales. Les meilleurs exemples de ce développement peuvent sans doute se trouver dans la collection éclectique du père Daniel Donovan de plus de 150 œuvres par plus de soixante artistes canadiens, qui vont du figuratif et du paysage aux images abstraites, et qui contiennent des sujets se rapportant à la philosophie biblique, théologique et religieuse. Le point de vue de ces artistes a été interprété comme postmoderne par son éloignement délibéré des approches modernistes et son intérêt pour les croyances, les périodes et les styles du passé. Ainsi, dans *Remembering Postmodernism: Trends in Recent Canadian Art* (1991), Mark Cheetham et Linda Hutcheon analysent *Boy with Ingrown Tattoo* (1971) par Evergon (n. 1946), photographe dont l'identité homosexuelle est au centre de son œuvre, en montrant comment sa photographie d'un jeune homme musclé transforme les représentations classiques et baroques de saint Sébastien en utilisant des connotations ironiques qui inscrivent et dérangent à la fois le souvenir de son message chrétien. Joanne Tod (n. 1953), Jennifer Macklem (n. 1960) et Adrian Gorea (n. 1979) illustrent des perspectives nouvelles et différentes sur la religion. *Flag for a State of Perpetual Motion* (1988) de Tod s'attaque à des questions sociales clés comme le pouvoir, le racisme et l'impérialisme culturel. La brève vidéo de Macklem, *L'Histoire de l'albatros* (2008), est une réflexion sur l'environnement d'un point de vue spirituel, et *My dear baby, do you know my name?* (2010), de Gorea, s'approprie des icones byzantines et des images de la culture populaire pour révéler le sens complexe de l'icone comme récit sacré et son pouvoir de changement et de renouveau.

Traduction : Élise Bonnette



Thunderbirds and Concepts of Transformation in the Art of Norval Morrisseau

CARMEN L. ROBERTSON

Over the course of his fifty-year career, Anishinaabe artist Norval Morrisseau (1931–2007) or Copper Thunderbird (Miskwaabik Animiiki) fashioned a unique visual language that articulated a wide variety of artistic themes, including shamanistic conceptions. He explored three main spiritual directions in his life – traditional spiritual teachings within the Anishinaabe culture, Christianity, and Eckankar – and these are also reflected in his art.

Morrisseau's oeuvre is typically infused with an intense spiritual force, but his imagery related to thunderbirds and notions of transformation most clearly expresses his engagement with art and religion. The power of his Anishinaabe name, Miskwaabik Animiiki – Copper Thunderbird – resonates in his thunderbird imagery. In 1965, with editor and anthropologist Selwyn Dewdney, he wrote *Legends of My People: The Great Ojibway* in which he explains the significance of the thunderbird: "The Ojibway believed the thunder to be a great massive bird called a thunderbird, whose eyes shoot out lightning and thunder. The first thunder in early spring was something good to hear, for the Ojibways welcomed their protector again from its home in the south where it had been all the winter. Offerings of tobacco were placed on the ground … or sacred pipes were smoked by the elders to the thunderbird in the early spring."[1]

Morrisseau produced a number of iconic images related to thunderbird transformation during his career, including two early examples from between 1958–1960, painted on birch bark, *The Shaman Riding a Thunderbird* in 1972, and the six-panel *Man Changing into Thunderbird* from 1977. Starting from a basis in Anishinaabe ways of knowing and proceeding through different life experiences, including, beginning in 1976, his embrace of Eckankar, Morrisseau shapes and incorporates disparate elements of spiritual transformation in these thunderbird paintings, each of which reveals diverse and significant moments in the artist's own changing spiritual understanding. This essay seeks to analyze the ways Morrisseau articulates unique notions of spiritual and personal transformation through his own visual aesthetic language.

Ian Samson, *Norval Morrisseau*, 1979, McMichael Canadian Art Collection Archives.

The Visual and the Oral: Placing the Anishinaabe

The Ojibway First Nations of the Great Lakes region call themselves the Anishinaabe, or the original people. The Anishinaabek believe their people were born on the continent they call Turtle Island.[2] This differs from the problematic, yet still recognized, Beringia or Bering Strait theory that claims that all of North America's Aboriginal peoples came from Asia from 10,000 to 25,000 years ago. Recent scholarship suggests that human habitation in the Americas can be dated as far back as 250,000 years ago, which calls into question scholarship surrounding the Bering Strait theory. Noted indigenous scholar Vine Deloria Jr. has been a vocal opponent of the Bering Strait theory, arguing that most Western scholarship begins with it as a premise and proceeds without questioning its validity.[3] Indigenous peoples in the Americas, including the Anishinaabe, disregard the Beringia theory in favour of their own creation stories. Indigenous studies scholar Leanne Simpson argues that the structure of Anishinaabek language and its creation stories provide both collectively and intellectually transformative knowledge.[4]

The dominant religion of the Anishinaabe, the Medaewaewin (sometimes spelled Medewiwin), was a society of medicine men and women dedicated to the study of the curative properties of plants, healing, and the pursuit of balance and well-being, according to Anishinaabe scholar Basil Johnston.[5] During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as art historian Ruth Phillips explains, Anishinaabe shamans, "became concentrated in the Midewiwin Society, whose members recorded their oral traditions, esoteric knowledge, and complex rituals of initiation by incising pictographic symbols on birch bark panels and scrolls."[6] Norval Morrisseau's grandfather, or Mishomis, Moses "Potan" Nanakonagos, was a widely known Mide and visionary shaman and Morrisseau spent hours listening to him and learning, absorbing oral traditions and developing an understanding of shamanistic ritual practices.[7] Morrisseau explains that the visions and dreams of the Anishinaabe, as captured in their pictographic drawings on birch bark scrolls and as rock art, allowed people to heal themselves.[8]

The Anishinaabe recognize a wide range of non-human persons who possess power. Johnston confirms that the thunderbird was the most revered of the *manitous,* or spirits, for the Anishinaabe.[9] Manitou beings were created by Kitchi-Manitou, the creator and Great Mystery, who endowed them with virtue and wisdom and infused them into beings and objects.[10] The Anishinaabe live in harmony with the manitous, addressing them and asking for favours. In *The Manitous*, Johnston focuses his discussion on figures who had "lived among the Anishinaabe people in human form in the early formative age of the people," including a number that were human or half-human.[11] He explains that while men and women could not

enter the world of thunderbirds, these manitous occasionally appeared as human beings.

Understanding the role of the thunderbird in Morrisseau's art demands a cultural context: it is more than just an idea for a painting as it is part of a larger symbolic order. His early works in particular operate within an Anishinaabe cultural frame. Acoma Pueblo poet Simon Ortiz explains how indigenous oral traditions reflect a belief system and consciousness: "The oral tradition of Native American people is based upon spoken language, but it is more than that too. Oral tradition is inclusive; it is the actions, behaviour, relationships, practices through the whole social, economic, and spiritual life process of people. In this respect, the oral tradition is the consciousness of the people."[12]

Educator Margaret Kovach adds that Aboriginal oral stories "tie us with our past and provide a basis for continuity with future generations."[13] The notion of storytelling involves far more than simply telling a tale. Cree scholar Neal McLeod emphasizes the centrality of narrative and memory, arguing that stories are analyzed and "brought to life by being integrated into the experience of the storyteller and the audience."[14] Johnston is one of the few writers from northwestern Ontario to compile Anishinaabe oral narratives, which he has gathered since childhood, and notes that he had difficulty finding many of the stories about the spiritual heritage of the Anishinaabe as he endeavoured to set the stories down "as they were told in the old days."[15] *The Manitous* includes a story about thunderbird transformation and thus is integral to this analysis.

Johnston shares a story about a man who unwittingly fell in love with a thunderbird woman and succeeded in becoming a thunderbird himself.[16] Norval Morrisseau recounts a similar version of this same narrative in two separate texts to explain *Man Changing into Thunderbird*.[17] In Morrisseau's accounts, the youngest in a family of seven brothers falls in love with the thunderbird woman but the oldest brother kills her, triggering a series of events that sends the youngest brother on an odyssey that stretches from Lake Nipigon or Lake Superior to a very high mountain, "maybe the foothills of Alberta … "[18] where the man became "afraid because he didn't know what was beyond there."[19] In each of the versions, the man enters the realm of the thunderbirds and the thunderbird woman convinces the others to allow him to become a spirit being.

Placing Morrisseau and Transformation

Morrisseau often painted the thunderbird and saw this manitou as one that spoke to him symbolically. Over the course of his life and career as an artist, his painting style and his ideas about spiritual transformation

changed. As this happened, paintings of the thunderbird transformation also changed.

Born in 1931 in northwestern Ontario, Norval Morrisseau grew up with his Anishinaabe grandmother Grace, a Catholic, and grandfather Moses "Potan" Nanakonagos, a sixth-generation shaman in the Midewiwin society. The artist had a solid understanding of both English and his Anishinaabe language. As a young boy, Morrisseau attended a Catholic residential school where, according to curator Greg Hill, he suffered both physical and sexual abuse.[20] After two years, he returned to his community where he continued his schooling but also, significantly, spent hours listening to and learning from elders. The story of Morrisseau's life has usually been cast within a romantic narrative that has tended to ignore the historic ills of colonialism, such as poverty and the policies of the Indian Act. Yet, clearly, his residential school experience and the racialized treatment he experienced as a Native man in Canada influenced him and his art.

His strong early exposure to Anishinaabe teachings and language provided the basis for his artistic translation of spiritual ideas. When he was twelve, his grandfather took him to an island for his first vision quest. Vision quests are common ceremonial rites of passage undertaken by Anishinaabe boys after years of apprenticeship and preparation.[21] Morrisseau describes this pivotal and life-changing event in the National Film Board documentary *The Paradox of Norval Morrisseau*.[22]

Morrisseau's paintings of transformation are invested with a sense of revelatory experience. His pictorial influences as a youth were rock paintings of vision quests, ceremonial images, and, most significantly, the noted Midewiwin birch bark scrolls. It is in these sacred drawings that Morrisseau embraced an aesthetic that shaped his own representations of the body. Using heavy black outlines and reference to interior bodily segmentations, Morrisseau began to produce contemporary art that reflected these influences.

In 1950 Morrisseau was stricken with a severe illness that led to his receiving the name Miskwaabik Animiiki or Copper Thunderbird. A medicine woman performed a ceremony to heal the young man and in the process honoured him with the powerful name.[23] During a healing ceremony such as this, Anishinaabe shamans invoke the assistance of the manitous to achieve a form of metamorphosis through transformative power for both the healer and the patient.[24] This naming ceremony forged his connection to the thunderbird manitous.[25] Morrisseau subsequently chose to sign his works of art with this name, written in Cree syllabics.[26]

At different points in his career, Morrisseau's creative style has been criticized by both First Nations and mainstream communities. In the 1950s,

local elders chided him for exposing ceremonial images to mainstream audiences. However, Morrisseau resisted challenges from Anishinaabek traditionalists, arguing that his images were unique, not merely copies of sacred images. He also argued that his personal aesthetic served to help decolonize artistic practice and social issues and eventually community members agreed. In a 1979 essay Morrisseau explained the pressures he felt from community members: "My grandfather showed me how to do interpretations of the shaman beliefs on birch bark. When I was playing with the other children, I was already playing the role of the shaman … The majority of these people were against me getting involved [in drawing shamans' scrolls]."[27] With the support of his grandfather, Morrisseau continued to paint subjects that spoke to him.[28]

In the late 1950s, Morrisseau's work centered on vision-derived images of spiritual experiences and animals painted on what Phillips calls, "commodity genres such as birch bark containers and replicas of drums."[29] These works were clearly connected to Anishinaabe teachings and therefore represent a transformative process aligned to those ways of knowing. This is the case with the two paintings of thunderbird transformation done prior to 1960.

The artist painted at least two early versions of *Man Changing into Thunderbird* on birch bark between 1958 and 1960 after his first introductions to Western art by his patrons and mentors Dr. Joseph Weinstein and anthropologist Selwyn Dewdney. One version shows two thunderbirds facing each other.[30] The thunderbird on the left side of the painting has both wings spread and is perched on a salamander. The bird/being on the right appears in a state of transformation. With a bird head, a left wing, and a thunderbird body, the being is bisected so that the right half remains male, complete with muscular chest, arm, hand and fingers, and a leg wearing a leather mukluk. The symmetrical composition of the overall image includes a representation of the sun, radiating between the two manitous. The thunderbird eyes emit lightning strikes, as described by Morrisseau in *Legends of My People*.[31]

The two forms are framed by circular symbols that include the moon and a segmented circle that may reference *megis*, the cowrie shell – a sacred symbol that appeared in the sky to the Anishinaabe during an early period of exile to signal their return to their homeland.[32] Overall, this early work represents a less stylized example of Morrisseau's later aesthetic language – black lines are less intense and the interior portions of the two beings add a sketch-like quality to the many detailed aspects of the two figures. The articulation of feathers and fingers, for example, is a convention Morrisseau discarded in his emerging visual aesthetic.

Morrisseau completed a second version of this painting during this period.[33] This work includes a frame, made from birch sticks fixed together

with strapping to resemble a stretcher frame for furs. It was common for Morrisseau to paint on birch bark during this early period and to frame work in a way that conforms to ideas of craft rather than to contemporary art conventions. Both of these early works demonstrate an instructive representation of Morrisseau's conception of spiritual transformation.

In the second version, Morrisseau reverses the transformational process, showing a progression of change from manitou to man. In this work, the thunderbird on the right is perched on the salamander. The arching, radiating aura that had surrounded the transforming man in the other work now frames the thunderbird/man. Clearly the salamander and radiating auras serve as signifiers for delineating a being that is undergoing transformation. This version does not include the lightning rays. It is unclear whether Morrisseau completed these two works as part of a larger narrative of transformation or if these pieces are simply configurations of the same theme.

The noted version of *Man Changing into Thunderbird* has been published twice. In 1979, the image was included in *Morrisseau* by Lister Sinclair and Jack Pollock, paired with a textual version of a thunderbird transformation story. Preceding this narrative is an explanation of the role of the thunderbird. In Sinclair and Pollock's interpretation of Morrisseau's fascination with these beings: "Morrisseau sees his Thunderbirds as strong, exciting, bringers of energy and fertility. Under the right circumstances a man of power, a shaman, can assume the formidable attributes of the Thunderbird. The man who changes into a Thunderbird is Norval Morrisseau – Copper Thunderbird."[34] This work was also included in the seminal exhibition mounted by Elizabeth McLuhan and Tom Hill at the Art Gallery of Ontario in 1984, which led to publication of *Norval Morrisseau and the Emergence of the Image Makers*. McLuhan explains that between 1958 and 1960 Morrisseau "set out the themes and concerns he would deal with for the next twenty years."[35] She argues that the themes are self and transformation and relate back to his 1950 naming ceremony. Clearly, these two works demonstrate a nascent sense of his artistic language but also reveal a strong relationship to specific Anishinaabe teachings about the thunderbird manitous.

As evidenced in works painted from the 1960s on, Morrisseau accepted the advice of early patrons such as Weinstein and Dewdney, both trained artists, who pushed him to move his art onto paper and canvas. Weinstein, according to Phillips, provided the otherwise untrained artist with an introduction to "modernist artistic sensibility and the values and conventions of the art world."[36] Easel painting afforded Morrisseau a level of seriousness that conformed to Western notions of "high" art and would have been unattainable had he continued to work in birch bark or hide.[37] This instruction marks the first transformation of the artist as he began to navigate an art world beyond northwestern Ontario.

When Morrisseau met Dewdney in 1960 they began an important relationship that culminated in a research and writing project published in 1965 as *Legends of My People, The Great Ojibway*. Morrisseau's two extended narratives and description of thunderbird and beliefs surrounding this manitou provide evidence of the artist's understanding of these beings.[38] Morrisseau also includes a personal narrative of an encounter he had with a woman from Red Lake, Ontario. He relates that the woman confronted him and said that since his name was Copper Thunderbird he must be powerful. "Then she told me, 'I am powerful, too. Also I have known the thunderbirds. Let us try our sorcery to see who is the stronger.' "[39] Morrisseau explains that her aggressive challenge is anathema to Anishinaabe protocols and tells her so. This story reveals both the perceived power of his Copper Thunderbird name and his understanding of the duty that comes with such a name.

Toronto gallery owner and art instructor Jack Pollock met Morrisseau in 1962 in Beardmore, Ontario. According to *The Globe and Mail*, "Pollock found the young native artist living and working in a shack on the edge of the Beardmore, Ont., garbage dump."[40] This meeting led to an important relationship between the two and to a solo show of Morrisseau's work at Pollock's gallery. At this moment, Morrisseau's art was reframed, moving from commodity genre work, as described by Phillips, to contemporary art in a mainstream sense. Critics judged his work in two ways: his art was contextualized within a Modernist art aesthetic that focused on formal aspects while the so-called Primitivist elements of his work captivated both critics and the public, who had not seen art like this. The art exhibition launched him into the art scene and inspired the artist to reach beyond his Anishinaabe ways of knowing for his inspirations.

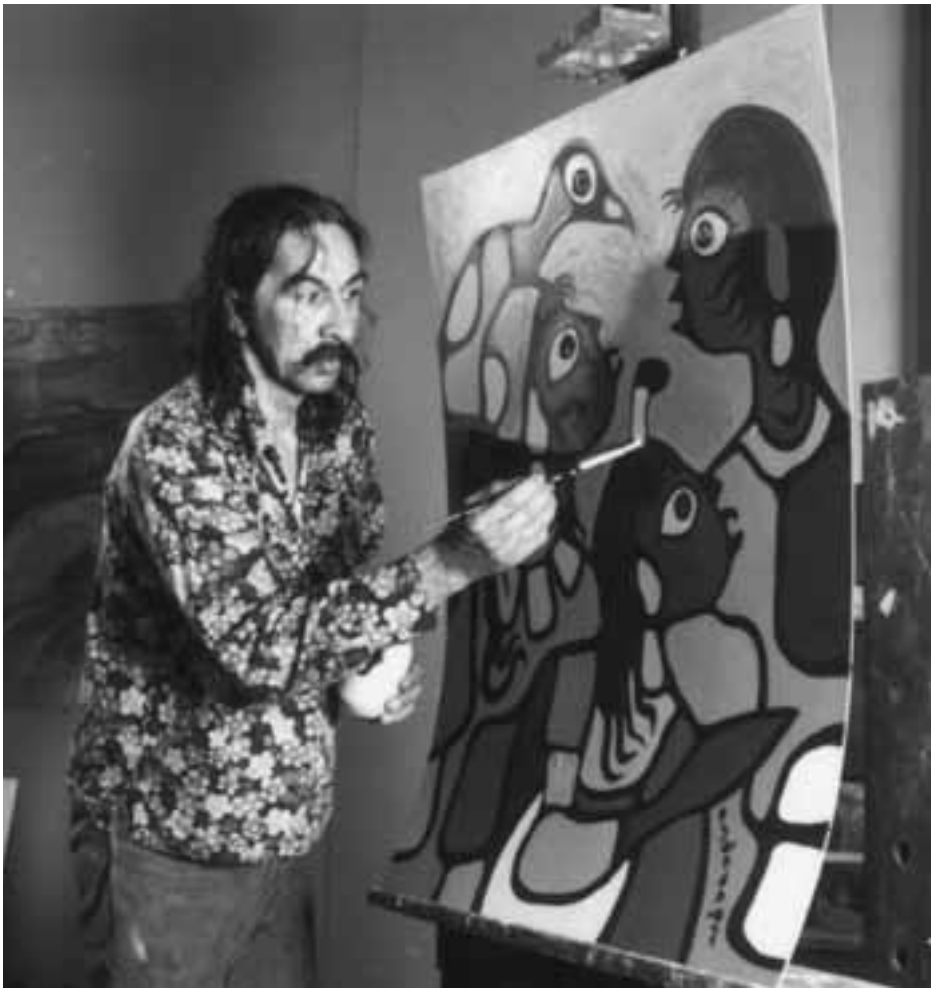
In his 1990 autobiography, Pollock confirmed the importance of this pivotal exhibition. "The exhibit made both him and me," he explained. "It brought him to international attention and it made the Pollock Gallery a public name."[41] Morrisseau's work found immediate commercial success – his show at the Pollock Gallery in Toronto in 1962 sold out. Curator Greg Hill suggests that even in the venue of a contemporary art gallery the idea of Morrisseau as "exotic other" remained a significant factor in his entry into the art establishment. "He was received simultaneously as both a primitive and modern artist," writes Hill.[42]

Critics positioned Morrisseau within a decidedly stereotypical racialized discourse. According to art historian Bill Anthes, Primitivist aspects of his art could be inserted into an already well-established Modernist art discourse because of the work of American Modern painters such as Barnett Newman. "Newman believed that he had found in Native American culture the solution to the crises of modernity. Newman believed that he found in the 'primitive' arts of the Americas a model and a resource for a new 'inter-American'

culture."[43] An ongoing fascination with Primitivism was well established in the United States by the late 1940s, with exhibitions such as "Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art" (1940) and "Indian Art of the United States" (1941) mounted by the Museum of Modern Art in New York. According to Anthes, Newman's 1946 exhibition "Northwest Coast Indian Painting," at the Betty Parsons Gallery in New York, claimed Indigenous artists as "the spiritual and aesthetic ancestors of modern American artists."[44] This Modernist art discourse spilled over into Canadian art criticism and clearly contributed to the framing of Morrisseau's art by art critics writing in Canadian newspapers and magazines.

The Globe and Mail art writer Pearl McCarthy wrote "Explorers Discover New Ideas" in August 1962 to announce Morrisseau's upcoming exhibition. The title succinctly captures a colonialist discourse of claiming and discovery. The short report provides a number of constructions that demonstrate the unfamiliar terrain Morrisseau had entered. "Ontario's hinterland has afforded an exciting discovery in the work of a 31-year old Ojibway Indian," implying that Jack Pollock had, like a New World explorer, entered the wilds of Ontario and discovered his artist.[45] Despite the racial discourse, McCarthy posits that Morrisseau has done something remarkable, "he has devised his stylized semi-abstraction to express the mysticism of the culture."[46] The art writer recognizes an artistic genius that trumps his confining racial construction and argues strongly that his work overwhelms a facile construction of identity, situating it within the universalizing discourse of American modernism advanced since the late 1930s. "Morrisseau's genius for unifying or breaking space in his designs is astounding, as is his sureness of line. It cannot be classed as primitive art."[47] Once Newman and others began to utilize Indigenous elements in their work, modern art criticism presented Indigenous art as a pan-Indian assortment of styles and motifs that could be co-opted for individualized art practices. The appropriation of these stylistic elements was heavily influenced by Jungian psychological theory.[48] It seemed that Morrisseau's art could easily be inserted into the universalized modern art movement with little regard for his Anishinaabe roots or the cultural signifiers he drew upon.

In 1963, *Montreal Gazette* art writer Dorothy Pfeiffer grouped Morrisseau with Emily Carr and anthropologist Marius Barbeau as figures whose legacy was to provide Canada with more of the "marvelously imaginative legends and rituals of our authentic 'First Canadians.' "[49] Pfeiffer romantically describes the artist as an untutored but important "link" and notes that his *discoverer* was Dewdney, an authority on Stone Age art in Canada – suggesting that Morrisseau was more closely aligned with the past than with contemporary Canadian culture.



1 | Ian Samson, *Norval Morrisseau as artist-in-residence in the Thomson Shack at the McMichael Gallery*, 1979, McMichael Canadian Art Collection Archives.

While art critics and pundits attempted to position the artist and his work, Morrisseau continued to paint images that reflected his personal conception of transformation. Unlike painters of the New York School who looked to Jungian philosophy for ideas of transcendence, Morrisseau melded his personal understandings of Anishinaabe spirituality to articulate notions of change.

The early, somewhat clunky, images created on birch bark are replaced by more fluid and visually powerful imagery in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Elizabeth McLuhan describes Morrisseau's changing aesthetic language toward thunderbirds as "strong, individualistic, and calligraphic."[50] The introduction of a confident black outlining reformulates images in a more compositionally unified form. This assured expression also reflects

Morrisseau's own transformation as a contemporary artist. Aesthetically, his work exhibits a shift away from the limiting stylistic conventions he used in the late 1950s and hails his entry into the contemporary art scene (Fig. 1).

In 1972 Morrisseau painted *Shaman Riding a Thunderbird.*[51] This painting offers another perspective on transformation, expressing a less fixed interpretation of the thunderbird narrative. Featuring a shaman astride a thunderbird, Morrisseau's aesthetic language reveals a more successful visual fusion of his style and the spiritual subject matter. The thunderbird, an energetic profiled form articulated with thick black line and decorative interior segmentations, has become emblematic of Morrisseau's work. The stylized shaman, also in profile, rides the dynamic bird. Gone are the stilted, sketched details found in the two early birch bark examples.[52] The two figures, encased and surrounded by two birds and energy lines, meld as separate but united characters. McLuhan describes the work as an example of one of his "most graphically realized Indian images."[53] Indeed, the overall painting demonstrates a visual dynamism that symbolically integrates the two beings into one, subtly expressing shamanistic transformational process in new ways.

During this creative period, both urban experience and greater exposure to the art world affected Morrisseau's aesthetic handlings of spiritual conceptions of transformation. The artist integrates Anishinaabe cultural references by synthesising transformational notions related to his many life experiences. Morrisseau also began to migrate toward Christianity. His grandmother, a devout Catholic, had long ago introduced him to these teachings. The artist's interest in this religion was mediated by Anishinaabe ways of knowing. His further investigations of Pentecostal, Russian Orthodox, and Roman Catholic beliefs affected his art. While serving a six-month jail term in Kenora, Ontario, in 1973 for public drunkenness, his art production once again reflected his shifting spiritual ideas. The prison superintendent provided him with an additional cell to use as a studio and Morrisseau emerged from his incarceration with a new body of rich works, including *Indian Jesus Christ* (1974). Morrisseau commented on this body of work, "I went through a phase of painting Christian religious pictures, but yet I always saw them with the eyes of the Indian … I have always been attracted to religious paintings, but only the ones that had that mystical or supernatural quality in them."[54]

When he was released from the correctional facility the National Film Board of Canada was waiting in Kenora to shoot a planned documentary. *The Paradox of Norval Morrisseau* shows a tortured artist struggling with a number of issues that are presented through a series of stereotypical signifiers but that also reveal the artist as having a close connection to

nature and a spirituality that attempts to connect Ojibway traditions and Christian teachings.[55] One of the more successful moments in the film occurs when Morrisseau relates the details of his vision quest. The connection to Anishinaabe tradition and his captivating storytelling style combine to give Morrisseau credibility in a film that otherwise thwarts unmediated efforts to learn from the artist. Morrisseau also describes an incident in which he is transported into a thunderbird nest, though the director edited much of this story, leaving little of the narrative intact.[56]

By the 1970s, performing a role that both fed his own interest in shamanism and satisfied aspects of the stereotype he was labelled with, Morrisseau began to feature spiritual shaman figures in his art. The artist attempts to erase the ignoble aspects of the tropes that plague him in the media and visually channels his energy into the embodiment of the shaman artist: Morrisseau promotes shamanism in his art and writings in part to thwart negative, stereotypical reports that tend to present him as both violent and drunken but also to fulfill his own spiritual needs. A 1976 news article by James Purdie in *The Globe and Mail* confirms the success of his branding attempt. The art critic describes *Sacred Bear* (1971) as a "classic Indian experience," explaining that the artist, who "sometimes believes he would have been a shaman if he had been born 200 years earlier," had had a vision a year earlier.[57] This form of reportage positions the artist and his work within a mystical frame, albeit a stereotypical one. "The latest canvas indicates that Morrisseau is continuing to develop a new phase in his work – an approach that seems to be leading him away from direct depictions of the teaching of the elders and toward a more densely populated world of symbols and mysticism."[58]

The universalizing influence in this critique again categorizes Morrisseau's work within an acceptable Modernist art discourse. Accentuating the "noble" aspects of the Noble Savage construction, stereotypes that represent Indigenous peoples as being one with nature and inherently spiritual, Morrisseau created an identity that capitalized on universalized mainstream notions of shamanism.

Religious scholar Mircea Eliade, in *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy,* describes shamans as: "those individuals who stand out in their respective societies by virtue of characteristics that, in the societies of modern Europe, represent the signs of a vocation or at least part of a religious crisis. They are separated from the rest of the community by the intensity of their religious experience."[59] Religious scholar John A. Grim adds that Anishinaabe shamans provide "the members of the tribe with the ritual means to aggressively foster their own independent existences."[60] This sense of religious intensity and rugged individualism resonates in Morrisseau's work

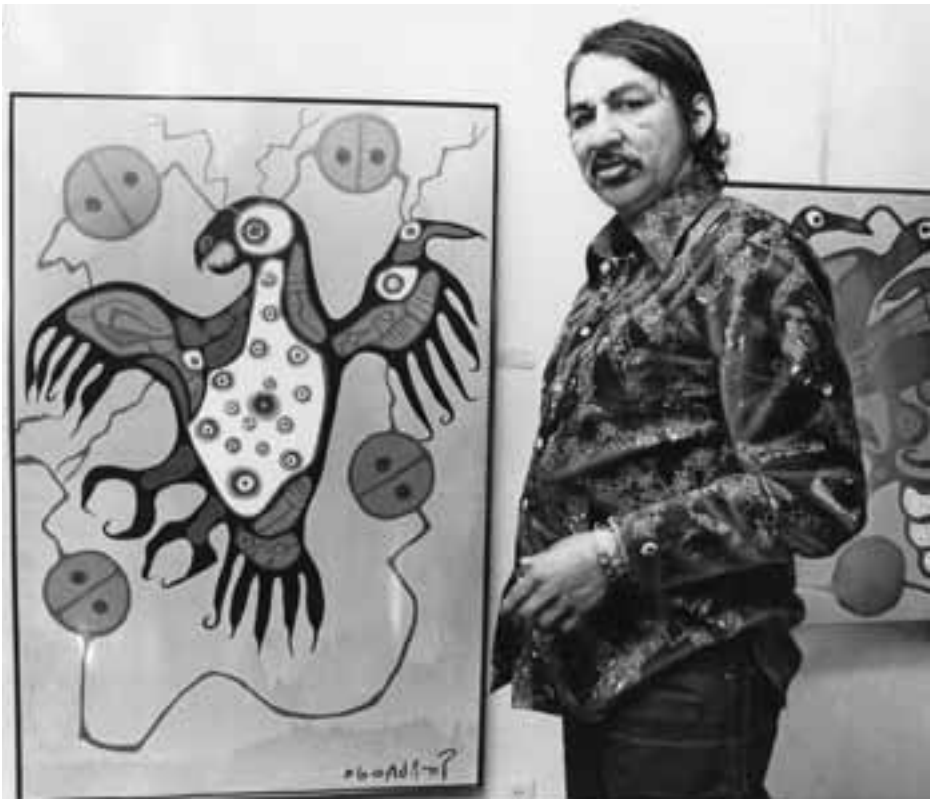
as it does in his actions. While the artist champions his shaman role, it is a performance that shifts away from Anishinaabe conceptions of the shaman as spiritual leader. The ceremonial rites and apprenticeship necessary for such an identity within the Anishinaabe cultural milieu eluded him. Instead, Morrisseau searched for ways to achieve his spiritual aims outside these cultural confines and beyond the limited stereotypical sense promoted by mainstream popular culture. Morrisseau's identity transformation affects his artistic articulation of transformational imagery.

In 1976, Pollock's gallery assistant Eva Quan introduced Morrisseau to Eckankar, a spiritual pursuit that combined both Eastern and Christian concepts and gave the artist a vehicle for his brand of shamanism. A controversial organization founded as a variation of the Radha Soami Sant Mat, a religious tradition in the Punjab area of northern India, Eckankar was formed in 1965 by Paul Twitchell, a former student of Sant Mat Master Kirpal Singh. In a series of writings published to promote and increase the credibility of Eckankar, self-proclaimed ECK Master Twitchell explains that divine light is the key to understanding because the group's teachings were shared with him by a ageless spiritual guide who had appeared before him in light form.[61]

In 1997 Morrisseau wrote that Eckankar allowed him to make sense of the many spiritual directions he had pursued till then, "It was not until I came into Eckankar that I was able to understand."[62] After this dramatic spiritual conversion, Morrisseau's work underwent both stylistic and thematic change.

Eckankar promotes a concept of inner light and shamanistic astral travel that Morrisseau interpreted in his art. Through his intense colour palette, Morrisseau infuses his work with a combination of illuminating light and symbolic associations to transformation. Hill argues that: "through Eckankar, Morrisseau develops a vocabulary for his shamanism. His incorporation of this 'new age' religion brings his ancient knowledge of Anishinaabe traditions into the present day while at the same time allowing him to explore new imagery – the Eckist identity of soul travel."[63] The adoption of Eckist ideas sparks a pivotal shift in Morrisseau's articulation of transformation in his large-scale investigation of *Man Changing into Thunderbird* (Fig. 2).[64] Described by *Toronto Star* art critic Gary Michael Dault as "the best work of his career," this monumental work captures the nuanced spiritual and artistic changes that Morrisseau had experienced in his life to that point.[65]

The multi-panel work confirms Morrisseau's personal shamanistic transformation into Copper Thunderbird and reads as a visual biographical primer for his shifting vision of his conception of this spiritual pursuit. Morrisseau explains, "I've wanted to paint this picture for fifteen years but I couldn't do it in those days. This is the ultimate picture for me and I'm sharing it. Sharing it is wonderful."[66] Morrisseau expands his visual aesthetic language with Eckist concepts, arriving at a unique formula for expressing



2 | Dick Loek, *Norval Morrisseau in front of one panel from a six-panel series, Man Changing into Thunderbird*, 1977. (Photo: *Toronto Star,* Photo Archives)

his new ways of spiritual knowing. In the first five panels Morrisseau paints himself as shaman undergoing transformation. "It took me two months," said the artist. "I didn't think I'd finish it. But I went slow. I relaxed and worked at it in my home bit by bit … and everything worked out."[67]

The young man in the first panel represents an early stage of Morrisseau's spiritual apprenticeship in Anishinaabek teachings. His naming ceremony and his receiving the name Copper Thunderbird is implicit in this first canvas. Positioned in profile, the figure looks to the right, or to the eastern quadrant, of the panel to a representation of the sun, which is connected to him by energy lines that surround the figure, birds, and fish. Four bisected circles unite the composition in the lower frame of the painting. The young man cradles two birds and holds a staff in his right hand.

Significantly, Morrisseau infuses each of the six panels with lightness, as he chooses a bright copper colour for much of the field of the works. Dault describes it as being "painted against about an acre of bright orange ('a very spiritual colour')."[68] The bottom third of the painting is an earthy mustard colour that demonstrates an earthly grounding – suggesting it is still early

in his spiritual apprenticeship. While Morrisseau renders the objects in this panel in strong colour, there is little articulation of decoration or intense colour pairings.

The second panel displays a critical metamorphosis in that his right arm has now morphed into a wing, painted in bright blue feathers. The figure remains interconnected to fish and birds as he raises the staff skyward. Compositionally, the figure still fills the left side of the canvas, though the rendering contains more ornamentation, with an accentuated eye and an infusion of colour. In the right quadrant, the moon, rather than the sun, delineating another phase of his life, is linked to him by a uniting line, signifying energy and oneness.

A bird claw has been added to the ongoing process of transformation in the third panel. Morrisseau celebrates the visual changes by further accentuating the decorative elements of the composition – adding additional colour and shapes to the segmentations of the thunderbird wing and the bodily elements of the included animals. The mustard colour shrinks, replaced by more of the copper colour to signify his increasing connection to his role as Copper Thunderbird. In panel four, the entire canvas background is painted copper. The sun radiates, once again, in the top left quadrant. The transformation process continues, as Morrisseau re-articulates the human form as a bird-shaped one. The hair headdress of the first three panels is replaced by a more dramatic bird headdress. Morrisseau begins to visually acknowledge his embodiment as thunderbird. An electric blue fills many of the segmentations, pulsating with life, like the now organically wrought energy lines surrounding the transformational being.

The fifth panel demonstrates the liminal stage prior to full conversion. The figure displays two wings that cradle his staff, birds, and fish and hold up a large mass of the mustard-coloured earth. His hair headpiece has been replaced, as the final traces of human form are erased.

Looking from panel to panel, a slow but constant progression appears. When the eye finally settles on the sixth and final panel, a majestic thunderbird captures full attention. It looks left, back toward the man changing form. Now a completed form, the transformed thunderbird manitou pulses with spiritual colour and energy. Ornate segmentation and intense colour pairings imbue the canvas with a spiritual light. Morrisseau masterfully elicits his visual aesthetic language to convey the story of his own transformation into Copper Thunderbird. Utilizing form, colour, composition, and six separate panels, the artist advances a personal, spiritual, and artistic conversion that is shared with the viewer.

Continually positioned within a romantic Primitivist genre, correspondingly linked to stereotypical binaries present in constructions of the Other, Morrisseau satisfies popular culture by delivering an artistic

masterpiece that appeases the universalizing force of modernism, just as his celebrated shamanic actions conform to stereotypical notions. John Bentley Mays, in a 1981 article titled "Morrisseau's Art Explores Magic Forests of the Mind," argues that the artist's recent work "transports us into a shadowy archetypal realm"[69] and that his identity was continually constructed as both "tortured" and "powerful innocence."[70] A 1979 *Maclean's* magazine feature describes him as an "extremely religious man," whose work is "reaching out beyond the Indian world."[71] *Maclean's* critic Christopher Hume says, "shifting from one shade of religion to another, Morrisseau has nonetheless stayed a shaman, or medicine man."[72] Further, in his 1979 essay published by Sinclair and Pollock, Morrisseau presents himself as "being a shaman as well as a spiritual person."[73] Embodiment of the non-descript shamanistic identity provided some measure of agency to Morrisseau, though clearly this confining identity remained within a racialized discourse that was a distortion of universalized notions of Indigenous shamanism reflected in the artistic Primitivism movement.

Conclusions

The six-panel *Man Changing into Thunderbird* exemplifies an artistic conveyance of visual and compositional shifts in Morrisseau's spiritual teachings as the artist takes what he learned from his Mishomis and embarks on his spiritual journey within the context of Eckankar. Morrisseau understatedly confirms his transformation from his Anishinaabe roots to a unique, personal understanding of shamanism across six panels, far removed from the early explorations on birch bark.

Works envisioning transformation punctuate Morrisseau's body of work, often painted when changes in his career and his own spiritual understandings occurred. From Anishinaabe teachings to his infusion of Christian and Eckankar spiritual lessons, a mélange of transformational revelations blossom in his work. The thunderbird transformation images discussed above fully actualize the artist's personal and artistic evolution. A storyteller, Morrisseau forges unique concepts of change, conjuring the thunderbird narrative as an illustrative force for his personal convergence as Copper Thunderbird.

Man Changing into Thunderbird, through colour, form, and composition, archives Morrisseau's sense of transformation that solidly defines his hybrid metamorphosis as an artist. The illuminating light and astral travel Morrisseau appropriated from his understanding of Eckankar, integrated with his early cultural teachings and his interest in Christianity, results in a lifelong exploration of transformation. Adhering to no specific religious doctrine but his own, Morrisseau creates compelling works that offer layers of meaning

and connections that reveal his rich identity, informed by the past, present, and the future.

NOTES

I had hoped to include images of the pictures discussed here but the Norval Morrisseau estate had not provided permission by the time of publication. Photographs that give some idea of Morrisseau's style have been included instead.

1 Norval Morrisseau, *Legends of My People: The Great Ojibway*, ed. Selwyn Dewdney (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1965), 4.
2 Basil Johnston, *The Manitous: The Spiritual World of the Ojibway* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2001), xvi.
3 Vine Deloria jr., *Spirit and Reason: The Vine Deloria Jr., Reader*, Barbara Deloria, Kristen Foehner and Samuel Scinta, eds. (Golden, CO: Fulcrum, 1999), 80–83.
4 Leanne Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2011).
5 Basil H. Johnston, *Anishinaubae Thesaurus* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2007). Johnston has published more than a dozen books on the Anishinaabe. There are a number of spellings of Anishinaabe and I have chosen the one used by the Ojibway Cultural Foundation as my standard.
6 Ruth Phillips, "Morrisseau's 'Entrance': Negotiating Primitivism, Modernism, and Anishnaabe Tradition," *Norval Morrisseau: Shaman Artist*, ed. Greg Hill (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2006), 52.
7 Ibid., 50.
8 Norval Morrisseau and Donald Robinson, *Norval Morrisseau: Travels to the House of Invention* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1998), 22.
9 Johnston, *The Manitous*, 121.
10 Ibid., xxi–xxii.
11 Ibid., xxii.
12 Simon J. Ortiz, *Woven Stone* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992), 7.
13 Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 94.
14 Neal McLeod, *Cree Narrative Memory: From Treaties to Contemporary Times* (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing, 2007), 8.
15 Johnston, *The Manitous*, xiii.
16 Ibid., 123.
17 Lister Sinclair and Jack Pollock, *The Art of Norval Morrisseau* (Toronto: Methuen, 1979). See also: Morrisseau, *Legends of My People*, 4–11. Morrisseau and Johnston collaborated on an exhibition project titled *The Art of Norval Morrisseau, The Writings of Basil H. Johnston*, mounted by the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, Alberta, in 1999.
18 Sinclair and Pollock, *The Art of Norval Morrisseau,* 68.
19 Ibid.
20 See Hill, *Norval Morrisseau*.
21 See Basil Johnston, *Ojibway Ceremonies* (Toronto: McLelland & Stewart, 1982), 41–56.

22 Duke Redbird and Henning Jacobsen, directors, *The Paradox of Norval Morrisseau* (documentary film) National Film Board of Canada, 1974. Anishinaabe poet Armand Ruffo also describes this event in his poem "Norval Morrisseau: Man Changing Into Thunderbird," ed. Hill, *Norval Morrisseau*, 78–92.
23 For Morrisseau's description of his acquisition of the name *Copper Thunderbird*, see Hill, *Norval Morrisseau*, 17.
24 John A. Grim, "Ojibway Shamanism," *Shamanism: A Reader*, ed. Graham Harvey (London: Routledge, 2003), 96.
25 Johnston describes a naming ceremony (Wauweendaussowin) in *Ojibway Ceremonies*, 11–31.
26 Cree syllabics were devised by the Reverend James Evans at Norway House (in present-day Manitoba) in 1840. He had designed a similar alphabet for Ojibwa, a closely related language, in 1836. Evans produced considerable printed material in syllabics, largely hymnals and prayer books. *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Accessed 25 Sept. 2012, http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/james-evans
27 Sinclair and Pollock, *The Art of Norval Morrisseau,* 45.
28 Pressure to cease painting spiritual imagery eventually dissipated but not before a number of the artist's early works were destroyed.
29 Ruth Phillips, *Trading Identities: The Souvenir in Native North American Art from the Northeast, 1700–1900* (Seattle, wa: University of Washington Press and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998), 266.
30 Norval Morrisseau, *Man Changing into Thunderbird*, 1958–1960, watercolour and ink on birch bark, 63 × 101.3 cm, Canadian Museum of Civilization, Gatineau, Quebec (III-G-1099). Please see comment at the beginning of the notes.
31 Morrisseau, *Legends of My People*, 4–5.
32 Johnston, *Anishinaubae Thesaurus*, 19.
33 Norval Morrisseau, *Man Changing into Thunderbird*, 1958–1960, oil on birch bark, 84 × 90.5 × 3 cm, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (2002.14). Please see comment at the beginning of the notes.
34 Sinclair and Pollock, *The Art of Norval Morrisseau,* 66.
35 Elizabeth McLuhan and Tom Hill, *Norval Morrisseau and the Emergence of the Image Makers* (Toronto: Methuen, 1984), 32.
36 Phillips, "Morrisseau's 'Entrance'," 60.
37 Phillips, *Trading Identities*, 266.
38 Morrisseau, *Legends of My People,* 4–14.
39 Ibid., 78–81.
40 John Bentley Mays, "Morrisseau's Art Explores Magic Forests of the Mind," *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto)*,* 9 July 1981, 17.
41 Jack Pollock, *Dear M: Letters from a Gentleman of Excess* (London: Bloomsbury, 1990), 40.
42 Hill, *Norval Morrisseau,* 21
43 Bill Anthes, *Native Moderns: American Indian Painting, 1940–1960* (Durham, nc: Duke University Press, 2006), 60.
44 Ibid., 78.
45 Pearl McCarthy, "Explorers Discover New Ideas," *The Globe and Mail,* 25 Aug. 1962, 25.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.

48 Anthes, *Native Moderns,* 84.
49 Dorothy Pfeiffer, "Ojibway Indian Artist," *The Montreal Gazette,* 27 Apr. 1963, 28.
50 McLuhan and Hill, *Norval Morrisseau and the Emergence of the Image Makers,* 56.
51 Norval Morrisseau, *Shaman Riding a Thunderbird*, 1972, acrylic on kraft paper, 101.6 × 161.3 cm, Collection of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Gatineau, Quebec. Please see comment at the beginning of the notes.
52 A pencil sketch of this same subject included in the Canadian Museum of Civilization collection is more closely aligned to the birch bark paintings mentioned here. See Hill, *Norval Morrisseau,* 168.
53 McLuhan and Hill, *Norval Morrisseau and the Emergence of the Image Makers,* 65.
54 Sinclair and Pollock, *The Art of Norval Morrisseau,* 42–44.
55 See Carmen Robertson, "The Reel Norval Morrisseau: An Analysis of the National Film Board of Canada's Paradox of Norval Morrisseau," *International Journal of Learning* 11 (2004): 315–21, for further discussion.
56 This section of the film is heavily edited and difficult to understand. See Redbird and Jacobsen, *The Paradox of Norval Morrisseau*.
57 James Purdie, "Traditional Value Systems Challenged," *The Globe and Mail,* 3 July 1976, 30.
58 Ibid.
59 Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: University of Princeton Press, 1964), 8.
60 Grim, "Ojibway Shamanism," 96.
61 Paul Twitchell, *Dialogues with the Master* (San Diego: Illuminated Way Press, 1970). Controversy surrounds Eckankar and it has been referred to as a cult. Religious scholar Lucy DuPertuis argues that Eckankar and over twenty other similar spiritual organizations sprang up in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s because of the influence of Sant Mat, Radhasoami, or the Divine Light Mission (DLM) tradition, the Hindu concept of charisma. Eckankar borrows liberally from the DLM for notions of illumination and light as direct symbolic paths to enlightenment. See Lucy DuPertuis, "How People Recognize Charisma: The Case of *Darshan* in *Radhasoami* and Divine Light Mission," *Sociological Analysis* 47:2 (1986): 111–24.
62 Morrisseau and Robinson, *Norval Morrisseau*, 16.
63 Hill, *Norval Morrisseau,* 26.
64 Norval Morrisseau, *Man Changing into Thunderbird*, 1977, acrylic on canvas (six panels), 153.5 × 125.7 cm each, private collection. Please see comment at the beginning of the notes.
65 Gary Michael Dault, "Painter Gives Canadians a Masterpiece," *Toronto Star,* 29 Aug. 1977, D5.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
69 Mays, "Morrisseau's Art Explores Magic Forests of the Mind," 17.
70 Dault, "Painter Gives Canadians a Masterpiece."
71 Christopher Hume, "The New Age of Indian Art," *Maclean's Magazine* 92:4 (22 Jan. 1979): 24.
72 Ibid.
73 Sinclair and Pollock, *The Art of Norval Morrisseau,* 45.

L'Oiseau-tonnerre et le concept de transformation dans l'art de Norval Morrisseau

CARMEN L. ROBERTSON

L'artiste anishinaabe Norval Morrisseau (1931–2007), ou Copper Thunderbird (*Miskwaabik Animiiki*), a construit, au long d'une carrière de cinquante années, un langage visuel unique qui formule une grande variété de thèmes artistiques, y compris des concepts chamaniques. Morrisseau a exploré au cours de sa vie trois directions spirituelles principales qui sont reflétées dans son art : les enseignements spirituels de la culture anishinaabe, le christianisme et Eckankar. Chacune de ces forces spirituelles influence l'artiste de diverses manières, et il en réunit des aspects pour informer son sens personnel de la spiritualité.

Morrisseau a produit un certain nombre d'images iconiques liées à la transformation de l'Oiseau-tonnerre au cours de sa carrière, y compris deux exemples du début, 1958–1960, peints sur écorce de bouleau noir, ainsi que *Shaman Riding a Thunderbird* en 1972, acrylique sur toile, et les six panneaux de *Man Changing into Thunderbird* de 1977. Chacune de ces peintures révèle des moments divers et signifiants dans la transformation de la propre compréhension spirituelle de l'artiste. Partant du savoir anishinaabe et à travers diverses expériences de vie jusqu'à son adhésion à Eckankar en 1976, Morrisseau forme et incorpore des éléments disparates de transformation spirituelle dans les représentations de l'Oiseau-tonnerre mentionnées plus haut. Le présent essai analyse de quelle manière Morrisseau exprime des notions originales de transformation spirituelle et personnelle à travers son propre langage esthétique visuel.

Le grand-père, ou *Mishomis*, de Norval Morrisseau, Moses 'Potan' Nanakonagos était un chaman bien connu, et Morrisseau passait des heures à l'écouter et à apprendre, absorbant les traditions orales ; c'est de lui qu'il a appris à comprendre les rituels chamaniques. La religion organisatrice des Anishinaabe, le *Medaewaewin* (qu'on épelle parfois *Midewiwin*), était une société d'hommes et de femmes médecine qui se consacraient à l'étude des propriétés curatives des plantes, à la guérison et à la recherche de l'équilibre et du bien-être, selon l'ethnologue anishinaabe Basil Johnston. Pendant le XIX^e^ siècle et au début du XX^e^, nous dit l'historienne de l'art Ruth Phillips,

les chamans anishinaabe « ont formé la société Midewiwin dont les membres enregistraient leurs traditions orales, leurs connaissances ésotériques et leurs complexes rituels d'initiation en gravant des symboles pictographiques sur des panneaux d'écorce de bouleau et des rouleaux ».

L'artiste a peint au moins deux premières versions de *Man Changing Into Thunderbird*, entre 1958 et 1960, sur de l'écorce de bouleau. Sinclair et Pollock interprètent la fascination de Morrisseau pour ces êtres : « Morrisseau voit ses Oiseaux-tonnerre comme des êtres forts, dynamiques, porteurs d'énergie et de fertilité. Si les conditions sont bonnes, un homme de pouvoir, un chaman, peut assumer les formidables attributs de l'Oiseau-tonnerre. L'homme qui se transforme en Oiseau-tonnerre est Norval Morrisseau – Copper Thunderbird ».

Les premières images, plutôt maladroites, conçues sur écorce de bouleau, ont été remplacées par une imagerie plus fluide et visuellement puissante à la fin des années soixante et au début des années soixante-dix. L'introduction d'un ferme contour noir redéfinit les images d'une manière plus unifiée au plan de la composition. Une interprétation de l'art de Morrisseau – aussi bien au plan de la forme que de la performance – à travers le concept de transformation démontre l'importance dans son art d'influences qui se meuvent au-delà de ses premières racines culturelles anishinaabe.

En 1972, Morrisseau a peint *Shaman Riding a Thunderbird*. Cette œuvre offre une autre perspective sur la transformation, en exprimant une interprétation moins didactique du récit de l'Oiseau-tonnerre. En montrant un chaman chevauchant un Oiseau-tonnerre, le langage esthétique de Morrisseau révèle une relation mieux réussie en fusionnant son style et le sujet spirituel. L'Oiseau-tonnerre, forme dynamique, vue de profil, au contour tracé d'un trait noir épais et à l'intérieur décoré de segments colorés, est devenu emblématique. Le chaman stylisé, aussi vu de profil, chevauche le dynamique oiseau. Disparus, les détails esquissés avec raideur que l'on retrouve dans les deux premiers exemples sur écorce de bouleau. Morrisseau est un conteur et il forge des concepts de changement originaux, conjurant le récit de l'Oiseau-tonnerre comme une force illustrant sa convergence personnelle en tant que Copper Thunderbird – Oiseau-tonnerre de cuivre.

L'œuvre grand format en six panneaux intitulée *Man Changing into Thunderbird* (1977), forgée visuellement à travers la couleur, la forme et la composition, récapitule le sens de la transformation qui définit solidement la métamorphose de Morrisseau en tant qu'artiste. La lumière illuminatrice et le voyage astral que Morrisseau a acquis de sa compréhension d'Eckankar, passés au tamis de ses premiers enseignements culturels et de son intérêt pour le christianisme à célébrer, résulte en une exploration de la transformation

tout au long de sa vie. N'adhérant à aucune doctrine religieuse autre que la sienne, cette œuvre nous saisit, offrant des niveaux de sens et de connexions qui révèlent la riche identité de Morrisseau, nourrie du passé, du présent et du futur.

Traduction : Élise Bonnette

The Story of Life: A Ceramic Mural by Lorraine Malach

SUSAN SURETTE

In 2003, a ceramic tile project for the renovated reception area of the Royal Tyrrell Museum in Drumheller, Alberta, was made possible through funds from the Alberta provincial government; museum director Dr. Bruce Naylor expressed interest in working with local artist Lorraine Malach (Regina, Saskatchewan, 1933 – Drumheller, Alberta, 2003). In her proposal for *The Story of Life*, Malach explained that the purpose of the mural was to make the idea of "deep time" – the vastness of the geological time scale – accessible to the museum's audience, and suggested a composition that would bring this concept into the present[1] by using "human forms and symbols" to portray "evolution, diversification, and extinction through the ages."[2] The resulting ten-panel sculpted ceramic mural of unglazed fired beige clay now mounted along the museum's reception area wall is three metres high, fifteen metres long, and about thirty centimetres deep (Fig. 1). Directed floodlights dramatically illuminate *The Story of Life,* heightening the play of shadow and light on the complex symbols and larger than life-size human forms on its high relief surface.

Given its location in a science museum, the initial assumption is that the mural should be understood within the paradigm of science: the mandate of the Royal Tyrell Museum "is to be an internationally recognized public and scientific museum dedicated to the collection, preservation, presentation, and interpretation of palaeontological history, with special reference to Alberta's rich fossil heritage" (Fig. 2).[3] The mural acknowledges this context in its scientific notations and references to fossils and geological strata, but its visual language and presentation do not conform to other visual representations of science within the museum: it is dramatically lit as an artwork and uses a stylistic vocabulary associated with the figurative abstraction of early twentieth-century modern art. As well, the information provided by the museum underscores the work as having been created by an individual. At the right side of the mural is a descriptive panel containing the mural's title, a photographic portrait of the artist, and information about the context in

Detail, Lorraine Malach, *The Story of Life*, panel 10, "The Cretaceous." (Photo: Susan Surette)

1 | Lorraine Malach, *The Story of Life*, 2003, ceramic and sealer, 15 m × 3 m × 30 cm. Courtesy of the Royal Tyrrell Museum, Drumheller, Alberta. (Photo: Sue Sabrowski)

which the mural was made: the artist died before she completed the firings of the last two panels. The descriptive panel refers to "the final work of the renowned Canadian artist, Lorraine Malach," as well as the museum's decision to leave the mural unglazed as it "honours the integrity of the work and the artist."[4] Below this is a plexiglass cardholder with descriptive sheets for distribution, one side of the sheet describing the mural and Malach, and the other presenting the image of a detail from the mural. The mural as an art object must therefore be considered in the context of its location. Many viewers have, however, asked the museum staff why the mural is in a museum dedicated to paleontology rather than a church. In fact, when Malach presented her maquette to the museum for approval, there was some concern among the committee members about its sacred or religious connotations; the curator of vertebrates, Dr. Paul Johnston, was well aware of Malach's religious imagery, as he had initially encountered her work through the large sculptured ceramic angel in her yard.[5] However, despite concern over the mural's implicit religiosity, the entranceway renovations were designed to highlight its contemplative qualities: the tent-like textile on the ceiling of the entryway lowers the height of the space, while the stripes direct the visitor's attention to the mural. Diffused overhead lighting filtering through the cloth creates an atmosphere of intimacy, evoking a space for reflection. Presentation and reception of the work as spiritual must thus also be taken into account.

Discursively, modern art, religion, and science are often considered separate and incommensurable, but *The Story of Life* draws upon all three as

2 | Royal Tyrrell Museum, Drumheller, Alberta. (Photo: Susan Surette)

it inserts the metaphoric languages of modern art and religion into a space dedicated to the language of science.

The Story of Life is situated in the entrance hall, a transitional place, and brings a larger social/political/spiritual context into the space, focusing attention on its liminality. Liminality is understood here as recently articulated in political anthropology:

> [L]iminality refers to in-between situations and conditions that are characterized by the dislocation of established structures, the reversal of hierarchies, and uncertainty regarding the continuity of tradition and future outcomes … [S]uch liminal conditions of uncertainty, fluidity, and malleability are situations to be studied in their own right where lived experience transforms human beings cognitively, emotionally, and morally, and therefore significantly contributes to the transmission of ideas and to the formation of structures.[6]

This essay examines the material and visual content of a ceramic mural within the context of its location, proposing that the fusion of science, modern art, and religion found in *The Story of Life* can be understood within the context of liminality and suggesting that the importance of liminality is best explained by reading the mural within the framework of Ecotheology. Ecotheology is closely associated with the foundational principles of Matthew Fox's Creation Spirituality and grew from environmental and

social concerns raised by theologists and ecologists. I argue that as we move from the Cenozoic to the Ecozoic era, the latter a time period postulated by ecotheologian Thomas Berry, the mural facilitates the moral transformation of human beings, a transformation crucial to addressing the pressing ecological and social challenges of today. I show that the mural dislocates established discursive structures, reverses traditional scientific and religious hierarchies, and highlights the uncertainty of future outcomes for all life if modernist modes of thinking prevail. To develop this argument, Malach's lifelong interest in cosmology and paleontology, her practice of the fine and applied arts, her attraction to Christian mysticism, and her feminism as expressed in her own writing, media reports, and interviews with her friends complement a discussion of the mural's iconography, style, and material.

As visitors enter and leave this modernist museum, they walk by the mural, first on their left and later on their right. Through this double encounter, the mural invites reflection both before and after the museum visit. Like a scientific representation of evolution, *The Story of Life* offers a conventional left to right reading on the initial encounter, beginning with the formation of the universe and the Pre-Cambrian world in the first panel and ending with the Cretaceous period in the tenth panel. On leaving the museum, the viewer retraces her steps back through time, eliciting reflection on evolutionary cause and effect. At first glance, *The Story of Life* generates thought on the relationship between human beings and the natural world, within the context of evolution. Malach has rhythmically populated her mural with abstracted humans interspersed with scientific notations that, taken together, represent the first ten geologic and evolutionary periods of the earth, spanning the Precambrian, Palaeozoic, and Mesozoic eras. The time period stretches from the Hadean era, four and a half billion years ago, when the solar system was formed, to the end of the Mesozoic era, sixty-five million years ago, when most dinosaur species became extinct, and each of the ten panels tells the story of one geologic period. While the mural's subject matter is evolution, this process is not presented in a triumphalist manner: rather, cycles of extinction and the resurgence of species are suggested. Although Malach rarely explained her symbolism, often admonishing her audience to make their own interpretations,[7] certain conjectures can be made based upon her conversations with Drumheller staff, her notes, sketches, and maquette, interviews with her executor, and general knowledge of the subject. The mural's scientific references are accessible only to those who have some scientific knowledge, and the more knowledge the viewer has, the more these specific references can be decoded. While the museum staff has been trained to explain some of its basic scientific content, it can be assumed that people who have visited the exhibits will be better equipped to engage with

the mural's scientific code than those entering the museum. *The Story of Life*, then, is playful as well as thought-provoking.

In the first panel, the Pre-Cambrian, we see the expansion of the universe after the Big Bang and the formation of the solar system. This period includes a reference to the version of Newton's Ellipse used by Richard Feynman in a lecture "The Motion of Planets Around the Sun," and this mathematical graph-like illustration of planetary motion appears in the centre of the panel.[8] Gravitational and electromagnetic forces as well as the nuclear forces of fusion and fission appear. Figures with eyes refer to more celestial kinds of beings and are involved with the gravitational forces of all our solar system's planets and their moons. Atomic and subatomic particles, electron rings, and meteors travelling to the earth, evoke the requisite conditions required to initiate the formation of early molecules, such as water, and one-celled nucleated life.

The Paleozoic Era occupies the second to the seventh panels. The second panel, the Cambrian, also makes use of scientific notation, dominated by the DNA double helix, amino acid pairings that determine genetic coding, as well as schematic representations of RNA, of meiosis and mitosis, and of the development of bilateral symmetry and segmentation (Fig. 3). The three singular human forms refer to the rapid biodiversification of life. Here we are shown the formation of eyes as well as the hard-shelled creatures and burrowing life forms that participated in the Cambrian substrate revolution. At the base of the mural there is a depiction of the prolific mountain building occurring at this time depicted by the coned-hat figure and the uplifting forces acting on it. The beginnings of plants appear as the multiple-stemmed caps on the one-eyed heads. In the third panel, the Ordovician is represented by the development of the segmented worms, piles of branch corals, clams, bivalves, and nautiloids. The stacked abstracted humans could also refer to the beginning of true vertebrates. It is possible to interpret the female embracing a tube-like form as the female sea-lily who occasionally protected her larva within her "arms," while beneath her is the crust of filter-feeding bryozoans. The Ordovician era is separated from the Silurian by a massive extinction in which almost half the earth's life forms were wiped out, hence the strong vertical line dividing the two panels and stretching over half their length. The Silurian era, in the fourth panel, illustrates the movement of life forms out of the water and back into it through the paired swimming figures moving in opposite directions across a narrow wave. We see the collision of the proto-European and North American tectonic plates that produced mountain building and the southward movement of the continent Gondwana. The relatively hospitable conditions of the earth favoured the development of psilopsid plants that reproduced through

3 | Lorraine Malach, *The Story of Life*, detail, panel 2, "The Cambrian." (Photo: Susan Surette)

spores, a development alluded to in the centre of this panel. The three figures at the top are a nod to Johnston, who introduced Malach to the particularities of a snail whose straight gut twisted upwards as it became an adult.[9] The Devonian period, shown in the fifth panel, includes the evolution of amphibians, represented by humans with flipper-like hands, and curled ammonites. The ammonites are also a tribute to Johnston, who, Malach wrote to a friend, had developed a new hypothesis on the cause of holes in their shells.[10] The progress of vascular plants and the spread of large dense forests are depicted by figures with caps that look like abstract leaves. In this section is a representation of live birth by the armour-plated placoderm, one of the first jawed fish. It is possible the diagonal forces pushing down into this panel

refer to the two major air cells that were active in climate modulation, or they could indicate the Alamo bolide impact of hypervelocity objects suggested as the triggers of the Devonian extinction, which primarily affected life in the shallow seas. The sixth panel, the Carboniferous period, features a malevolent face in the central area, surrounded by bones representing the major marine extinction that occurred in the middle of this geologic period. Above the extinction line are prolific, diversified and vigorous corals, signified by the figures with outstretched arms, their fingers like polyps, as well as plants and forests. The active mountain-building processes resulting from tectonic plate movement and characteristic of this time are represented by pushing hands in the upper right. Below the extinction line are three four-winged insects that denote the appearance of giant dragonflies, the first flying creatures to inhabit the coal swamps that formed amid the dying rainforests.[11] In the seventh panel, the Permian period at the end of the Palaeozoic era, insects from the Carboniferous continue to evolve. The major overlapping forms within this panel signal the formation of the massive supercontinent Pangaea, while objects of extraterrestrial origin impact the earth. Amid this turmoil, ammonites continue to thrive. The panel is completed by an arc signalling the mass extinction that wiped out about ninety-five per cent of living organisms, while the few that survived are shown in the upper corner, moving into the Mesozoic era.

On the other side of the mass extinction, the Mesozoic Era begins with the Triassic period, shown in the eighth panel, and a resurgence of life. Depicted here is the diversification of land life, seen especially in the development of reptiles, including the pterosaur, a turtle carapace, true eggs associated with dinosaurs, and hollow dinosaur bones. Here we also find the first mammal, curled up womb-like at the base of the section. A strong vertical break between the Triassic and Jurassic periods is indicative of yet another extinction event. In the centre of the ninth panel, the Jurassic, we are possibly looking at the separation of the supercontinent into Laurasia and Gondwana. This period is also represented by the appearance of a true bird with feathers and a variety of dinosaurs of all sizes, as well as the increased prominence of the mammalian family, seen in the small child at the base of the section. Perhaps the three figures in the lower part of the panel stand for the first appearance of the plesiosaurs, with their prominent flipper paddles for swimming. Rain forests also proliferated at this time. The tenth and last panel, the Cretaceous period, depicts the conclusion of the Mesozoic era before the onset of the Palaeocene era (Fig. 4). This panel is divided into two sections, the lower one bounded by an arc that cradles the non-flying dinosaurs, flowers, and the ammonite. The arc refers to the mass extinction event at the end of the Mesozoic. This killed off the ammonites, represented here through the depiction of an ammonite shell, as well as early flowering

4 | Lorraine Malach, *The Story of Life*, detail, panel 10, "The Cretaceous." (Photo: Susan Surette)

plants and the rapidly diversifying dinosaur population, such as the duck-billed dinosaur that communicated by trumpeting through its horn, which appears here as an abbreviated pan flute. As the birds appear above the extinction arc, we are made aware of their evolution from dinosaurs in the Jurassic to true birds in the Cretaceous by the strong diagonal lines formed from arms that stretch between the two periods. The small and slowly diversifying mammals, represented as foetuses in wombs, also survive the mass extinction, the cause of which is alluded to by a large meteor in the lower right. Perhaps the hooded heads near the base refer to the snails and other detritus feeders that proliferated during this time. Mammals, still presented as curled in the foetal position, also survived. The implication that evolution, with its processes of extinction and resurgence, continues today is achieved through the metaphorical bird and mammal figures pushing beyond the upper vertical edge of this last panel.

Malach had always had a keen interest in science, especially cosmology, astronomy, physics, geology, and paleontology. As a young student at the Philadelphia Academy of Art she had delved into the philosophical implications of the relationship between her Catholic faith and Einstein's

Theory of Relativity, writing about it to her mother.[12] When she returned to her home in Regina, she spent evenings stargazing on the prairies through binoculars or a telescope, and followed discoveries and discussions on cosmology and quantum physics in science magazines and journals, such as *Sky and Telescope* and *Scientific American*.[13] She relied upon the *Canadian Journal of Earth Sciences* for up-to-date information on geology and paleontology.[14] Her many books included the writings of Albert Einstein, Teilhard de Chardin, Carl Sagan, Alan H. Guth, Stuart Kauffman, Richard Feynman, and Stephen Hawking, all writers who address the interface between science and religion, with an explicit emphasis on cosmology.[15] Malach was firmly convinced that science was a legitimate way to discover and know God, and evolution was part of this discovery. When she moved to Drumheller from Regina, her easy access to the Royal Tyrrell Museum allowed her to intensify her inquiry into paleontology, and she devoured books and articles on the subject. She connected with Drumheller's scientific community, hiking through the Badlands, visiting the museum, and attending the winter weekly Speaker Series to hear guest lecturers share new research. The Drumheller scientists recognized Malach for her ability to engage with "challenging themes and ideas" during Friday evenings spent socializing with members of the scientific, artistic, and musical communities where freewheeling conversations abounded.

While the scientific content of the mural can be decoded using information acquired during a visit to the museum, the repetition of the human figures suggests metaphorical content as well, leading the viewer to carefully consider the relationship between humans and the evolutionary process. Within science it is known that one type of scientific representation alone does not give a complete "picture" and that combinations lead to a more extensive understanding of the subject. *The Story of Life* can be seen as another of the museum's representations of the story of evolution, adding subjectivity to the objectivity of a science museum, suggesting we become aware of the interplay between different kinds of experiences. Through its integration of human imagery, so different from the presentations in the museum, the mural underscores how we, as individuals and as a part of an ecological community, have been shaped by and continue to shape the world. According to Johnston, Malach had originally considered using animal forms to tell the story of life, but quickly "realized the museum already does this and does this well."[16] She wanted her work to avoid competition with the museum's well-established and effective illustration in its interpretive displays, as well as the scientific graphing used to present evolutionary data. In part, Malach may have chosen to use abstracted humans as metaphor[17] because she was experienced and adept with this representational style, having used it previously in drawings and several large ceramic murals. Most of these

murals were made as commissions for the Catholic Church, and Malach, as a committed Catholic who attended mass regularly and engaged with the social and philosophical debates within the Church, was an ideal artist to execute sacred art for Catholic spaces. Her focus on the abstracted human body was consistent with mid-twentieth century Catholic directives regarding modern sacred art practices, which privileged the human body, considered "a central fact in Christianity."[18] Malach's various ceramic commissions for the Church spanned forty years, including a plate for the Vatican, two Franciscan murals, a mural for Regina's Holy Rosary Cathedral, several murals for Catholic churches in Saskatchewan and retreat centres in Alberta and Saskatchewan, and murals for Catholic schools in Alberta.[19]

Malach was particularly interested in feminist issues and liberation theology within the Catholic reform movement and engaged in discussions about the doctrines of Vatican II, supporting a renewal of the Church and expressing a commitment to the ideals of the universal church and ecumenism. Attending an interfaith lecture series in Regina, she rejoiced in the advancement of the role of women within the different Christian churches, and distanced herself from the Catholic evangelism of her youth.[20] A self-described Franciscan, she had life-long friends within the Order, and, fusing Franciscan ideals with her commitment to art, she lived her life simply, growing food, bicycling everywhere, scavenging firewood, and possessing a bare minimum of furniture.[21] Her public declarations as a "Franciscan" were made shortly after her completion of two monumental Franciscan murals: one at the Edmonton Friary in 1977 and another at Port Alberni's Holy Family Notre Dame parish church in 1981. This was an active period in terms of the establishment of the ecology movement and in the autumn of 1979, Pope John Paul II declared Saint Francis of Assisi the patron saint of ecology.[22] Considered an early environmentalist by her friends, Malach had read Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, a book that has been credited with launching the environmentalist movement in 1962 through its reporting on the use of harmful pesticides, and Malach wrote in dismay about her encounters with clearcutting while on Vancouver Island to install her Port Alberni Franciscan mural.[23] Malach's letters of the 1980s and 1990s consistently reflect her distress with material waste, corporate excess, over-consumption, social inequalities, environmental pollution, and the political and corporate policies that encouraged such states. During this period she was increasingly disturbed by the role of religious institutions in perpetuating these problems and the challenges a responsible individual faces in addressing them. Malach was also searching for a clear way to express these pressing social, environmental, and theological concerns through her art.

In the early 1990s, Malach wrote she had had a "life changing" experience upon viewing the IMAX movie *The Blue Planet*.[24] She wrote: "It didn't

change attitudes but rather confirmed and cemented those I've had now for some time – attitudes formed through information, intuition and spiritual sensitivity. It reinforces the feeling of place – or sense of place – which I've had for some time now – but particularly this past year … that home is the planet (not Regina) itself – and that this is where we are."[25] Using images taken by astronauts coupled with film and photographic footage from sea and land locations, *The Blue Planet* emphasizes the interconnectedness of atmospheric and geological forces and the tissue of life, concluding with showing ways in which current human activity menaces this fragile ecosystem. The movie's final plea is that all the peoples of the world, despite ongoing conflicts, realize they share a fragile common home. Shortly after seeing this movie, Malach put this powerful experience into a theological context through contact with the teachings of radical Catholic theologians Hans Kung, Thomas Berry, and Matthew Fox. They appreciated and incorporated the ideas of Teilhard de Chardin, Meister Eckhart, and Thomas of Aquinas, and were seeking a new expression of Catholicism for the late twentieth century, one that would resonate with people who were actively engaged in the great social and scientific concerns of the present.[26] In 1992, as a regular reader of the *Prairie Messenger*, a weekly Catholic magazine committed to social justice, Malach had encountered the writings of Fox, the leading exponent of Creation Spirituality.[27] Fox rejects a Christianity that places humankind and its redemption at the centre of dogma and instead proposes Creation Spirituality, which is based on the creative energy of the universe as the starting point of spirituality. In this belief system, science and religion work together to produce a new wisdom that values creativity, feminism, and the oppressed peoples of the world, enabling us, as humans, to adequately respond to the major ecological and social justice crises facing us.[28] Fox encourages a return to medieval mysticism such as that expressed by Hildegard of Bingen, Saint Francis of Assisi, and Meister Eckhart and revisited in the nineteenth century by writers such as Henry David Thoreau, but he also connects with those in the contemporary scientific community who are interested in spiritual renewal.[29] The foundations of Fox's theology were familiar to Malach, who had read Saint Thomas Aquinas's *Summa contra Gentiles, Books I and II* while travelling in Europe in 1955. It contains the message, "[t]he order of the universe is the ultimate and noblest perfection in things."[30]

As a follower of Saint Francis and someone who had enjoyed de Chardin and Thoreau,[31] she was receptive to Berry's thought, as he, too, was inspired by Chardin. Berry, a cultural historian, member of the Passionists, Aquinas scholar, and student of various religions, is, with mathematical cosmologist Brian Swimme, the author of *The Universe Story*. Berry states his basic proposition as:

> [T]he universe, in the phenomenal order, is the only self-referent mode of being and that all other modes of phenomenal being are universe-referent, that all beings in the universe constitute a single community of existence … Since all living beings, including humans, emerge out of this single community there must have been a bio-spiritual component of the universe from the beginning. Indeed we must say that the universe is a communion of subjects rather than a collection of objects.[32]

Both Berry and Fox critique the modern era's dualistic, oppositional, and hierarchal nature, rooted in patriarchy, and express the need for a "comprehensive story of the universe" that integrates both humans and non-humans. In developing this new story that highlights the interconnections of the universe, their goal is to mobilize people to redirect their actions away from destructive and exploitive social, economic, political, cultural, and environmental practices.[33] Berry helps provide a spiritual foundation for the scientifically driven ecology movement, proposing a new holy trinity comprised of immensity, intensity, and intimacy. At the core of this new movement is Ecotheology, a repudiation of anthropocentric ways of thinking and believing and the adoption of a cosmic awareness based on all of creation.[34]

Ecotheology developed in many Euro-American Christian churches during the late twentieth century because of an increasing awareness of, and response to, the environmental crisis. It has also been embraced within an ecumenical community and has been an important discussion point in the World Council of Churches, particularly in Vancouver in 1983 when universal peace and justice were specifically linked to the protection of the natural world through the concept of "Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation."[35] Biologist Carolyn King points out the relationship between ecumenism, ecology, and economy, all of which are derivatives of the Greek *oikoumene*, meaning habitat or home.[36] Extending this idea of "home," Ecotheology "describes theological discourse that highlights the whole 'household' of God's creation, especially the world of nature, as an interrelated system."[37] Ecotheology holds that the creation of oppositional categories such as culture and nature, religion and nature, and religion and science has had profound and negative effects on how we interact with our world, resulting in what is broadly understood today as an ecological crisis.

Malach's letters written during the decade before she made *The Story of Life* indicate her concern with "ecologizing,"[38] with taking concrete steps to protect the integrated human/non-human environment, and her awareness of the potential power of a fusion of ecology and theology for mobilizing action. As someone who was intensely interested in cosmology, Malach was receptive

to Ecotheology as a foundational discipline. She wrote: "our religious concept of time as being cyclical with the seasons has now become a wide open state of perpetual change through the revelation of the True Trinity – the sense of the divine, the sense of the human and the sense of the universe."[39] Malach's worldview reflects Ecotheology's idealistic character, as explained by ecotheologian, H. Paul Santmire: "the idea of divine immanence in the whole cosmos; a relational, ecological rather than a hierarchical understanding of God, humans, and the created world; a radically reinterpreted view of human dominion over nature in terms of partnership with nature; and a commitment to justice for all creatures, not just humans, highlighting the needs of the impoverished masses and endangered species around the globe."[40] These thoughts reflect Berry's, who writes of an intimate relationship between humans and the universe that could be seen as the driving force of *The Story of Life*: "Our own presence to the universe depends on our human identity with the entire cosmic process."[41] He suggests, in terms of the eras of the earth, that we are moving into the "ecozoic" era, where humans recognize that they are part of evolutionary processes and have the capacity, the opportunity, and the responsibility to participate in them.[42] In one of Berry's "Twelve Principles for Understanding the Universe and the Role of the Human in the Universe Project," he suggests, "each being of the planet is profoundly implicated in the existence and functioning of every other being."[43] After reading Berry's *The Dream of the Earth,* Malach wrote of the excitement of understanding the earth "as a living unit – and that we are not only extensions of that living cell – we are that same living unit."[44] She later wrote joyfully, "What a great time to be living in!! … For the first time in the history of humans we are now beginning to see and understand with the universe itself. There is still so much to know – and for me the excitement is the realization that everything existing is interconnected – everything."[45] *The Story of Life* narrates a profound interconnectivity where humans have emerged from the energy of the cosmos and are both embedded within and continue to be contributors to the processes of evolution.

The importance of "narrative" is fundamental to the ecotheological movement. Fox, Berry, and Swimme all urge the development of a new narrative of the universe that takes into account both science and religion. Certainly the need for a new "narrative," "epic," and "story" of the universe and creation is fundamental to the movement and over the last three decades these words have featured in the titles of several influential books and organizations dedicated to the subject. Ecotheology reframes ecology as a moral dilemma as well as a scientific, economic, and political one and nomenclature must recognize this. The distinctions between these terms and the tensions that arise in analyzing them, specifically with regard to Ecotheology, point to the power of "Story" as linked to culture, myth,

and artistic voice. It becomes important for artists to express the story of the unfolding of the universe in different forms in order to transmit it intergenerationally as an epic, embedded within cultural expression. This associates the "Story" with personal drama that will engage people, rather than with "narrative," which is more rooted in science alone. The role of "story" in the title of the mural *The Story of Life* encourages communal transmission and personal engagement, making clear that the work reaches beyond the "narrative" of science. Importantly it has "value mixed in with the facts," which aids in promoting Ecotheology.[46]

The idea of "Story" is also evident through the mural's large stylized figures, which "personalize" diverse elements of evolutionary processes. Through their rhythmic composition and vocabulary of abstraction these figures make visual associations with religious relief sculpture from Western and non-Western cultures, and thus also reference mythological and religious narrative structures. Malach's approach to sculptural abstraction drew upon her early studies at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and the Barnes Foundation, visits to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and two extended study trips to Europe made possible through art school scholarships. She closely examined figurative representation in non-Western art that is suitable for expressing monumentality within modern art practices.[47] As a mature artist Malach was "disdainful" of the label "religious art": "she held that all art was spiritual as it spoke 'to the inner nature of the human of those values common to all – love, joy, grief, sorrow, elation' … It has the capacity to evoke a response within the individual on a higher plane. It could by definition be called religious."[48] In several previous murals she had used the same blocky human forms she employed as metaphors for evolution in *The Story of Life* to represent angels guiding both cosmic events and human experience.[49] Angels are often understood to be heavenly messengers, and in each of these murals Malach associated them with cosmological forces, "as bearers of mystery."[50] The figures in *The Story of Life* can be understood, then, within the same context of mysterious energy associated with the universe story, a blend of forces set into motion by cosmological events and earth processes. But they can also be understood as a melding of those forces and life forms, which together form the basis of human origins and all existence today.

While the mural's human figures are abstracted, they are also individualized: some suggest men and others women and, as each has unique facial features, they allude to the variety of peoples that inhabit the planet. In this manner the mural suggests not only a common evolution but also working together within a global society, despite individual and collective differences. The inclusion of such a variety of facial features ensures that a wide assortment of people can identify with the figures in the mural, allowing them to insert themselves into evolutionary development and encouraging

awareness of individual responsibility within the global community. The ideal of a global community had much appeal for Malach, who was raised in a Polish-Canadian home within a multicultural immigrant community in Regina and had lived in Turkey for several months as a young woman. An early student mural in egg tempera, oil, and dry powder pigment, which earned her a travel scholarship, was described as a prairie nativity scene with children from many nationalities within Canada "depicting the building of a combined Canadian spirit."[51] In light of her belief that art could transform the world, *The Story of Life* was Malach's last chance to make an appeal for a global community that would work together for the betterment of the planet. Although she had already decided this would be her last large ceramic mural project, Malach died from heart disease before it was completed, leaving two unfired panels (Fig. 5).[52] Finishing the mural was possible because of Malach's extensive community ties and wide circle of friends. Created as a representation of the unfinished process of evolution, *The Story of Life* itself became an unwitting metaphor for the always-unfinished project of life.

The material of *The Story of Life* also speaks to the precepts of Ecotheology. From the perspective of ceramic art discourse, Ronald A. Kuchta, curator, art museum director, and art magazine editor, recognizes the powerful metaphorical associations attached to clay as the precursor material of ceramics.

> Clay is the most natural, realistic and poignant medium for presenting ideas or images of the earth itself. It is in fact its essential material, at least on its surface. The earth, the origin and source of life, is a subject for art of greater significance today perhaps as we view the earth more objectively as a limited resource, one that we desperately need to sustain for living organisms in general and for human beings in particular.[53]

The rhythmical disposition of sculptured forms and their horizontal arrangements can be compared to the stratification of the earth evident in the weathered shapes characteristic of the Badlands in which the Royal Tyrrell Museum is situated. The eroded hoodoo formations with their capstones are particularly obvious references, but there are also more nuanced allusions. To the imaginative eye, human shapes seem to thrust from the undulating weathered hills of the Drumheller Badlands, sometimes pushing forward, sometimes disappearing into the surface of the cliffs, as they do in the mural. The unglazed fired clay of the mural, which retains its natural beige colour, also points to the surrounding Badlands landscape where very fine clay particles, bentonite, become treacherously slippery when wet, giving the area its name.[54] In many of the world's religions, clay is linked

5 | Lorraine Malach, Earthenware maquette for *The Story of Life*, 2001, 198.1 × 40.7 × approx. 7.6 cm, private collection. (Photo: Susan Surette)

to creation stories, which often contain allusions to "Mother Earth,"[55] and both Fox and Berry make explicit mention of the sacredness of the earth and the interconnectedness of all biosystems to it. Recent biochemical experiments suggest that montmorillonite or bentonite can serve as catalysts for the chemical reactions needed to make vesicles that correspond to early living cells and can also help to transport RNA into such vesicles, as well as aiding the formation of RNA inside the vesicle.[56] Life could then be seen as springing directly from clay, the same material used to make *The Story of Life.* The mural's material reminds us that the eroded hills and valleys of Alberta's Badlands have been the source of many of the museum's fossils, the basis of Drumheller's prosperity and the Royal Tyrrell Museum's fame, and conceivably of the origins of life itself. It brings together the wonder of the cosmos and the earth beneath our feet.

Compositional elements, such as the rhythmic placement of the forms that flow across the surface and rise and fall within its three-dimensional relief, communicate delight in a sensual engagement with the world. Fox considered such overt joy in sensuality an important component of Creation Spirituality and in *Original Blessings* he exhorts his readers to recognize "earthiness and sensuality and passions."[57] The expression of this sensuality and passion is often associated with music and dance, and so these compositional elements in *The Story of Life* can also be seen as alluding to a musical score. Like musical notes, rhythmical circular forms alternate with strong horizontal and vertical lines, and the occasional diagonal flourish, while the uniform spacing of the geological time periods, despite the disparate lengths of time

they actually lasted, as shown on evolution charts, evokes regularly spaced musical bars. The figures, like notes of a musical score, are grouped in triplets or quarter notes and move up and down across the length of the mural; bass and treble lines and chords. These rhythms are also experienced in the surge, swirl, pitch, and momentum of the bodies themselves, dancing to the music of life and the universe. Malach was a musician and musical references were common in her earlier ceramic murals, expressed in angels playing instruments and singing, in the incorporation of the forms and patterns of the instruments themselves within decorative motifs, and as the specific subject matter of certain works.[58] In *The Story of Life* the esoteric concept of the music of the universe as order is evoked. Berry suggests music as a metaphor to help illustrate what he calls the "cosmogenetic principle," where the order of the universe's creative energy is characterized by the interrelated processes of differentiation, autopoiesis, and communication: "Music consists of both the particular notes and the governing themes. For without the notes the themes would have no power to move anyone; but without the themes the notes would only irritate and distract."[59] While in Ecotheology musical structure is associated with the underlying principles of cosmological evolution, it is also linked with the age-old intuitive human response to the mystery of the universe.[60] This same impulse can also be seen in the contemporary compositions of R. Murray Schafer, an innovative Ontario environmental composer whom Malach admired.[61] Schafer has suggested that in the modern era music has lost its participatory and ecstatic aspect through its enclosure within walls. Many of his compositions, such as *The Princess of the Stars*, premiered 1981 in Ontario and played in Banff National Park in 1984, are meant to be played on a lake along with the sounds of the animals,

birds, wind in the trees, and moving water, reminding us of the soundscape of a non-industrial world, where the diurnal and seasonal rhythms and sounds of the flora and fauna recall the origins of music.[62] In a visual form, Malach, like Schafer, brings music to the wilderness, fusing creation and creativity.

Through evoking *both* science *and* religion, Malach's mural questions the exclusive right of either to truth, breaking down disciplinary divisions and upsetting academic hierarchies. As environmentalist James D. Proctor points out in *Science, Religion and the Human Experience,* Albert Einstein famously articulated this troubled relationship: "Science without religion is lame and religion without science is blind."[63] Proctor suggests that by bringing human experience "into the science-and-religion equation," by giving these fields "a human face," we can understand religion, science and humanity in more complex ways.[64] It is therefore worthwhile to consider *The Story of Life* as a work that proposes the complementarity, rather than incompatibility, of science and religion. The agency of *The Story of Life* lies in its fusion of the overt informational feature of science with the obvious transformational goal of religion, encouraging its audience to experience surprise through the unusual juxtaposition of science and religion.

Liminality thus emerges as fundamental to the mural's agency. The Royal Tyrrell Museum educates visitors about palaeontological history and the mural poses questions about the human aspect within this history. *The Story of Life* destabilizes the categories of religion and science, brings together disparate art forms, and bridges exterior and interior spaces, while implying the interrelatedness of all aspects of the universe. Encountered in a liminal place and discursively situated in interdisciplinarity, the mural suggests that all life forms are at an important and fundamental threshold, pointing to humanity's dependence upon and role within the outcome of evolution. As such, it sets the stage for possible cognitive, emotional, and moral change in the mural's audience, exactly what Ecotheology maintains is needed to save the ecosystems of the world from current human practices. It suggests that the choices humanity makes now, at this evolutionary threshold, have the potential to affect fundamental societal, cultural, political, and cognitive structures. It conveys Berry's message of the need "to create a new language, even a new sense of what it is to be human … to transcend not only our national limitations, but even our species isolation, to enter into the larger community of living species."[65] *The Story of Life* challenges us to re-evaluate how we define community and to live creatively in and through our world in order to recognize, cherish, and celebrate its complex interconnectivity. By suggesting the possibilities for a new wisdom-knowledge paradigm, it encourages us to "ecologize."

NOTES

1 Deep Time is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as: "Time in the far distant past or future; *spec.* time viewed on a geological or cosmological scale rather than the historical scale." Accessed 24 Apr. 2012, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/264316?redirectedFrom=Deep%20Time#eid

Deep Time is a term currently used by many scientists to describe the unfathomable time dating back 4.6 billion years when the earth emerged from the chaos of gas and energy, thereby starting the beginning of life on this planet. Paul R. Pinet, "Deep Time: Its Meaning and Moral Implications," *Forum on Public Policy Online, a Journal of the Oxford Round Table*, 2. Accessed 24 Apr. 2012, http://www.forumonpublicpolicy.com./spring09papers/archivespr09/pinet.pdf

2 "Entry Hall Mural by Lorraine Malach Progress Report," File 3935-M2 Vol. 1 Operational Exhibits and Displays – Case Files, Malach, Lorraine/Sculpture for Lobby, Royal Tyrrell Museum Archives.

3 *Royal Tyrrell Museum* "About Us." Accessed 26 Feb. 2012, http://www.tyrrellmuseum.com/about_us.htm

4 Descriptive panel beside *The Story of Life,* Royal Tyrrell Museum, Drumheller Alberta. Viewed by the author 9 Sept. 2010.

5 Dr. Paul Johnston, phone interview with the author, 2 Nov. 2010.

6 Agnes Horvath, Bjørn Thomassen, and Harald Wydra, "Introduction: Liminality and Cultures of Change," *International Political Anthropology* 3. Accessed 13 Mar. 2012, http://www.politicalanthropology.org/the-journal-current-a-past-issues/57-ipa-journal-3

7 Information on Malach's ideas and attitudes, except where noted, was obtained through conversations with her friends, particularly Syl Kramer, Catherine Carpenter, Christine Rutledge, Father Don MacDonald O.F.M., Warren Nicholls, Kathryn Valentine, and Johnston.

8 Bob Rimmer, "Newton's Ellipse," *Wolfram Demonstrations Project*. Accessed 15 Oct. 2010, http://demonstrations.wolfram.com/NewtonsEllipse

9 Johnston, "Mural Unveiling." Lorraine Malach Mural, Royal Tyrrell Museum Archives.

10 Lorraine Malach, letter to Dolores Kramer, n.d., Lorraine Malach Archives, private collection.

11 Johnston, "Mural Unveiling."

12 Malach, letter to her parents, 30 May 1955, Lorraine Malach Archives.

13 Malach, letter to Dolores Kramer, 29 Nov. 1980, Lorraine Malach Archives; Johnston, 2 Nov. 2010.

14 Several issues of these journals were in Malach's possession when she died according to her executor. Malach also mentions these journals in multiple letters to Dolores Kramer during the last two decades of her life. Lorraine Malach Archives.

15 Malach kept many of these books beside her bed and frequently wrote in her letters to friends about her excitement in reading these authors. Her friends in both the scientific and religious communities also speak of her passionate engagement with these ideas, Lorraine Malach Archives. Father Don MacDonald, interview with the author, 13 Sept. 2010; Syl Kramer, interview with the author, 6 Sept. 2010; Brother Dominic Tessier, interview with the author, 31 Aug. 2010; Johnston, phone interview with the author, 2 Nov. 2010.

16 Johnston, "Mural Unveiling."

17 "Entry Hall Mural by Lorraine Malach Progress Report," File 3935-M2, Vol. 1 Operational Exhibits and Displays – Case Files, Malach, Lorraine/Sculpture for Lobby, Royal Tyrrell Museum Archives.

18 Marcos Barbosa O.S.B., "Sacred Art," in *The Liturgy of Vatican II: A Symposium in Two Volumes,* ed. William Baraúna, English edition, Jovian Lang, OFM (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1966), 255.

19 *Stations of the Cross,* St. Michael's Retreat House, Lumsden, SK, 1963; *Spring and Summer* and *Fall and Winter*, St. Michael's Retreat House, Lumsden, 1969; Mural, Catholic Information Centre, Regina, SK, 1970; Altarpiece, Our Lady of Perpetual Help parish church, Qu'Appelle, SK, 1973; Mural, Plains Hospital, Regina, 1975; Mural, Franciscan Friary, Edmonton, 1977; Mural, Mount Saint Francis Retreat Centre, Cochrane, AB, 1978; *Stephan's Quintet*, Sacred Heart parish church, Regina, 1978 (now in St. Vincent de Paul parish church, Weyburn, SK); *Exultation*, Holy Family Notre Dame parish church, Port Alberni, BC, 1981; *Glorious Mysteries,* Holy Rosary Cathedral, Regina, 1988; *The Vision of St. Ignatius,* Campion College, Regina, 1991; Panel, St. Anthony's School Drumheller, AB, 1994; Panel, Holy Family parish church, St. Albert, AB, 1998; Panel, Monsignor Neville School, Calgary, 2000.

20 Malach, letter to her mother, 18 Jan. 1955, Lorraine Malach Archives. Malach took "Confraternity of Christian Doctrine at the St. John's night school to further the idea of pushing one's religion – perhaps through painting …. " Malach's interest in ecumenism was expressed in a letter ca. 1976, to Dolores Kramer, Lorraine Malach Archives.

21 As a student, Malach wrote she was "living the way I believe. Not in complete austerity but really on the simple side – all art people do, serious art people – I can see I'm no special case. It's just that all other things are so incidental." Malach, letter to her mother, 26 Mar. 1955, Lorraine Malach Archives. In the early 1980s, she described herself in the media as a Franciscan, although members of the order have pointed out she was never formally affiliated with them. Elaine Carlson, "Lorraine Malach Between Commissions," *Regina This Month* (June 1982): 4. Lorraine Malach interviewed by Ken Mitchell, Saskmedia, 1982. Saskatchewan Archives Board, VTR-6073.1. Tessier, interview with the author, 31 Aug. 2010.

22 Sean McDonagh, "St. Francis, Patron of Ecology," *Columbans Ireland,* Mission Challenges. Accessed 19 Sept. 2012, http://columban.com/ssc/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=392:st-francis-patron-of-ecology&catid=85:action&Itemid=270

23 Malach, letter to Dolores Kramer, n.d., Lorraine Malach Archives.

24 *The Blue Planet* (1990), Director: Ben Burtt, Writer: Toni Myers, Producer: Graeme Ferguson for the National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution, presented by Lockheed Corporation and National Air and Space Museum.

25 Malach, letter to Dolores and Syl Kramer, n.d., Lorraine Malach Archives.

26 *Matthew Fox: Welcome Friends of Creation Spirituality!* Accessed 19 Sept. 2012, http://www.matthewfox.org/about-matthew-fox/

27 Malach sent newspaper clippings to a friend about Fox and referred to him in letters when she contemplated the "future church," which she eagerly anticipated. Malach, letter to Dolores Kramer, 30 Nov. 1992, Lorraine Malach Archives. The "future church" to which Malach refers is a Roman Catholic organization whose guiding principle is a "spirituality based on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the

Eucharist, the Spirit-filled beliefs of the faithful and the teachings of Vatican II." Their vision includes collaborative worship, married and celibate priests, and participation of women as "leaders of faith communities." Future Church Mission and Vision. Accessed 21 Sept. 2012, http://www.futurechurch.org/about/

28 Fox, *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality* (Santa Fe, NM: Bear & Co., 1983), 9–29.

29 Wayne G. Boulton, "The Thoroughly Modern Mysticism of Matthew Fox," *Christian Century* 107 (18 Apr. 1990): 428-32. Accessed 19 Sept. 2012, http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=773; *Matthew Fox: Creation Spirituality (excerpt) – A Thinking Allowed DVD, with Jeffrey Mishlove*, Press: Video. Accessed 19 Sept. 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=72-ByOYQtxU

30 Thomas Berry, "Foreword," in Anne Marie Dalton, *A Theology for the Earth: The Contributions of Thomas Berry and Bernard Lonergan* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1999), vii.

31 Malach, letter to her parents, 1955, Lorraine Malach Archives.

32 Berry, "Foreword," vii.

33 Brian Swimme and Berry, *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era – A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Universe* (New York: Harper One, 1992), 1–4.

34 Berry, "Ethics and Ecology: A paper delivered to the Harvard Seminar on Environmental Values, Harvard University, April 9, 1996, www.earth-community.org/images/Ethics%20and%20Ecology%201996-Edited.pdf. This file is from a website created by Caroline Webb, a former friend and student of Berry, *Thomas Berry and the Earth Community.* Accessed 19 Sept. 2012, http://www.earth-community.org/pdfs.htm

35 Carolyn M. King, "Ecotheology: A Marriage between Secular Ecological Science and Rational Compassionate Faith," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture, Ecotheology Issue* 10 (January 2001): 43.

36 Ibid, 43–45.

37 H. Paul Santmire, "Ecotheology," *Encyclopedia of Science and Religion*, ed. J.W.V. van Huyssteen (New York: Thomas Gale, 2003).

38 This term was used by Bruno Latour in 1998 and more recently in 2009. Latour, "To Modernize or Ecologise? That Is the Question," In *Remaking Reality: Nature at the Millenium,* eds. B. Braun and N. Castree (London: Routledge, 1998), 221–42; Latour, "Will Non-Humans Be Saved? An Argument in Ecotheology," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15, no. 3 (September 2009): 464.

39 Malach, letter to Dolores and Syl Kramer, n.d., Lorraine Malach Archives.

40 Santmire, "Ecotheology."

41 Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988), 17.

42 Mary Evelyn Tucker, "Biography of Thomas Berry," *Thomas Berry.* Accessed 29 Dec. 2010, http://www.thomasberry.org/Biography/tucker-bio.html

43 Berry, "Twelve Principles for Understanding the Universe and the Role of the Human in the Universe Process," in *Thomas Berry and the New Cosmology*, eds. Anne Lonergan and Caroline Richards (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1988), 107-108.

44 Malach, letter to Dolores and Syl Kramer, 1992, Lorraine Malach Archives.

45 Malach, letter to Dolores and Syl Kramer, 15 Oct. 1993, Lorraine Malach Archives.

46 The nuances among these terms, and the importance of these nuances to promote Ecotheology were discussed in an online forum published as "Forum: Epic, Story,

Narrative: A Cosmogen Dialogue," *Epic of Evolution Quarterly* (Fall 1998): 10–16. References have been made here to the contributions of Connie Barlow (10), Lauren de Boer (12), and Larry Edwards (16). Accessed 22 Mar. 2012, http://thegreatstory.org/EpicStoryNarrative.pdf

47 Malach specifically mentions Turkish, Egyptian, Sumerian, Babylonian, Indian, Cambodian and Chinese art. Malach's diary, 28 Feb. – 2 Mar. 1961, Lorraine Malach Archives.

48 Malach, quoted in Deanna Driver, "To Evoke a Response," *The United Church Observer, Special Edition on the Arts,* December 1985, Lorraine Malach Archives.

49 Craig Carpenter, in conversation with the author, 6 Sept. 2010. These murals include: *Stephan's Quintet*, 1979; *Exultation*, 1981; *The Vision of St. Ignatius*, 1990; Panel, St. Anthony's School, 1994; and Panel, Monsignor Neville Anderson School, 2000.

50 Exchange of emails between Monty Williams, SJ, and the author, 14 Aug. 2010.

51 Bessie Bissett, "Italian art masterpieces studied by Regina artist," *Leader-Post* (Regina)?, Lorraine Malach Archives.

52 Jacob Ketler, interview with the author, 26 May 2011. Ketler installed all Malach's large murals from 1979 onwards, including *The Story of Life* in the Royal Tyrrell Museum a few months after Malach's death.

53 Ronald A. Kuchta, "Major Themes in Contemporary Ceramic Art," in *The Persistence of Craft: The Applied Arts Today,* ed. Paul Greenhalgh (London: A&C Black; New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 88.

54 Royal Tyrrell Museum, "Seven Wonders of the Badlands." Accessed 11 Mar. 2012, http://www.tyrrellmuseum.com/media/Teachers_Resource_Guides-7Wonders.pdf

55 Heinz Insu Fenkl, "Of Men and Mud." Originally published in *Realms of Fantasy Magazine*, 1997. Accessed 11 Mar. 2012, http://www.endicott-studio.com/jMA0301/menMud.html

56 Martin M. Hanczyc, Shelly M. Fujikawa and Jack W. Szostak, "Experimental Models of Primitive Cellular Compartments: Encapsulation, Growth, and Division," *Science* 302, no. 5645 (24 Oct. 2003): 618–22.

57 Fox, *Original Blessing*, 61.

58 These works include *Spring and Summer, Autumn and Winter, Untitled* (Franciscan Friary 1977); *Stephan's Quintet, The Opera Singer* (Christine Rutledge, Calgary, ca. 1981); *The Entertainers* (Timothy Vernon, Victoria, 1979); *Untitled* (Sturdy-Stone Centre, Saskatoon, 1979); *Exultation* (Holy Family Notre Dame parish church, Port Alberni, 1981).

59 Swimme and Berry, *The Universe Story,* 72.

60 Ibid., 11, 44.

61 Malach, letter to Dolores Kramer, Lorraine Malach Archives.

62 Suzi Gablik, *The Reenchantment of Art* (New York and London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 85–88.

63 Albert Einstein quoted in James D. Proctor, "Introduction," in *Science, Religion, and the Human Experience,* ed. James D. Proctor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3, doi:10.1093/0195175328.001.0001

64 Proctor, "Introduction," *Science, Religion and the Human Experience,* 9.

65 Berry, *The Dream of the Earth,* 42.

The Story of Life : murale en céramique par Lorraine Malach

SUSAN SURETTE

La murale de céramique en relief *The Story of Life* – « L'histoire de la vie » – a été installée à l'entrée du Royal Tyrrell Museum, Drumheller, Alberta, en 2003. Cette institution provinciale d'éducation et de recherche mondialement connue dessert le grand public et la communauté scientifique, et s'intéresse particulièrement à la riche histoire paléontologique de l'Alberta. La céramiste Lorraine Malach (1933–2003) a conçu cette murale pour rendre accessible aux visiteurs du musée le concept du temps profond, en représentant les processus d'évolution, de diversification et d'extinction par des figures humaines abstraites et des symboles scientifiques. Les dix panneaux d'argile cuite non vernie, beige, de quinze mètres de hauteur et de trente centimètres de profondeur, sont dramatiquement éclairés afin de souligner les surfaces sculptées de cette composition complexe.

Située dans un musée de paléontologie, *The Story of Life* est tout d'abord comprise de manière scientifique, ce que viennent confirmer des représentations de notes, de fossiles, et d'éléments géologiques. Cependant, le langage visuel de la murale et sa présentation tiennent davantage de l'art : éclairée de façon dramatique, elle utilise un vocabulaire stylistique associé à l'abstraction figurative de l'art moderne du début du XX^e^ siècle. Les informations qui sont fournies nous apprennent que l'artiste en est l'unique auteur et nous renseignent sur sa démarche artistique. Les commentaires des visiteurs indiquent aussi une association avec l'art religieux et, lorsque Malach a soumis sa maquette pour approbation, le musée s'est inquiété de possibles connotations de ce genre. Malgré cela, lorsque le musée a réaménagé le hall d'entrée pour mettre la murale en valeur, ils ont souligné ce fait, créant un espace de contemplation avec un toit de tissu rappelant une tente. De manière discursive, l'art moderne, la religion et la science sont souvent considérés comme incompatibles, mais *The Story of Life* insère les langages métaphoriques de l'art moderne et de la religion dans un espace scientifique.

Dans le présent essai, nous examinons le contenu matériel et visuel de la murale dans le contexte de sa situation pour comprendre comment et pourquoi elle amalgame la science, l'art moderne et la religion. Nous proposons que l'effet de la murale tient à sa propre liminalité discursive à

l'intérieur d'un espace liminal et, nous tournant vers l'écothéologie, nous soutenons que la murale provoque la transformation morale de l'humanité, alors que nous sommes au début de ce qu'on appelle l'ère écozoïque. Selon l'écothéologie, cette transformation est cruciale pour affronter de pressants défis écologiques et sociaux. Elle s'exprime à travers les écrits du théologien, écologiste et historien de la culture Thomas Berry et dans la spiritualité de la création élaborée par le théologien écologiste Matthew Fox. L'intérêt que Malach a toujours porté à la cosmologie et à la paléontologie, la pratique des beaux-arts et des arts appliqués, l'attrait pour la mystique chrétienne médiévale et le féminisme, tels qu'exprimés dans ses propres écrits, les rapports des médias et les interviews avec des amis, complètent cette discussion de la matière, de l'iconographie et du style de la murale.

Le contenu scientifique de *The Story of Life* raconte les dix premières périodes géologiques et l'évolution de la terre, depuis la formation du système solaire jusqu'à l'extinction des dinosaures. Malach a puisé à même ses connaissances scientifiques étendues pour représenter la chimie et la physique fondamentales associées à la cosmologie, à la formation biologique de la vie et à sa diversification, ainsi qu'aux cycles d'extinction et leurs conséquences pour les formes de vie. Les dimensions monumentales des métaphores humaines suggèrent, cependant, la possibilité d'un contenu religieux dans la murale, car la religion procède principalement au niveau de la métaphore. Malach avait déjà utilisé des figures semblables dans ses céramiques destinées à des espaces religieux catholiques, et ces figures plus grandes que nature, sculptées dans l'argile naturelle, font référence à d'autres sculptures religieuses monumentales, occidentales et non occidentales. Pendant la dernière décennie de sa vie, Malach, catholique fervente mais contestataire et parfois rebelle, s'était de plus en plus attachée à l'écothéologie. L'écothéologie propose un nouveau paradigme qui unit la science et la religion pour célébrer la création originelle et la recréation continue de l'univers, où l'aspect anthropocentrique de plusieurs religions actuelles est remplacé par un autre qui glorifie les humains aussi bien que les non-humains. L'utilisation du mot « histoire », dans le titre de la murale, est une référence aux tentatives de l'écothéologie d'exprimer ce nouveau paradigme d'une manière intergénérationnelle et culturelle, au mythe et à l'expression artistique. L'idée d'histoire, dans la murale, est portée par les figures stylisées. Leur légère individualisation faciale suggère à la fois l'évolution commune et la communauté universelle et encourage une approche coopérative à la résolution des problèmes écologiques et sociaux, un des messages au centre de l'écothéologie. L'argile, comme matière, fait référence aux limites et aux possibilités de la terre elle-même, les Badlands de la région de Drumheller, et à la formation de la vie que l'on retrouve dans la littérature aussi bien

religieuse que scientifique. Les éléments de la composition comprennent des allusions à des partitions musicales avec des mesures et des groupes de notes qui expriment l'ordre de l'univers ainsi que l'émerveillement et la joie de l'humanité lorsqu'elle fait l'expérience de ce mystère. La murale disloque les structures discursives établies, renverse les hiérarchies scientifiques et religieuses traditionnelles et souligne l'incertitude de l'avenir du monde et de toute vie si les modes de pensée modernistes prédominent.

Traduction : Élise Bonnette

Detail, Marisa Portolese, *A Descent into the Maelstrom*, 2010, C-print, 102 × 127 cm.
(Photo: Marisa Portolese)

ARTICLE

Wassily Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* and the Video Works of Sylvia Safdie, Marisa Portolese, Marielle Nitoslawska, and Sarindar Dhaliwal

LOREN LERNER

The artist must have something to say, for this task is not the mastery of form, but the suitability of that form to its content … From which it is self-evident that the artist, as opposed to the non-artist, has a threefold responsibility: (1) he must render up again that talent which has been bestowed upon him; (2) his actions and thoughts and feelings, like those of every human being, constitute the spiritual atmosphere, in such a way that they purify or infect the spiritual air; and (3) these actions and thoughts and feelings are the material for his creations, which likewise play a part in constituting the spiritual atmosphere.

Wassily Kandinsky, 1911[1]

In 1949, Clement Greenberg, an American art critic who was closely associated with modern art in the United States, categorically ejected religion from modernism by stating that art had to be "uninflated by illegitimate content – no religion or mysticism or political certainties."[2] In his essay on modernist painting in 1960, he upheld his belief that none of the arts need religion: "The arts could save themselves from this levelling down only by demonstrating that the kind of experience they provided was valuable in its own right and not to be obtained from any other kind of activity."[3]

Greenberg's attention to the formal properties of art, such as line, colour, light, composition, structure, and space, his exacting approach to art criticism, and his understanding of the development of modern art as an unfolding tradition have had major impacts on generations of art critics and art historians. As Donald Kuspit has repeatedly stated, Greenberg's theory of modernist painting was the final phase in "despiritualizing" art by reducing it completely to a "material medium."[4] This was most evident in Greenberg's argument that "the great masters of the past achieved their art by virtue of combinations of pigment whose real effectiveness was 'abstract,' and … their greatness is not owed to the spirituality with which they conceived the things they illustrated so much as it is to the success with which they ennobled raw matter to the point where it could function as art."[5]

Although few Western artists today explicitly express an adherence to religious beliefs or congregational affiliations, there has been a resurgence of religious subject matter in contemporary art. The German philosopher and

sociologist Jürgen Habermas adopts the term "post-secular society" to capture the return to the religious ties that had steadily and dramatically lapsed after the Second World War.[6] In his 2008 essay, *Notes on a Post-Secular Society,* Habermas refers to a society that expects the continuing survival of religious communities where relations between citizens who believe and those who do not produce a "public consciousness." This development, he explains, alters religious and secular ways of thinking."[7]

Habermas's concept has its roots in the writings of key figures who have reinstated theology and religion in contemporary philosophy. Jacques Derrida, for example, considers "a messianism without religion" to mean an openness in one's commitment to justice and the just treatment of every individual. He calls this a "quasi-atheistic" attitude, differentiating it from the religious messianism of the past.[8] Paul Ricoeur argues that moral life is inherently creative and has at its centre the primordial human ability to transform historical evil and tragedy through the creation of an ever more radically inclusive moral society.[9] Julia Kristeva discusses "various means of purifying the abject" that "make up the history of religions, and end up with that catharsis par excellence called art, both on the far and near side of religion."[10]

Elsewhere in this issue, I have looked at the secularization of twentieth-century Canadian art and some manifestations of post-secularism in more recent practice.[11] In this essay, I look more closely at a set of ideas that have accompanied its current reinvigoration. I refer to the seminal text *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1911) by Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944), in which the Russian-born painter and philosopher, influenced by his upbringing as an Orthodox Christian and by theosophical writings, used abstracted religious iconographical components to create new spiritual perceptions about colour, music, and abstract form.

The resurgence of religious themes in art has sparked a renewal of interest in Kandinsky's understanding of spirituality.[12] An early, and highly significant, indication of this was the Los Angeles County Museum of Art exhibition *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890–1985* (1986), which revisited the origins of abstraction in the paintings of Kandinsky, František Kupka, Piet Mondrian, and Kazimir Malevich, examining the simultaneous influence of non-western religions, mysticism, and the occult.[13] This rethinking of abstract art refuted the idea that it was narrowly concerned with line, form, and colour.

Since this significant exhibition, numerous others have been indebted to Kandinsky's concepts of art, spirituality, and the spiritual mission of the artist.[14] *Negotiating Rapture: The Power of Art to Transform Lives*, at Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art in 1996, attempted to define the sacerdotal role of artists. According to curator Richard Francis, the artists included had

been "making art in their studios in much the same way that monks meditate in their cells." The substantial essays in the exhibition catalogue explore how artists, as creators, can be propelled from the ordinary into a transformative experience approaching spiritual mystery, religious ecstasy, and the sublime, and how we, as spectators, can respond by deepening our understanding of humanity within both personal and cultural contexts.[15] Among recent exhibitions, by far the most comprehensive was *Traces du Sacré* at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 2008. Over 350 works of art by nearly 200 artists from the nineteenth century to the present were arranged thematically in categories such as Apocalypses, Nostalgia of the Infinite, Doors of Perception, and Resonances of the Archaic. The objective was to investigate the way that art continues to demonstrate, in our secular world, the quest for spirituality and to explore the multi-faceted reasons for this persistence.[16]

Numerous publications on Kandinsky, as well as recent writing about contemporary artists and religion by Brent Plate, James Elkins, David Morgan, Maria Hlavajova, Sven Lütticken, and Jill Winder, have offered ways, both direct and indirect, to interpret and extrapolate from Kandinsky's writings about art,[17] particularly Kandinsky's perception that the artist is capable of transforming the individual and society, his belief that scientific developments can contribute to new artistic discoveries and modes of experiencing reality, and his theory that the communication between artist and the viewer involves the senses and the mind.[18]

Differing from these approaches is the argument made by Peg Weiss, author of *Kandinsky and Old Russia: The Artist as Ethnographer and Shaman* (1995).[19] According to Weiss, Kandinsky's most profound ideas about the spiritual power of art were developed during his travels in the province of Vologda in northwest Russia, which he undertook after studying law, economics, and ethnography at Moscow University. Departing from the premise of her 1979 book, where she considered the German *Jugendstil* to be the origin for Kandinsky's development of abstraction,[20] Weiss now argues that Kandinsky's ethnographic education, his involvement with the Imperial Society of Friends of the Natural Sciences, Anthropology, and Ethnography, and his knowledge of shamanism and the folklore of the Russian peoples were seminal experiences. While Kandinsky's Russian heritage and interests in folk and primitive art had been discussed previously by a number of art historians, Weiss provides the first in-depth analysis of his interest in ethnography.

In 1889, Kandinsky embarked on a six-week, 1,600-mile journey to learn about the folk art and customs of the region's native peoples. He took detailed notes and made many sketches that contributed to his merging of the beliefs and images from Finno-Ugric, Lapp and Siberian shamanism with Christian

themes and motifs.[21] Kandinsky emerged from the journey having discovered the imagery and underlying philosophy that, as Weiss explains, would inform *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* and guide his artistic production for the rest of his life.

The ethnographic methodology that led to these discoveries resonates with contemporary art practice. In his *Return of the Real* (1996), Hal Foster devotes a chapter to "The Artist as Ethnographer."[22] Considering the objectives and practices of recent art movements, Foster explores what he calls the "ethnographic turn" since the 1960s. He argues that, with anthropology becoming the new language of artistic practice and critical discourse, artists must resist the tendency to project themselves onto the culture of the other in a search for political truth and cultural identity. Reflexivity, Foster warns the artist, is essential to avoid identifying with a community as though it were one's own.

Bearing this caution in mind, I am nevertheless struck by the sincerity and seriousness of purpose exhibited by artists who, like Kandinsky, journey to places that they relate to as their own and purposefully connect to spiritually. The first aim of this essay is to consider what Kandinsky defined as the spiritual mission of the authentic artist and then show how this mission can be seen to have been adopted and adapted by four Canadian women artists, Sarindar Dhaliwal (1953–), Marielle Nitoslawska (1953–), Marisa Portolese (1969–), and Sylvia Safdie (1942–).

The second, closely related to the first and informed by Habermas's notion of today's post-secular society, is to consider the widespread phenomenon of people who situate themselves at some distance from the religion of their forebears, yet maintain a productive relationship with it. For this too applies to Dhaliwal, Nitoslawska, Portolese, and Safdie and, arguably, to members of their audiences who experienced exhibitions of their work in Montreal.

For these four artists, particular histories and geographies served as points of contact for the evocation of different religious and spiritual experiences. With Kandinsky's statements from *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* and his ethnographic experiences as a guide, I will consider how these artists, in ways comparable to Kandinsky, understand art-making to be a spiritual activity. With each artist, I will explore how different places, whether the Middle East for Safdie, Italy for Portolese, Quebec for Nitoslawska, or India for Dhaliwal, were contributing factors in evoking the "inner necessity" of spiritual experience.

Sylvia Safdie: Abstraction as Spiritual Expression

Sylvie Safdie considers herself to be a "non-practising Jew."[23] While she participates in family celebrations of certain Jewish holidays, she is not

religious in the traditional sense. In this respect she is like many Jewish intellectuals who connect with Jewish cultural history and identity but not its religious beliefs and practices. Informing her spiritual life and artwork is Safdie's interest in the Jewish history of migration and her strong relationship with nature.

In Safdie's Moroccan video series, created in 2009, we see images of cemeteries and synagogues, the entrance to a Jewish quarter, and portraits and figures of the people currently inhabiting those spaces. Safdie's people came from Syria, where they had lived in a similarly vibrant community, but Syria had long ago been lost to them. Since as a Jew Safdie was unable to visit Syria, Morocco became a catalyst for her to think about her own place of origin and what happens when a society no longer inhabits the place where it lived for many years.

Before embarking on her project, Safdie took on the role of ethnographer, just as Kandinsky did during his expedition in 1889. She did extensive research to deepen her understanding of the history of the Jews in the area, travelling with a guide to the villages and towns around Marrakech and to southern Morocco, where she gathered the footage that led to this project. She interviewed Berber elders, an elderly Jewish scholar who came from a village in southern Morocco, and an old rabbi in Casablanca who had known the Jews who once lived in these places. Safdie learned that in every village and town Jews had inhabited the *mellah*, the Jewish quarter, and had taken part in a symbiotic and respectful relationship with the Berber people. She also learned that the situation in southern Morocco was different from that in the Middle East in that the Jewish population had left voluntarily. Safdie used this considerable ethnographic documentation to create an abstract, poetic essence of her experience.

Her search focused on looking for what Susanne Langer describes in *Feeling and Form* as an "ethnic domain," a place in the non-geographical sense that is fabricated in order to make visible, tangible, and sensible the illusion of a self-contained space.[24] An abandoned synagogue in Amzrou, for example, embodies feelings of the sacred and collective. In contrast to what Kuspit describes as Kandinsky's discovery of "an artistic experience of religion and a religious experience of art"[25] in the bright and intricately coloured interiors of Russian churches and chapels, Safdie responds sensuously to the few crumbling remains of a Moroccan Jewish community. In *Wall, A Triptych* (2009), a video consisting of three screens or projections, a patch of light travels along the wall of a synagogue, offering a visual expression of the past, present, and future (Fig. 1). A second work, titled *The Guardian* (2009), is arranged in the form of a diptych. It shows Mbark, the synagogue's caretaker, standing in the interior, repeating over and over, almost like a mantra, the names of the eighteen or so Jewish families who used to live in the

1 | Sylyia Safdie, *Wall, A Triptych*, 2009. 6:37 min (continuous loops). Camera: Sylvia Safdie. Editing: Patrick Andrew Boivin, Sylvia Safdie. Music: Arthur Bull. Sound design: Patrick Andrew Boivin. Format: HD. (Photo: Sylyia Safdie)

community (Fig. 2). Rays from above illuminate his face as he appears from and then disappears into the light. Particles of dust from the earth and straw used to make the walls and floor move around him, suggesting the living force and spiritual nature of this ancient religious building.

In these works Safdie focuses on the region's few remaining symbols of Jewish culture, imagining the past through images of the present. In one video exposure, titled *Morning* (2009), the camera focuses on a brightly lit opening at the end of a dark tunnel. A silhouette of a woman with a child on her back, pouring water from a pail, appears and disappears in a mirage-like image. Since the opening was the entrance to the *mellah*, long ago this might have been a Jewish woman.

Safdie primarily uses light to express the objects and beings she discovered in these formerly Jewish places. As a consequence, the faces, figures, walls, floor, and other contained spaces become universal, removing us from the ordinary and placing us in a context that is transformative. In this way her approach can be associated with the spiritual investigations that interested Kandinsky. The abstraction he gave birth to was nourished by a wellspring of religious elements whose underlying premise was that the spiritual world is governed by laws that mirror natural laws and can be expressed in symbols. The spiritual world, like the natural world, is charged with energy. The ethereal properties of light can be understood to awaken the ability to experience the metaphysical. Inherent in this concept

2 | Sylvia Safdie, *The Guardian*, 2009. 3:26 min (continuous loops). Camera: Sylvia Safdie. Editing: Patrick Andrew Boivin, Sylvia Safdie. Sound design: Patrick Andrew Boivin. Format: HD. (Photo: Sylyia Safdie)

is the paradox of the abstract and concrete: the understanding that art cannot simply be derived from abstract universal laws but must also involve concrete particulars, for example, the illuminated dust inside an empty synagogue.[26]

Kandinsky believed there was a powerful relationship between music and art and was determined to create a synaesthetic equivalence in his art, with lines, colours, and movements mirroring the harmony and rhythm of a musical composition. His objective was to paint music, to evoke the harmonies of a composer such as Mozart by using a "strife of colours" with "unexpected assaults … broken chains, antitheses and contradictions, these make up our harmony."[27] Safdie achieves this same synaesthesia through the use of moving images and goes one step further by selecting sounds to accompany each video, often collaborating with contemporary musicians. In *Dust* (2009), Malcolm Goldstein responds to the image with violin and voice improvisations. In *The Guardian,* the layering of sounds includes the *adhan*, the Muslim call to prayer that echoes four times a day in the synagogue, the names Mbark recites, natural sounds from inside the synagogue, and Jewish prayers from a Hiloula, an occasion when Moroccan Jews visit a sage's grave, usually on the anniversary of his death, to light candles and pray for health and prosperity.[28] The video offers us a mix of Hebrew sounds, both those that are no longer heard in this particular synagogue and others currently natural to the space. The repetition of words and sounds increasingly reveals the

3 | Marisa Portolese, *Pietà*, 2010. Video projection, 15:26 min. (Photo: Marisa Portolese)

inner harmony of the images, bringing to the fore what Kandinsky refers to as the "unsuspected spiritual properties" of sound.[29]

Safdie's spiritual experiences, which have their sources in her personal journeys and philosophies, infuse her approach to Jewish ethnography and history. As she explains, "I do believe one thing, and I think it's a fundamental thing, I think that we are all connected to the universal energy, and I think that we are all connected to collective energy. Some of us are more open to it than others." For her, as for Kandinsky, inner meanings can be found in the subtle world of natural matter, where feelings and thoughts exist as material entities. As an artist connected to the energy of life and nature, Safdie crosses cultural and historical barriers. Despite the loss of the Jewish communities in Morocco, with only traces left – the cemeteries and synagogues, houses and streets, dust and fragments – she is intent on showing us that spiritual life, as she defines it, continues in these places.

Marisa Portolese: The Sympathetic Meaning of Relations

Pietà (2010) (Fig. 3), a passion portrait, consists of a fifteen-minute continuous loop video projection that shows the artist and her mother in a body of

water. Portolese is standing waist-deep and holding her reclining mother in her outstretched arms as the two look intensely into one another's eyes. A personal event precipitated its making: a 2007 visit to Italy with her mother to see her grandmother, who had broken her hip and been bedridden ever since, her hip inoperable because of her angina. Portolese's mother had been reluctant to make the journey by herself due to her complicated relationship with her mother. At sixteen, Portolese's mother married and went with her husband to Canada, rarely returning to visit her family. This was because, as Portolese explains: "In 1951, when my mother was five years old she was sent from her native province of Sardinia in Italy to live with her sick aunt in the southern province of Calabria. She never returned to live in her childhood home with her immediate family."[30]

While Portolese was photographing her bedridden grandmother, she observed that her mother was taking care of her in the same way she must have taken care of her aunt many years ago. The artist realized that her mother had always played the role of caretaker and now needed to be taken care of herself. Portolese went in search of a prototype that evoked her mother's spirit as well as her relationship with her mother. She found it in Michelangelo's *Pietà* (1498–99). She had thought of *Pietà* "because it

is a compassion portrait of the Madonna holding Jesus right after he was crucified, the idea of martyrdom, the Catholic reference, it is all connected to my family lineage, but also to my own mother's experience." Michelangelo's *Pietà*, Portolese explains, "expresses the inner landscape between mother and child. In my adaptation, the roles are reversed, my mother is the one portrayed in a state of vulnerability, alluding to a maelstrom of the intense emotional imbalance she experienced as a child."[31]

Images of Jesus and Mary figured prominently in Portolese's upbringing, especially iconic images of the *Pietà*. Although no longer a practising Catholic, in this work she reclaims her Catholic identity, reshaping it with poetic licence and creativity. Recognizing Michelangelo as a source of ideas for insights into human nature, Portolese was intent on discovering the "inner sympathy of meaning,"[32] as Kandinsky puts it, in his *Pietà* that could inspire her own work. Though previously she had always worked in photography, Portolese chose video because she wanted to create a photograph that could express very subtle motion. In the resulting diptych arrangement, water and sky, two separate elements, interact with one another through the bodies of the women. The brilliant light of the moon is particularly compelling, revealing a medley of colours: the silvery white sparkles and deep turquoise of the water, the dark greens of the fog and sky, the lush mauve and black of the women's nightgowns, and the fresh pink tones of their faces and arms. Portolese recognizes, as Kandinsky did in his discussion of the emotional effects of colour in *On the Spiritual in Art*, that feeling needs colour to become consummate and colour needs feeling to have inner meaning,[33] thus the colours in *Pietà* contribute to its emotional intensity.

In *Pietà* the viewer can experience some notion of transcendent reality. While Portolese interprets the religious as something out of the ordinary and spiritually inspired, this expression of a religious concept does not render the image at all religious. Rather, she remakes the religious narrative with poetic licence, introducing significant dimensions of everyday life and the perspective of personal experience.

At the same time, given its interpretative approach, *Pietà* has the potential for expanded meaning for those who understand the theology behind it. Portolese's narrative, following the spirit of Michelangelo's, is a symbolic representation that adds a fresh dimension to our analysis of a complex religious theme. Because Christ's body does not display signs of the Crucifixion, it has been suggested that the sculpture is not a depiction of death.[34] Instead, the calm face of Jesus may be interpreted as the acceptance of his abandonment. A comparison can be made with the serenity emanating from Portolese's mother, despite her abandonment as a child.

Portolese's religious symbolization offers inspiration for change. Like Kandinsky, she is determined to reaffirm the spiritual, to explore the idea of

4 | Marisa Portolese, *A Descent into the Maelstrom*, 2010, C-print, 102 × 127 cm. (Photo: Marisa Portolese)

transcendence that involves an experience inseparable from the cosmos at large and includes a renewal of the self in defiance of a disturbing reality. The act of holding her mother in water refers to baptism, which in turn refers to renewal. This rite of passage involves the cleansing away of old attitudes and opening up to inner possibilities. Portolese's mother, devalued in Italy, can escape to another country where she can eventually become a strong person in her own right. With the help of her daughter, who has adopted the role of the all-embracing mother, she has the chance to gain the strength to redeem, recover, and change her identity.

Reflecting on the similarities between Kandinsky's ideas and Portolese's work, it is interesting to read Kenneth Berry's important insights in *The Paradox of Kandinsky's Abstract Representation* (2005).[35] Berry explains that Kandinsky is not just a painter but a visual poet who uses "imagination and poetic license to explore both ambiguity and paradox." The creative thinking disclosed in his art often involves transforming common interpretations. For example, the motif of horse and rider chosen for the cover of the *Der Blaue*

Reiter almanac of 1912 played a significant role in the symbolic world and iconography of Kandinsky's œuvre. Taking as his source the images of St. George fighting a dragon that appear in Russian icons and folk paintings, he used this motif as an allegory of artistic struggle and the victory of the spirit. Kandinsky also reshaped his ethnographic experiences in order to explore his concept of an all-encompassing universal aesthetic experience. The 1889 journey transported him beyond time and space into a primal landscape, "absorbing myself in my surroundings and in my own self."[36]

Portolese similarly uses the imagery of the Pietà, baptism, her experience with her Italian family, her contact with Michelangelo's work, and a cosmic landscape of water and sky to reach into her inner being and that of her mother. It is significant in this respect that in *Pietà* Portolese and her mother evoke a female psyche and sexuality. This can be seen as profane, given the sensuous contact of mother and daughter and the voluptuous qualities of their bodies in the wet nightgowns, and at the same time as sacred, their expressions, movements, and gestures having been choreographed to mirror Catholic images of idealized femininity. In the dark night, under a cloudy sky and partial moon, mother and daughter seem to be in a trance, caught in a state of contemplation of the interior world. Implicit in this dreamlike image of sensuous forms straining to remain motionless is the notion that redemption requires corporeal sacrifice and suffering.

Portolese reveals how dream-work can be prospective, as well as retrospective, in the working through of past experiences. A companion photograph that hung in the next room of the gallery, *A Descent into the Maelstrom* (Fig. 4), represents the emotional and spiritual survival that is the aftermath of *Pietà*. The title comes from a short story by Edgar Allan Poe, in which a man recounts his survival of shipwreck and a whirlpool.[37] In *A Descent into the Maelstrom*, the night is over, dawn has come, and mother and daughter have emerged from the water and rest under a willow tree by the river's bank. Their roles are now reversed, with the mother watching over her daughter. Portolese's body is heavy and limp, having taken on the burden of her mother's grief at being sacrificed, as Christ is shown to have done in paintings of the Descent from the Cross. The image is hopeful in that both have survived the past and can now simultaneously play the roles of mother and daughter in the present and future, communicating and connecting with one another.

Marielle Nitoslawska: Sensations of Sacred Space

Marielle Nitoslawska's *Possible Movements* (2010) is a layered cinematic exploration of a religious space, the Chapel of the Sisters of Charity,

5 | Marielle Nitoslawska, *Possible Movements*, 2010. Conception and supervising: Marielle Nitoslawska. Digital animation and stereoscopic imaging: Alison Reiko Loader. Compositing design: Suzie Synnott. Management and curating: Jane Tingley. Video screen detail. (Photo: Marielle Nitoslawska)

commonly known as the Grey Nuns, which is the centrepiece of the Roman Catholic community's Mother House in Montreal.[38] The innermost strata contained a virtual architectural model of the chapel, built in 1879 by Victor Bourgeau, created by scanning various materials, including the original plans and drawings as well as renovation plans. An assortment of photographs and films were then added, such as new films and archival footage found at the Cinémathèque québécoise. The resultant stereoscopic projections made it possible to see multiple representations of the chapel in simultaneous time.

The architectural model, including cross sections, interiors, and exteriors, was entered into the computer and wire meshing was used to connect the many plans and drawings (Fig. 5). The lines were then programmed to move, fall apart into fractals, and fly away. In this way the spatial infrastructure of the building was transformed, suggesting the spiritual and otherworldly atmosphere of a church through the magical appearance and disappearance

of the lines as well as the movements of the photographs and films of the building's interior and the people occupying the space.

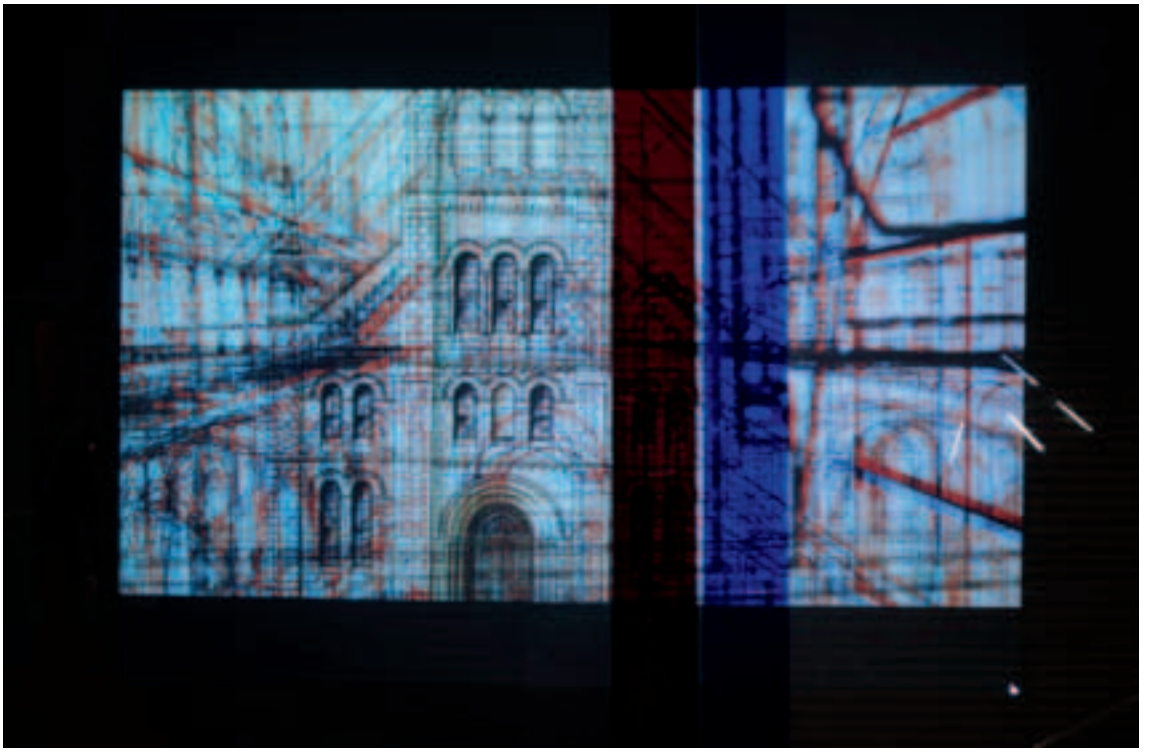
The first time Nitoslawska walked into the chapel, she said, "I would like to fly around in this space."[39] These moving images and forms not only allowed her to achieve her desire but also uncovered what she refers to as the "fourth dimension," based on Russian filmmaker and master of montage Sergei Eisenstein's concept of the cinematic overtone that occurs when space and time are unified in the virtual reality of a screen projection.[40] Using lines, film animations, colour, and light, Nitoslawska hoped to convey the transcendental experience that can occur in religious and sacred spaces.

The sensations Nitoslawska sought to project in her artistic interpretation of the chapel are similar to the emotions Kandinsky felt upon entering a church and was determined to express in his paintings. Kuspit points out: "it was an artistic experience of religion and a religious experience of art – a sense of the easy and seamless merger of religious and artistic experience, their inevitable reciprocity."[41] Kuspit emphasizes that the bright and intricate colours in the interiors of the churches and chapels were what Kandinsky appreciated and hoped to evoke in his works. For him, the convergence of these colours with feelings of inner life fused sense and spiritual experience.

The chromatic intensity in the Grey Nuns chapel is manifested in the red and blue of the stereoscopic image, best seen through glasses available at the exhibition. This technique, used in photography in the 1850s, was developed for film in 1920 by Sergei Eisenstein,[42] who used two films, one painted red and the other blue (or green), projected simultaneously to create a sense of three-dimensional images. In Nitoslawska's screen projections the resulting optical uneasiness stemming from the contradiction between the strangely illuminated images and the empty surrounding space creates a dreamlike phenomenon rich with evanescent light and colour.

The interface between colour and line and the abstraction of a three-dimensional space on a flat screen is also in keeping with Kandinsky's spiritual thinking. Kandinsky describes exactly this in *On the Spiritual in Art* when he discusses the importance of "using the material plane as a space of three dimensions in order to create an ideal plane" through line and colour. He writes: "The thinness or thickness of a line, the placing of the form on the surface, the overlaying of one form on another may be quoted as examples of artistic means that may be employed. Similar possibilities are offered by colour which, when rightly used can advance or retreat, and can make of the picture a living thing, and so achieve an artistic expansion of space."[43]

As if following Kandinksy's advice, Nitoslawska produced a multilayered abstraction of the chapel that was linear and colouristic. The layers of different images suggest not only the aura of this sacred place but also the



6 | Marielle Nitoslawska, *Possible Movements*, 2010. Conception and supervising: Marielle Nitoslawska. Digital animation and stereoscopic imaging: Alison Reiko Loader. Compositing design: Suzie Synnott. Management and curating: Jane Tingley. Video screen detail. (Photo: Marielle Nitoslawska)

meta-narrative that describes the history of the Grey Nuns and their role in Quebec culture. The emphasis on movement also partakes of Kandinsky's interest in adapting forms to bring forth "their motion in the picture, their inclination to material or abstract, their mutual relations, either individually or as parts of a whole."[44] The first of the seven screens accomplishes this through a cubist-like geometric expression of the various architectural plans. The next four screens refer to the history of the Grey Nuns and the effect of the Quiet Revolution, which is represented abstractly, as when the chapel benches where people are sitting dissolve into space. The last two screens are more specifically an homage to the Grey Nuns. Here the nuns are shown spinning, as if fully involved with their bodily movements and their spirit, in the church service (Fig. 6). The paintings of the chapel are also spinning, evoking the transcendence of the space as well as the fact that the chapel is trapped in history, referring particularly to the gender roles imposed on the nuns.

7 | Sarindar Dhaliwal. *Mother with Family*, 2010, Chromira print, 35.56 × 139.7 cm. *Olive, Almond & Mustard Series* (2010). (Photo: Sarindar Dhaliwal)

In dealing with the Grey Nuns, Nitoslawska felt "the weight and burden of this history." She started to work on the Grey Nuns project years ago, when she became aware that their culture and even their space were disappearing. The building has already become part of the past, although there is one last group of nuns still inhabiting the space before Concordia University claims it for university use. The artist's ethnographic viewpoint is similar to Kandinsky's, who immersed himself in the visual evidence of religious culture during his journey to Russia's interior. While not a Christian in the sense of adhering to traditional rituals and practices, Kandinsky was inspired by what he witnessed and keenly interested in theosophy.[45] His aim was to depict a mystical, transcendent realm that transmitted his personal experience of spirituality. In the same vein Nitoslawska has trouble identifying with the structure of the Catholic Church, although she was brought up Catholic, considers herself to be of Judeo-Christian heritage, and continues to associate with that heritage.

Nitoslawska's awareness of her own spirituality, like Kandinsky's, was affected by ethnographic experiences. As a child growing up in Montreal she rejected her Polish heritage, as many children of immigrants do. In 1977, however, she moved to Poland and stayed for ten years, studying at the Polish National Film School in Lodz. It was there that she started to make what are now referred to as experimental ethnographic films: "We spent years going around the Polish countryside and filming the last generation of potters and naive artisans … I always thought that if I wasn't a filmmaker then I could have maybe been an anthropologist. I'm always interested in disappearing cultures."

Despite her dedication to "disappearing cultures," Nitoslawska understands, as Hal Foster has emphasized in his writing on the "artist-ethnographer," that engaging with anthropological ideals or attempting to have a collaborative relationship in which the artist recreates the "otherness" of a particular society is not really possible.[46] Her ethnographic intervention could not pretend to replicate the intimacy of the Grey Nuns community but this exhibition allows viewers to experience a work of art that is a response to the intersection of religion and history in the Grey Nuns chapel. The chapel appears as an illusion, with transcendent plastic symbols of a once-inhabited religious world. Within this perceptual semblance is the memory of a sacred place that is no longer what it was throughout its long history.

Sarindar Dhaliwal: Traditional Reconnections in a Journey Home

In 1956, when Sarindar Dhaliwal was three, her family moved from Birbansian, a village in India's Punjab, to Southall, a borough of London,[47] as part of an influx of Sikh Punjabis brought about through a friendship with a British Indian Army office during the Second World War. Dhaliwal grew up in Southall and was fifteen when her family decided to immigrate to Canada.[48]

Olive, Almond & Mustard … (2010) is Dhaliwal's first film/video projection after years working in painting, photography, and multimedia installations.[49] A narrative without dialogue, the work is a triptych of still and moving images accompanied by popular English and Punjabi songs. The artist wished to evoke the people and places she knew growing up in Southall and others

8 | Sarindar Dhaliwal, *Mother and Child: Dissonance*, 2009, Chromira print, 35.56 × 180.34 cm. *Olive, Almond & Mustard Series* (2010). (Photo: Sarindar Dhaliwal)

she rediscovered as an adult when she returned to Birbansian for the first time in 2002.

The film/video projection begins with grey images of Dhaliwal's childhood environment in Southall: rooftops, factory chimneys billowing smoke, streetscapes, children playing, and a fast-moving city bus. As the dull images of Southall stream across the screen, grey clouds of factory smoke turn vibrant yellow, orange, green, pink, and purple. They give way to more images of Southall, this time shops, trains, railroad stations, and row houses. Finally, a diaphanous red curtain closes on a formal family picture of Dhaliwal as a child, her siblings, and her mother (Fig. 7). Folds of deep red fabric spread across the screen to suggest that at this juncture in the story a new chapter is beginning, one marked by the ethnic things and practices that characterized Dhaliwal's home life: a bottle of bright orange olive oil, multicoloured jars of spices and preserves on shelves, cooking pots in a shower stall, and intricately embroidered cloth.

As the images unfold, intermittent and abstract expressions of colour evoke timeless space. While Dhaliwal's colours are initially attached to or contained in the objects of her home, they soon become a subjective interpretation of her vision of reality by also appearing to exist independently. The qualities of the domestic objects, however, remain important and are reminiscent of Kandinsky's correlation of the inner power of art with the traditional material culture of the home. Inspired by the colours and ornaments of the peasant houses he saw during his ethnographic expedition, he wrote: "I shall never forget the great wooden houses … In these magical houses I experienced something I have never encountered again since. They taught me to move within the picture, to live in the picture."[50] Kandinsky's encounter with the objects and spaces of these houses was instrumental in his discovery of the ideals of a transcendent aesthetics.

For Dhaliwal, the affinity of aesthetics and spiritual awareness is not so straightforward. Enamel kitchenware placed around the drain of a shower stall represents her mother's preparations for washing Dhaliwal's hair. Soon we see a young girl performing the role of Dhaliwal having her hair washed and braided. She is clearly unhappy (Fig. 8). Dhaliwal says that her mother washed her and her sister's hair with yogurt, and afterwards applied olive oil to the long tresses. In the video we see the yogurt dripping down the girl's legs and the look of anguish on her face as her mother scrubs her hair and the stinging yogurt finds its way into her eyes. Dhaliwal recalls how the girls at school refused to play with her and her sister because their hair was greasy and smelly. As a child her insecurities were shaped by her feelings of not being wanted by the English society around her and of never seeing herself reflected in that world of beauty.

Dhaliwal's mother would say, "You can't do that … We don't want you to," and Dhaliwal would ask, "Why?" and her mother would tell her, "We don't want you to do that." At an early age she figured out that the "we" her mother spoke of was not her or her mother, but the Punjabi community, made up of a tightly knit network of kinship ties. She realized that this community, this kinship, was never going to let her do what she wanted, that she would always be dominated by the "we." Her mother's answers consistently invoked Sikhism, the monotheistic religion of the rural people of Punjab, which stresses the importance of maintaining strong family connections and engaging in the practices of everyday life.[51] Kinship and family are considered to be the best institution for fulfilling the Sikh ideal of contributing to the development of society.

When Dhaliwal turned 50 she recognized that all her efforts in life came down to pulling away from her mother and it was time to return to her place of origin in Birbansian to affirm her connection to her late mother

and to better understand herself. Dhaliwal began to realize that she admired her mother's cultural values, kindness, and generosity. In *Olive, Almond & Mustard …* she comes to terms with her self-conscious ethnicity and her avoidance of the past, which was larger than herself.

Because Dhaliwal's video is a narrative of return, she inserts elements of Sikh religious practice into its sequence of images, although she is not religious herself. In Sikhism, everyday objects are imbued with religious significance or, put another way, "sacred" objects have entered into everyday practice. These objects are more than symbols: they are articles of faith that collectively form the external identity of the devotee's commitment to the *Sikh Rehni* (Way of Life).[52] They include *kesh*, uncut hair that is considered, like everything else, to be a gift from God; the *kanga*, a wooden comb that indicates cleanliness and tidiness; and *kara*, an iron bracelet that serves as a reminder to follow the morals that are at the heart of Sikh faith.

The video shows us close-ups of women's hair, combs, and bracelets, and later we see the long flowing hair of a young man, who brushes it well before fastening it into a bun and hiding it from sight under his turban. The sense we have of travelling back in time and space is accentuated by the flickering of the images and the view from a window of a fast-moving train. The train slows and now we see dimly lit countryside and then, in the centre frame, a vivid farmland scene in which a traditionally dressed woman is walking away from the viewer, a silver pail on her head and one in her hand. The woman in the landscape is simultaneously Dhaliwal's mother, who washed her hair with yogurt, and a source of experience, knowledge, and belief.

Another similarity between Kandinsky and Dhaliwal emerges in considering the final sequence of the video. Both Kandinsky's father and Dhaliwal's mother conveyed to their children an original spirituality associated with traditional life. This spirituality linked Kandinsky to his father's childhood in Kyakhta, a Siberian town in the Republic of Buryatia near the Russian-Mongolian border.[53] One senses that Dhaliwal, following her visit to her ancestral village and having created this ode to her mother, has discovered peace, happiness, freedom, and independence in the world of her imagination, where vivid colours awaken an affiliation with her family life and the landscape of her forebears.

Conclusion

In "Revisiting the Spiritual in Art," Donald Kuspit suggests "that the future for a spiritual art looks bleak … The question today is where are the few artists who are ready and willing to reaffirm the spiritual, and, more crucially, who can convince us that their art does so – that it is a beacon of transcendence in dark materialistic times."[54]

This essay shows that the video works of Sylvia Safdie, Marisa Portolese, Marielle Nitoslawska, and Sarindar Dhaliwal are just such beacons. Coming from different religious backgrounds and despite not adhering to traditional religious practices or beliefs, they deploy a variety of techniques to interweave religious, cultural, and secular threads. As Kandinsky did before them, they use the visual motifs of religion, including works of art, buildings, objects, and the natural world, as catalysts for reinvigorating a personal sense of spirituality. Simultaneously, a reservoir of cultural memories and religious knowledge sustains and renews their attitudes. Their situations can be compared to Kandinsky's memories of his childhood and the ethnographic expedition he undertook as a young man.

At the same time, these artists, like Kandinsky, do not express a straightforward or easy understanding of spirituality or of their perceptions of the world. The content and context of these video works have no simple alignment with particular religious beliefs. Significantly, the interconnections, interdependence, and diversity of these works suggest complex worldviews and beliefs.[55] Rather than establishing a sense of exclusivity or separation, their works evoke a contemporary ethnicity and spirituality that tends toward a pluralistic universalism. Each video, in effect an ethnic and aesthetic search for self-definition, offers a textured sense of being that allows the viewer to participate in another person's culture and religion. While the videos show individualism, they also recognize that parallels affect individuals across a religious and cultural spectrum.

Safdie, Portolese, Nitoslawska, and Dhaliwal have successfully recovered and revitalized cultural and religious resources from different traditions into visual dialogues that generate new perspectives. Portolese and Dhaliwal initiate this spiritual conversation through connecting with their mothers, recuperating past narratives, and creating new visions. Safdie suggests an interplay between Jewish and Moslem religious and cultural traditions that preserves the richness of a universal spirituality. Nitoslawska creatively recreates the liturgical architecture of the Grey Nuns community in a way that sustains an informed knowledge of its historical texts and religious rituals.

Drawing attention to the fictive nature of their videos, these artists encourage the viewer to participate in the production of meaning. Although the photographic reality of the images in these videos is quite different from Kandinsky's abstractions, the autobiographical references, self-reflections, expressions of interiority, and abstract manipulations of images capture what Kandinsky called "the all-important spark of inner life."[56] The interiority central to the images they chose occurs through de-emphasizing the realism of the works. This is true of Safdie's fragments of dust, the incongruous pose of Portolese and her mother, the traces of Nitoslawska's flying lines,

and Dhaliwal's bursts of colour, to mention only a few effects that serve as spiritual metaphors. This abstraction is not merely descriptive of how ethnic and religious connections are experienced but, more importantly, of how they are activated in the artist and relayed to the viewer.

While neither participating in religious rituals and ceremonies nor adhering to traditional religious beliefs, these four artists recognize that something outside their essential being and immediate consciousness requires an effort of self-definition through art. Their autobiographical searching, like Kandinsky's spiritual quest, focuses on mysterious and inviting revelations sourced in ethnic ties and traditions and recollections of personal identity. The interface between religion and ethnicity consists of ever-changing relationships embedded in different identities, diverse cultural forms, and distinct geographies. For these Canadian artists, spiritual experience emanates from acts of memory and retrospection associated with the discovery of their pasts via the lands and people of Morocco, Italy, Poland, Quebec, and India.

NOTES

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Du spirituel dans l'art de Wassily Kandinsky et les vidéos de Sylvia Safdie, Marisa Portolese, Marielle Nitoslawska et Sarindar Dhaliwal

LOREN LERNER

En 1949, le critique d'art Clement Greenberg a catégoriquement éjecté la religion du modernisme, déclarant que l'art ne devait pas être « gonflé par un contenu illégitime – aucunes certitudes religieuses, mystiques ou politiques ». Plus récemment, comme l'historien de l'art et critique Donald Kuspit l'a maintes fois répété, la théorie de la peinture moderniste de Greenberg a été la phase finale de la « déspiritualisation » de l'art en le réduisant entièrement à l'état de « médium matériel ». Bien qu'aujourd'hui peu d'artistes occidentaux affirment explicitement leur adhésion à des croyances religieuses ou à des affiliations dénominationnelles, il y a une résurgence du religieux dans l'art contemporain. Le philosophe et sociologue allemand Jürgen Habermas a adopté le terme « société post-séculière » pour signifier le retour aux liens religieux qui n'ont cessé de se briser de façon dramatique après la Deuxième Guerre mondiale. Le présent essai examine un ensemble d'idées qui ont accompagné leur retour actuel au regard du texte clé de Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944), *Du spirituel dans l'art* (1911). Ce peintre et philosophe d'origine russe, influencé par son éducation chrétienne orthodoxe et les écrits théosophiques, a utilisé des éléments iconographiques et religieux abstraits pour créer de nouvelles perceptions de la couleur, de la musique et des formes abstraites. De nombreuses publications sur Kandinsky, ainsi que de récents écrits sur les artistes contemporains et la religion, ont offert des moyens, directs et indirects, d'interpréter et d'appliquer les écrits de Kandinsky sur l'art. Cela comprend la perception de Kandinsky que l'artiste est capable de transformer l'individu et la société et que les développements scientifiques peuvent contribuer à de nouvelles découvertes et façons de connaître la réalité, ainsi que sa théorie selon laquelle les communications entre l'artiste et le spectateur mettent en jeu les sens et l'esprit. Peg Weiss, auteur de *Kandinsky and Old Russia: The Artist as Ethnographer and Shaman* (1995), a une approche différente. Selon elle, les idées les plus profondes de Kandinsky concernant le pouvoir spirituel de l'art se sont développées au cours des voyages qu'il a entrepris dans la province de Vologda, au nord-ouest de la Russie, après ses études en droit, en économie et en ethnographie à l'université de Moscou. La méthodologie ethnographique qui a conduit à ces découvertes a trouvé un écho dans la pratique artistique contemporaine. Dans *Return of the Real*

(1996), Hal Foster consacre un chapitre à « l'artiste en tant qu'ethnographe ». Considérant les objectifs et les pratiques des récents mouvements artistiques, Foster explore ce qu'il appelle « le tour ethnographique » depuis les années soixante. En rapport avec les déclarations de Kandinsky dans *Du spirituel dans l'art* et son expérience d'ethnographe et de guide, le présent essai examine comment quatre artistes canadiennes, Sylvia Safdie (n. 1942), Marisa Portolese (n. 1969), Marielle Nitoslawska (n. 1953) et Sarindar Dhaliwal (n. 1953), qu'on peut, d'une certaine manière, comparer à Kandinsky, comprennent l'art comme une activité spirituelle. Pour chacune, différents lieux – que ce soit le Moyen Orient pour Safdie, l'Italie pour Portolese, le Québec pour Nitoslawska ou l'Inde, pour Dhaliwal – ont contribué à évoquer la « nécessité intérieure » de l'expérience spirituelle. Dans la série de vidéos marocaines de Safdie, créée en 2009, nous voyons des images de cimetières et de synagogues, l'entrée d'un quartier juif et des portraits et figures des gens qui habitent présentement ces espaces. Puisque, en tant que juive, Safdie n'a pu visiter la Syrie, où sa famille a vécu dans une communauté aussi dynamique qu'au Maroc, ce pays est devenu le catalyseur qui lui a permis de penser à son propre lieu d'origine et à ce qui arrive lorsqu'une société n'habite plus le lieu où elle a vécu pendant plusieurs années. Dans *Pietà* (2010), une vidéo en boucle d'une durée de 15 minutes qui montre l'artiste et sa mère dans l'eau, Portolese utilise l'imagerie de la Pietà, le baptême, son expérience au sein de sa famille italienne, ses contacts avec l'œuvre de Michel-Ange et un paysage cosmique d'eau et de ciel pour atteindre son être intérieur et celui de sa mère. Conçue et supervisée par Marielle Nitoslawska, l'exploration cinématographique *Possible Movements* (2010) consiste en couches superposées de dessins d'architecte de la chapelle des Sœurs Grises, construite en 1879 par Victor Bourgeau, et d'images photographiques projetés sur des écrans gigantesques. Les couches d'images différentes suggèrent non seulement l'aura de ce lieu sacré, mais aussi le métarécit qui décrit l'histoire des Sœurs Grises et leur rôle dans la culture québécoise. *Olive, Almond & Mustard …* (2010), film/vidéo projection par Dhaliwal, est un triptyque d'images fixes ou en mouvement accompagnées de chansons populaires en anglais et en punjabi. Dhaliwal a souhaité évoquer les gens et les lieux qu'elle a connus durant sa jeunesse à Southall, un borough de Londres, et d'autres qu'elle a découverts alors qu'adulte, elle est retournée à Birbansian, village du Panjab indien, pour la première fois en 2002. Parce que la vidéo est un récit du retour, elle y insère des éléments des pratiques religieuses sikhes pour affirmer sa relation avec sa mère décédée et pour mieux se connaître elle-même.

Traduction : Élise Bonnette

Imaging Islam in the Art of Arwa Abouon

VALERIE BEHIERY

Since the events of September 11, 2001, there has been no shortage of literature and societal debate on the growing visibility of Islam in Europe and the United States, including on art from or related to the Muslim world. But despite the numerous exhibitions dedicated to "contemporary Islamic art," little, if any, scholarship has directly addressed the meaning and effect of the increasing number of visual references to Islam *as a lived and living practice* in contemporary art.[1] Arwa Abouon (1982–) is a Libyan-Canadian Muslim artist whose work is openly informed by Islamic religious, cultural, and artistic traditions. In this essay I explore the imaging of Islam in her work and map how it relates to wider questions of taxonomy, gender, and self as well as to other dimensions of her practice. The approach I take to Abouon's work may seem disarmingly straightforward: it is anchored in the practice and event of looking, as I, like Doris von Drathen, consider the act of spectatorship and the encounter with a work of art an attempt, and sometimes a successful means, to meet an or the other.[2]

In this article, my use of the qualifier "Muslim" is broad, similar to that of Munir Jiwa, who characterizes the term as "relational" and thus to be considered in relation to other identity markers such as race and nationality, and who argues that examining art through this particular lens, in addition to affording a supplementary reading, "allows us to see more clearly the relationship between art worlds and the field of forces in which they are embedded."[3] Artists of Muslim descent who have become visible on the Euro-American contemporary art scene often employ symbols and themes pertaining to Islam to address issues of identity, marginalization, and discrimination rather than religion or spirituality or to proffer feminist and political critiques directed at either East or West. And certainly an analysis of what gets shown where and why would expose the substructures of what Olu Oguibe calls "the culture game."[4] However, here the term possesses an additional critical dimension. Abouon is a self-identifying practicing Muslim

Detail, *Abouon Family*, 2007, digital print on photographic paper, 40.6 × 50.8 cm, limited edition of ten, all collection of the artist. (Photo: Arwa Abouon)

who makes contemporary art or, more to the point, a contemporary artist who simply happens to be a practicing Muslim, a combination that, even if only a statement of fact, is nonetheless radical in its implications. Her art not only challenges the continued antinomy posited between art and religion and modernity and religion but effectively depicts a prescriptive religion – Islam – in a positive light. That it garners success in the mainstream art world only confirms its singularity.

My definition of art is here willingly institutional. Like the American art historian James Elkins in his seminal text *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art*, I am limiting art to "whatever is exhibited in galleries in major cities, bought by museums of contemporary art, shown in biennales and the Documenta, and written about in periodicals."[5] There is, of course, not only *the* art world: there are myriad art worlds, and one is much more likely to find artists claiming and owning their Muslim identity in alternative art communities and arenas such as the many Muslim artist associations or the increasing number of grass-roots Muslim art festivals sprouting up throughout North America and Europe. In addition, one must equally recognize that there are art milieus in which traditional – for some perennial – Islamic means of expression, from calligraphy through the whole gamut of Islamic decorative arts, are still practiced, exhibited, valued, and collected. There sometimes exists an overlap between these specific cultural modes of expression and those of Western modernism, as in the work of the Franco-Iraqi calligrapher Hassan Massoudy (1944–); those of street and hip hop culture, as in the calligraffiti of Britain's Aerosol Arabic (1980–) or Canada's eL-Seed (1981–); or those of contemporary art, as in the compelling work of two internationally recognized artists inspired by *tasawwuf* (Sufism), Franco-Algerian Rachid Koraïchi (1947–) and Anglo-Iranian Shirazeh Houshiary (1955–).

In order to facilitate discussion of the penetration of Islam into the field of contemporary art, I have deliberately chosen an artist who, like Koraïchi and Houshiary, sees herself as a contemporary artist and functions within what are considered the normative venues and visual modalities of the art world. Those artists who continue to work in artistic idioms rooted in Islamic art and whose aims are jointly aesthetic and spiritual raise complex interpretive questions that are beyond the scope of the present study, particularly the much debated issue of what constitutes a religious image in an essentially aniconic artistic tradition.[6] Abouon's art, which I am suggesting is transnational, cannot completely transcend the limits inherent in (cross-cultural) translation, particularly with regard to divergent culturally produced definitions of representation, religion, and their relationship. For example, beauty, which has always constituted a primary vehicle of meaning in Islamic

art, possesses a religious inflection in Islamic culture, as witnessed by the oft-cited *hadith* (saying of the Prophet Muhammad): "Verily, God is beautiful and loves beauty." Abouon's profound sensitivity to the visual is consciously indebted to this religious *cum* aesthetic principle and tradition. However, while her work produces and communicates meaning through the language of visuality, not all publics will necessarily qualify its resonance as religious or spiritual.

Arwa Abouon's work is figurative, even narrative, and intimately rooted in her personal story. It is in fact autobiographical. However, if rooted in daily life, her art is not premised on the banal, the spontaneous, or a Brechtian-style realism, all strategies some contemporary artists have used very successfully. Abouon is gifted with an unparalleled sense of the image and a consummate fluency in its specific mode of communication. She constructs every image very deliberately, and each image, even when predicated on humour, is an artfully composed re-presentation and re-enactment of various aspects of her life. Much of her work consciously involves the portrayal of the bicultural experience. Abouon emigrated from Libya with her family at the age of just over one year and grew up in Canada, in Quebec. The artist, who refers to herself as living proof of the success of Bill 101, is equally at home in English and French language contexts, and one might therefore speak of a tricultural identity. However, the artist gives precedence to her religious rather than her national identity. When I asked Abouon how she sees herself, she unhesitatingly responded, "First of all I am Muslim. When I describe myself, I put it in order, Muslim, Libyan, Canadian," adding, "Here I'm Libyan but when I go to Libya, I'm Canadian."[7] The sentiment of being always displaced, of being "neither from here nor from there," constitutes the shared fundamental experience of all bicultural or polycultural subjects and often makes its way into art produced by diasporic artists or artists minoritized in other ways. However, as Abouon's work attests, or, more accurately, emphasizes, the phenomenon of dislocation is not only about loss but equally about creative gain.

Family is a recurrent subject in the Canadian artist's work. However, while the artist always deploys it in a manner that renders its Arab Muslim roots evident, usually through dress, the pieces vary in style and mood. The black and white images from the *Generation Series* (2004) are undoubtedly the most poetic among Abouon's representations of her family, and those that best demonstrate her consistent use of pure visuality as the principal vehicle of meaning. The photographic diptych depicting the artist's father and one of her brothers consists of two full-length portraits affixed to the wall side by side that are near-perfect mirror images (Fig. 1). Both men strike the same frontal pose: standing with one foot forward, they are not quite parallel to the

1 | Arwa Abouon, *Untitled, Generation Series (Father and Son)*, 2004, digital prints, 182.9 × 81.3 cm each, limited edition of ten, five in private collections. (Photo: Arwa Abouon)

picture plane. Upright with impeccable posture, their heads held high crown their shoulders as they look steadfastly at the viewer. Wearing crisp white *jilbabs*, both the young man on the right and the older man on the left are set against an all white background, a hint of shadow around the men's bare feet constituting the only indicator of space. The stark composition recalls the work of twentieth-century photographer Irving Penn, who first made the use of bare white backdrops as a method of enshrining subjects popular decades ago in his documentary work, but the visual effect is transformed in Abouon's piece because of the overall whiteness of the images: dissolving figure and ground, space becomes as important as what is more palpably visible. The figures' bodies, or rather the white *jilbabs* clothing them, seem to merge with

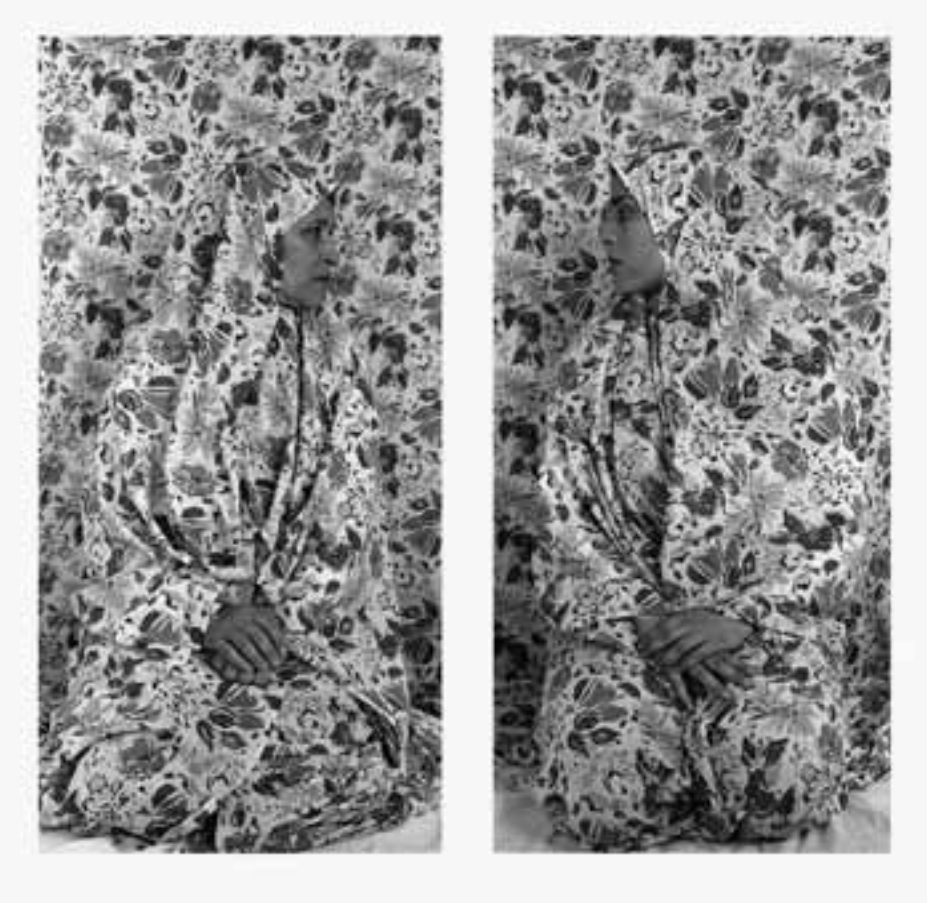
and emerge from the backdrop and the space around them. The sense of ethereality produced by the nebulous whiteness is transferred to the figures, who appear to issue forth from it like very alive apparitions as if to underline the importance or mystery of being and human life. Conveying in visual terms that a noumenal quality underwrites the phenomenal world, the white space in fact somewhat paradoxically accentuates the intimated physicality and embodied presence of the two men and draws the viewer's attention to the subjects' hands, faces, and inescapable gazes to scrutinize these visual signs for possible meaning. The notion that the world and being possess a theophanic aspect or at least exist as signs pointing to an unknowable reality constitutes a central premise of both Islamic theology and aesthetics, although one must note that this idea is found in other spiritual traditions, including the two other Abrahamic faiths, Judaism and Christianity.

The hieratic sculptural poses, as well as the minimalist but carefully constructed composition in which each fold and shadow count, are reminiscent of the long tradition of European art, in particular the formal restraint of classicism rooted in – often later interpretations of – Greco-Roman ideals. The use of this particular aesthetic premised on the idealization of the human being and form makes the images fully readable across cultural contexts and further emphasizes each man's dignity, individuality, and, for lack of a better term, knowingness. The long elegant robes, while quintessentially Arab and evocative of the Muslim world, equally call to mind the history of Western painting but are here used to bring forward and ennoble subjects that the art world has generally left out, namely Arab Muslim men, who continue to be portrayed, particularly post 9/11, in a poor light in both European and North American visual culture. Abouon's use of the garment as a site of cross-cultural translation constitutes a perfect example of the capacity of biculturalism and the double vision it procures to add supplementary meaning and to build bridges *through* difference. The artist has reconfigured the Middle Eastern *jilbab*, a sign of the culturally impoverished and fanatical desert dweller, now terrorist, by evoking the positive connotations identical garments hold in the Western imaginary and art. Acknowledging difference, Abouon foregrounds the interrelatedness or commonality of the East and the West, increasingly posited as antithetical, but she does so in purely aesthetic terms, devoid of moralism, self-righteousness, or pedantry.

Father and Son rewrites the figure of the Arab Muslim male. The two men are portrayed as fully fledged subjects and not as objects of fear or loathing, confirming the thesis that the representation of minoritized subjects as agents offers an effective means of overriding stereotypes and the process of objectification or de-subjectification on which they are based. The two men

invite the viewer to meet them as equals by means of the gaze, to engage in an intersubjective experience with the other or, as Kaja Silverman so aptly puts it, "to identify with bodies we would otherwise repudiate."[8] In addition, Abouon, by representing the Arab man as part of a family, also displaces the customary portrayal in which, often decontextualized, he constitutes the perfect screen for collective projections and/or the site of sometimes unfortunate realities. Her representation of the father-son relationship is particularly poignant. Both men are interacting with the viewer and not with each other, yet the visual correspondences in dress and stance, denoting the power of the invisible bond, make it impossible for the viewer not to compare them. While the father stands as proudly as his son, the full-bodied vitality of youth embodied by his son has given way to a slight weakening. The *jilbab*, ever slightly too big, seems to indicate the subtle shrinking that often accompanies aging. His hair is grey, his face wrinkled, displaying the subtle, inevitable pull of gravity that comes with middle age and the realities of life. The universal nature of the theme and the concomitant cycle of life stages it implies transcends cultural borders. The diptych is an affirmation of life and individuality, but also a moving reminder of the inescapability of time and mortality. The classical aesthetic, the *jilbab*, and the power of the human gaze and human relationships all, through the artist's lens, coalesce into powerful transcultural elements that bind rather than divide.

The piece's female counterpart showing mother and daughter is equally powerful and cognizant of the continued communicative possibilities of visuality (Fig. 2). Echoing *Father and Son*, the images of *Mother and Daughter* mirror each other. However, the women are kneeling and not standing, and they look at one another and not at the viewer. Both the artist and her mother are wearing all encompassing over-garments that cover the hair and the entire body, the floral print material of which they are made also constituting the sole backdrop of both photographs. The piece, visually structured and produced through the veiling effect of cloth and the aesthetics of veiling so central to an Islam-inflected regime of visuality, lays claim to a different conception of vision and representation.[9] In the context of the present study, I want to focus, however, on *Mother and Daughter*'s more overt references to Islam. Similar to *Father and Son*, the large-scale photographs are visually striking and are produced using two competing modes of representation, the planar and the perspectival. The textile, with its repeat floral pattern, composing almost the entire image surface, flattens the image. The optical effect of continuous pattern that constantly leads the viewer's gaze beyond the borders of the image further emphasizes the surface plane and its implied continuity, as in historical Islamic art.[10] The sense of visual endlessness the pattern creates renders it difficult to see and focus on what is visible of the



2 | Arwa Abouon, *Untitled, Generation Series (Mother and Daughter)*, 2004, digital prints, 182.9 × 81.3 cm each, limited edition of ten, all in private and public collections. (Photo: Arwa Abouon)

two women, while simultaneously, analogous to *Father and Son*, accentuating the three-dimensionality of their faces and hands, the power and dignity of personhood, and the parent-child bond. Also comparable is the rewriting of stereotypes, in this case that of the veiled Arab Muslim woman, whether in contemporary visual culture or Orientalist art. Abouon has again done this through the coupling of visual beauty with the representation of agency communicated by way of intersubjectivity, although here the depicted intersubjective relationship takes place between mother and daughter, and not between the women and the viewer.

If the photographic diptych can be appreciated as a work of art treating the theme of matrilineal filiation – its beauty, power, and constitutive nature – being able to decode the references to Islam obviously provides critical additional meanings. The visible sign or object of difference in

Father and Son, the *jilbab*, is essentially a cultural symbol generally worn out of custom rather than in imitation of the Prophet Muhammad (*sunnah*).[11] However, in *Mother and Daughter* both the women's kneeling position and the type of floor-length veil they are wearing unquestionably evoke Muslim prayer or *salat* and thus constitute religious symbols. The mother-daughter bond is, in fact, apart from the gaze, wholly imaged and performed through the metaphor of veiling and prayer. Islam is generally posited as a profoundly misogynistic tradition in global dominant discourse (a bias that is unfortunately sometimes corroborated by actions carried out by Muslims), but the artist has recast and engendered the faith, including the *hijab*, placing it squarely within the realm of womanhood and matrilineal transmission. That the piece is truly autobiographical and rooted in the artist's experience in that Arwa considers her mother her spiritual teacher both adds another textured stratum of content to the work and provides insight into the artist's process of producing images and constructing meaning. In addition to repositioning Islam in a female-centric perspective and claiming it as a central part of her self-identity, *Mother and Daughter* also declares, through the language of aesthetics, Islam to be beautiful, countering by proposition rather than opposition its image in Western media, as well as popular and political culture. On the topic of beauty and its relationship to Islam, the young Abouon states with utmost simplicity, "I like to use beauty and have nice aesthetics … I find my religion beautiful *tout simplement*." It is important however to underscore that these are not naïve images. Abouon is fully aware of the context in which they are produced and exhibited, but instinctively moves beyond deconstruction and the binarism contestation inexorably upholds. Rather, her biculturalism, allowing her to perceive the world as both a Westerner and its Muslim other, enables the artist to create images that can resonate with all audiences, and she does so knowingly. Discussing the representation of Islam in her work, she stresses that she wants to portray it in a manner that "makes me and others feel comfortable," adding, "That is important to me, I want people to feel comfortable with the work, not threatened by it."[12] That she succeeds in *Generation Series* is evident by its exhibition history: the mother and daughter diptych, all ten of which have been sold, has been exhibited in Canada, England, Germany, Belgium, Libya, the United Arab Emirates, and Mali.

Not all of Abouon's images of her family openly display such an admittedly staged orchestration, nor are they all black and white. *Abouon Family* is a small colour photograph of a family that might even go unnoticed were it not for the simple but flawless manner of its execution, which displays a full awareness of the potential of the image to draw in and even transform the viewer (Fig. 3). The colour photograph shows the whole family sitting

3 | Arwa Abouon, *Abouon Family*, 2007, digital print on photographic paper, 40.6 × 50.8 cm, limited edition of ten, all collection of the artist. (Photo: Arwa Abouon)

outdoors in tall grass in a characteristically Canadian outdoor setting that I associate with the country's national tradition of landscape painting. The mother is sitting just slightly below and to the right of the centre of the image. To the right of her is her husband. The only one standing, he looks out and off beyond the right border of the photograph. Surrounding the mother are her four children. To her left, a son sits with one knee up, staring out into

the distance beyond the left edge of the image. Next is Arwa. Lying down, her head in her mother's lap, she is staring up at the sky. Beside her, another brother, who has donned a white prayer cap, or *taqiya*, is also lying down and dreamily or sleepily gazing out at something afar. Seated behind him, seen only in profile, is the last Abouon son, his back leaning against his mother, his head resting on her shoulder. He is also glancing up, although it is difficult to tell whether his gaze is directed at his father or simply upward, again beyond the confines of the image. The children and the father are all looking in different directions and away from the camera. Only the mother, wearing a plain white long *hijab*, looks squarely at the viewer. Like all the figures in this drama, her gaze is deep. Her faced is graced with the particular humility and frankness that come with maturity. Her central position and direct gaze, as well as the shining whiteness of her headscarf and the magnetic pull she exerts on all the members of the family, drawing them in close around her, put forth in unambiguous visual terms that she forms the heart and core of both the family and image. If the father standing on guard is portrayed as the *pater familias*, pillar and provider of the family, the mother is represented as its real foundation. Holding a Muslim rosary or *misbaha* out and up for the viewer to see, she is also depicted as the family's spiritual head or *sheikha*, the necessary centre that affords each family member his or her own individual direction.

Abouon Family functions on several levels. As in all her work, Abouon has stripped the theme *cum* image down to its simplest human expression, which is always situated beyond cultural or religious specificity and difference. The photograph is an archetypal portrait of a family, including the traditional gender roles that continue to be maintained to varying degrees in most societies, including Western ones, despite the societal changes brought about by the women's movement in the last century. But it is equally a portrait of an Arab Muslim-Canadian family, the Arab Muslim part rewritten by the Group of Seven type background, and the Canadian part by the three small references to Islam, the *hijab*, the *misbaha*, and the *taqiya*. As a depiction of a contemporary Canadian family, one might qualify it as "accented," to use the term Hamid Naficy coined in his work on immigrant or diasporic cinema in the United States.[13] All are dressed in Western clothes. It is only the veil, prayer cap, and beads that expose its particular accent; because the physiognomies of the family members appear more Mediterranean than specifically 'Arab,' the family is not overtly otherized through race. While the photograph can be considered to be and in effect constitutes a documentary image of the Abouon family, it also bears witness to the deterritorialization of contemporary identities and to the plural nature of belonging evident in an increasingly globalized world.

4 | Arwa Abouon, *Al Matar Rahma*, 2007, digital print on photographic paper, 91.4 × 189.6 cm, limited edition of ten, five in private and public collections. Please note that for the Culture Village site discussed in the text, the images were much larger, the image of sky measured 3 × 216 m, the one of the artist praying 3 × 284 m. (Photo: Arwa Abouon)

The photograph unquestionably serves as an ode to the mother and motherhood, a theme that, like fatherhood, translates across cultures regardless of the artist's mother's *hijab*. However, for a viewer looking at the image through a filter shaped at least in part by Islam, it is not only the few details noted above that evoke Islam: the whole picture appears as an enactment of the oft-cited *hadith*, "Paradise lies under the feet of mothers," and, more generally, of the centrality of the mother in Islam and Islamic discourse. Family and motherhood are not usually subjects in contemporary art, although they do appear in feminist art, including the practice of feminist bicultural artists. However, Abouon's (and her acquiescent family's) performances of the ordinary and her inimitable sensitivity to the language and thus signification of visuality place her work in a category of its own.

Abouon considers her art a means of exploring and learning about her religious tradition, an interest that has grown over the last few years, and as such she broaches decidedly religious themes in her work. If the act of prayer is referenced in *Mother and Daughter* and to a lesser degree in *Abouon Family* through the *misbaha*, it forms the central premise of *Al Matar Rahma*, a public art piece commissioned by and for Culture Village in Dubai (Fig. 4). The two immense colour photographs appeared on two billboards, each over 200 metres long, on either side of the highway leading into Culture Village, one side presenting a panoramic strip of gorgeous clear blue sky streaked with white clouds and the other showing the artist enacting all the positions involved in each of the five Muslim daily prayers. The work, whose

title literally means "Rain Is Mercy" was inspired by the idea that "after hard times, there is light," a theme Abouon states "echoes throughout many different faiths."[14] However, in the same way that mercy is a feminine noun in Arabic, the woman seems to embody not only the ease that follows adversity but also the feminine aspects of spirituality. The dimension of gender inherent in Abouon's work is impossible to underestimate in light of current widespread Islamophobic discourse premised on Islam's alleged misogyny as well as the patriarchy that still often underwrites Muslim interpretations of Islamic religious texts. Donning traditional prayer clothes in various intense colours that cover the colour spectrum, Abouon is simultaneously enacting a rainbow and therefore the piece, while incontestably taking prayer as its predominant metaphor, visually communicates hope and joy through the globally translatable premises of sky and rainbow as well as pure colour. Through the latter, *Al Matar Rahma* concurrently re-presents prayer not as dry obligation and hardship but as a joyous beautiful event or performance, thus displacing, visually and not dogmatically, various assumptions, such as the divides between art and religion, modernity and religion, religion and freedom or happiness, as well as between the West and Islam.[15]

Other works focus on Muslim rituals of private prayer and invocation (*du'ā*), and again Abouon manages to produce works that, while treating a specifically Islamic theme, are neither culturally nor religiously constrained. *Duaa* (2008) is a vertical sequence of three close-up shots of a hand shown almost in totality and, in the background, what appear to be bed sheets, intimating that the scene captures one of the artist's meditative or prayerful moments in her room. In each image the thumb touches a part of the baby finger, referring to *tasbih*, short recitations made after prayer in sequences of thirty-three, counted over the fingers. However, if the piece references Islamic practice directly, its aesthetic, its sequential and performative nature, its focus on the body, and its use of synecdoche – the hand standing in for the subject – parallel the visual codes of international conceptual art. Here again Abouon employs a contemporary and globally understood language – at least within the art world – to reference Islam, which is usually portrayed as antagonistic toward both modernity and contemporary art. Moreover, the quiet reflective nature of the work can be appreciated regardless of whether or not one is aware of the allusion to meditative invocation. The work is not about (re)claiming an identity or challenging prevalent dominant discourses but rather about simply witnessing life, albeit a life informed by Islam, as it is lived. Because *Duaa* adheres to current global means and forms of representation and both its image and performance have been pared down to the barest minimum, it moves beyond, or at least widens, the concept of Islam, the focus on the body and the intimacy of the everyday, pointing instead to our common humanity.

5 | Arwa Abouon, *Hands Are Holy*, 2008, digital print on Duratrans, 121.9 × 81.3 cm, collection of the artist. (Photo: Arwa Abouon)

Hands Are Holy consists of a white light box bearing an x-ray image of two long hands stretched out side by side (Fig. 5). The x-ray is positioned on an angle, reminiscent of the way they are often hung in medical settings. The position of the hands reenact another type of personal prayer Muslims perform after their daily *salat*; the hands held together and forming a receptacle are brought up to the level of the chest or face in order to give thanks and/or to ask for forgiveness or help for oneself and others. Here the cupped hands are seen from above. Like all the works discussed here, the piece is no less visually effective for viewers unaware of the religious reference. The image of the hands, their large scale, the presence of light,

the strong contrast between the blue-black and white, and the title are all eloquent. The hand is here, as in the previous work, a visual shorthand for the human being and for being, or stated differently, for the subject and subjecthood. However, unlike *Duaa*, *Hands Are Holy* images a physical reality that is normally hidden and escapes physiological vision. The sight of bones, while it might be construed as a reminder of human mortality, here seems to evoke a shared human sameness by proclaiming the relative nature of both sight and visible difference. Abouon has poeticized a clinical image and its myriad associations to expose race as a discursive construction and demonstrate that, as the artist says, "no matter who we are, no matter our race or our differences, we are all the same underneath."[16]

Abouon's art confirms the continued power of both subjects and images, despite recent theorizations suggesting the opposite. Recognizing that "cultural-particular norms define who is recognizable as a subject capable of living a life that counts" and who is not, it affirms with grace the subjecthood of selves who have been and remain unrecognized in Euro-American contexts, including art institutions.[17] But these selves are marginalized not only by culture, ethnicity, and/or race but also by religion, a dimension often overlooked in postcolonial critique. Visual signs related to Islam in contemporary art underscore many things, not least of which is the continued lack of knowledge about Islam and Muslims in Euro-America that goes beyond deeply engrained (neo)colonial attitudes, despite the growing Muslim presence in the West. Because it recognizes the salience of ideas, objects, and practices associated with Islam, Abouon's work encourages viewers in non-Muslim majority contexts to see these things in a new light and, unlike media and other Western representations of Islam, from a Muslim's perspective. The artist's bicultural vision, understanding of the language of visuality, and capacity to distil the essence of each theme give the work a heteroglossic and communicative beauty, enabling it to speak across cultural, geographical, and religious borders. All of Abouon's overt references to Islam are themselves plural: moving from the particular and denominational to a wider and more global frame of reference, they reveal both the difficulties of qualifiers such as Muslim and their usefulness. Abouon produces art that is clearly cognizant of Islam's role as "the other of Western secular modernity," but the bicultural vision underwriting it dissipates any East-West or religion-secularism antagonism precisely because it cannot be contained within the binarism of inclusion/exclusion inherent in every culture.[18] Moving beyond postcolonial critique and simply affirming what is, it maps new transnational ways of seeing (and being). From this perspective, the importance of Abouon's work transcends questions of Islam and the contentious issues surrounding it worldwide, although admittedly its recasting of the West and Islam as neither

incompatible nor mutually exclusive is obviously consequential. Images are powerful tools in shaping cultural notions of subjectivity, belonging, and citizenship; Abouon's visual enactments of workable plural subjectivities redefine the assumed ethnic, racial, and religious characteristics of the modern Western – in this case Canadian or Québécois – subject and citizen. Over and above their strong aesthetic appeal and original engagement with Islam, they plot a way forward. Having developed a cogent language capable of cross-cultural translation in its recognition of the necessary negotiation of competing self-identities, her works propose models of pluralism that eschew conflict without abolishing difference.

NOTES

1 The difficulties created because the expression "Islamic contemporary art" only further entrenches the notion of the traditionalism, religiosity, and homogeneity of the Muslim world have been addressed elsewhere and remain beyond the parameters of the present study. Although the expression was no doubt coined for the sake of communicability and usually conveniently means from or related to the Muslim world, I am not here working on consolidating the notion of contemporary Islamic art, at least not with regard to much of the art generally classified as such. See Farhat's critique of Daftari's interrogation of the set of terms in the catalogue text of the 2006 MoMA show *Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Looking* curated by Fereshteh Daftari; Maymanah Farhat, "Contemporary 'Islamic' Art in Context: The Discourse Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Looking," *ArteEast Quarterly* (1 Apr. 2006). Accessed 24 Aug. 2011, http://www.arteeast.org/pages/artenews/article/39/

2 Doris von Drathen, *Vortex of Silence: Proposition for an Art Criticism Beyond Aesthetic Categories* (Milan: Charta, 2004), 24–25. This methodological perspective, if it needs a name, is best described as aesthetic phenomenology. See Valérie Gonzalez, *Beauty and Islam: Aesthetics in Islamic Art and Architecture* (London: I.B. Tauris, in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2001). While it leaves certain critical questions unaddressed – for example, the difficulties and underrepresentation of so-called minority artists in the Euro-American art world, and specifically in Canada – it is no less political. The act of seeing, largely fashioned and produced by culture, is itself political and I am here addressing the problem by helping to bring to visibility Abouon's work across different cultural regimes of vision and visuality rather than by addressing the systemic problems of the Canadian art world and institutions.

3 Munir Jiwa, "Imaging, Imagining and Representation: Muslim Visual Artists in NYC," *Contemporary Islam* 4, no. 1 (April 2010): 79–80.

4 Olu Oguibe, *The Culture Game* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004). See particularly "Double Dutch and the Culture Game," 33–44.

5 James Elkins, *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 1.

6 The interpretative question of whether Islamic art is or is not a religious or sacred art that has effectively formed a substantial matter of debate in Islamic art historical scholarship throughout the last decades rests, in my opinion, on culturally divergent conceptions of representation and perhaps religion. The discipline of Islamic art history, having originated in nineteenth-century Europe, may be considered a Western discipline based on Western art historical concepts, criteria, and methodologies that are often inapplicable to non-Western art traditions.

7 Personal communication with the artist, 1 Aug. 2010.

8 Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 2.

9 See also Valerie Behiery, "Discours alternatifs du voile dans l'art contemporain" (trans. C. Lavarenne), *Sociologie et Sociétés* 41, no. 2 (2009): 299–326.

10 See Titus Burckhardt, *Art of Islam: Language and Meaning* (London: World of Islam Festival, 1976) or, for a somewhat different perspective, Oleg Grabar, *The Mediation of Ornament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

11 The long robe known as *jilbab* or *thobe* or myriad other names across the Muslim world is considered *sunnah* in Islamic theology, which means that while it is commendable to wear it, it is not a religious requirement (*fard*). The point is here that it is a customary, not to mention comfortable in hot climates, garment. The small minority of Muslim men who wear *jilbabs* in Euro-American societies do so for several reasons: tradition, practicality, and/or because they seek to emulate the Prophet in every aspect of his life. Sometimes, *jilbab*-wearing can indicate that the wearer follows a literalist non-mainstream school of Islam such as Salafism or Wahhabism.

12 Personal communication with the artist, 1 Aug. 2010.

13 Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), see especially the introduction, 3–9.

14 Haig Aivazian, "Al Matar Rahma: Rain Is a Blessing," in *Flashback/Forward: A Visual Timeline of Cultural Practices in the Middle East* (Dubai: Dubai Properties-Culture Village, 2006), n.p.

15 Ibid. In the Dubai art catalogue, she is quoted as saying, "Prayer for me is sacred, personal, and full of love … It warms my heart and cools me down."

16 Personal communication with the artist, 1 Aug. 2010.

17 Moya Lloyd, *Judith Butler: From Norms to Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 134.

18 José Casanova, "Public Religions Revisited," in *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, ed. Hent de Vries (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 108.

L'image de l'islam dans l'art d'Arwa Abouon

VALERIE BEHIERY

La visibilité croissante de signes reliés à l'islam, aux musulmans ou au monde musulman dans l'art contemporain mondial est dû à deux facteurs : l'intégration du Golfe Persique dans le marché de l'art international et le nombre croissant d'artistes de descendance musulmane qui vivent, travaillent et exposent en Europe et en Amérique. Ce phénomène explique l'émergence et l'utilisation devenue commune de l'expression « art islamique contemporain ». Cette expression, cependant, est impropre la plupart du temps. Référent géographique plutôt que stylistique, elle est utilisée pour désigner l'art produit par des artistes demeurant dans des pays à majorité musulmane – ou originaires de ces pays –, plutôt que pour délimiter la nature du contenu artistique. Et, effectivement, l'art ainsi classifié démontre une variété d'attitudes envers l'islam et les traditions culturelles islamiques, y compris la dérision. Les artistes d'origine musulmane vivant en Europe et en Amérique et travaillant à l'intérieur des paramètres établis, des modalités visuelles et des institutions de l'art contemporain, utilisent des thèmes islamiques ou reliés à l'islam généralement pour aborder des questions postcoloniales ou identitaires. Il y a, naturellement, des exceptions, particulièrement ces artistes qui doivent beaucoup à la tradition à la fois esthétique et spirituelle de la calligraphie, comme Hassan Massoudy (n. 1944), ou à la rhétorique soufie, comme Rachid Koraïchi (n. 1947) ou Shirazeh Houshiary (n. 1955), deux traditions appréciées en Occident. Plus rares encore sont les artistes qui opèrent simultanément dans le monde courant de l'art, tout en abordant l'islam comme une pratique vécue et vivante d'une manière figurative et narrative, comme la jeune artiste canadienne-libyenne Arwa Abouon (n. 1982).

« L'image de l'islam dans l'art d'Arwa Abouon » analyse les représentations visuelles de l'islam dans l'œuvre d'Abouon et définit les questions plus larges qu'elles posent sur la taxonomie, le genre et le soi. La méthodologie utilisée, basée sur la pratique et l'acte de regarder, est délibérément simple et directe, mieux adaptée, semble-t-il, à l'œuvre et sensible au langage visuel ainsi qu'à mon but premier de favoriser sa lisibilité. Cet essai examine six œuvres,

chacune traitant d'une dimension différente des pratiques culturelles ou religieuses musulmanes. La *Generation Series* (2004) aborde le thème de la filiation patrilinéaire ou matrilinéaire. *Father and Son* et *Mother and Daughter* sont tous deux de frappants diptyques photographiques grandeur nature, en noir et blanc, représentant respectivement le père et le frère d'Abouon et Abouon et sa mère. Les deux hommes, vêtus du *jilbab*, regardent le spectateur, alors que les femmes, toutes deux voilées du même tissu imprimé, se regardent l'une l'autre. Les deux œuvres interpellent les stéréotypes, en représentant les Arabes musulmans en tant que sujets et signifiants islamiques sous une lumière favorable. Alors que le thème de la prière est implicite dans *Mother and Daughter*, les deux femmes étant voilées et agenouillées, des références plus explicites à la prière se retrouvent dans *Abouon Family* (2007), *Al Matar Rahma* (2007) et *Duaa* (2008). La première photographie montre la famille Abouon entourant la mère qui tient à la main un chapelet musulman ou *misbaha* ; l'image de la mère, représentée comme le chef spirituel de la famille, peut être lue comme une traduction visuelle du *hadith* souvent cité du Prophète Muhammad : « Le Paradis se trouve sous les pieds des mères ». *Al Matar Rahma* engendre aussi l'islam. Cette image monumentale représentant l'artiste revêtue de différents vêtements de prière monochromes et de couleurs vives, adoptant les différentes positions de la prière rituelle musulmane au-dessus de près de 300 mètres d'un magnifique ciel bleu, donne à l'islam une image nouvelle, constitutive plutôt que répressive de la femme musulmane. Rappelant aussi un arc-en-ciel, elle reformule la religion prescriptive comme désir plutôt que contrainte et rend un objet en mal de traduction – l'islam – intelligible. *Duaa*, pièce plus intimiste, est aussi « bilingue » : la représentation d'invocations récitées sur les doigts, en séries de 33, évoque également des notions d'agentivité et du corps performatif. La dernière œuvre examinée, *Hands Are Holy* (2008), qui consiste en une radiographie des mains de l'artiste à l'intérieur d'un caisson lumineux, est délibérément moins spécifique au plan religieux, car des mains levées, communes à plusieurs traditions religieuses, sont vues comme un signe de notre commune humanité au-delà des frontières raciales et religieuses.

L'art d'Abouon, en combinant la beauté visuelle avec la représentation de l'islam, redéfinit ce dernier en tant que tradition viable et même bienveillante à l'égard des femmes, alors que la vision biculturelle qui l'informe le rend lisible au-delà des cultures, ce qui n'est pas un mince exploit à la lumière du discours dominant euro-américain sur l'islam. Je soutiens qu'au-delà de son indéniable attrait esthétique et thématique, sa formulation d'une subjectivité contemporaine plurielle, où ni l'Occident et l'islam, ni la religion et la modernité ne sont incompatibles, possède une puissante dimension

politique, fournit un modèle pour restructurer les débats actuels sur la visibilité croissante du religieux, spécifiquement de l'islam, dans les sociétés euro-américaines et reconceptualise un monde de plus en plus complexe, transnational et diversifié.

Traduction : Élise Bonnette

1 | Al-Rashid Mosque, Fort Edmonton Park, Alberta, 1938. (Photo: Nadia Kurd, 2009)

Sacred Manifestations: The Making and Meaning of Mosques in Canada

NADIA KURD

ARTICLE

When they arrive in the new country,
Voyagers carry it on their shoulders,
The dusting of the sky they left behind.[1]

And whenever the time comes for prayer, pray there, for that is a mosque.[2]

Introduction

A 1940s tourism booklet on Edmonton, Alberta, describes the city as the ideal gateway to the north and praises it for its central location in Canada.[3] Throughout the booklet the tourist (and possibly the potential investor) is presented with Edmonton's many virtues as a picturesque yet growing natural resource–based and global economy. Somewhat surprisingly, it also refers to two communities that contribute to the city's cosmopolitan image, noting the existence of a Chinatown and the presence of Canada's first "Moslem temple" the Al-Rashid Mosque (Fig. 1). While it may seem odd that either of these communities is credited with giving Edmonton a sense of global presence, their mention provides a glimpse of Canada's increasingly diverse cultural and religious landscape, although it gives an inaccurate portrait of the prevalent attitudes towards belonging, citizenship, and immigration in Canada during the 1940s.[4] Unlike the Chinese community of this period, Edmonton's predominately Arab Muslims had been neither fully defined as or considered as being part of a racial Other distinct from their Euro-Canadian counterparts. Upon their arrival in Canada, many community members had become somewhat assimilated by adopting English names and marrying non-Muslims and could, as a result, often legally or socially pass for being white.[5] The Al-Rashid mosque, with its two hexagonal minarets and makeshift metal dome, was for many the only visible marker of their religious identity in Edmonton.

The story of the Al-Rashid Mosque, while an important part of Edmonton's early settler history, is an unfamiliar one. Members of the community that formed the Al-Rashid Mosque had been coming to Alberta

2 | Assuna-Annabawiyah Mosque, Montreal, Quebec, 1993. (Photo: Nadia Kurd, 2010)

since the late 1880s, seeking economic prosperity and political refuge.[6] This community, which consisted of Ottoman Arabs from countries now known as Lebanon and Syria, was composed of traders, merchants, and farmers who made up a small yet significant part of Alberta's social and economic fabric. By 1938, the community had the means to employ Ukrainian master-builder Mike Drewoth to build the Al-Rashid Mosque.[7] The mosque's unique, church-like design, which showcases an amalgamation of the community's needs and the builder's skill and knowledge, would come to represent the hybrid nature of subsequent mosques in Canada. The history of the Al-Rashid Mosque, like those of mosques in cities such as Montreal and Vaughan, Ontario, is evidence of a deep history of Muslim arrival and settlement, one that is far less politically or socially polarized from Canada's past than is often imagined.

The intent of this paper is to examine the development and impact of two distinct types of mosques in Canada: the repurposed (Fig. 2) and the purpose-built (Fig. 3). Buildings such as Montreal's repurposed Assuna-Annabawiyah

3 | Baitul Islam Mosque, Vaughan, Ontario, 1992. (Photo: Tahir Mahmood, 2012)

Mosque (1993) and Vaughan's purpose-built Baitul Islam Mosque (1992) not only display divergent methods of mosque construction but also convey the varying social and religious circumstances of contemporary Muslim life in Canada. As a distinct historic structure, the mosque has a significant place in the practice of Islam and in shaping Muslim identities, serving as a place where one can learn about Islam, seek supplication, and receive community support. I argue that these two types of Canadian mosques, though different in their representation of Islam, can provide an understanding of the Islamic faith that is "lived by its people today, people who are no longer isolated from the pluralistic chaos and consequences of modernity and the after-effects of colonialism."[8] Moreover, these mosques show the ways in which Muslims spatially and visually articulate Islam. In doing so they raise significant questions, such as, what constitutes a mosque in Canada? How are these mosques used? Where do these buildings fit in the chronology of Islamic architectural history?

Whether purpose-built or repurposed from existing structures, these mosques, with their various visual forms taken from several cultures, trouble the traditional parameters of Islamic architectural history in both their use and understanding of Islamic built forms. They also reveal the presumption that it is possible to have a secular and raceless urban landscape in countries like Canada, which have growing Muslim populations.

Purpose-built mosques such as the Baitul Islam use a combination of crafts and visual forms of traditional Islamic architecture from Egypt, Iran, Turkey and Spain.[9] Designed by architects at the behest of Muslim communities, such buildings are easily recognizable as archetypal mosques. In replicating and synthesizing the visual forms commonly associated with traditional Islamic architecture, they affirm an idealized image of the mosque. Conversely, repurposed mosques such as the Assuna-Annabawiyah are purchased storefronts, houses, and even warehouses that are made into mosques through a series of renovations to both the exterior and interior of their original structures. Depending on the scale of the renovations, these mosques are often not easily identifiable as places of worship and, as a result, are most often experienced as "interiors."[10]

Though the roots of Muslim immigration to Canada can be traced back to the late 1880s, the easing of Canadian immigration laws for non-European immigrants from the 1960s onward has meant that the size and diversity of Muslim communities in cities such as Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal have grown significantly.[11] According to Statistics Canada, from 1991 to 2001 the number of people identifying themselves as Muslim grew by 128.9 percent, making the Muslim community one of the most significant religious groups in the country.[12] However, the growing presence of Muslims in major Canadian metropolises has been met with heightened levels of hostility toward Muslims, Islamic religious practices, and the establishment of mosques. Hostility toward the Muslim community has grown in tandem with global concerns about terrorism that are often linked to polarizing events, from the Gulf Wars to 9/11 and the subsequent war in Afghanistan.[13] Rather than being seen as an integral part of Canada's multicultural society, Muslims have increasingly been seen as being at odds with Canadian society in terms of integration and assimilation.[14] The construction of mosques has been at the heart of these debates and such sentiments are most clearly expressed in some of the thinly veiled Islamophobic arguments made against their establishment. Among the most common concerns are complaints over the appropriateness of the building's location, decreased property values, traffic congestion, and the possibility of inadequate access to parking for local residents.[15]

For many Muslims across the globe, the template for all mosques is the Prophet's Mosque in Medina. As the second holiest site for Muslims,

this early mosque was initially a simple courtyard with a palm leaf roof for shade,[16] which was primarily used as a meeting place for followers and for communal prayer. Contemporary mosques have largely stayed true to the function and purpose of this first mosque. As spaces that are used for more than just the performance of Islamic ritual, contemporary Canadian mosques, either purpose-built or repurposed from an existing structure, have become community centres in the diaspora and continue to serve Muslims as places for educational, cultural, and social activities. In recent years, there has been increased availability of faith-based services such as marriage and youth counselling, food bank and housing initiatives, funeral services, and even secular primary and secondary education, which are organized and handled by mosque administrators.[17]

A cursory review of Islamic architectural history reveals that historical approaches have focused almost exclusively on the religious character of an array of buildings originating in Spain, North Africa, the Middle East, and the South Asian Subcontinent.[18] A product of nineteenth-century colonialism, the study of Islamic architecture was initially taken up by men employed in the military service of colonial powers such as England and France.[19] This often meant that the survey of buildings was conducted by men such as K.A.C. Creswell who, during the 1920s, worked on the assumption that Islamic buildings constructed in Muslim lands were intrinsically spiritual, timeless, and limited to the period between 650 to 1918 A.D. Put another way, this time frame begins at Revelation and stretches to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.[20] Despite Creswell's lack of education and knowledge of Middle Eastern languages, his extensive survey of buildings in Egypt not only provides the basis of the field of Islamic architecture but also contributed to the formation of the notable library of Islamic art and architecture at the American University in Cairo, which, during his tenure there, he often fondly referred to as his "harem."[21]

Although the field of Islamic art and architecture has developed considerably since its colonial inception, several conceptual limitations linger. Islamic art and architecture, in the broadest sense, is still understood as comprised of objects and buildings produced in the "core" Muslim lands (conventionally known as the Middle East) by Muslims and for Muslim patrons for the purpose of Muslim populations.[22] This framework has ensured that both secular and religious objects are found in the historiography of Islamic art and architecture. Medieval glassware and dynastic mosques as well as late nineteenth-century paintings originating across a vast geographic area have been considered to be within the scope of the field. In their examination of the precariousness of the subject of Islamic art and architecture, historians Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom write,

> There is no evidence that any artist or patron in the fourteen centuries since the revelation of Islam ever thought of his or her art as "Islamic," and the notion of a distinctly "Islamic" tradition of art and architecture, eventually encompassing the lands between the Atlantic and the Indian oceans, is a product of late nineteenth- and twentieth-century Western scholarship, as is the terminology used to identify it.[23]

Fellow Islamic art historian Oleg Grabar echoes Bloom and Blair's analysis of the tenuous parameters of the field:

> Thirty years ago, the study of Islamic art was easy enough to define. Most people came to it along one of three simple paths: One was archaeology: the study of Umayyad palaces in the Levant and cities like Nishapur in Iran … Another was collecting rugs: ceramics and miniatures acquired a market value … Finally, there was the old and much-maligned Orientalism, which instilled, through dry and inhospitable grammars and furtively read travel accounts, romantic notions of faraway lands and exotic cultures.[24]

In terms of architecture, the term "Islamic" has come to define a more limited terrain. Because there are a limited number of examples of dynastic and monumental built forms, Islamic architecture is often considered to be distinct from other forms of Islamic art in that it is more commonly created and used by Muslim populations. However building types such as mosques, medressas, caravanserais, palaces, and mausoleums have all been viewed within the context of Islamic architecture. Among these examples of building types, only the mosque has a direct relationship with the practice and propagation of Islamic religious ritual and, more significantly, is used by wider segments of the Muslim population. As Islamic architectural historian Robert Hillenbrand argues, the mosque "lies at the very heart of Islamic architecture. It is an apt symbol of the faith which it serves. That symbolic role was understood by Muslims at a very early stage."[25]

Repurposed Mosques: Montreal's Assuna-Annabawiyah

Nestled in the heart of Montreal's multiethnic Parc-Extension neighbourhood sits the Assuna-Annabawiyah Mosque (Fig. 2). Originally an office building, the four-story Mosque is almost indiscernible among the rows of discount fruit shops, hair salons, and Lebanese restaurants. Apart from the sign above the doors, the mosque is subtle in its proclamation of a Muslim identity. Since 1993, the Muslims of this working-class Montreal neighbourhood have found

4 | Assuna-Annabawiyah Mosque (interior view, men's section), Montreal, Quebec, 1993. (Photo: Nadia Kurd, 2010)

solace, education, and support in this place of worship. Once a predominantly Greek enclave, Parc-Extension has recently become known more for its South Asian stores and residents. Unsurprisingly, many of these businesses have congregated around the mosque and, as a result, the neighbourhood itself has also become visibly "Muslim." With the establishment of the Assuna-Annabawiyah, Muslims from across North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia have established roots and made Parc-Extension home.

Though understated, the repurposed Assuna-Annabawiyah Mosque reflects not only the socioeconomic realities of its congregants but also the ways in which they have had to adapt and integrate their ritual and communal spaces in an urban environment. While the exterior of the mosque remains unchanged, save for the calligraphic Arabic signage above the main entrance, a number of small-scale modifications were carried out in order to transform the former office building into the Assuna-Annabawiyah Mosque. These renovations included the installation of a *minbar* (pulpit), elimination of walls to create wide unobstructed rooms (Fig. 4), insertion of the *mihrab* (niche) to orientate the congregants towards Mecca, curtaining of spaces to segregate women and men (Fig. 5), as well as appliqués of patterned arches adorning the windows (Fig. 6). Inside the mosque, there are also classrooms,

5 | Assuna-Annabawiyah Mosque (interior view, women's section), Montreal, Quebec, 1993. (Photo: Nadia Kurd, 2010)

administrative offices, and a community library. The renovations made to the Assuna-Annabawiyah do not necessarily reflect any strict aesthetic concerns for Islamic visual traditions but rather the need for practical spaces for the community within the mosque.

Furthermore, what becomes immediately evident upon looking at the Assuna-Annabawiyah Mosque is the communal nature of its construction. As a repurposed mosque, modifications have been carried out and maintained exclusively by members of the community and changes to the sparsely decorated mosque were made without the assistance of an architect to oversee or develop the space. Absent are outwardly architectural forms closely associated with Islam, such as minarets, domes, or a stylized tilework facade. As well as presenting an alternative image of a mosque, the Assuna-Annabawiyah Mosque emphasizes a re-examination of the primacy of architecture over ritual practice. Such mosques reveal the fluidity of ritual practice by showing that it is not contingent on the replication of specific visual forms or structures of space. Considered from a religious perspective, the act of prayer and remembrance of God require the believer's undivided attention, independent of the presence or assistance of formal structures and visual aids. This means that reliquaries, religious images, or idols are strictly

6 | Assuna-Annabawiyah Mosque (window), Montreal, Quebec, 1993. (Photo: Nadia Kurd, 2010)

prohibited inside the mosque and more importantly, in the presence of an individual performing prayer. The physical performance of communal prayer becomes the primary means through which the identity of the mosque is formulated, an identity that is independent of the form of the structure or the appearance of the mosque. Repurposed mosques emphasize the "separation of architecture's cultural content from its spiritual and community functions" and, arguably, suggest that such cultural visual forms are unrelated to spiritual or religious practice.[26]

To understand the non-visual religious informality of the Assuna-Annabawiyah Mosque, an apt description of how the building is ascribed with a sense of sacredness is what social anthropologist Michel S. Laguerre explains a "hegemonic temporality." Laguerre's conception of time refers to the way in which non-Christian religious communities in North America articulate their identity both via time and against the hegemonic temporality

of an urban centre. Diasporic Muslim communities, Laguerre notes, observe social practices regulated by civil society on one hand while, on the other, they are part of a temporal enclave "that links them to a worldwide Islam via an Islamic calendar."[27] The mosque and its surrounding neighbourhood experience a different time, one that has been modified and adapted to also make room for religious practice. Around the Assuna-Annabawiyah Mosque, this temporality can be directly observed five times a day when the faithful, composed primarily of taxi drivers, neighbourhood shopkeepers, and residents, arrive at the mosque for their daily prayers. Through the temporality of place, the structure of Assuna-Annabawiyah becomes visibly activated as a sacred site through the daily and repeated performance of ritual.

This is not to wholly disregard the visual importance of the mosque in Canada, for a few symbolic and structural elements are regularly taken up by Muslim communities during the transformation of existing structures. Whether it is the Arabic calligraphic text on the mosque's exterior or the gendered divisions within the mosque, these "storefront" mosques incorporate Islamic architectural forms that communicate the sense of a communal tradition and the sacredness of the site that serve to distinguish it from other urban structures. While these elements are not consistently or uniformly replicated across similarly renovated mosques, they are idioms that can be traced back to historical mosque architecture. Due to the affordability of buildings such as that used for the Assuna-Annabawiyah Mosque, in terms of the scale of the renovations and the initial cost, these types of buildings have come to represent the bulk of mosques in North America.[28]

Despite the wide presence of repurposed mosques across North America, such buildings have not received the scholarly examination commonly given mosques that conform to a defined affinity with traditional architectural styles. Ranging from old churches to storefronts, repurposed mosques like the Assuna-Annabawiyah are often disregarded because they do not make their religious identity explicitly known. In their architectural subtleness, these mosques contest the traditional, colonial image of mosque as well as a singular visual or built-form representation of Muslim life in the West. Instead, these repurposed mosques respond to the immediate needs of the local community, demonstrating the degree to which experience is privileged over expression.[29]

Purpose-built Mosques: Baitul Islam Mosque (Vaughan, Ontario)

Purpose-built mosques such as the Baitul Islam stand in sharp contrast to mosques like the Assuna-Annabawiyah. Built in 1992 and located half an hour north of Toronto, the Baitul Islam Mosque was, until 2005, one of the largest

mosques constructed in Canada.[30] At first glance, the striking architectural designs of the Baitul Islam Mosque suggest that this monumental building represents typical mosque architecture characteristic of mainstream Islam – and such an observation would not be altogether incorrect: the mosque's use of archetypical Islamic architectural elements such as lattice work, minaret, dome, and vaulting all visibly confirm its Muslim identity. However, a closer examination of the building and its congregants would reveal that the mosque is used by adherents of an Islamic sect who, due to their religious viewpoints and practices, have been marginalized in countries where orthodox Sunni Islam dominates.

Through the establishment of mosques in countries such as Canada, the US, and UK, these communities have been able to claim a Muslim identity that is otherwise denied them. The Muslims who worship at Baitul Islam Mosque are part of a revivalist sect known in Islam as the Ahmadiyya Movement. With roots in British India, the sect has been deemed heretical and is considered to be non-Muslim in countries such as Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, where it has been subject to persecution and displacement since the early twentieth century. Legally declared to be non-Muslims in Pakistan in 1974, members of the Ahmadiyya Movement are, among many other things, denied access to public places of worship, banned entry to Mecca, and forbidden to label their buildings as mosques.[31] Only in the diaspora are the members of the Ahmadiyya permitted to identify themselves as Muslims and construct mosques that have the formal characteristics of Islamic architecture.

Such attitudes towards the Ahmadiyya exist outside the geographical boundaries of either Saudi Arabia or Pakistan. Reflecting on the construction of Baitul Islam Mosque, architect Gulzar Haider writes "I was advised to reject this commission, lest I risk my future and never get another job, or even risk my hereafter by 'partnership in crime of Ahmadiyyat.'"[32] Indeed, Haider's comment on the construction of the Baitul Islam Mosque reveals how various diasporic Muslim communities struggle to legitimize their claim to a Muslim identity, while other parts of the community continue to reject the claims of such sects to visual and religious authenticity. While entrenched Sunni antagonism against the Ahmadiyya continues in the diaspora, being outside countries with Sunni Muslim majorities allows these sub-sects to legitimize their buildings as mosques. Because of their knowledge and expertise, architects like Haider navigate a precarious position, being the arbiters of both Islamic architecture and Muslim identity.

In her study of Alevi and Sunni Turkish communities in Berlin, Ruth Mandel notes that in the diaspora, "migrant Alevis have in many ways successfully reversed their hierarchical subordination to Sunni Turks … [They] also have opportunities to participate in organizational, preaching

7 | Baitul Islam Mosque (interior view), Vaughan, Ontario, 1992. (Photo: Tahir Mahmood, 2012)

and educational modes that would be illegal in Turkey."[33] In terms of understanding the dynamic involved in the ownership of Muslim identity, this scenario closely parallels that of the religious activities and observances of Ahmadiyya communities, a religious minority within Islam, in that the legally unlegislated religious space of the diaspora offers freedom from persecution that would otherwise be unavailable. In claiming the mosque as a visual and structural edifice for their practice, these Muslim sects are not only offered access to legitimacy but also to the practice of Islam and ownership of a Muslim identity. Moreover, for the Ahmadiyya, the Baitul Islam Mosque functions as a potent image of Islam that anchors their practice of Islam and also contributes to the stable growth of the community.

Stylistically, the Baitul Islam incorporates several identifiable Islamic architectural tropes. The Ottoman minarets buttress the stainless steel Mughal-style dome, while the Mosque's geometric-shaped windows throw patterned shadows across its light-filled interior (Fig. 7). Like the Assuna-Annabawiyah, the interior of the Baitul Islam Mosque is spatially sparse. The presence of the *mihrab*, *minbar,* and clean unobstructed rooms corroborates Assuna-Annabawiyah's layout for ritual space. The Baitul Islam differs in the

format of the interior space primarily in the look of the design but also in the building's technological capacities. Throughout its various administrative offices and educational and ritual spaces, the Baitul Islam Mosque is electronically linked via projectors and wide-screen televisions that ultimately serve not only to connect congregants to the individual leading the prayers and delivering sermons but also to the Ahmadiyya community abroad.[34]

Like most other purpose-built structures, the Baitul Islam Mosque was designed by an architect under the close guidance of community members. Furthermore, commissioned mosques are often supported financially by both local and international communities. Due to a centrally organized religious clergy, the Baitul Islam Mosque, from its groundbreaking, has been an important part of the larger Ahmadiyya community in Canada. In contrast to the local storefront mosque, the purpose-built Baitul Islam plays a far more critical role for the Ahmadiyya community across Eastern Canada in terms of its location and religious organization. In addition to being the primary congregation site for Ahmadiyya members from Ontario and Quebec, the mosque also hosts an annual religious event known as the *Jalsa Salana*. This formal religious convention provides members the opportunity to listen to and potentially to meet Mirza Masroor Ahmad, the fifth spiritual leader of the Ahmadiyya Movement. Besides being the religious leader, Mirza Masroor Ahmad is also the great-grandson of the founder of the sect, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, considered by the Ahmadiyya as the "Promised Messiah." The mosque's role as the site of the spiritual event of the *Jalsa Salana* in Eastern Canada heightens its symbolic role in the wider community.

More recently, the desire of the Ahmadiyya community to claim a larger authentic religious space has been demonstrated: soon after constructing the Baitul Islam, members of the Ahmadiyya community advocated renaming streets around the mosque with Muslim names associated with both the Ahmadiyya Movement and Islam generally. Streets such as Ahmadiyya Avenue, Mosque Gate, and Tahir Street, now surround the Baitul Islam Mosque. Changing street names around the mosque was part of a larger architectural and spatial program: in the late 1990s, the community began the creation of a purpose-built Ahmadiyya subdivision called the "Peace Village" adjacent to the Baitul Islam. Single unit family homes and a high school were constructed on the twenty-five acres around the mosque. For the Ahmadiyya residents of the predominately Urdu-speaking South Asian enclave, the benefit of living in Peace Village is the ability to hear the call to prayer five times a day from the comfort of their homes.[35] In addition to providing a spatial and visual claim to Islam, the Baitul Islam Mosque also offers an aural reminder of Islamic ritual practice that extends far beyond the walls of the mosque.

Though the Ahmadiyya enclave is one of many suburban enclaves in and around Toronto, the establishment of a neighbourhood around religious values has, on one hand, provided a sense of security and stability, while, on the other, increased the isolation and ghettoization of the Ahmadiyya community. Even with the sect's active global missionary and charitable programs, the degree to which these purpose-built enclaves affect Ahmadiyya acceptance among other Muslim denominations has yet to be seen. The establishment of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam and the construction of the Baitul Islam Mosque in Vaughan exemplify what is at stake for Muslim communities in the use of Islamic architectural tropes and the complexity involved in ownership of such visual forms.

By way of conclusion: Revisiting the Al-Rashid Mosque

A look at the contemporary situation of the Al-Rashid Mosque provides an illustration of the radical changes in attitudes towards mosques in North America in the last few decades. After being the centre of Edmonton's Muslim community for close to forty years, the purpose-built mosque, known for its fusion of distinct architectural styles, the early settlement histories of its congregants, and its Ukrainian builder, entered a new phase.[36] By the mid-1980s, Edmonton's multi-ethnic and multi-generational Muslim community had grown exponentially to 16,000 and two new mosques had been constructed to accommodate the Muslim congregation. Unused and abandoned for several years, the old Al-Rashid Mosque had fallen into disrepair and had been set for demolition by the city. A group of women led by Karen and Evelyn Hamdon, the granddaughter and grand-niece of Hilwie Hamdon, one of the first community leaders of the Edmonton Muslim community, rallied to save the mosque because of its historic legacy.[37] Through active community fundraising, the women were able to secure enough funds to preserve the mosque. However, to the dismay of the Muslim community, the most challenging task was persuading the city to allow the mosque to be relocated to Fort Edmonton Park as there was heated public opposition. Among the numerous arguments from outside the Muslim community was the claim that the mosque did not fit the park's mandate and that the park should not have to accept a "historical intruder."[38] During a public meeting held by the city of Edmonton, an outspoken resident shouted at the elderly Saleem Ganam, an early member of the mosque, that he should "go back" to the country he came from, to which he replied, "Sir, are you aware that I was born in Canada?"[39]

Toward the fall of 1992, after much debate and fundraising, the mosque was successfully moved to its current location at Fort Edmonton Park. As a

living museum, Fort Edmonton Park narrates Alberta's history up to 1930 with period actors circulating inside and outside historical built-forms throughout the park. Because the mosque was constructed in 1938, the period actors do not narrate its history but instead step out of character, breaking the historical framing and narration of the tour to talk about the building in the first person. No longer part of Edmonton's rich collective and celebratory past, the Al-Rashid mosque is now largely seen as an unanimated recent addition at the end of the 1930s street, removed from the other buildings and histories at Fort Edmonton Park.[40]

This recent history of the Al-Rashid Mosque reflects the current condition of Muslim life in the West. In the last three decades, Muslim identity has undeniably been shaped by and contingent on geopolitical events and has been vigorously scrutinized with regard to its adaptability in modern, democratic societies. These polarizing debates about the location and inclusion of mosques build upon colonial hierarchical divisions and have had immediate and detrimental effects on all sectarian segments of the Muslim community.

The history of mosques such as the Assuna-Annabawiyah, Baitul Islam, and the Al-Rashid show the challenges and conditions communities face in attempting to access and adapt the urban landscape in order to maintain their religious needs. While contemporary scholarship on traditional Islamic architecture continues to expand upon the valuable surveys of buildings in the Muslim world, without a contextual analysis of how Islam is represented in built-form, Muslim practices and identities risk being further stigmatized and ultimately viewed as incompatible with Canadian civic ideals and democratic values. As a result of their varied forms, Canadian mosques resist colonial and formulaic understandings of Islamic architecture but reveal how these mosques are continually utilized, reinterpreted, and re-examined by Muslim communities. In other words, by being both geographically and stylistically outside official Islamic architectural histories, Canadian mosques show the limits of the field but are also dependent on a number of symbolic conventions of mosque architecture.

No doubt, the mosques represent a powerful and challenging image of Islam. In settler societies such as Canada, the idea of a normative urban landscape and built-forms is heavily informed by distilled notions of not only cultural but also religious belonging. These notions are deeply rooted in early histories of European settlement and continue to be dependent on the dispossession of those who do not culturally fit within this conception.[41] The marginalization of mosques can be linked to a longer colonial project that alleges an incompatibility between Islam and democracy and has been active in shaping attitudes towards Muslim groups in Canada.[42] Such binary

frameworks have created barriers for Muslims throughout Canada, not only in the terms of claiming urban space but also of accessing full citizenship rights.[43]

As Muslim communities grow and establish mosques across Canada, their heterogeneous composition needs to be continually affirmed, recognizing that it emphasizes the variable ways in which the term "Islamic" has been conceived and visualized through mosques. In the Baitul Islam, we see how the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam uses the image of the mosque to affirm its religious identity whereas the Assuna-Annabawiyah shows that Islamic religious practice is not contingent upon replication of strict structural or visual forms. Whether renovated or purpose-built, Ahmadiyya or Sunni, Canadian mosques employ symbolic visual forms to varying degrees and incorporate the community's needs in their construction. "Even the most casual engagement with these buildings and the communities they serve," writes art historian Jerrilynn Dodds, "defies any single reductive image."[44]

NOTES

1 Mohja Kahf, "Voyager Dust," *Emails from Scheherazad* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 1.

2 Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj al-Qushayri (ca. 821–75 CE) *Sahih Muslim; being traditions of the sayings and doings of the prophet Muhammad as narrated by his companions and compiled under the title al-Jami'-Sahih, by Imam Muslim. Rendered into English by 'Abdul Hamid Siddiqi, with explanatory notes and brief biographical sketches of major narrators* (Lahore, Pakistan: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1971–75), 264.

3 *Edmonton, Gateway to the North: Tourists' Souvenir Guide Book* (Edmonton, AB: T.H. Dale, 1947).

4 Canada and the United States have long had discriminatory immigration policies that favour European settlement through the displacement and dispossession of Aboriginal peoples. In the 1960s, the liberalization of immigration policies opened the door for non-European settlers. See Sherene H. Razack, ed., *Race, Space, and the Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2002) and Sunera Thobani, *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

5 Sarah M.A. Gualtieri's *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009) provides insight into how early Syrian settlers used legal and economic means to define their racial identity as being "White" in the US during the late 1800s–early 1900s. Unlike early South Asian or East Asian immigrants, these Ottoman Arab settlers, the majority of whom were Christian, were able to use both historical and contemporary notions of race to support their claims of whiteness and, ultimately, their citizenship.

6 Leading up to the First World War, given the changing religious and ethnic legislation aimed at non-Muslims and non-Turks during the late-Ottoman period, the bulk of Ottoman Arabs who migrated to North America were of Christian and Jewish faiths. However a significant number of Muslim Arabs were also affected by the changing laws and social attitudes towards Arabs in the predominately Turkish-ruled Ottoman Empire.

7 Andrea W. Lorenz, "Canada's Pioneer Mosque," *Saudi Aramco World* 49:4(July/August 1998): 28–31.

8 Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (Oxford: OneWorld Publications, 2006), 2.

9 Akel Ismail Kahera, *Deconstructing the American Mosque: Space, Gender and Aesthetics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 69.

10 Jerrilynn D. Dodds and Edward Grazda, *New York Masjid: The Mosques of New York* (Brooklyn, ny: PowerHouse Books, 2002), 21.

11 Omar Khalidi, "Approaches to Mosque Design in North America," eds. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito, *Muslims on the Americanization Path?* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 317.

12 Haideh Moghissi, Saeed Rahnema and Mark J. Goodman, *Diaspora by Design: Muslim Immigrants in Canada and Beyond* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 7. According to the 2001 Census, the number of Muslims in Canada was 579,640, which represents 2 percent of the total population. Accessed 24 Sept. 2012, http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/home/index.cfm

13 Much has been written on contemporary Muslim life in North America. For more recent information, see Sherene H. Razack, *Casting Out: The Eviction of Muslims from Western Law and Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008); Natasha Bakht, *Belonging and Banishment: Being Muslim in Canada* (Toronto: tsar Publications, 2008); Geneive Abdo, *Mecca and Main Street: Muslim Life in America after 9/11* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Peter Mandaville, *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma* (London: Routledge, 2003) and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, ed., *Muslims in the West: From Sojourners to Citizens* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

14 Moghissi, Rahnema, and Goodman, eds., *Diaspora by Design,* 16.

15 Engin F. Isin and Myer Siemiatycki, "Making Space for Mosques: Struggles for Urban Citizenship in Diasporic Toronto," *Race, Space, and the Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society*, ed. Sherene Razack (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2002), 188, 201.

16 Robert Irwin, *Islamic Art in Context* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997), 11.

17 Moghissi, Rahnema, and Goodman, eds., *Diaspora by Design,* 14–15.

18 Robert Hillenbrand, "Studying Islamic Architecture: Challenges and Perspectives," *Architectural History* 46 (2003): 5.

19 Ibid., 5–6.

20 Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, "The Mirage of Islamic Art: Reflections on the Study of an Unwieldy Field," *Art Bulletin* 85, no. 1 (March 2003): 152.

21 J.M. Rogers, "Architectural History as Literature: Creswell's Reading and Methods," *Muqarnas* Vol. 8, K.A.C. Creswell and His Legacy (1991): 45.

22 Blair and Bloom, "The Mirage of Islamic Art," 152.

23 Ibid., 153. Many other historians of Islamic art and architecture have examined the origins and limitations of the field. They have included, most notably, Oleg Grabar, Robert Hillenbrand, Dogan Kuban, Hassan Khan, Sheila Blair, and Jonathan Bloom. The approaches used to understand traditional Islamic art and architectural history have become increasingly fragmented with the emphasis on contemporary national identities rather than any particular religious ones. In terms of understanding the colonial production of knowledge on the Middle East and Muslims more broadly, work by the late Edward W. Said has been the most influential and informative, namely, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978) and *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York: Random House, 1997).

24 Oleg Grabar, "Reflections on the Study of Islamic Art," *Muqarnas 1: An Annual on Islamic Art and Architecture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 2.

25 Robert Hillenbrand, *Islamic Architecture: Form, Function and Meaning* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), 5.

26 Dodds and Grazda, *New York Masjid,* 65.

27 Michel S. Laguerre, *Urban Multiculturalism and Globalization in New York City: An Analysis of Diasporic Temporalities* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2003), 80.

28 Khalidi, "Approaches to Mosque Design in North America," 317–34.

29 Dodds and Grazda, *New York Masjid*, 32.

30 In 2008, the Ahmadiyya community built another mosque in Calgary, which now claims the title of largest mosque in Canada. In addition to prayer spaces, the 48,000-square-foot Baitul Nur Mosque also contains a library, offices, gymnasium, and classrooms.

31 Barbara Daly Metcalf, "Introduction: Sacred Words, Sanctioned Practice, New Communities," in Metcalf, ed., *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), 10.

32 Gulzar Haider, "Muslim Space and the Practice of Architecture: A Personal Odyssey," ibid., 42.

33 Ruth Mandel, "A Place of Their Own: Contesting Spaces and Defining Places in Berlin's Migrant Community," ibid., 155.

34 Unlike Sunni Islam, the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam has a centrally organized clerical leadership. Based in London, UK, members of the Ahmadiyya missionary leadership regularly communicate religious teachings via satellite television programming.

35 Dorn Townsend, "Building an Enclave Around a Mosque in Suburban Toronto," *The New York Times,* 18 Nov. 2007. Accessed 24 Sept. 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/18/realestate/18nati.html

36 As a mosque built with the specific intention of being used as a place for ritual practice and community gathering, the Al-Rashid is a purpose-built mosque. However, because of the building's use of modified elements of local built forms (those of Eastern Orthodox Christian churches found in the Prairies for example), the Al-Rashid also encapsulates characteristics of a repurposed mosque. Some well-known mosques that similarly synthesized religious architectural forms across the globe include the Great Mosque of Cordoba (Spain) and the Jamia Mosque of Srinagar (India).

37 Lorenz, "Canada's Pioneer Mosque," 28–31.
38 Ibid.
39 Richard Asmet Awid, *Through the Eyes of the Son: A Factual History About Canadian Arabs* (Edmonton, ab: Accent Printing, 2000), 71.
40 In the fall of 2009, I visited Fort Edmonton Park and was provided a tour of the site where I learned that the park does not regularly animate or host activities at the mosque. This task is often delegated to volunteers from the local Muslim community. Though Edmonton's Muslim community had arrived and settled in Canada before the 1930s, their identity only became materially and spatially identifiable with the construction of the mosque after the Park's 1930 historical cut-off, and as a result, the history of the Al-Rashid Mosque is largely absent from the Park's scripted historical narrative.
41 Nicholas Blomley, *Unsettling the City: Urban Land and the Politics of Property* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 110.
42 Isin and Siemiatycki, "Making Space for Mosques," 192.
43 A number of recent public examples of Muslim Canadians who have been denied citizenship rights can be cited here, namely, Mahar Arar, Suaad Hagi Mohammed, Mohammed Harkat, Abousfian Abdelrazik, and Omar Khadr. Some building projects in Switzerland and the United States have generated hostile public debate over the "appropriateness" and admissibility of mosques and spaces created by Muslims.
44 Dodds and Grazda, *New York Masjid*, 25.

RÉSUMÉ

Manifestations du sacré : construction et signification des mosquées au Canada

NADIA KURD

En tant que structure historique distincte, la mosquée est une institution importante dans la vie religieuse et séculière du musulman, car c'est un lieu où on peut apprendre à connaître l'islam, s'adonner à la supplication et recevoir l'appui de la communauté. Le présent article examine la construction et la signification de deux types distincts de mosquée, celles qui ont été bâties spécifiquement comme mosquées et celles qui sont des structures existantes réaménagées, et pose la question : qu'est-ce qui constitue une mosquée au Canada ? Et, le plus important, quelle est la valeur symbolique de ces édifices ? Citant en exemple les mosquées Al-Rashid (Edmonton, AB), Baitul Islam (Vaughan, ON) et Assunna Annabawiyah (Montréal, QC), cette étude montre les stratégies visuelles divergentes employées dans ces constructions pour exprimer leur identité islamique. Pour les mosquées construites avec une intention spécifique, comme Al-Rashid et Baitul Islam, des marques visibles comme le dôme ou le minaret, non seulement confirment l'importance de l'architecture islamique monumentalisée, mais expriment aussi la force de ces signes comme formes symboliques dans la diaspora musulmane. En particulier pour les membres de la mosquée Baitul Islam, qui font partie du mouvement islamique Ahmadiyya, les formes authentiques d'architecture islamique confirment leurs lieux de culte comme mosquées et, ultimement, leur propre statut de musulmans.

Bien que toutes les formes utilisées par ces mosquées ne soient pas fondées sur les conventions de l'architecture islamique traditionnelle, ces édifices montrent que ces décisions dépendent des diverses réalités économiques et politiques vécues par leurs congrégations respectives. Ainsi, les mosquées réaménagées sont discrètes dans la proclamation de leur identité islamique et sont presqu'exclusivement perçues comme des intérieurs. Bien que de tels édifices montrent la simplicité non visuelle de l'espace rituel musulman, ils peuvent communiquer leur identité à travers ce que Michael Laguerre explique en terme de « la temporalité de l'espace ». Cela signifie que ceux qui fréquentent des mosquées comme Assuna-Annabawiyah, par exemple, communiquent leur identité à travers le temps aussi bien que contre la temporalité hégémonique d'un centre urbain. Les communautés

de la diaspora musulmane, note Laguerre, d'une part observent les pratiques sociales réglées par la société civile, et, d'autre part, adhèrent à une enclave temporelle « qui les relie à un islam mondial par un calendrier islamique ». Cela signifie que la mosquée et son voisinage expérimentent une routine temporelle différente qui a été modifiée et adaptée pour accommoder la pratique religieuse. Autour de la mosquée Assuna-Annabawiyah, cette pratique du temps peut être directement observée cinq fois par jour, quand les fidèles, principalement des chauffeurs de taxi, des commerçants du voisinage et des résidents, arrivent à la mosquée à temps pour les prières quotidiennes. À travers la temporalité du lieu, la structure de la mosquée Assuna-Annabawiyah devient visiblement un espace sacré à cause de la répétition du rituel quotidien.

Je soutiens, de plus, que ces mosquées hybrides et réaménagées rompent, à leur façon, avec la compréhension traditionnelle de ce qu'est l'architecture islamique, pour montrer une tension particulière de la diaspora musulmane au regard de la question de l'authenticité. En tant que produit du colonialisme de la fin du XIX^e^ siècle, l'étude traditionnelle de l'architecture islamique a été presqu'exclusivement axée sur un ensemble d'édifices historiques, séculiers et religieux, à travers le Moyen Orient, l'Espagne et le sous-continent sud-asiatique. Les mosquées contemporaines dont il est question dans le présent essai montrent les déficiences des connaissances coloniales dans la description de l'histoire sociale de ces immeubles contemporains, mais interpellent aussi la présomption d'un paysage urbain séculier et racialement neutre dans des pays à population musulmane croissante comme le Canada. Qu'elles soient construites avec une intention précise ou réaménagées, ces mosquées montrent la fluidité de la pratique spatiale islamique et soulignent ce qu'Edward Saïd appelle « la dimension humaine de l'islam ». Elles sont aussi devenues une pierre de touche importante pour comprendre la transformation du paysage religieux canadien qui continue d'interpeller notre compréhension des formes bâties islamiques en Occident aujourd'hui.

Traduction : Élise Bonnette

ARTICLE

Dybbuks of Derrida: Traces of Deconstruction in Contemporary Jewish Art

LOUIS KAPLAN

Introduction

The title of this essay is designed to give a decidedly Jewish twist to one of Jacques Derrida's well-known books – *Specters of Marx* (1994).[1] In this work Derrida introduced the portmanteau *hauntology* as a way to register the spectral surplus of ontology that marks our being in the world as a being haunted. Hauntology evades the metaphysics of presence and introduces haunting into every concept to the extent that ontology becomes the forever failing attempt to exorcise the ghost from the concept. As Derrida writes, "To haunt does not mean to be present, and it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept. Of every concept, beginning with the concept of being and time. That is what we would be calling here a hauntology. Ontology opposes it only in a movement of exorcism."[2] While such uncanny and spectral logics occupied Derrida in the last decade of his life, and to this extent we might say that he became haunted by hauntology, it is interesting to note that he never invoked or conjured the *dybbuk*, a Jewish version of these spooky specters, in his vast corpus of writings. As the spirit of the deceased that inhabits and cleaves to the body of a living person, the dybbuk is part and parcel of this uncanny class of beings between. Indeed, the dybbuk provides a wonderful parasitic figure for thinking about the practice of deconstruction itself or as a double of itself.[3]

Spun out of the lore of Kabbalah and Jewish mysticism and documented beginning in the first half of the sixteenth century in the Sephardic communities around the Mediterranean, the dybbuk was popularized during the Jewish cultural renaissance in Russia by the famous folklorist S. An-sky through his play *The Dybbuk or Between Two Worlds* (1914),[4] which tells the tragic love story of the scholar Hannan and his beloved Leah. When Leah is to be married off to a rich suitor, Hannan turns to the Kabbalah to find the magical means to get her back but dies in the process. On the evening of the wedding, the dislocated soul of the dead lover returns to take possession

Detail, Melissa Shiff, *ARK* video sculpture at the Jewish Museum in Prague, 2006. (Photo: Courtesy of the artist)

1 | Film still of Lili Liliana as Leah in Michal Waszynski, *The Dybbuk*, 1937. (Photo: Courtesy of the author)

of Leah's body and she begins to speak with the voice of the dybbuk that the rabbis must exorcise (Fig. 1). It is a perfect Derridean parable: the onto-theological rabbis refuse to accept the dybbuk as it floats between two worlds (between being and non-being) and as it lodges itself as a parasite cleaving to its beloved host. It should be recalled that in the literature the dybbuk is often figured as both a restless soul and an evil spirit (as "a notorious sinner in his lifetime"[5]) who takes possession of a woman. While the idea of the restless soul fits well with Derridean dissemination and the endless play of the signifier, the idea of an evil spirit speaks with a religious and moral authority that seems unsuited to deconstruction's post-Nietzschean subversion of the binary opposition of good and evil. Or perhaps one can say that the deconstructive spirit will always appear as something evil to those of a more philosophical bent who desire to set boundaries and systematic classifications and therefore want to exorcise this dybbuk. It is also possible to argue that the figure of the dybbuk resonates as well with Derrida's own liminal and complex relationship with Judaism and Jewish thought (e.g., in referring to himself as "the last of the Jews" or as "otherwise Jewish").[6] This subject has been taken up in such recent books as Gideon Ofrat's *The Jewish Derrida* (2001)[7] and Bettina Bergo, Joseph Cohen, and Rafael Zagury-Orly's co-edited volume *Judeities: Questions for Jacques Derrida* (2003), which includes

Derrida's essay "Abraham, the Other" as well as in Hélène Cixous's tribute, *Portrait of Jacques Derrida as a Young Jewish Saint* (2004).[8] I am indebted to all of these texts for their valuable reflections on Derrida's interrogative relationship with Judaism and Jewish thought.

It is the goal of this essay to explore how both Derrida and deconstruction function as a type of dybbuk in selected works of contemporary Jewish art that draw inspiration from his writings in the lens-based media of photography, video, and film.[9] In marking the continuing relevance of Derrida as a touchstone for contemporary Jewish artists over the past decade, I am directly challenging one of the central assumptions made by Daniel Belasco, who served as the curator of a recent survey exhibition that took place at the Jewish Museum in New York. Proclaiming a new Zeitgeist that prompted his exhibition *Reinventing Ritual*, Belasco offhandedly states that we have moved beyond postmodernism and deconstruction into a new age of reconstruction. "If postmodernism was about deconstruction, then our time is about reconstruction. The contemporary impulse is exemplified by Sandi Simcha Dubowski's documentary film *Trembling Before G-d* (2001) which argues that one can be both gay and Orthodox. This film documented the struggles of men and women trying, in their individual ways, to make peace with the tensions between the two identities."[10] While the attempt to "make peace" between being gay and being Orthodox documented in Dubowski's film may be laudable, this does not alter the fact that it is somewhat self-deluded and cloaks a number of irreconcilable differences. For one, this reconstructive approach elides the fact that homosexuality remains an abomination for Orthodox Jews, who invoke Biblical chapter and verse. In bringing together the lion and the lamb and trying "to make peace with the tensions between the two identities," Belasco's conciliatory and rather conservative project represses the aporias and violent contradictions from which deconstruction cannot look away.

This problematic position is further exemplified by the reconstructive way in which Belasco frames the video *Dancing with Men* (2003) by the British artist Oreet Ashery in this exhibition. This transgressive work stages the Hasidic drag king performance by Ashery's alter-ego Marcus Fisher as she/he infiltrates the all-male ultra-Orthodox religious rave celebrating the Lag b'Omer festival at Mount Meron in Israel. One notes how Belasco seeks to tone down the transgressive aspects of the work and convert it into a voyeuristic documentation of an intense religious ritual. "Once the subversion of cross-dressing is accepted, her video *Dancing with Men* becomes less about her transgression and more a documentation of the variety of music and fashion, from Hasidic to reggae to hip-hop, among the participants enacting the ritual of pilgrimage."[11] In this way, Belasco's reconstructive project sucks the deconstructive life out of *Dancing with Men* and shifts

attention away from both its performance of identity and troubling of gender (à la Butler) or its subversion and overturning of hierarchies (à la Derrida). (In this context, it should also be noted that this work is also part of Boris Groys's curated exhibition *Medium Religion* where it is specifically and more appropriately referred to as an "intervention."[12]) Rather than making a reconstructive statement about some mismatched hybrid identity (like queer Jewish Orthodoxy), deconstruction poses the alterity or strangeness of Jewish identity at its origins or as something that is just not (nor ever was) itself. It recalls this provocative question posed in relation to the work of Edmond Jabès: "Would 'Jew' be the other name for this impossibility of being oneself?"[13] Belasco's monolithic "contemporary impulse" of reconstruction represses the deconstructive dybbuk as a viable option found in the contemporary artists and the lens-based works that I will be exploring and championing in this essay.

Through a close reading of these artists and their haunting works, I want to demonstrate how they speak in the voice of the Derridean deconstructive dybbuk – in the name of a restless and diasporic soul that asks profound and unsettling questions (sometimes about Judaism itself) and that resists simple identification. These artists are the French photographer Frédéric Brenner (1959–), the Canadian photographer Simon Glass (1956–), and the Canadian video sculptor Melissa Shiff (1967–). Simon Glass's digital photography series *The Ten Commandments/Prohibited Weapons* (2005) is in direct dialogue with Derrida's essay "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority',"[14] while Melissa Shiff's video sculpture installation *ARK* (2006) draws upon Derrida's *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*.[15] In the case of French-Jewish photographer Frédéric Brenner and his twenty-five-year photographic odyssey *Diaspora: Homelands in Exile*, Derrida has been a major interlocutor, culminating in his commentaries for approximately a dozen of Brenner's photographs in the volume *Voices* (2003).[16] It is important to insert the voice and the figure of the dybbuk into the conversation between Derrida and Brenner. By doing this, the essay raises the specter of deconstruction's Jewish inflection and its strange attraction for this particular photographic artist. But it will become apparent that, rather than being under the influence of a single text by Jacques Derrida, Brenner's photographic œuvre and its vision of Jewish diaspora is haunted by the dybbuk of deconstruction in general.

Affirming "Stranjew" Bodies: Derridean Dybbuks Speaking through Frédéric Brenner's Photographic *Diaspora*

In 2003, the French photographer Frédéric Brenner published *Diaspora: Homelands in Exile*, which showcases his documentation and staging of Jewish

diasporic life over twenty-five years and in forty countries. In the fall of that same year, the Brooklyn Museum in New York mounted the retrospective exhibition *The Jewish Journey: Frédéric Brenner's Photographic Odyssey*.[17] For Brenner, diaspora can only be understood in relation to Derridean constructs of *différance* and deferral as originary. This approach subverts the possibility of self-same identity and opens unto questions of alterity and exteriority right from the beginning. Therefore, it is not surprising to learn that Brenner takes as his starting point the Biblical injunction *Lekh Lecha* found in Genesis, chapter 12, verse 13, where God tells Abram to leave his father's house and his country for a land that the Lord will show him.[18] (The exact passage reads: "Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee.") By focusing on this sacred scriptural passage that relates a divine injunction to exteriority (to get out of oneself, to be beside oneself), Brenner's project underscores Jewish identity as always already separated and estranged from itself. For Brenner, Jewish self-identification paradoxically means being at home in a state of exile and exodus and he affirms this diasporic condition as a blessing rather than a curse. Commenting on *Lekh Lecha* as the Jewish diasporic point of departure, Brenner stated the following in an interview that I conducted with him: "And I believe that historical circumstances have enabled the Jewish people to enact this injunction of God to Abraham. And from this point of view, I never considered diaspora as a curse, but truly as a vocation, as a project. This is at the heart of what I do."[19] Brenner even insists upon this paradoxical status to those dwelling in the nation-state of Israel today in his photographic project *Exile at Home (Galut Bayit)*[20] for, as John Paul Ricco has phrased it, they too "exist as exposures to, and promises of, a future to come."[21] Interestingly, Derrida also discusses the same Biblical passage when he writes about the status of the stranger in the work of the French Catholic scholar of Islam Louis Massignon (as well as in the texts of the Jewish philosophers Emmanuel Levinas and Franz Rosenzweig) in his essay "Hostipitality."[22] Here, Derrida wants us to recall that all three monotheistic religions, as Abrahamic, take as their point of departure the going forth of the patriarch Abram from Ur and therefore share this originary logic of the stranger (or *gêr* in Hebrew).

Brenner's allegorical photographs are always interrogative sites full of symbolic condensation (in Freud's sense) that raise compelling questions and require unpacking through exegesis and commentary (or in Hebrew, *Midrash*). I would like to focus on two of the dozen images that Derrida interprets in order to illuminate further how Brenner's photographs speak in the voice of the deconstructive dybbuk. The first image is a highly theatrical tableau taken from Brenner's American project of the mid-nineties, *jews/*

2 | Frédéric Brenner, *Spiritual Gathering, Navajos and Jews*, Monument Valley, Arizona, 1994. (Photo: Courtesy of the Howard Greenberg Gallery, New York)

america/a representation. Brenner's image *Spiritual Gathering* (1994) stages a monumental meeting (and a mirror reflection) in the desert between a group of New Age Jews and Navajo natives in Monument Valley, Arizona (Fig. 2). It is an encounter of two spiritual traditions and imperilled ethnic groups who have had to deal with mass genocide in the West. In this image, Brenner uses the rearview mirror of an automobile to produce a haunting reflection where, in this meticulously symmetrical staging, the dividing line of the highway performs a photographic trick. The prayer shawls of the Jews bounce off the ceremonial garb of the Navajos. The slash marks two clans in the desert, separated yet sharing the same space in a reversible play of mirror reflections that show us how it is that the presence of the other functions as a necessary blind spot for the constitution of self-same identity. In other words, this image's logic of alterity visualizes how identity is constituted and risked though the other.[23] Referring to this "strange gathering," which is also a gathering of strangers, Derrida's reading focuses on how these two communities share a disaporic condition that constitutes what he calls

both an "irreducible experience of the proper as nonproper" and a state of "ex-appropriation." Again, Derrida insists that such ex-appropriation must never be reified or projected into something like the experience of a promised land. Rather, in keeping time with the immemorial and eliciting an exposure to the outside, ex-appropriation has to remain open to the indeterminacy of the future, thereby eliciting Derrida's formulation of "messianicity without messianism."[24] As Derrida writes about this diasporic gathering of spirits, "We, all of us, all the presently living, the living ones of the past and the specters of the future, all of us, men and animals, have no proper place and no beloved land except a promised one, one promised since an ageless ex-appropriation, older than all of our memories."[25]

Not surprisingly, Derrida also "identifies" with Brenner's paradoxical exposure of *Marranos Celebrating Passover in Secret* in Belmonte, Portugal (1988). In this image, a group of these proud crypto-Jews, all dressed in sacred white vestments and displaying such things as the unleavened bread (*Matzoh*) that enables them to keep the rituals of the Passover holiday, continue their secret centuries-old tradition of going into the attic to celebrate the ancient Israelite's exodus and liberation from Egypt (hence, the theme of diaspora again). The Marranos are those Sephardic Jews who were forced to hide their religious practices in order to escape expulsion or forced conversion to Christianity in Spain in 1492. As Derrida attests: "They still have to hide, these Marranos, to celebrate the exodus from Egypt. Here they do so in an attic."[26] It should be noted that Brenner was so taken with their story that he co-directed an ethnographic documentary on the subject with Stan Neumann entitled *The Last Marranos* that was released in 1991.

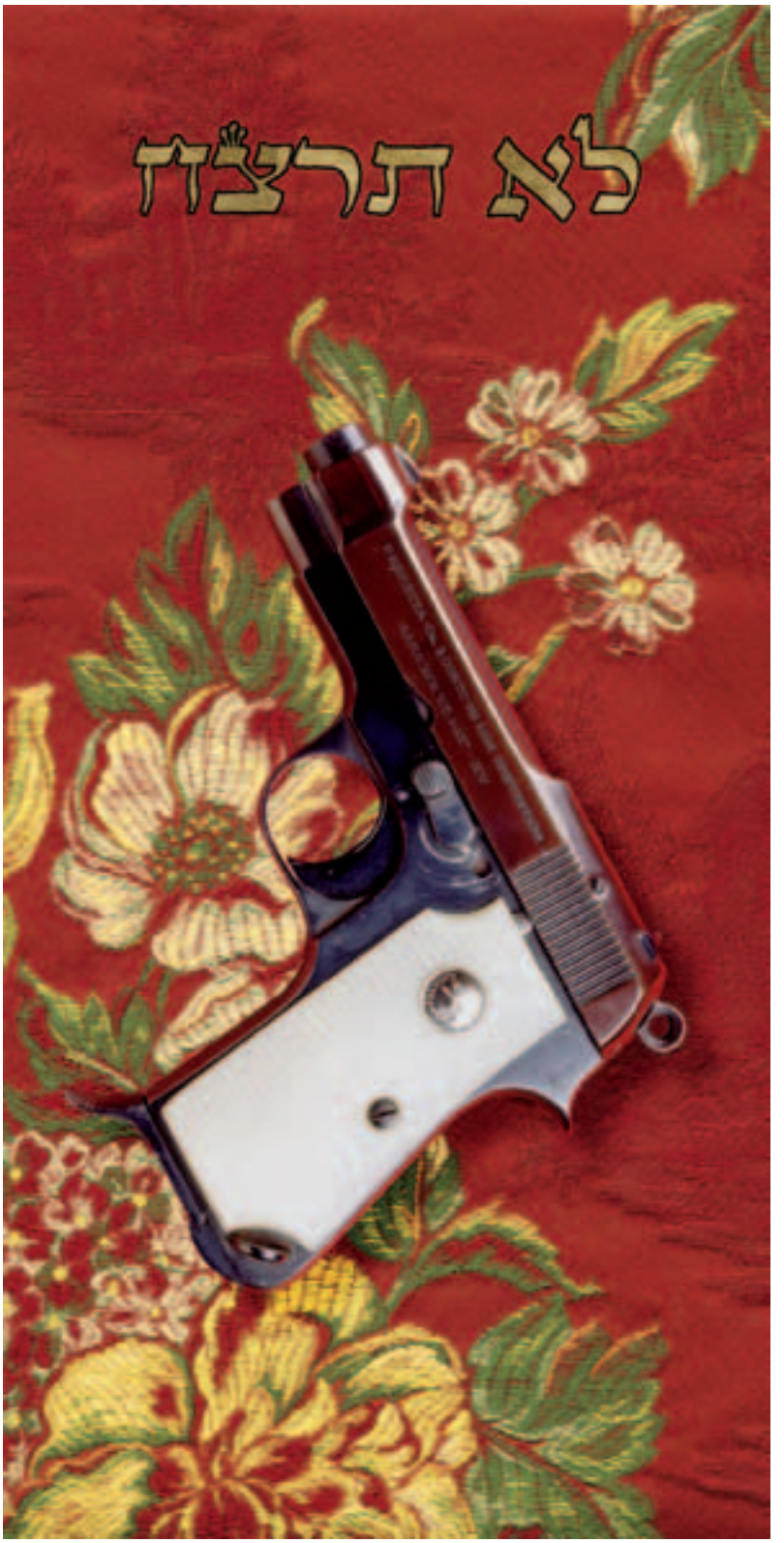
In exploring the mysteries of the Marranos and their crypto-Jewish ontological/hauntological status, Derrida is particularly fascinated by Brenner's paradoxical exposure of their secret. Marking what he calls their "invisible visibility" before the lens, he uses language to describe the photographic Marranos of Belmonte that echoes his discussion of ghosts in *Specters of Marx*.[27] "They make of their secret an archived invisible visibility. They are the only ones, in this series of photograms, to keep the secret that they exhibit and to sign their belonging without belonging."[28] Yet, the signing of one's belonging in non-belonging is one of the crucial aporia that can be traced throughout Brenner's *Homelands in Exile* given its deconstructive refusal to function as a mere photographic (re)presentation of diaspora. Rather, one might say that Brenner's diasporic exposures frame his subjects as posed in exteriority. Such a reading of the exposed/protected secret of Brenner's Belmonte Marranos also resonates with Derrida's own crypto-Jewish *Circumfession* and his paradoxical self-identification with the Marranos. "I am one of those *marranes* who no longer say they are Jews even

in the secret of their own hearts, not so as to be authenticated *marranes* on both sides of the public frontier but because they doubt everything."[29] This unlimited and generalized doubt records a version of the haunting of the undecidable that adheres (like a dybbuk) to being crypto-Jewish. For Derrida, the Marranos trace the impossible logic of the Jewish secret that wants to expose/protect itself as other. As he writes in "Abraham, the Other": "that is why I play seriously, more and more, with the figure of the marrano: the less you show yourself as jewish, the more and better jew you will be."[30] Finally, Hélène Cixous pursues a similar line of inquiry in her meditation on the status of Derrida's own liminal relationship to Jewishness and his non-identitarian sense of affiliation in the section "A Desire to Be a Marrano."[31] In "This Stranjew Body," Cixous links Derrida and the Sephardic Marranos together as *stranjews* in a perceptive neologism that couples the status of being Jewish with that of being the stranger.

A (Jewish) Haunting of the Undecidable: Simon Glass's *The Ten Commandments* and Jacques Derrida's "Force of Law"

In fall 2005, I had the opportunity to curate the exhibition *Command J: Jewish Laws, Digital Arts* as part of the ReJewvenation festival at the University of Toronto. The exhibition included Simon Glass's *The Ten Commandments/ Prohibited Weapons*, a suite of ten giclée prints 44″ × 22″ embellished with gold leaf.[32] These striking images juxtapose the Hebrew text of the Ten Commandments with weapons prohibited by the Canadian criminal code – snub-nosed pistols, switchblades, and butterfly knives. As Glass put it in his artist statement, "The law is juxtaposed with imagery suggesting its most grave consequence, namely violence"[33] (Fig. 3). Thus Glass's series meditates on violence that is in excess of the law and the violence of the law itself to the extent that force and enforcement are bound up with the law. Taking up the mystical authority of these Old Testament injunctions, Glass's project puts itself in direct dialogue with Walter Benjamin's *"Zur kritik der Gewalt"* (1921),[34] Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer*,[35] and Jacques Derrida's "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority.' "

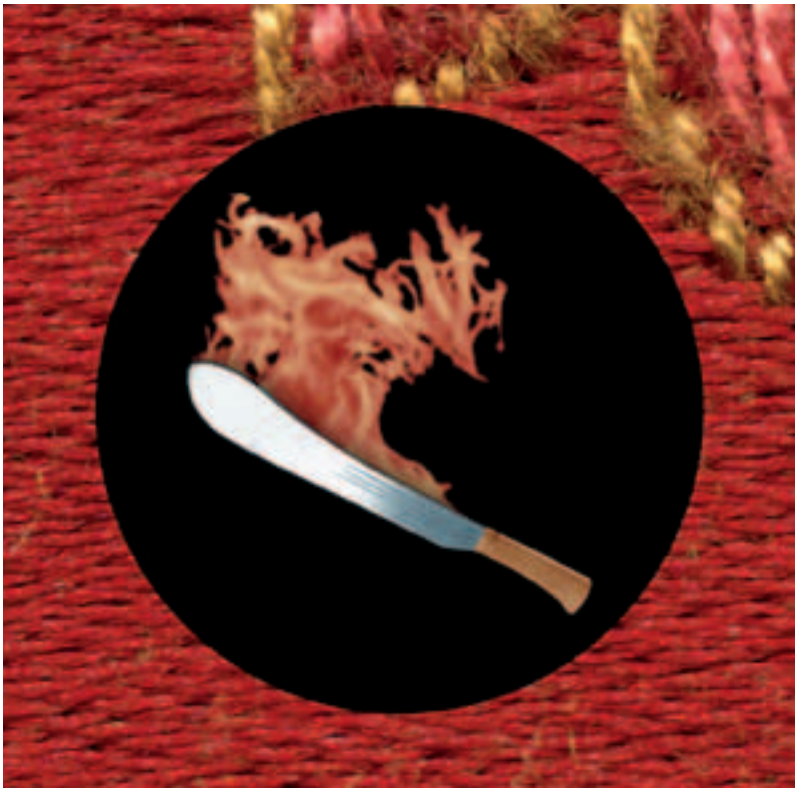
Illustrating YAHWEH's Ten Commandments by means of these contraband weapons, Glass's work raises politico-theological and Biblical themes such as sacrifice, the unaccountable and destructive nature of "divine violence," and the wrath of God. Brandishing these guns and knives, these "Laws of Glass"[36] affirm a distinctively Judaic perspective that situates itself in direct opposition to the Greek mythic tradition on the subject of violence. As Derrida reminds us, Benjamin's *"Zur Kritik der Gewalt"* offers "a Judaic perspective that opposes just, divine (Jewish) violence, which would destroy



3 | Simon Glass, "Sixth Commandment," *The Ten Commandments/Prohibited Weapons*, 2005. Giclée print with 23.5k gold leaf, 55.9 × 111.8 cm. (Photo: Courtesy of the artist)

the law, to mythical violence (of the Greek tradition) which would install and preserve the law."[37] Derrida's text also provides us with further insight regarding Glass's attraction to and fascination with Benjamin's essay. For Derrida, "this text is haunted by the themes of exterminating violence" (259) and therefore anticipates the Holocaust (which is uncannily "haunted in advance"[38] here). This helps us to explain the trajectory of Simon Glass's work from the 1990s when he was largely preoccupied with the "exterminating violence" of the Holocaust to *The Ten Commandments/Prohibited Weapons*. In photographic series such as *YAHWEH!* (1995), *Zundel's Place* (1995), and *untitled (Auschwitz)* (1997), Glass staked out the position of a Canadian-Jewish artist for whom the catastrophe of the Holocaust offered an opportunity to probe and reflect upon the limits of representation and comprehension. In the series *YAHWEH!*, he entered the space of unknowing by superimposing "the unutterable name of the God of the Jews" "upon photographs taken in 1945, upon the liberation of various concentration camps in Europe."[39] Here, it remains an open question as to whether these haunting images affirm or subvert a theodicy of Holocaust suffering.[40] In the work under consideration, the historical violence of the Holocaust is transposed into the foundational violence of the Ten Commandments.

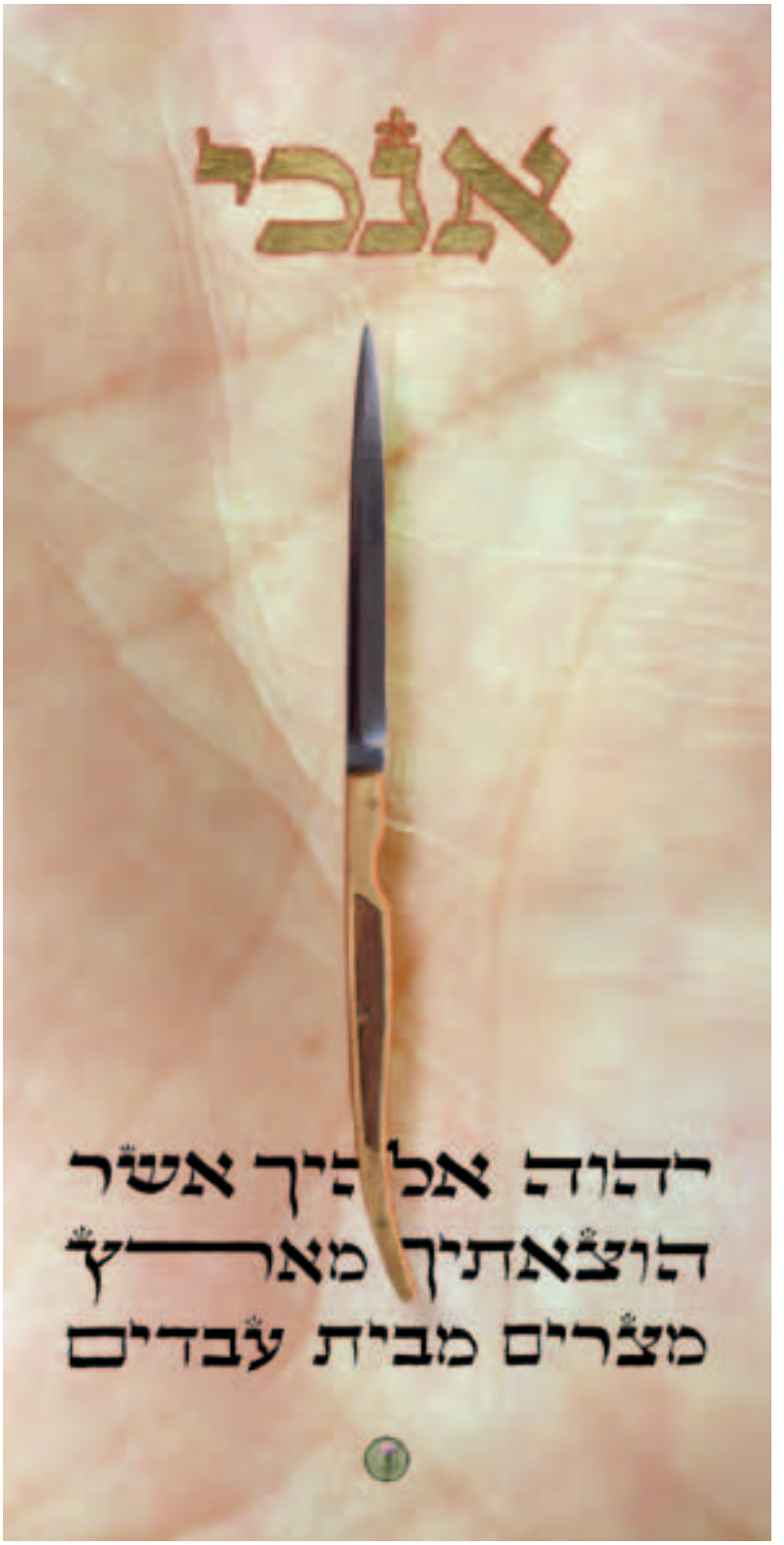
In "Force of Law," Derrida follows Montaigne's thinking by distinguishing between laws and justice. He writes: "The justice of law, justice as law is not justice. Laws are not just in as much as they are laws. One does not obey them because they are just but because they have authority."[41] Indeed, Derrida posits justice (not unlike the Messiah itself) as "an experience of the impossible"[42] and goes on to refer to "justice as the [undeconstructible] possibility of deconstruction" such that "deconstruction takes place in the interval that separates the undeconstructibility of justice from the deconstructibility of law."[43] In his artist's statement, Glass links and separates justice and law in the following Derridean manner: "There can be no justice without law, yet no law will always be just."[44] One looks for justice in Glass's *The Ten Commandments/Prohibited Weapons*, but one finds only obstacles to *Gan Eden* or Paradise, to *Meshiach ben David* or messianic justice. Benjamin's post-Edenic reflections on the origins of language and on the judging word that differentiates and divides good and evil are quite relevant here: "This judging word expels the first human beings from paradise."[45] Glass visually references the grand theme of the expulsion from Paradise and the obstacles preventing one's return in two small, circular insets at the bottom of the First and Tenth Commandments. In the First Commandment is the thistle, a reminder that, after the expulsion from Paradise, Adam was made to struggle against the thorn and the thistle in order to produce food. Meanwhile, Glass's Tenth Commandment features a final weapon – the rotating flaming sword



4 | Simon Glass, "Flaming Sword" (detail) for the Tenth Commandment, *The Ten Commandments/ Prohibited Weapons*, 2005. (Photo: Courtesy of the artist)

at the east entrance to the Garden of Eden – that signifies the impossibility of human re-entry (Fig. 4). Are we to understand the flaming sword of paradise as God's prohibiting weapon? If so, how can we extinguish its flame and "get ourselves back to the Garden" (as the Canadian chanteuse Joni Mitchell once phrased it)?[46]

But the messianic impulse to transform the legally bound world of judgment and sentencing into one of justice and peace requires more than a simple plea for utopia. Barring some kind of divine intervention, there can be no final end to violence because it inhabits the founding of the law. Thus, non-violence (in which the Messiah presumably abides) must be viewed as the *telos* rather than the essence of discourse. In "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas," Derrida locates a similar problematic. By exploring the violence that institutes and constitutes language and discourse through an examination of the relations between war and peace, Derrida arrives at this paradox: "There is war only after the opening of discourse, and war dies out only at the end of discourse. Peace, like silence, is the strange vocation of a language called outside itself by itself. But since *finite* silence is also the medium of violence, language can only indefinitely tend toward justice by acknowledging and practicing the violence within it.



5 | Simon Glass, "First Commandment," *The Ten Commandments/Prohibited Weapons*, 2005. Giclée print with 23.5k gold leaf, 55.9 × 111.8 cm. (Photo: Courtesy of the artist)

Violence against violence. Economy of violence."[47] To apply Derrida's analysis to the case at hand, the Ten Commandments, in their attempt to stringently codify these foundational Jewish laws, can be viewed as the first defeat of violence – but it is a victory achieved only through the inscription and threat of violence (Fig. 5).

It is possible to think of these "Laws of Glass" – this meditation on the broken tablets of Moses – as practicing their own economy of violence using digital photographic means. Simon Glass's *The Ten Commandments/ Prohibited Weapons* are not so self-assured and definitive as to claim to be hastening the coming of the Messiah. Such an interpretation would produce an unreasonable expectation that relies on an inflexible dogmatism. Nevertheless, in this photographic series Glass engages with what Derrida calls *messianicity* or what is linked to the question of and the quest for justice and the undeconstructible. Derrida discusses "messianicity without messianism" in both *Specters of Marx* and "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone." In the latter text, he defines it in the following manner: "This would be the opening to the future or to the coming of the other as the advent of justice, but without horizon of expectation and without prophetic prefiguration."[48] In this way, *The Ten Commandments/Prohibited Weapons* grants the idea of justice the possibility of coming to be through the promise and the impact of a light writing that shoots and cuts its way toward justice, using the camera and digital montage as weapons, even as this work risks injustice by accepting and practicing the violence of the law and of photographic writing itself. Suspended in the interval between the bounded representation of the law and the incalculable demand for justice or the slash between *The Ten Commandments* and *Prohibited Weapons*, Glass's deconstruction offers what Derrida has marked as the "just decision" – one that has undergone the ordeal that "delivers itself over to the impossible decision while taking account of laws and rules" and that subsists in the "haunting of the undecidable" thereby acknowledging that which remains as "an essential ghost [or dybbuk] in every decision, in every event of a decision."[49]

A Spectral Vision of (Jewish) Messianicity: Melissa Shiff's *ARK* in the Light of Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever*

In 2005, Melissa Shiff was invited by the Jewish Museum in Prague to create a work of art celebrating their one hundredth anniversary. Her response was the video sculpture *ARK* that was launched in the fall of 2006. As Shiff describes it, "My ARK is a metaphor for the museum as ark and archive."[50] This ambitious and bold work comes into dialogue with both the Biblical

6 | Melissa Shiff, *ARK* video sculpture at the Jewish Museum in Prague, 2006. (Photo: Courtesy of the artist)

allegory of Noah's Ark and Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever* as it reflects upon the turbulent history of this particular museum in the dark light of the Holocaust. Shiff states: "It occurred to me that the museum functions much like Noah's Ark in the *Tanakh*, the Hebrew Bible, given that one of the functions of the museum is to salvage and save precious objects that might otherwise by destroyed by natural disaster or human catastrophe.

7 | Melissa Shiff, *ARK* video sculpture adjacent to the Pinkas Street Synagogue in Prague, 2006. (Photo: Courtesy of the artist)

ARK became the perfect metaphor for a project about the museum and particularly about this museum that was able to save so many objects amid the destruction of European Jewry."[51] Using hundreds of actual photographs from the Museum's collection, Shiff mobilizes and animates them, using the software program After Effects, into a thirty-minute video wherein the ARK becomes a three-dimensional movie screen. In this way, Shiff's video *ARK* provides a radically new way to display these Judaica artifacts and the museum collection in general (Fig. 6).

The narrative arc of the *ARK* video moves from the passages in Genesis on Noah's Ark to the present-day flood in Prague in 2002. Much of the video illuminates the history of the museum and demonstrates the amassing of its collection (particularly during the Nazi period) as the Jewish ritual objects come into the ARK, along with their accession cards, two by two. Occupying

an alley next to the Holocaust memorial in the Jewish quarter in Prague (the Pinkus Street Synagogue), Shiff's "para-museological" ARK moved the archive from inside the museum's hermetic interior to the outside, where it was viewed from the street as a public art project (Fig. 7). In this way, Shiff's ARK functions as a postmodern para-site or "dangerous supplement" in Derrida's sense as these Judaica apparitions (the ghosts of these objects) question what properly belongs inside or outside the museum's walls.

Derrida is invoked very early in Shiff's video at the moment when the museum is instituted in 1906. The following text scrolls over the ARK. "Arkhe. The commencement and the commandment. Where authority and social order are exercised in this place from which order is given." Shiff's quotation is actually an abridgement of a longer text from the first page of *Archive Fever*. "Arkhe, we recall, names at once the *commencement* and the *commandment*. This name apparently coordinates two principles in one: the principle according to nature or history, *there* where things *commence* – physical, historical, or ontological principle – but also the principle according to the law, *there* where men and gods *command*, *there* where authority, social order are exercised, *in this place* from which *order* is given – nomological principle."[52] Interestingly, Shiff focuses here on the question of order rather than origins. This makes sense when we recall that the "archive fever" that possessed this institution was a direct result of the dis-orderly conduct and aggressive genocide implemented by the Nazis from 1939 to 1945. The archive grew from one thousand objects to two hundred thousand during the Holocaust period as the Jewish archivists worked on this Judaica collection in collaboration with the Nazis to satisfy Hitler's perverse dream of a Museum of the Extinct Race. In this portion of the video, Shiff's ARK begins to fill up at an accelerated pace and objects rain down from the sky amid a stormy sequence. Following the archival impulse, Shiff describes how the Jewish Museum's project involves "the feverish desire to salvage, to save, to escape oblivion and to ward away the relentless force of the formless."[53]

When Derrida discusses Freud's own *mal d'archive*, he alludes to the Holocaust as well and speaks of "the great holocaustic tragedies of our modern history and historiography."[54] It should be recalled that *Archive Fever* engages with Freud's thinking on the death drive beyond the pleasure principle as and at the strange root of archivization – not its other but rather as its internal motor or drive. To quote Derrida, "All the texts in the family and of the period of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* explain in the end why there is archivization and why anarchiving destruction belongs to the process of archivization and produces the very thing it reduces, on occasion to ashes, and beyond."[55] One might say that Shiff's ARK offers us this terrifying case history of the Jewish Museum in Prague to make exactly this point. In other

8 | Melissa Shiff, *ARK* video sculpture at the Jewish Museum in Prague, 2006. (Photo: Courtesy of the artist)

words, the ARK offers visible evidence of how radical anarchiving destruction advances the archivization process. Indeed, *ARK* may be viewed as a video sculptural response to Walter Benjamin's infamous "angel of history" that leaves disaster in its wake and "keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage." It is an apt figure for making a comparison with Shiff's ARK in that Walter Benjamin specifically made reference to history as "the storm" that "irresistibly propels [the angel] into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward."[56] As already suggested, this is exactly what Shiff's video illustrates during the turbulent and stormy Holocaust period as the archiving ark is filled to the brim with this pile of Judaica remains that can be viewed as either treasure, booty, or debris depending upon one's perspective

(Fig. 8). These remains are the fallout from the anarchiving disaster known in Hebrew as the Shoah (calamity). The same thing goes for the 2002 flood that brought Prague to a halt and generated another feverish campaign to save the archival documents in danger of being destroyed before it was too late. Shiff articulates the Benjaminian dialectic this way: "My video creates a tension between the form and structure of ARK as archive and the unpredictability of the ebbs and flows of history that leave disasters in its wake."[57]

But Shiff also takes on the question of the archive in relation to temporality when she turns to *Archive Fever* again in her video and when she paraphrases another passage from Derrida at the conclusion of the narrative. As the time counter clocks the present (i.e., 2006) and before it spins out into the future, we read the following: "The true obligation and imperative of the ARCHIVE is to remember the future." Refusing to relegate the archive simply to the past, this counter-intuitive statement links up with Derrida's emphasis on the importance of futurity and situates the archive in relation to the promise as well to the rhetoric of messianicity. As Derrida insists, "But it is the future that is at issue here, and the archive as an irreducible experience of the future."[58] This means that Shiff's video sculptural installation and archival monument, built to mark a centennial commemorative celebration, belongs as much to the future as it does to the past. Given the twist of its future anteriority, both the archive and the ARK allow for the haunting return of the specter or dybbuk. After all, Derrida reminds us that "the structure of the archive is spectral"[59] and that "a spectral messianicity is at work in the concept of the archive and ties it, like religion, like history, like science itself, to a very singular experience of the promise."[60] Shiff's spectral video with its reanimation of the Jewish Museum's collection offers an oblique way to give or return a voice to these abandoned treasures of a destroyed culture and to project them into (the promise of) an unknown future. From this perspective, it is futurity rather than memory that is the crucial aspect through which Derrida understands the importance of being/becoming Jewish. He writes: "What would be the least Jewish, the most 'un-Jewish', the most heterogeneous to Jewishness, would not be a lack of Judaism, a distancing, as the French translation says, with respect to Judaism (religion, belief in God, Israel's election), but the nonbelief in the future."[61] In this way, Shiff's video project and projection is allied to the Jewish injunction to remember not just the past but also the future or what is to come.

A Final Dybbuk

In the opening scene of the Coen brothers' film *A Serious Man* (2009), we encounter another alleged dybbuk, although one whose logic operates more

9 | Film still of Traitle Groshkover/The Dybbuk (Fyvush Finkel) in the Coen brothers, *A Serious Man*, 2009. (Photo: Courtesy of the author)

in line with the classic Christian ghost in the sense that its operative structure seems more related to a return from the dead rather than a cleaving to the living. But rest (or no rest) assured, there is no certainty or determinacy in this film that affirms a Judaism that is full of questions and mysteries. For starters, undecidability rules as to whether the man who comes to visit a modest home in a Polish shtetl is or is not an inhabitant in the land of the living. While the wife, Dora, is convinced that Traitle Groshkover died of typhus and has been dead for three years, her husband, Velvel, is a rational man and he refuses to believe in this undead possibility.

In posing questions to and of rabbinical authorities (and, by extension, of God) for which there are no definite nor definitive answers, the story of the forlorn and anxious physics Professor Larry Gopnik – not unlike the Biblical story of Job to which the film has been compared in numerous reviews – becomes a part of that great Jewish tradition of and as a "book of questions."[62] By foregrounding the Jefferson Airplane's 1967 classic psychedelic rock track "Somebody to Love" in the credit sequence and later incorporating the first line of the song into the plot to serve as the basis of old Rabbi Marshak's rabbinical advice to Larry's son Danny when he returns his confiscated

transistor radio to him, this deconstructive film is very self-conscious about the post-Nietzschean world that it occupies, one far beyond moral and epistemological certainties, recalling the Airplane's aporia: "When the truth is found to be lies."[63] The film constantly suspends itself between tragedy and comedy, keeping its audience on constant edge in a deconstructive defiance of the "law of genre" (as Derrida once referred to it).[64]

Meanwhile, Derrida's "haunting of the undecidable" also figures into other aspects of the plot. For instance, the Coen brothers' film engages with the figure of Schrodinger's cat, that famous thought experiment and (indeterminate) mascot for quantum mechanics. We see Larry Gopnik at the blackboard during one of his classes asking questions of his students as if haunted or even possessed by its paradox. With Schrodinger's cat, the logic of the undecidable lodges itself at the heart of this supposedly scientific discipline: "Is that right? Isn't that right? And that's Schrodinger's paradox, right? Is the cat dead or is the cat not dead?" Of course, that same question can also be asked of the figure that appears in the shtetl. Professor Gopnik reveals how Schrodinger's cat functions as the dybbuk of modern physics.

As a fabulous filmic parable of a deconstructive dybbuk, the opening scene ends with Dora stabbing Traitle with an ice pick (Fig. 9). He appears to be bleeding, thereby confounding those who would say he is already dead. But then he gets up to take his leave so perhaps he is a ghost or dybbuk after all. With the ice pick still lodged in his chest, on his departure from Velvel and Dora's home he muses: "Perhaps I should go. One knows when one isn't welcome."

In reviewing contemporary artistic projects by Frédéric Brenner, Simon Glass, and Melissa Shiff that invoke Biblical scripture and the texts of Jacques Derrida and that map out a Jewish version of hauntology, we welcome these deconstructive dybbuks into the houses of being and art rather than attempting to banish them in the reconstructive names of either identity or integration.

NOTES

I want to thank the organizers of the ART+RELIGION symposium (Tim Clark, François LeTourneux, Loren Lerner, as well as Jeremy Stolow) for inviting me to deliver the keynote lecture on contemporary Jewish art that serves as the basis for this expanded text. I also want to acknowledge the astute and generous editorial comments and suggestions of Martha Langford as well as the excellent copyediting of Joan McGilvray.

1 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994).

2 Ibid., 161.

3 The deconstructive implications of the figure of the dybbuk and its connection with the occult practice of exorcism is taken up by the French art historian Georges Didi-Huberman in *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art* (University Park, pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004). The book reviews in part the ways in which the German cultural theorist Aby Warburg functioned as a dybbuk in the life and work of his student Erwin Panofsky and Panofsky's desire to exorcise his teacher. Didi-Huberman's interpretation makes a lot of sense when we consider that Warburg's theory of culture put a great deal of importance on the idea of *nachleben* (survival or afterlife), thereby stressing in the visual cultural realm "the powers to adhere and to haunt that inhere in all images" (xxii). The book begins with a preface (appropriately entitled "The Exorcist") in which Didi-Huberman situates the dybbuk as something undeniably hauntological. Focusing on the plot of S. An-sky's play, he writes, "The first [aspect of the dybbuk] is the ghostly power to rise again to effect a psychic haunting and to defy all chronological law of before and after, of old and new: it is after being dead that the dybbuk begins to speak fully, to live its thought, its youth, even to 'be born' for good in its substantial unity with Leah" (xxii). Moreover, Didi-Huberman's analysis of the dybbuk echoes the logic of contamination and the dangerous supplement that is so crucial to Derridean deconstruction. "The second characteristic of a dybbuk is adhesion, in accordance with a like defiance of all topological laws of inside and outside, of near and far" (xxii). I thank my colleague Kajri Jain for suggesting Didi-Huberman's book.

4 For a newly translated and edited version of the famous play as well as a collection of critical essays on its multi-talented author, see Gabriella Safran and Steven J. Zipperstein, eds., *The Worlds of S. An-sky: A Russian-Jewish Intellectual at the Turn of the Century* (Stanford, ca: Stanford University Press, 2006).

5 Yoram Bilu, "Dybbuk and Maggid: Two Cultural Patterns of Altered Consciousness in Judaism," in *AJS Review* 21, no. 2 (1996): 348. I thank Rachel Haliva for this reference.

6 Derrida takes up the phrase "the last of the Jews" in "Circumfession: Fifty-nine Periods and Periphrases" in *Jacques Derrida*, Geoff Bennington and Jacques Derrida (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 190. Meanwhile, Derrida refers to being "otherwise Jewish" at the conclusion of his essay "Abraham, the Other" in Bettina Bergo, Joseph Cohen, and Raphael Zagury-Orly, eds., *Judeities: Questions for Jacques Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), 35.

7 Gideon Ofrat, *The Jewish Derrida*, trans. Peretz Kidron (Syracuse, ny: Syracuse University Press, 2001). It should be noted that one chapter of Ofrat's book is entitled "Derrida's *Ruah*" (112–120). It begins: "*Ruah* is the Hebrew word for 'wind,' 'spirit,' 'ghost,' 'phantom,' 'specter' " (112). Similar to my point about the dybbuk, Ofrat comments that Derrida "has never mentioned the Hebrew word *ruah* in reference to his specters and phantoms" (113). It also explains why Ofrat focuses on the use of the word *ruah* twice in Derrida's texts in relation to the question of spirit.

8 Hélène Cixous, *Portrait of Jacques Derrida as a Young Jewish Saint*, trans. Beverley Bie Brahic (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

9 I thank Aurèle Parisien for reminding me of the privileged space of lens-based media and their reproductive capacities for the staging of such hauntological effects. Derrida considers this relationship in Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, "Spectrographies," in *Echographies of Television: Filmed Interviews*, trans. Jennifer Bajorek (Cambridge, uk: Polity Press, 2002), 113–34. As Derrida says during the filming of his interview with Stiegler: "We are already specters of a 'televised.'" (117).

10 Daniel Belasco, "Chopping Noodles: The Art of Jewish Practice," *Reinventing Ritual: Contemporary Art and Design for Jewish Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 9.

11 Ibid., 14.

12 This particular description of Ashery's project situates her wavering subject position as follows: "In her interventions as an orthodox Jew in picture-perfect attire in London, Berlin and Tel Aviv, she confronts her secular environment with the explicitly 'other', thereby probing the limits of multicultural and multi-religious societies. By confronting orthodox Jewish tradition with its own taboos, such as homosexuality, transvestism and sexuality, Ashery simultaneously describes her own 'queer' return to this very tradition." The exhibition originated at the zkm's Museum für Neue Kunst in Karlsruhe, Germany from 23 Nov. 2008 to 19 Apr. 2009. Accessed 24 Aug. 2011, http://www02.zkm.de/mediumreligion/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=57%3Aoreet-ashery&catid=34%3Akuenstlerliste&Itemid=53&lang=en. The opening complementary program to the exhibition also featured a lecture and discussion around the theme "Grammatheology: Jacques Derrida and the Religious Dimension to Media Transformation."

13 This questioning quotation from Derrida's "Edmond Jabès and the Question of the Book" is cited by Gerard Bensussan in "The Last, the Remnant … (Derrida and Rosenzweig)" in *Judeities*, 38. It was originally published in *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) but in a somewhat different declarative version. "But the Jew's identification with himself does not exist" (75).

14 Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'," *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002).

15 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

16 Frédéric Brenner, *Diaspora: Homelands in Exile*, 2 vols., *Voices* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003).

17 For further information about this exhibition, see the Brooklyn Museum website. Accessed 24 Aug. 2011, http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/exhibitions/2670/The_Jewish_Journey%3A_Frederic_Brenners_Photographic_Odyssey

18 It is interesting to point out that the same Biblical passage that motivates much of Brenner's photographic practice also appears in the text of Jacques Derrida in his essay "Hostipality" and his discussion of Abraham as a stranger. "But from the perspective of hospitality, these thoughts of substitution were turning toward Abraham the hôte or the stranger, to whom Yahweh said; 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house' (Genesis 12:1) and be a stranger" (414).

19 Louis Kaplan, "What Is Represented Is What Is at Stake: Frédéric Brenner on *jews/america/a representation*," *c/r: The New Centennial Review* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 100.

20 Frédéric Brenner, *Exile at Home* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998).

21 John Paul Ricco, "The Surreality of Community: Frederic Brenner's *Diaspora: Homelands in Exile*" in *Culture Machine* 8 (2006). Accessed 24 Aug. 2011, http://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/article/viewArticle/43/51

22 Derrida writes, "In this text, one reads the formulation of a central theme that inspires Massignon's entire exegesis and spiritual struggle, namely that the three monotheistic religions, as Abrahamic religions, are issued from a patriarch that came to this earth as a 'stranger, a hôte, *gêr*,' and a kind of saint of hospitality. We will return to this major reference of Genesis 12:1, which plays a determining role in both Rosenzweig and Levinas (another time, we shall also return to the notion of the stranger in Levinas), where Yahweh orders Abraham to depart, to leave his land, and the house of his father, transforming him into a hôte (but, obviously, while promising him a land)." See Jacques Derrida, "Hostipitality," in *Acts of Religion*, 369.

23 I take up the reading of this image (143, 145) as well as many others in the context of Brenner's American project in "Slashing Toward Diaspora: On Frédéric Brenner's *jews/america/a representation*," in Louis Kaplan, *American Exposures: Photography and Community in the Twentieth Century* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 131–54.

24 I will elaborate further upon this important Derridean construct in relation to the work of Simon Glass.

25 Derrida in Brenner, *Voices*, 101.

26 Ibid., 65.

27 Derrida puts it this way: "The specter is first and foremost something visible. It is of the visible, but of the invisible visible, it is the visibility of a body which is not present in flesh and blood." See Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 115.

28 Derrida quoted in Brenner, *Voices*, 65.

29 Derrida, *Circumfession*, 170.

30 Derrida, "Abraham, the Other," in *Judeities*, 13.

31 Hélène Cixous, "This Stranjew Body," in *Judeities*, 56. This passage begins, "If one could be a marrano – which is like the desire to be an Indian – this seizes hold of him one morning, a foreign seizure like the one that takes hold of Kafka, that *Wunsch, Indianer zu werden*." Thus, Cixous's invocation of the stranger as mediated through the text of Kafka intersects with Brenner's *Spiritual Gathering* photograph and the Jewish/Navajo encounter in an uncanny manner.

32 The exhibition took place at xpace in Kensington Market in Toronto from 21 October – 20 November 2005. The other artists and works in this exhibition were Hélène Aylon (*The Digital Liberation of G-d*), Jeffrey Shaw (*The Golden Calf*), and Melissa Shiff (*Gender Cuts/The Jew Under the Knife*). These thoughtful and provocative works by four contemporary artists in technologically based media raised important questions for traditional Jewish laws and commandments, whether it be Jeffrey Shaw on the Second Commandment, Melissa Shiff on the rite of circumcision, Simon Glass on the Ten Commandments, or Hélène Aylon on the Torah in general.

33 Simon Glass, "Artist Statement," in *Command J: Jewish Laws, Digital Arts*, ed. Louis Kaplan (Toronto, on: ReJewvenation, 2005), 6.

34 Indeed, Glass claims that it was the discussion of divine violence and the Sixth Commandment in particular ("Thou shalt not kill") in Benjamin's 1921 essay "*Zur Kritik der Gewalt*" (Critique of Violence) that initially sparked his interest in the

project. Benjamin's discussion of the Sixth Commandment begins, "For the question 'May I kill?' meets its irreducible answer in the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill.' " See Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," in *Selected Writings Volume 1, 1913–1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, ma: Harvard University Press, 1996), 250.

35 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, ca: Stanford University Press, 1998).

36 I have written previously about this photographic series in "Laws of Glass: *The Ten Commandments/Prohibited Weapons*," *Prefix Photo* 17 (Spring/Summer 2008): 54–67.

37 Derrida, "Force of Law," 259.

38 Ibid., 258–59.

39 Accessed 24 Aug. 2011, http://simonglass.ca/pages/artworks/Yahweh/Yahweh.html

40 Derrida's essay concludes with his active resistance to the temptation to read Benjamin's text and the concept of divine violence as providing a justification for the Holocaust. He writes, "One is terrified at the idea of any interpretation that would make of the holocaust an expiation and an indecipherable signature of the just and violent anger of God." See "Force of Law," 298. I would argue that Glass's earlier work poses the same risk even as it withdraws such an interpretation for the viewer by holding out atheism as an appropriate response.

41 Ibid., 240.

42 Ibid., 244.

43 Ibid., 243.

44 Glass, "Artist Statement," 6.

45 Walter Benjamin, "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man," in *Reflections*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 327.

46 Of course, I refer here to the cosmic lyrics that Mitchell composed for the song "Woodstock" (1969). The lyrics contain a series of messianic imaginings for a new golden age of peace and love that will free the soul. The refrain invokes the Garden of Eden as a return to the future. "We are stardust, we are golden, We are billion year old carbon, And we've got to get ourselves back to the garden."

47 Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 117.

48 Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, 56.

49 Derrida entitles this section of the essay "Second Aporia: The Haunting of the Undecidable." To recite the full passage: "The undecidable remains caught, lodged, as a ghost at least, but an essential ghost, in every decision, in every event of decision. Its ghostliness [*sa fantomaticité*] deconstructs from all assurance of presence, all certainty or all alleged criteriology assuring us of the justice of a decision, in truth of the very event of a decision." See Derrida, "Force of Law," 253.

50 Melissa Shiff, "Centennial Ark: The Making of a Video Ship," *Ark/Archa* (Prague: Jewish Museum in Prague, 2006), n.p. The exhibition was curated by Michael Hajkova and opened on 14 Sept. 2006. For further details on the project and the press coverage that it received, see the Jewish Museum website. Accessed 24 Aug. 2011, http://www.jewishmuseum.cz/en/avice3.htm. One can also find

a number of images and a video clip at Shiff's website. Accessed 24 Aug. 2011, http://www.melissashiff.com/works/ark/

51 Shiff, "Centennial Ark."

52 Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 1. The Derrida citation also serves as the epigraph to curator Michaela Hajkova's catalogue preface "ark: archive/archetype/architecture."

53 Shiff, "Centennial Ark." As Robert Enright reminded me at the art+religion symposium, one might think of the Holocaust as the *dybbuk* (in the sense of the evil spirit) that haunts contemporary Jewish art. I have indicated how the Holocaust preoccupied Simon Glass's earlier work in this way. This is also the case in the works of other lens-based artists such as Christian Boltanski and Shimon Attie.

54 Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 90.

55 Ibid., 94.

56 Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 257.

57 Shiff, "Centennial Ark."

58 Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 68.

59 Ibid., 84.

60 Ibid., 36.

61 Ibid., 74.

62 I refer to Edmund Jabès, *The Book of Questions*, trans. Rosemarie Waldrop (Middletown, ct: Wesleyan University Press, 1976).

63 Here, I recall Friedrich Nietzsche's important essay, "Of Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense" (1873). To cite Nietzsche's version of the Jefferson Airplane's twist: "Truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are." See *The Portable Nietzsche*, translated and edited by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Press, 1976), 47.

64 Derrida, "The Law of Genre," in *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1, trans. Avital Ronell (Autumn 1980): 55–81.

RÉSUMÉ

Les *dibbouks* de Derrida : traces de déconstruction dans l'art juif contemporain

LOUIS KAPLAN

Le présent essai examine de quelle façon certaines stratégies et idées reliées au regretté philosophe français Jacques Derrida et à la déconstruction hantent et inspirent une sélection de productions de l'art juif contemporain dans les médiums de la photographie, de la vidéo et du film. Alors que la pensée de Derrida, après *Spectres de Marx*, s'est développée autour de l'hantologie, le présent essai se tourne spécifiquement vers la figure juive du *dibbouk* pour démontrer comment elle fait écho aux idées de Derrida et à sa relation liminale et complexe avec le judaïsme et la pensée juive.

« Les *dibbouks* de Derrida » jettent un regard attentif sur trois artistes contemporains afin de montrer comment ils parlent par la voix du *dibbouk* déconstructeur derridien – au nom d'une âme inquiète et diasporique qui pose des questions profondes et dérangeantes (parfois à propos du judaïsme lui-même) et résiste à une identification simple. Ces artistes et leurs œuvres définissent une version juive de l'hantologie. Ce sont le photographe français Frédéric Brenner (n. 1959), le photographe canadien Simon Glass (n. 1956), et la sculptrice vidéaste canadienne Melissa Shiff (n. 1967).

La série de photos digitales de Simon Glass *The Ten Commandments/ Prohibited Weapons* (2005) est en dialogue direct avec l'ouvrage de Derrida *Force de loi : "Le fondement mystique de l'autorité"*. Des images frappantes juxtaposent le texte hébreu de l'Ancien Testament aux armes interdites par le code criminel canadien – revolvers de poche, couteaux à cran d'arrêt et couteaux papillons, soulignant la violence irréductible de la loi et de sa transgression. Ces « Lois de Glass », méditation sur les tables brisées de Moïse, mettent en pratique leur propre économie de violence au moyen de photographies digitales. Suspendu dans l'intervalle entre la représentation stricte de la loi et la demande incalculable pour la justice, Glass s'engage, dans cette série photographique, dans ce que Derrida appelle *messianicité* ou ce qui est lié à la question et à la quête de la justice et de l'indéconstructible. Glass met ainsi en scène l'intérêt de Derrida pour « la hantise de l'indécidable » dans toute « décision juste » en tant qu'elle préoccupe le *dibbouk* juif.

L'installation de vidéo-sculpture de Melissa Shiff *ARK* (2006) engage le dialogue avec le texte de Derrida « Mal d'archive, une impression freudienne » et l'Arche de Noé dans des réflexions sur l'histoire mouvementée du

musée juif de Prague et à la lumière de désastres naturels (inondations) et de l'Holocauste. Le présent essai examine de quelle manière *ARK* aborde les questions de spectralité, de futurité et de messianicité, et comment ces notions acquièrent plus de sens lorsque vues à travers la lentille de la pensée derridienne. Ces connexions ne sont pas seulement enracinées dans le fait que la vidéo *ARK* incorpore deux citations de Derrida, mais aussi dans la conscience déconstructiviste d'ARK de ses propres angles morts archivistiques. De cette manière, l'*ARK* de Shiff, avec son cas de figure du musée juif de Prague, montre de façon évidente que la destruction d'archives va de pair avec tout processus d'archivisation.

Dans le cas du photographe juif français Frédéric Brenner, auteur de l'odyssée photographique qui s'est déroulée sur un quart de siècle *Diaspora. Terres natales de l'exil*, Derrida a été pour lui un interlocuteur majeur, et les commentaires du philosophe s'inscrivent sur une douzaine de photographies de Brenner dans *Voices* (2003). Plutôt que de se situer sous l'influence du texte de Derrida, l'œuvre photographique de Brenner, avec sa vision de la diaspora juive, est hantée par la déconstruction en général. La section se concentre sur deux photographies qui parlent par la voix du *dibbouk* déconstructeur – *Marranes célébrant la Pâque en secret* (1988) à Belmonte, Portugal, et *Spiritual Gathering* (1994), qui met en scène une imposante rencontre entre des juifs nouvel-âge et des Indiens Navajos dans le désert de Monument Valley, Arizona. Les deux images unissent le statut de juif et celui d'étranger. Alors que la première image souligne la fascination de Derrida pour le statut onto-hantologique des crypto-juifs ou marranes, la seconde met en scène un rassemblement d'étrangers qui partagent un état d'exappropriation où ils n'ont pas leur propre place.

En soulignant la pertinence actuelle de Derrida comme pierre de touche pour les artistes juifs au cours de la dernière décennie, le présent essai interpelle une affirmation centrale dans la récente exposition de Daniel Belasco au Jewish Museum de New York. Proclamant une nouvelle *Zeitgeist* qui suggère une « réinvention du rituel », Belasco affirme d'emblée que nous avons dépassé le postmodernisme et la déconstruction pour entrer dans un nouvel âge de reconstruction. Toutefois son « impulsion contemporaine » vers la reconstruction réprime le *dibbouk* déconstructeur en tant d'option viable démontrée par ces trois cas de figure.

L'essai conclut par une exploration des implications déconstructrices d'un autre exemple tiré d'un film populaire, en retraçant le sens (indécidable) et la signification du *dibbouk* qui hante la séquence d'ouverture du film des frères Coen *A Serious Man* (2009).

Traduction : Élise Bonnette

A Letter to MONTREAL: Making Love with Jesus

AA BRONSON

FROM: AA Bronson, born Michael Tims, formerly a hippy, a member of the artists' group General Idea, and a pagan become a Buddhist; now an artist and healer, focusing on issues of queerness and healing, studying for my Master of Divinity at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, and artistic director of the Institute of Art, Religion, and Social Justice, which I founded, together with my colleague Kathryn Reklis, at the seminary last year.

TO: the population of Montreal, and to the participants in the ART+RELIGION Symposium, in particular to my esteemed colleagues: Paulette Gagnon, Clarence Epstein, Tim Clark, François LeTourneux; also Boris Groys, Louis Kaplan, Iftikhar Dadi, and the rest of my colleagues speaking at this conference; to the students gathered here today and especially to the students of art or of religion; to the queer community, to the Aboriginal community, to those of colour; to all the marginalized communities that find themselves here today; and as well as to the living, also to the dead: to the French-Canadian artist Paul-Émile Borduas and his *Refus global*, which Wikipedia terms "anti-religious" but which I say is a call to spirit; to the musicians, artists, writers, poets, actors, dancers, composers, directors and others who have contributed to the artistic richness of Montreal; to the generations of witches who populated the St. Lawrence Valley; to the African and Aboriginal slaves who worked as domestics, and on farms; to all those who were persecuted for their difference, and murdered; to those who suffered from abuse as children, or adults; to those who committed suicide because of their inability to live fully as who they felt they were; to those who died of HIV and AIDS; to all the dispossessed and abandoned; to all those who have died but cannot leave this place: I invite them to join us here, in witnessing this discussion of art, religion, and social justice; for we are a community of the living and the dead.

I am here as one of many speakers at this academic conference, and I am the sole speaker whose academic affiliations are not listed: I do not speak then

Detail, AA Bronson, *Jorge, February 3, 1994*, 1994/2000, sepia on mylar. (Photo: AA Bronson)

as an academic seeking human approval, or the approval of the academy. I have lived and worked as an artist, as a queer artist, as an artist in community, for over forty years. I am here to tell you that there are no "professional" artists; to be an artist is not a "career"; art, like religion, is a calling: we are called to be present, to be present to our communities, to our society, to our world, and to tell the truth as we perceive it. To be an artist, then, is about perception. Like being a priest, or witch, or shaman, it is an exercise in consciousness.

I first came to Montreal in 1951.

I was five years old, and my father was a pilot in the Canadian Air Force. We were stationed at St. Jean d'Iberville, which at the time was a small town south of Montreal. It is now a suburb.

My primary memory of Montreal from the time is the Eaton's Department Store at Christmas. While English Canada enjoyed a certain amount of Scottish Calvinism, Montreal was quite another matter. Montrealers celebrated shopping in a way that was quite unusual for the period and prefigured the experience of consumerism that has become the main characteristic of contemporary urban life. I still have a vivid memory of a flood of bodies surging joyously up and down department store escalators: the sight was at once shocking and intensely satisfying to my young soul. Pleasure, it seemed, was a good thing, rather than a bad thing.

In St. Jean d'Iberville, we lived in a brand new fifties suburban house. Boom Boom Geoffrion, the famous hockey player, lived down the street, and our very modern next-door neighbour – she was French, of course – had a house painted orange and purple with furniture that I realize now was a mixture of Eames chairs and shelving made by balancing glass shelves on bricks – très chic! In the winter a sled pulled by horses delivered milk, and in the spring the same horses pulled a wagon carrying a gargantuan block of vividly yellow maple sugar. The farmer would cut off chunks with a big knife and sell them for pennies to us kids. On Sundays my parents took me to the little Anglican church on the Air Force base, which was the only English-speaking church in the area.

This church is, in a kind of backwards way, the origin of my obsession with the life of the spirit. Around about grade three, new Sunday School teachers arrived, a couple who had worked on a missionary base in Africa. Every Sunday they showed us slides of impoverished African children. At a certain point I realized that this was just baby-sitting. I was not getting the religious education I wanted and deserved. So I stamped my little foot and refused to go back, and did not step foot in a church again for several decades. To be totally transparent, I have to admit that I won an award for perfect attendance before I left, an illustrated book of bible stories with an impossibly

sexy picture of Samson, naked, with long blonde hair, and his genitalia hidden by a lion in the foreground. Even to an eight-year old, the image was provocative and arousing. I hid the book of bible stories in the bottom of my desk, and took it out surreptitiously to gaze at Samson. Perhaps this was my earliest encounter with art and religion; and also perhaps an early indicator that the life of the spirit is infused with eroticism. My great-grandfather, who was the first missionary to the Blackfoot tribes in Western Canada, would not have agreed. More about him later.

As a child, I surrounded myself with books. We moved from town to town, and in each town I raided the library and surrounded my bed with everything from palmistry and ceremonial magic to Greek mythology and Buddhism. I decided at the age of three to become an artist – and to my young mind the image of the artist was some sort of Yves Klein–like mythical priest – but by the mid-sixties I gravitated to architecture instead – it seemed more socially responsible. I attended the School of Architecture at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, and, in second year in 1966, dropped out with seven other students to found a radical commune, a free school, a free store, and an underground newspaper. The commune was based on the principles of the Diggers, a group of Protestant Christian communists founded in England in 1649. The Diggers were in vogue in radical hippy circles at the time: a group of the same name was active in San Francisco. The Digger philosophy was derived from Acts 4:32 in the New Testament: "Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common."

Like the early Christians, our moment of egalitarianism was brief. We invited into our community anyone who asked and so the little community grew quickly from eight people to sixty-five, one year later. At that point I left, and the commune collapsed shortly after.

There are many things I planned to drop into the text around about here: that our underground newspaper connected me to the art world, for example. An early issue featured Yoko Ono, and through the underground network I came into contact with the International Situationists. And perhaps our occasional all-naked body painting could be considered another encounter with art and the divine. Most important of all, there was our psychotherapist, Gerald, who was writing his dissertation on group therapy for intentional communities. He visited our commune monthly, gave us free therapy sessions, and eventually I traveled with him across Western Canada as a sort of apprentice, visiting co-ops, communes, and various student groups for all-day therapy sessions that borrowed freely from the newly founded and much-lauded Gestalt Therapy. Gerald was very sexy, with a full red

beard and bright green eyes, He was covered with glossy red body hair that had me quietly lusting after him. Our goal was to teach techniques of self-governance, to undo the patriarchal and hierarchical in favour of those more horizontal forms developed by the early Christians. We didn't think of what we were doing as religious, of course. But we were fully committed to social justice, and to reforming the basic structures of society. The Summer of Love came and went, and the riots started in Paris. I came to Montreal for a brief flirtation with this fair city, and with a beautiful bearded friend, before finally settling in Toronto.

I'm aware now that I am well into my paper and I have made only the faintest references to art and religion. Looking at the program of this ART+RELIGION symposium, phrases like "Religion in the Age of Digital Reproduction," "Epistemologies of Engagement," and "Traces of Deconstruction," jump out at me. But what I want to talk about is something much simpler.

In 1968 I arrived in Toronto to check out the spanking new vertical commune known as Rochdale College. Rochdale was an experiment with intentional community, living and learning on a grand scale. It was here that I apprenticed with the Coach House Press, and immersed myself in alternative publishing, and worked for Toronto's first alternative theatre, Theatre Passe Muraille, as their graphic designer, and almost immediately had the honour of being arrested for contributing to an obscene performance. Art and creativity at Rochdale were firmly enmeshed with drugs, but also with visions of social justice and utopian existence. One floor was occupied by a coven of witches, and another by a group devoted to Black Magic. It was here that I lived with my Winnipeg friend Mimi, met Jorge and Felix, and then we all moved into a wretched little house on Gerrard Street West together, and General Idea began.

Some of you are familiar with the story of General Idea. You know about our twenty-five years together, which we described like this: "We wanted to be famous, we wanted to be glamorous, we wanted to be rich. We wanted to be artists and we knew that if we were famous, if we were glamorous, we could say 'We are artists,' and we would be. We did and we are. We are famous glamorous artists." In the same manifesto, we declared ourselves cultural parasites: "we animate dead bodies and speak in alien tongues." And a few years later our very Wittgensteinian mantra: "What do you say when there is nothing to say? When there is nothing to say, shut the fuck up!"

Although there is a huge volume of artwork that came out of General Idea, we conceived of our life together as our *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Everything else was simply a fragment of something larger. In the eighties and early nineties, when HIV and AIDS entered the scene, we devoted ourselves entirely

1 | AA Bronson, *Felix, June 5, 1994*, 1994/1999, digital print of lacquer on vinyl, 213.5 × 227 cm. (Photo: AA Bronson)

"I made this photograph of Felix a few hours after his death. He is arranged to receive visitors, and his favorite objects are gathered about him: his television remote control, his tape-recorder, and his cigarettes. Felix suffered from extreme wasting, and at the time of his death his eyes could not be closed: there was not enough flesh left on the bone.

Felix and Jorge and I lived and worked together from 1969 until 1994. This communal life ended when Jorge died of AIDS on 3 February 1994. Felix followed shortly after, on 5 June 1994.

Since Jorge and Felix died I have been struggling to find the limits of my own body as an independent organism, as a being outside of General Idea. Over the last five years I have found myself, much like a stroke victim, learning again the limits of my nervous system, how to function without my extended body (no longer three heads, twelve limbs), how to create possibilities from my reduced physicality."
—AA Bronson, *Mirror Mirror*, 2002

to the subject of AIDS. Jorge and Felix were diagnosed in 1990. We moved from New York, back to Toronto. They declared that they wanted to die at home, and then the wonderful Canadian medical system kicked in. The doctors and nurses came to our home, with me as the primary caregiver. It was a given that they would die, and die soon, and this period of living with

2 | AA Bronson, *Jorge, February 3, 1994*, 1994/2000, sepia on mylar, three parts each 184 × 92 cm. (Photo: AA Bronson)

"About a week before Jorge died, he asked me to take these photographs. Jorge's father had been a survivor of Auschwitz, and he had the idea that he looked exactly as his father had on the day of his release. He wanted to document that similarity, that family similarity of genetics and of disaster … Jorge was blind when I took these photos. I had to act as his mirror in order that he could look 'normal'. 'Should my eyes be like this?' he asked. 'A little more open,' I replied, 'No, not quite that much.' "
—AA Bronson, *Mirror Mirror*, 2002

the spectre of their death was an astonishingly rich time, a time when we could talk about anything, and we did. Jorge died at home on 3 February 1994, and Felix followed soon after, on 5 June 1994 (Figs. 1 and 2).

Two years later, on my fiftieth birthday, 16 June 1996, I met my current partner, Mark Jan Krayenhoff van de Leur. We have been together ever since (Fig. 3).

What is it that I want to say by telling this abbreviated story of my own life? It seems to me that art and religion are densely intertwined in the life story of an artist. It is spirit to which we give voice. By making myself a

3 | AA Bronson, *Anna and Mark, February 3, 2001*, 2001/2002, digital print of lacquer on vinyl, 213.5 × 305 cm. (Photo: AA Bronson)

"Anna was born on January 23, 2001, ten days before this picture was taken. Mark—her father, my spouse—is holding her here for the first time, and I am recording the encounter. She weighs five pounds, and she is cherry red, still raw from the difficulty of a breach birth, one month premature. How to covey this labour of love, not the love of parent for parent, but the outpouring of love from two men, two women, towards the creation of this little being? Each of us knows the importance of love, the essential nature of unconditional love, and each of us participates in creating this movement, this flow of outwardly directed love which has created this child and which we will to carry her along in her journey through life and living."
—AA Bronson, *Mirror Mirror*, 2002

midwife to the dying, to the death processes of Jorge and Felix, I forced myself to listen. To listen for what? Not only the subtle inner untyings by which they gradually let go. Something more profound (Fig. 4).

Now I call myself a healer. When I put my hands on someone with intention, I get information. The body speaks to me. I act as a translator between the person who has entrusted himself to me, and the intelligence of his body. This is social sculpture to an astonishing degree. At the same time, it is quite literally like working with clay. It is a collaborative process. Together we mould something out of the material of his body.

Before I move on to my own observations about art and religion in the world of contemporary art today, I will tell a story, the story of a vision. The

vision is not mine and I report it in the exact words of the person who told it to me. He asked to remain anonymous.

> I had a powerful vision in the spring of 1992. I was thirty-four when this happened. I was single at the time and lived alone in a small apartment … It happened around dawn one morning, before I would normally wake up. Jesus was in my bedroom – I could sense his presence so strongly, and in my mind I could see him as well. I couldn't actually see his face, but sometimes he was a white man with a beard, and other times he was a black man. He was incredibly beautiful in either case – I kept exclaiming in a loud whisper "You're so beautiful!!" He was wearing a fisherman's sweater, because he is a "fisher of men."
>
> We did a number of things together, including shopping for clothes, which is one of my favourite things. We were going together through my favourite boutiques in New York City and enjoying the beautiful clothes there. We both marvelled at the beauty and creativity we saw. We saw some of the designers I love such as Romeo Gigli and Thierry Mugler. And it's very hard to put into words, but my main impression was that Jesus loved the me-ness of me. He loved exactly who I was as a person – my personality, my character. And considering I grew up in a conservative Evangelical Protestant household where earthly pleasures were seen as sinful and distracting from spiritual concerns, this was earth-shaking.
>
> Then, we were making love. It would have looked very strange to an observer – I was standing up and embracing the air, although in reality I was embracing Jesus. We were kissing and hugging – it was so wonderful. We went on for quite a while. I didn't actually cum, but I was very aroused.
>
> And then gradually it started to fade. I was still feeling totally stunned as I got dressed and made my way to work. If I thought about it at all, I could see Jesus sitting next to me on the subway, holding my hand and being my friend …
>
> After this, I immediately started to enter the dark night of the soul. This lasted four and a half years.
>
> *

By making love with Jesus, he found love for himself. Jesus modeled for him the joy in loving each person for who they are. How often have each of us been loved for who we are?

4 | AA Bronson, *Hanged Man*, 2002, Lambda color photographs rear-mounted to acrylic, set of three panels, each 305 × 122 cm. (Photo: AA Bronson)

"The tarot card of the same name indicates a time in one's life when there is nothing one can do to change one's situation. It indicates a time of internal growth and change. I made this self-portrait at a time when I did not know how to make art any more. Part of me had died with my two partners, and I had to wait for new life to come forth within me."

Paul, in Galatians 5, says it like this: "Through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' "

I mention Paul, and his words in Galatians, because this letter from me to you, which I am reading to you right now, takes its structure from Galatians. In struggling to find a model for a literary form that might combine the various voices I find in myself, I realized that in the Pauline letter, I had the perfect form. As most of you know – or if you don't, you soon will – Paul wrote thirteen letters in the New Testament, of which only six are currently attributed to him, at least in Union Theological Seminary. Galatians is one of the more general: it is written to all the nations of the Gentile mission, in other words to the entire Roman Empire, which was the entire known world. It echoes those columns in *Art in America* from the late sixties that one or two of you may remember: "Letter from London," "Letter from Paris," and so on. Of course my content does not include the theological. One of the many voices I find in myself is intensely theological, but it is not quite ready to speak: it has been largely silenced by decades of shunning in the art world.

The divide between the art world and the world of religion is deep. The art world is uncomfortable with religion, whether progressive or fundamentalist; the world of religion is uncomfortable with contemporary art. An academic risks her career by writing seriously on art and religion; an artist who uses religious language risks being cast out of the inner circles of contemporary art.

However, the divided realms of the religious and the secular are increasingly blurred. Yoga is a Hindu practice that is ubiquitous in contemporary so-called secular culture. Various yogic schools compete using branding and marketing to promote differing methods, and differing traditions. Many yogic schools espouse a form that is devotional, while others, like hot nude yoga, appear decidedly blasphemous, and that is equally their appeal.

Consider meditation. Meditation classes abound. Wearing the two hats of alternative therapy and alternative spiritual practice, schools of meditation from Hindu and Buddhist traditions compete for our attention. This morning I googled "meditation center new york city" and was awarded with 37,000,000 links.

And yet neither yoga nor meditation is considered *verboten* by the contemporary art world, quite the opposite.

Consider Judaism: in the high-end world of New York museums – the Guggenheim, MoMA, the Metropolitan, the New Museum, and the Whitney – the majority of donors – and the majority of serious collectors of contemporary art – are Jewish. An astonishing number of successful art dealers are Jewish: many of them have mastered the art of passing as wasp.

Without Jewish money, the museums, and contemporary art as we know it, would collapse, or at least become a very different thing. It's not possible to determine to what extent these donors and dealers are religious, or secular. But on a gossip level at least, it is clear that Jewish money drives the culture machine in New York City. This financial relationship between art and religion deserves attention.

What about Tibetan Buddhism? While an artist who attends an Episcopalian church might be looked upon with suspicion, an artist who identifies as Tibetan Buddhist has an aura of depth. The Dalai Lama has worked intensely over the last forty years to reposition Tibetan Buddhism as something more akin to psychotherapy than to religion, non-threatening, and with social consequences that can be thought of as universally beneficial. Artists such as Marina Abramovic, Laurie Anderson, and Philip Glass have had their reputations burnished rather than tarnished by their involvement with the Tibetans.

A message to my fellow speakers, here in Montreal today, at this conference on art and religion: when speaking of the new presence of religion in the contemporary world, be aware of what you speak; in addition to the much-publicized fundamentalist forms of Christianity and Islam, we have many religious practices infiltrating the world of culture, as I have indicated. Both Judaism and Buddhism are more present in the world of culture than outer appearances suggest. The religions of the African diaspora, such as Santeria and Yoruba, with their personal experience of spirit, are coming out of the closet. We have a fascination with shamanism, vision quests, and other esoterica of the spiritual realm. Exploring our spiritual side has taken on new importance, especially with those who declare themselves non-religious.

This conference has not embraced religion. Boris Groys, in your keynote speech, you distanced yourself from religion and defended your lecture as "only observation." You, the speakers, and you, the organizers of this symposium, each declared academic and institutional affiliation, but no faith affiliation, or even a lack of faith affiliation. My own academic affiliation with the Union Theological Seminary is implicitly religious, and interestingly it was eliminated from all promotional materials for the conference. And I had to ask three times to have it added to the website. Such temerity!

I quote Paul in Galatians when I say: You foolish academics! Who has bewitched you? What secular demon has removed you from the divine?

I close with a prayer freely adapted from Rob Brezsny's *Prayer for Us*:[1]

We pray to the God of Gods,
the God beyond all Gods, the Girlfriend of God,
the Teacher of God, the Goddess who invented God:

Oh Goddess Who Never Kills But Only Changes:
/
We pray these words might move You to unleash ferocious blessings on all the art+religion acolytes today.
/
Grant us what we don't know we want,
everything we're afraid to wish for.
/
Oh Goddess, You Wealthy Anarchist
Burning Heaven to the Ground:
/
Please use Your blinding magic to help us see we're wildly creative geniuses, too big for our bodies.
/
Help us to be disciplined enough to go crazy
in the name of creation not destruction.
/
Teach us the difference between
self-destructive self-control and liberating self-control.
/
Give us bigger, better, more original sins
and wilder, wetter, more interesting problems.
/
Show us how to purge ourselves of the wishy-washy wishes that keep us from our divine desires.
/
Dear God of Gods, God Beyond All Gods,
Sister Lover of God, Mother of God,
Goddess who invented God:
/
Inspire us to become more wildly disciplined, erotically feminist, aggressively sensitive, demonically compassionate, ironically sincere, lyrically logical, insanely poised,
and orgiastically lucid.
/
Amen. Awomen. And Ommmmmmm.

NOTE

1 Rob Brezsny, *Prayer for Us.* Accessed 31 Aug. 2011, www.freewillastrology.com/beauty/prayer.html

Lettre à MONTRÉAL : Faire l'amour avec Jésus

AA BRONSON

Le discours d'ouverture du symposium ART+RELIGION, à Montréal, fondait sa structure sur l'épitre de Paul aux Galates, lettre de première importance écrite pour exhorter les croyants à rester fermes dans la foi et à adhérer aux principes éthiques mis de l'avant par Jésus. Bronson, se situant lui-même comme survivant d'un traumatisme et, en tant qu'homosexuel, comme témoin de la violence, de la maladie et de la mort qui ont affecté sa communauté, a parlé de sa révolte contre les notions d'identité individuelle et artistique et de ses tentative de trouver sa voix théologique dans un monde où l'art contemporain n'est pas à l'aise avec le christianisme, et où le christianisme n'est pas à l'aise avec l'art contemporain.

Traduction : Élise Bonnette

L'art contemporain et la religion au Canada : œuvres choisies

DENIS LONGCHAMPS

La galerie d'images dans ce numéro des *AHAC* présente des œuvres de Goota Ashoona (n. 1967), Thérèse Chabot (n. 1945), Robert Houle (n. 1947), Ed Pien (n. 1958), Ted Rettig (n. 1949) et Mitch Robertson (n. 1974). Ces artistes ont été choisis pour leur relation créative et engagée avec la religion : certains ont été directement inspirés par des textes sacrés ou par leurs expériences avec les institutions religieuses, alors que d'autres ont puisé à même leurs croyances spirituelles personnelles. Les conséquences de ces moments sont révélées dans leurs œuvres.

Née à Cape Dorset, dans le territoire du Nunavut, Goota Ashoona est issue d'une famille inuite impliquée dans les arts plastiques depuis l'époque de sa grand-mère, la graveuse de renom Pitseolak (1904–1983). Le père de Goota Ashoona est le sculpteur Kiawak Ashoona (n. 1933) et sa mère, Sorroseeleetu (n. 1941), est également graveuse. Avec son mari, ses fils jumeaux et son neveu, Ashoona dirige Ashoona Studios à Yellowknife (Territoires du Nord-Ouest). L'artiste affirme : « Nous sommes une famille très proche … nous parlons du temps passé à notre camp de chasse, des nos œuvres, de notre histoire familiale, et nous conservons et affinons nos compétences et notre mode de vie inuits[1] ».

En réponse à notre question sur la place que tient la religion dans son œuvre, Ashoona nous a montré les images d'une sculpture et de deux masques qu'elle a créés et dans lesquels elle explore la spiritualité inuite, le chamanisme et les traditions chrétiennes qui ont infiltré la vie des Inuits. La sculpture a été façonnée avec le fanon d'une baleine et de la stéatite (pierre à savon), matériaux de base utilisés pour la sculpture bien avant l'arrivée des Blancs. Enfant, Ashoona s'émerveillait devant les images et les histoires de la Bible qu'elle voyait à l'église. L'ange était un moyen facile pour ses parents de lui expliquer les mystères de la vie. *Ange inuit* (2009–2010) représente un homme inuit qui danse, son tambourin dans une main et son maillet dans l'autre. Ses ailes sont en bois de caribou. Le concept chrétien de l'ange est ainsi incarné par des traditions inuites.

Les masques rappellent ceux autrefois utilisés dans les pratiques chamaniques et maintenant dans les prestations et les danses rituelles. Quand Pitseolak créait ses œuvres, le chamanisme était encore très présent dans la

Contemporary Art and Religion in Canada: A Selection of Works

DENIS LONGCHAMPS

The gallery of images in this issue of *JCAH* presents works by Goota Ashoona (1967–), Thérèse Chabot (1945–), Robert Houle (1947–), Ed Pien (1958–), Ted Rettig (1949–), and Mitch Robertson (1974–). Chosen for their creative and profound engagement with religion, some of the artists were directly inspired by sacred texts and experiences with organized religion, while others drew from private spiritual moments, revealing the effects these moments had had on their lives.

Born in Cape Dorset, Nunavut, Goota Ashoona is from an Inuit family that has been involved in making art since the time of her grandmother, the renowned printmaker Pitseolak (1904–1983). Goota Ashoona's father is the sculptor Kiawak Ashoona (1933–) and her mother, Sorroseeleetu (1941–), is a printmaker. With her husband, twin sons, and nephew, Ashoona runs the Ashoona Family Studio in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories. The artist states: "We are very close as a family … we talk about the years at our outpost camp, our artwork, family history, and retaining and refining Inuit skills and lifestyle."[1]

Responding to an inquiry about the place of religion in her work, Ashoona offered images of one sculpture and two masks that explore Inuit spirituality, shamanism, and the Christian traditions that found their way into the life of the Inuit. The sculpture is made of whalebone and soapstone, basic mediums for carving long before contact with whites. As a child, Ashoona marvelled at the images and stories from the Bible that she saw in church. The angel was an easy way for her parents to explain the mysteries of life. *Inuit Angel* (2009–2010) depicts an Inuit man dancing, his hand drum in one hand and a mallet in the other. His angel wings are made of caribou antlers. The idea of the Christian angel is here embodied through Inuit traditions.

The masks recall those once utilized in shamanistic practices and still used in performances and dance rituals. When Pitseolak created her work, shamanism was a strong part of Inuit life and Ashoona's parents witnessed the changes in the life of the community that followed the arrival of Christianity.

Goota Ashoona, *Ange inuit* | *Inuit Angel,* 2009–2010

Os de baleine bleue, bois de caribou, omoplate de phoque, ardoise du Lac Great Slave, disque vertébral de béluga, cuivre, 45.7 × 53.3 × 35.6 cm, cadeau à la famille. (Photo : Pablo Saravanja) | Blue whale bone, caribou antler, seal scapula, Great Slave Lake slate, beluga vertebral disc, copper, 45.7 × 53.3 × 35.6 cm, gifted to family. (Photo: Pablo Saravanja)

Goota Ashoona, *Shaman volant* | *Flying Shaman*, 2008

Vertèbres de baleine boréale, bois de caribou, câble en aluminium, cuivre, dents de béluga, 162.5 × 152.4 × 76.2 cm, collection privée. (Photo : Pablo Saravanja) | Bowhead whale vertebrae, caribou antler, aluminum cable, copper, beluga whale teeth, 162.5 × 152.4 × 76.2 cm, private collection. (Photo: Pablo Saravanja)

Goota Ashoona, *Esprits du nord | Spirits of the North*, 2008

Os de baleine boréale, stéatite serpentine, cuivre, 61 × 68.6 × 15.2 cm, collection du Great Northwest Territory Industry Trade and Tourism. (Photo : Goota Ashoona) | Bowhead whale bone, serpentine soapstone, copper, 61 × 68.6 × 15.2 cm, collection of the Great Northwest Territory Industry Trade and Tourism. (Photo: Goota Ashoona)

Thérèse Chabot, Installation, *Le peseur d'âmes ou le dur désir de durer* | *The Weight of Souls or The Strong Desire to Endure*, 2007

Matériaux variés, impression numérique sur lin, porcelaine, Biennale internationale du lin de Portneuf. (Photo : Michel Dubreuil) | Mixed medium, digital print on linen, porcelain, Biennale internationale du lin de Portneuf. (Photo: Michel Dubreuil)

vie inuite ; les parents d'Ashoona ont vu les changements dans la vie de la communauté après l'arrivée du christianisme. Ashoona dit que « avoir grandi dans ces circonstances m'a aidé à établir les fondations de ma carrière artistique, ainsi que mes propres explorations et approches de l'art inuit et des aspects de la religion et du système de croyances inuit[2] ». Pour ses masques, l'artiste a utilisé des matériaux provenant de son environnement immédiat, un morceau de travertin et du cuivre épousant la forme d'un ulu, le couteau universel des Inuits.

Thérèse Chabot explore la fugacité de la vie dans des installations éphémères et des performances présentées en Europe, aux États-Unis, au Mexique et au Canada. En 2001, Chabot a participé à l'exposition de groupe *Contemplations on the Spiritual*, à Glasgow (Écosse), pour laquelle elle a créé de grands jardins sacrés dans la synagogue de Garnethill et la cathédrale de Glasgow. Les deux installations illustrées dans cette publication unissent l'idée du sacré à celles de la commémoration, du souvenir et de la célébration.

Le peseur d'âmes ou le dur désir de durer (2007) est un hommage au sculpteur québécois Louis Jobin (1845–1928). Jobin est principalement reconnu pour ses œuvres qui ornent plusieurs églises du Québec. Ses scènes du Calvaire, ses monuments au Sacré-Cœur, ses sculptures de saints et d'anges étaient fort connues dans son temps, et les clients venaient de partout pour commander des sculptures et des bas-reliefs pour leurs églises. L'œuvre de Chabot a été installée dans l'église Saint-Joseph de Deschambault pour la Biennale internationale du lin de Portneuf. L'artiste dit de son œuvre « qu'elle propose un regard actualisé sur nos racines, notre culture et notre passé afin de nous rappeler qui nous sommes. Nous sommes un peuple jeune dont l'histoire a 300 ans. Notre patrimoine culturel et religieux, riche en façons de faire et en œuvres artistiques, a malheureusement parfois été négligé ou monnayé au profit de la nouveauté[3] ». L'œuvre de Chabot installée au jubé consistait en un jardin de fleurs séchées entourant l'*Ange de la justice* (date inconnue[4]) de Jobin et d'une bannière en lin, suspendue devant la fenêtre, montrant une reproduction numérique de l'ange à côté d'un portrait du sculpteur. Une main en céramique *raku* sur un coussin complète l'installation rappelant aux visiteurs que les sculptures de Jobin étaient entièrement faites à la main.

Pour sa seconde installation, Chabot a travaillé encore une fois avec la porcelaine, ce qui nous rappelle qu'elle a fait ses débuts comme artiste de la céramique. Cette pièce commémorative, titrée *Vanitas, Vanité, tout n'est que vanité!* (2009), consiste en une série de trente-six petits reliquaires. Faisant référence aux *vanitas* de la peinture hollandaise des XVI^e^ et XVII^e^ siècles, ces pièces mettent l'emphase sur le passage du temps et la brièveté de la vie. Les reliquaires sont des lithophanies, des œuvres d'art gravées et moulées dans

Ashoona says that "growing up in such circumstances has helped to establish the foundations of my art career, my own explorations and treatments of Inuit art and aspects of religion and ancient Inuit belief systems."[2] For these works, the artist used materials from her immediate environment, a leftover piece of travertine, and a copper shape in the form of an ulu, the all-purpose Inuit knife.

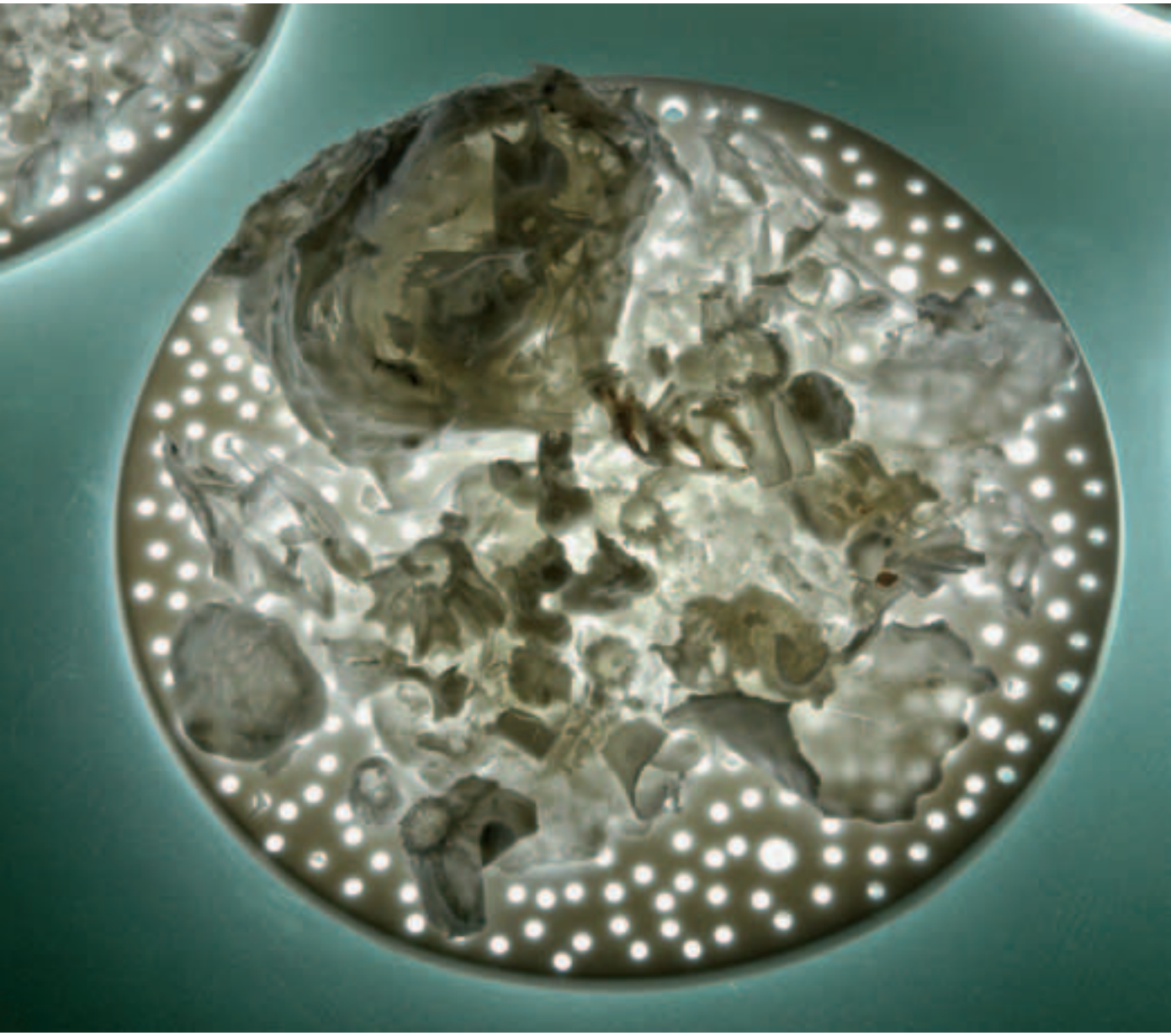
Thérèse Chabot explores the transience of life and the inner self through ephemeral installations and performances that have been given in Europe, the United States, Mexico, and Canada. In 2001, Chabot participated in the group exhibition *Contemplations on the Spiritual* in Glasgow, Scotland, for which she made large-scale sacred gardens in Garnethill Synagogue and Glasgow Cathedral. The two installations represented in this publication connect ideas of the sacred with concepts of commemoration, remembrance, and celebration.

Le peseur d'âmes ou le dur désir de durer (2007) is a tribute to Quebec sculptor Louis Jobin (1845–1928). Jobin is known principally for his religious works, which decorate many churches in Quebec. His scenes from Calvary, monuments to the Sacred Heart, and sculptures of saints and angels were well known in his day and patrons came from throughout the province to order his sculptures and low reliefs for their churches. Chabot's installation was presented in the Église Saint-Joseph de Deschambault for the Biennale internationale du lin de Portneuf. The artist says that the work "proposes a look at our roots, our culture, our past actualized in the present day to remind us who we are. We are a young country with a 300-year-old history. Our religious and cultural heritage, rich in ways of being and in artistic works, has been unfortunately neglected and too often sold in the pursuit of novelty."[3] Chabot's installation in the clerestory of the church consists of a garden of dried flowers flowing toward and around Jobin's white painted wood *Angel of Justice* (date unknown[4]) and a linen banner hanging in front of a large window that shows a digital image of the angel with the sculptor at its side. A raku-fired ceramic hand on a pillow completes the work, reminding the viewer that the artist's sculptures were all done by hand.

For her second installation, Chabot again worked with porcelain, recalling her beginnings as a ceramic artist. This commemorative work, entitled *Vanitas, Vanité, tout n'est que vanité!* (2009), consists of thirty-six small reliquaries. Referring to Dutch *vanitas* paintings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the works emphasize the passing of time and the brevity of life. The reliquaries are lithophanes, artworks etched and moulded

Thérèse Chabot, *Vanitas, Vanité, tout n'est que vanité!, Vanitas: nature morte* (détail | detail), 2009

Porcelaine, table lumineuse, commémorations. (Photo : Guy L'Heureux) | Porcelain, light table, commemorations. (Photo: Guy L'Heureux)



Thérèse Chabot, *Vanitas, Vanité, tout n'est que vanité!, Hommage à l'oiseau tombé du nid* (détail | detail), 2009

Porcelaine, table lumineuse, commémorations. (Photo : Guy L'Heureux) | Porcelain, light table, commemorations. (Photo: Guy L'Heureux)

une porcelaine très mince et translucide. On place ces plaques rondes sur une table lumineuse dans un espace sombre pour créer une atmosphère propice à la contemplation et à la prière. Chabot explique : « Dans l'ensemble de mon œuvre, je maintiens un lien spirituel profond avec la nature qui est à la fois une muse et une source d'enthousiasme, un bréviaire de savoir-faire anciens qui me permet de réapprendre à cerner les mystères au cœur de la vie. En tant qu'artiste engagée, je tiens à mon statut de créatrice "de l'inutile nécessaire"[5] ».

L'artiste Anishinaabe Saulteaux Robert Houle explore son patrimoine autochtone, l'histoire des Premières Nations, ses pratiques spirituelles et le catholicisme. Houle est un artiste multidisciplinaire, un enseignant et un auteur. Sa plus récente installation, *Paris-Ojibwa* (2010), inaugurée au Centre culturel canadien de Paris, est présentement en tournée nord-américaine. Il a co-organisé l'exposition marquante *Terre, esprit, pouvoir* (1992), le premier survol international de l'art autochtone pour le Musée des beaux-arts du Canada.

Pour les *Annales*, Houle présente huit dessins relatant son expérience traumatique dans un internat du Manitoba. Les dessins ont été inspirés par un rêve qui lui est venu beaucoup plus tard dans la vie, après qu'il ait participé à une veillée funèbre où il a parlé avec l'épouse d'un prédateur sexuel. Sa série complète comprend vingt-quatre œuvres sur papier. Pour Houle, « ces dessins célèbrent les moyens de survie et de guérison, l'art comme thérapie[6] ». Il explique que l'acte de dessiner « a transformé ma douleur, mon inquiétude et ma vulnérabilité en un ensemble d'œuvres qui m'ont donné des lueurs d'espoir[7] ».

Avec des moyens frugaux, et puisant à même ses souvenirs de certains lieux symboliques, comme le lac ou le dortoir, Houle révèle une douleur intense et constante que les mots seuls ne peuvent exprimer. Dans ses images, la figure fantomatique d'un prêtre sans visage s'avance dans le sanctuaire ; le toit d'une imposante bâtisse percée de multiples rangées de petites fenêtres est couronné d'une croix ; un petit lit de dortoir semble écrasé par l'immense crucifix accroché au-dessus. La présence du Dieu chrétien est symbolisée par l'homme en soutane et par la croix qui appellent tous les bons chrétiens à la rédemption éternelle. Dans chacune des œuvres, nous sentons le vide, l'obscurité, la peur, la solitude, le drame, la douleur et la souffrance et aussi, bien que cela puisse paraître étrange, un fragile sentiment d'espoir et de guérison.

Houle témoigne de la maltraitance endémique des enfants autochtones dans ces pensionnats, dirigés par l'Église et financés par les gouvernements, qui faisaient partie du plan « d'assimilation forcée » du gouvernement canadien. L'objectif de ces pensionnats était d'effacer la culture, l'histoire et l'existence même des Premières Nations en isolant les enfants de leurs familles. Houle explique que le « désir de revisiter un endroit et une époque funestes m'a

in very thin translucent porcelain. The round plates are placed on a light table in a dark space to create an atmosphere conducive to contemplation and prayer. As Chabot explains: "In my work, I maintain a deep spiritual link with nature, which is at once my muse and my inspirational source – a breviary for teaching ancient knowledge that allows me to relearn how to go to the mysteries at the heart of life. As a committed artist, I maintain my status as creator of the necessary useless."[5]

The work of Anishinaabe Saulteaux artist Robert Houle explores his aboriginal heritage, native history, spiritual practices, and Catholicism. Houle is a multi-media artist, educator, and writer whose recent installation *Paris-Ojibwa* (2010), which premiered at the Canadian Cultural Centre in Paris, is currently on a North American tour. He co-curated the landmark exhibition *Land Spirit Power* (1992), the first international survey of contemporary Indigenous art, for the National Gallery of Canada.

In this journal, Houle presents eight drawings relating to his traumatic experience in a Manitoban residential school. The drawings were motivated by a dream that came to him much later in life, after he attended a wake where he spoke to the spouse of a predator. The series consists of twenty-four mixed-media works on paper. For Houle, "These drawings celebrate survival and healing, art as medicine."[6] The process of drawing, he explains, "transformed pain, apprehension, and vulnerability into a body of work that gave me glimpses of hope."[7]

With an economy of means and using his recollection of particular places, such as the lake and the dormitory, as symbols, Houle expresses an intense and enduring pain that words cannot convey. In these images, a phantom-like faceless priest approaches the sanctuary. The roof of a massive school with rows of small windows is crowned with a crucifix, and a fragile dormitory bed appears to be crushed by an immense crucifix hanging overhead. The presence of a Christian God is symbolized by the men of the cloth and the crosses, which remind all good Christians of eternal salvation. Yet in each work we sense emptiness, darkness, fear, loneliness, tragedy, pain, and suffering, and, as strange as it may seem, a fragile sense of hope and healing.

Houle bears witness to the rampant child abuse of Native children by church-run, government-funded schools that were part of the Canadian government's "aggressive assimilation" plan. The objective of these boarding schools was to erase the culture, history, and very existence of First Nations by removing children from their families. Houle explains that the "desire to return to a calamitous place and time made me see and feel through my body and spirit the need for letting-go, a reconciliation without sin and forgiveness,

Robert Houle, *père*

De la série *Sandy Bay Indian Residential School*, 2009, dessins de matériaux variés sur papier. (Photo : Robert Houle) | From the series *Sandy Bay Indian Residential School*, 2009, mixed media drawing on paper. (Photo: Robert Houle)

Robert Houle, *school house*

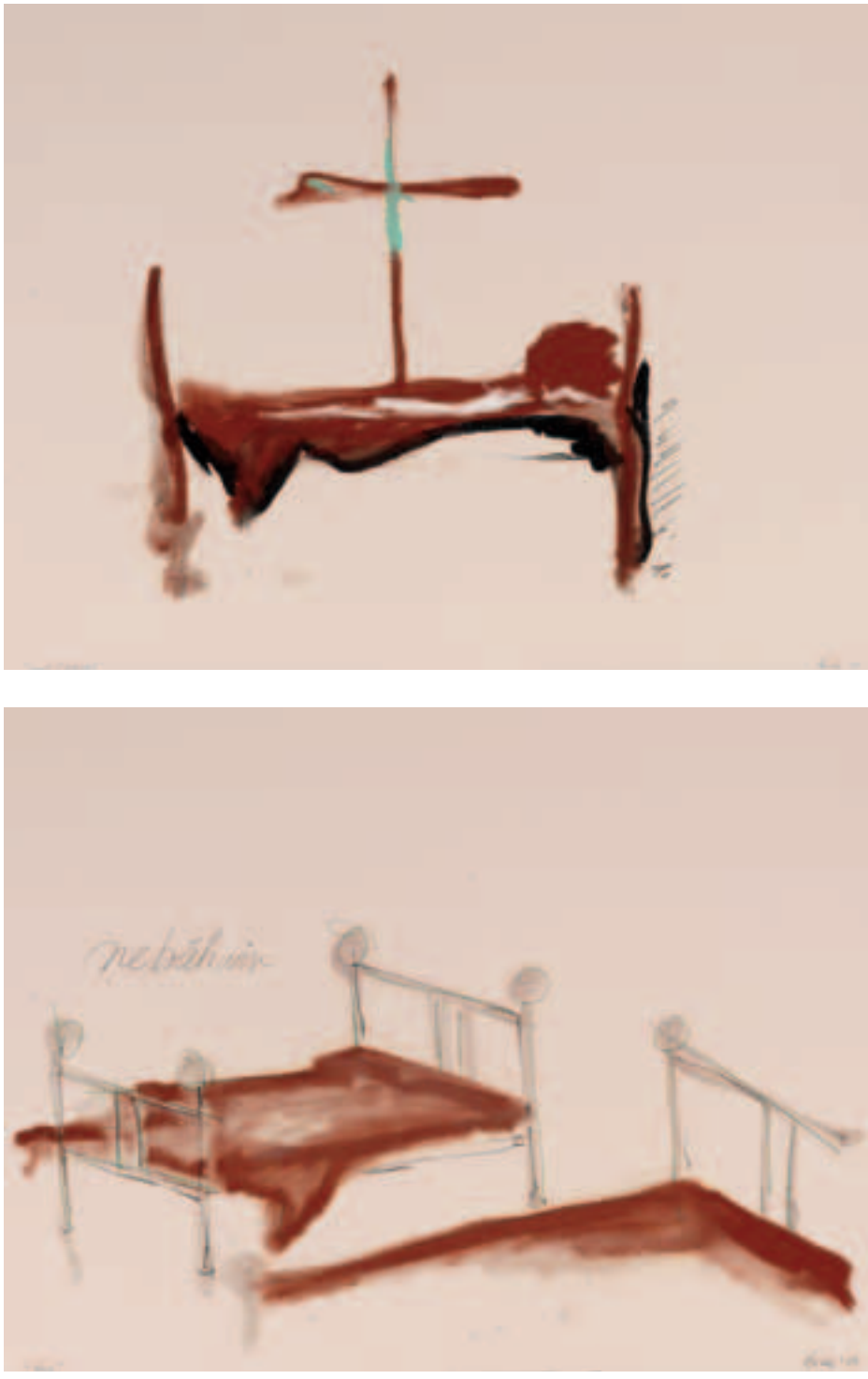
De la série *Sandy Bay Indian Residential School*, 2009, dessins de matériaux variés sur papier. (Photo : Robert Houle) | From the series *Sandy Bay Indian Residential School*, 2009, mixed media drawing on paper. (Photo: Robert Houle)

Robert Houle, *uhnúhméahkazooh/pretending to pray*

De la série *Sandy Bay Indian Residential School*, 2009, dessins de matériaux variés sur papier. (Photo : Robert Houle) | From the series *Sandy Bay Indian Residential School*, 2009, mixed media drawing on paper. (Photo: Robert Houle)

Robert Houle, *uhnúhméahkazooh/pretending to pray*

De la série *Sandy Bay Indian Residential School*, 2009, dessins de matériaux variés sur papier. (Photo : Robert Houle) | From the series *Sandy Bay Indian Residential School*, 2009, mixed media drawing on paper. (Photo: Robert Houle)



Robert Houle, *and I prayed* (*au-dessus* | above) and *sleep* (*au-dessous* | below)

De la série *Sandy Bay Indian Residential School*, 2009, dessins de matériaux variés sur papier. (Photo : Robert Houle) | From the series *Sandy Bay Indian Residential School*, 2009, mixed media drawing on paper. (Photo: Robert Houle)

Robert Houle, *outhouse abuse* (*au-dessus* | above) and *the black door* (*au-dessous* | below)

De la série *Sandy Bay Indian Residential School*, 2009, dessins de matériaux variés sur papier. (Photo : Robert Houle) | From the series *Sandy Bay Indian Residential School*, 2009, mixed media drawing on paper. (Photo: Robert Houle)

fait voir et ressentir dans mon corps et mon âme le besoin de lâcher prise, d'une réconciliation sans péché ni pardon, en dehors de la modernité judéo-chrétienne. Aujourd'hui, les Premières Nations doivent se montrer vigilantes et conscientes du pouvoir destructif d'une occidentalisation agressive comme celle malheureusement appliquée par l'État dans les pensionnats dirigés par l'Église[8] ».

Ed Pien est internationalement reconnu pour ses dessins et ses découpages de fantômes tirés du folklore taïwanais et ses images de l'enfer inspirées par *Le jardin des délices* (1503–04) et autres tableaux similaires de Jérôme Bosch. Comme l'artiste le dit lui-même, « mes œuvres graphiques, images de figures hybrides et étranges, défient toute tentative de lecture simple et rapide, et sont récemment devenues encore plus complexes par l'utilisation de lignes gestuelles superposées qui évoquent une masse dense de créatures agitées[9] ». Ses œuvres percutantes ont été présentées en installations ou en composites. Quelques dessins de grandes dimensions ont été réalisés sur plusieurs années, tel que *Mary Magdalene* (2002–2010) que nous reproduisons dans ce numéro des *Annales*. Pien s'explique : « Quand je reconfigure mes séries de dessins à moitié complétés, créés et amassés durant les dix dernières années, je sépare les images, je les reconstruis et les recombine, invitant délibérément les figures déjà grotesques et désincarnées à se transformer et à muter encore plus[10] ».

Marie-Madeleine est présentée dans le Nouveau Testament comme une prostituée adultère repentante, disciple de Jésus Christ. Elle aurait lavé les pieds du Christ avec ses larmes puis les aurait séchés avec ses cheveux. Dans l'art religieux occidental, Marie-Madeleine est typiquement représentée dans les scènes de la Crucifixion. Dans son dessin, Pien explore ce personnage dans une perspective nouvelle et plus mitigée. Au centre, un mendiant fait face à un raconteur. Sur la gauche, un amas de figures humaines enlacées et la tête d'un bouffon pervers. Marie-Madeleine apparaît sur la droite, la tête couverte, entourée par des formes humaines nues et des parties de corps d'hommes et de femmes.

En termes formels, les lignes et les couleurs se chevauchent et se frappent, créant un chaos contrôlé où les marques et les gestes sont utilisés pour transmettre une signification. Pien dit que les dessins « sont des œuvres très expressives [qui] négocient le temps même. Ce processus de négociation est continu et crucial, confrontant le chaos et l'ordre et tout ce qui se trouve entre les deux[11] ». La taille même du dessin original (1,52 m × 1,13 m) défie le spectateur

au verso Ed Pien, *Mary Magdalene*, 2002–2010, encre, peinture Flashe et collage sur papier, 1.52 × 1.13 m, collection de Pierre-François Ouellette et de John Latour. (Photo : Toni Hafkenscheid)

outside Judeo-Christian modernity. Today, as First Nations, we must be vigilant and cognizant of the destructive powers of aggressive Westernization as so sadly enforced by the state through church-run residential schools."[8]

Ed Pien is internationally known for his drawings and découpages of ghosts drawn from Taiwanese folklore and images of Hell inspired by Hieronymus Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1503–04) and related paintings. In the artist's own words: in "my drawing-based works, images of strange and hybridized figures defy quick or simple reading and have recently become even more complex, with the use of overlapping and gestural lines to render agitated and densely packed creatures."[9] His powerful works have been exhibited as composites or installations. Some large-scale drawings were developed over a period of years, such as the work reproduced in the journal *Mary Magdalene* (2002–10). As Pien notes "when I reconfigure my own series of half-completed drawings created and collected over the past ten years, images are split, reconstructed, and combined, deliberately causing the already grotesque and disembodied figures to further mutate and transform."[10]

Mary Magdalene figures in the New Testament as a repentant adulteress and prostitute, and a follower of Jesus Christ. She is believed to have washed Christ's feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. In Western religious art, Mary Magdalene is typically represented in depictions of the Crucifixion. In his drawing, Pien explores this figure from a fresh, more ambiguous perspective. At the centre is a beggar, who faces a storyteller. On the left are a mound of intertwined fleshy figures and the head of a deviant clown. Mary Magdalene appears as the figure on the right with her head covered. She is surrounded by naked human forms and the body parts of both men and women.

In formal terms, the lines and colours overlap and collide, creating a controlled chaos in which marks and gestures are used to convey meaning. As Pien explains, the drawings are "highly expressive works [that] boldly negotiate time itself. This process of negotiation is ongoing and crucial, confronting order, chaos, and everything in between."[11] The sheer size of the original drawing (1.52 m × 1.13 m) challenges the viewer with its mesh

overleaf Ed Pien, *Mary Magdalene*, 2002–2010, ink, Flashe paint and collage on paper, 1.52 × 1.13 m, collection of Pierre-François Ouellette and John Latour. (Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid)

avec ses réseaux de confusion. L'œuvre devient sa propre réalité et les notions de temps et d'espace sont en quelque sorte corrompues car il est impossible de dire quelle partie du dessin a été faite en premier. Ainsi, l'œuvre capture figurativement l'histoire emmêlée de péché, de repentir et de pardon de Marie-Madeleine. Pien conclut que « les images résultantes nécessitent l'attention du spectateur et défient toute lecture simple. On n'y trouve pas de désir de résolution[12] ».

Depuis 1974, les sculptures, les photos et les installations de Ted Rettig, exposées internationalement, sont axées sur la religion, la spiritualité et des artéfacts religieux comme les fonts baptismaux et les tabernacles. Les concepts de *Maitri* (amour bienveillant) et d'*Alatheia* (réalité vérité) dirigent le spectateur vers le christianisme, le bouddhisme et autres philosophies religieuses. Dans ses œuvres multidisciplinaires, le symbolisme permet plusieurs niveaux de lecture.

Les photos et poèmes de Rettig présentés ici sont inspirés par la religion, la nature et ce que l'artiste appelle la « spiritualité écologique[13] ». Les photos de la nature sont présentées en paires. La première série, *Event 1, 2010*, offre des images d'herbe et de sol nu. Le sens de vide initial est rapidement remplacé par des sentiments d'émerveillement, d'espoir et de renouveau, alors qu'on remarque différentes espèces végétales et des graines qui attendent de germer et de pousser. La deuxième série, *Event 11, 2010*, consiste en gros plans de feuilles vertes. Le jeu d'ombre et de lumière du soleil, visible à travers les branches, évoque une impression de légèreté et de paix.

Du texte complémente et complexifie la signification allégorique des photos. Le texte pour *Event 1, 2010*, « nothing doing, nothing known, gone fishing, gone home » (ne rien faire, ne rien connaître, parti à la pêche, rentré à la maison) est une collection d'expressions courantes à l'exception de « nothing known » (ne rien connaître) rajoutée par l'artiste. Cet ajout, Rettig explique, lui permet de faire référence au « nada, nada » (rien, rien) de l'écrivain contemplatif et spirituel saint Jean de la Croix. « La répétition peut mener à un sentiment d'habiter l'inconnu[14] ». Pour Rettig, l'expression « gone fishing » (parti à la pêche) évoque les peintures chinoises du treizième siècle qui montrent un pêcheur solitaire dans un vaste paysage. Le mode contemplatif du pêcheur, absorbé par le vide de la vista, est un des thèmes de la spiritualité taoïste et bouddhiste. L'artiste nous offre encore d'autres significations, par exemple, « dans la structure répétitive du son des syllabes. Le mot "home" (maison) a un accent sonore spécial qui le renforce et permet de le relier aux particules sonores ou au mantra hindou/bouddhiste *Om*. J'ai lu plusieurs chapitres de livres qui discutent du *Om* dans le cadre d'études d'un dialogue hindou-chrétien[15] ».

La deuxième paire d'œuvres, *Event 11, 2010* est suivie d'un texte que Rettig associe au *Cantique des créatures*, chant religieux composé par saint François

of confusion. The work becomes its own reality and notions of space and time are somehow corrupted because it is impossible to tell which parts of the drawings were made first. As such, the work figuratively captures Mary Magdalene's tangled story of sin, repentance, and forgiveness. Pien concludes that "the resulting images demand the viewer's attention and defy any simple reading. There is no desire for closure."[12]

Since 1974, the sculptures, photographs, and installations of Ted Rettig, exhibited internationally, have centred on religion, spirituality, and sacred artefacts such as tabernacles and baptismal fonts. The concepts of maitri (loving-kindness) and aletheia (reality-truth) lead the viewer to Christianity, Buddhism, and other religious philosophies. In his multidisciplinary work, symbolism offers multi-layered meaning.

Rettig's photographs and poems presented here have been inspired by religion, nature, and what the artist calls "ecological spirituality."[13] Photographs taken from nature are presented in pairs. The first set, *Event 1, 2010* (2010), presents images of grass and ground. An initial sense of emptiness is quickly replaced by feelings of awe, hope, and renewal as one begins to notice the various species of flora and the seeds waiting to germinate and grow. The second set, *Event 11, 2010* (2010), consists of close-ups of green leaves. The play of light and shadow from the sun on the leaves, perceptible through the branches, evokes an impression of lightness and peace.

The addition of text complements and complexifies the allegorical significance of the photographs. The text for *Event 1, 2010*, "nothing doing, nothing known, gone fishing, gone home" is a collection of everyday expressions, except for "nothing known," which was added by the artist. This addition, Rettig explains, allows him to reference the "nada, nada" (nothing, nothing) of the contemplative and spiritual writer St. John of the Cross. "The repetition can lead towards a sense of dwelling in the unknown."[14] For Rettig, the expression "gone fishing" also reminds him of thirteenth-century Chinese paintings where lone men fish in vast landscapes. The contemplative mode of the fisherman, absorbed by the emptiness of the vista, is a theme of Daoist and Buddhist spirituality. The artist offers even more meanings, for example: "in the development of the repetition of the sounds of the syllables. The word 'home' has a special sound emphasis that strengthens it. This seems to relate it to the Hindu/Buddhist sound particle or mantra, Om. I have read parts of several books discussing Om in relation to studies in Hindu-Christian dialogue."[15]

The second pair of works, *Event 11, 2010* is followed by a text that Rettig associates with *The Canticle of the Sun*, a religious song composed by St.

Ted Rettig, *Event 1, 2010*, 2010

Photographies et texte. (Photo : Ted Rettig) | Photographs and text. (Photo: Ted Rettig)

nothing doing

nothing known

gone fishing

gone home

Ted Rettig, *Event 11, 2010*, 2010

Photographies et texte. (Photo : Ted Rettig) | Photographs and text. (Photo: Ted Rettig)

the deep kindness of others

the deep kindness of the air

the deep kindness of water

the deep kindness of the warmth of the sun

the deep deep kindness of light

the deep deep kindness of plants and animals

the rich kindness of the earth

the gentle kindness of a peaceful night

d'Assise. L'artiste suggère qu'« un autre niveau peut être rajouté, tiré des écrits de Thich Nhat Hahn, moine, professeur et auteur bouddhiste vietnamien, notamment le terme "inter-being" (entre-être) qu'il a créé. Le concept de l'inter-being (ou l'interdépendance de toutes choses et des co-dépendances qui en découlent) est central au bouddhisme mahayana développé par le philosophe indien Nagarjuna[16] ».

La religion et les pratiques spirituelles liées à la consommation sont des thèmes récurrents dans l'œuvre de Mitch Robertson. Depuis 1998, il a exposé ses œuvres à travers le Canada de même qu'en Australie, en Angleterre, en Allemagne, en Irlande, en Nouvelle-Zélande, en Écosse, en Suisse et aux États-Unis. Robertson présente ensemble deux installations/performances récentes. La première répond aux problèmes que rencontre le christianisme avec ses congrégations qui disparaissent et ses églises qui se vident. La deuxième examine une adaptation d'un rituel païen écossais et la marchandisation globale.

Modular Church (Église modulaire, 2007)[17] est une structure portable non confessionnelle modélisée à partir d'un contenant de restauration rapide, une boîte de Timbits de Tim Hortons, et qui peut être assemblée par deux personnes en une journée. Faite de morceaux de cèdre dont la forme rappelle celle des modèles d'église standard, *Modular Church* inclut même un toit en plexiglass multicolore qui imite les vitraux caractéristiques de ces bâtiments. Équipée d'un lecteur DVD, d'un écran et d'un système de son, l'église portable offre une sélection de neuf pièces de musique populaire telles que « Neon Bible » (2007) du groupe rock Arcade Fire, et un choix de sermons disponibles sur internet. Cette église miniature rappelle une maquette qui serait présentée dans un salon d'exposition comme une solution que les communautés pourraient acheter pour contrer leurs problèmes de désertion et de manque de fonds.

La deuxième œuvre concerne le festival du feu, *Up Helly Aa*, qui se tient en janvier dans les îles Shetland (Écosse). Bien que ce festival n'ait commencé que dans les années 1870, il prend sa source dans les traditions et la mythologie des premiers habitants scandinaves. Au *Uphalliday* (la fin des fêtes de Noël), les habitants des Shetland retournent à leur passé païen en célébrant avec des festins et des feux de joie. Le rituel principal est la parade à travers la ville d'un bateau viking grandeur nature qui est ensuite brûlé (rappelant la sépulture en mer privilégiée par les Vikings). En écho à cet événement qui a lieu dans une région isolée du monde, Robertson a créé de petits bateaux vikings sculptés dans du chêne que les propriétaires peuvent exhiber dans leur maison pendant un an avant de les brûler dans l'âtre pendant une cérémonie privée pour la famille et les amis. L'œuvre finale est une photographie unique montrant le bateau en flammes[18]. L'artiste note que sa série de bateaux vikings « reproduit le procédé

Francis of Assisi. The artist suggests that: "another layer can be added as well. This can be found in the writings by the Vietnamese Buddhist monk, teacher, and author Thich Nhat Hahn and the term 'inter-being' that he coined. The concept of 'inter-being' (or the interdependence of all things or codependent arising) is central to Mahayana Buddhism and was developed by the Indian philosopher Nagarjuna."[16]

Religion and spiritual practices linked to consumerism are consistent themes in the work of Mitch Robertson. Since 1998 he has been exhibiting his works across Canada as well as in Australia, England, Germany, Ireland, New Zealand, Scotland, Switzerland and the United States. Here Robertson brings together two recent installations and performances. The first installation responds to the problems faced by Christianity in its dwindling congregations and church attendance. The second one and its following performance examine the adaptation of a Scottish pagan ritual and global commodification.

Modular Church (2007)[17] is a portable non-denominational structure modelled after a fast-food container, the Tim Hortons Timbits box, which can be put up in one day by two people. Made of pieces of cedar wood that resemble the basic form of a church, *Modular Church* also includes a multicoloured plexiglass roof that mimics the stained-glass windows that typify this kind of building. Equipped with a DVD player, a screen, and a sound system, the portable church offers selections from nine genres of popular music, such as "Neon Bible" (2007) by rock band Arcade Fire, and from sermons available from ministries via the Internet. This miniature church design is presented as if it were an item at a trade show in hopes that church communities will buy it as a solution to their dwindling numbers and financial problems.

The second work relates to the fire festival, Up Helly Aa, that takes place on Scotland's Shetland Islands every January. Although this festival began in the 1870s, it derives from the traditions and mythology of the early Norse settlers. At Uphalliday (the end of the Yule holidays), Shetlanders return to their pagan past by celebrating with feasts and bonfires. The main ritual is the parading through town of a full-size Viking ship (echoing Viking sea burials), which is then burnt. Responding to an event that takes place in an isolated region of the world, Robertson has created small, carved oak Viking ships that owners can display in their homes for about a year before burning them in their fireplace during a ship-burning party for family and friends. The finished piece is a unique framed photograph documenting the burning of the ship.[18] The artist states that his series of Viking ships: "replicates the local's process of building a real ship with the intention of destroying it by fire, but,

Mitch Robertson, *Modular Church*, 2007

Cèdre, plexiglass, quincaillerie, lecteur DVD portable, haut-parleurs, chaises, 2.14 × 3.36 × 2.44 m. (Photo : Toni Hafkenscheid) | Cedar, plexiglass, hardware, portable DVD player, speakers, chairs, 2.14 × 3.36 × 2.44 m. (Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid)

Mitch Robertson, *Modular Church* (vue du plafond | ceiling view), 2007

Cèdre, plexiglass, quincaillerie, lecteur DVD portable, haut-parleurs, chaises, 2.14 × 3.36 × 2.44 m. (Photo : Toni Hafkenscheid) | Cedar, plexiglass, hardware, portable DVD player, speakers, chairs, 2.14 × 3.36 × 2.44 m. (Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid)

Mitch Robertson, *Drakkar*, 2008

Chêne blanc et coton, 58 × 13 × 39 cm. (Photo : Toni Hafkenscheid) | White oak and cotton, 58 × 13 × 39 cm. (Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid)

Mitch Robertson, *Burning the Drakkar (Anouchka & Scott)*, 2009

Impression lambda unique, 97 × 81 cm. (Photo : Mitch Robertson) | Unique lambda print, 97 × 81 cm. (Photo: Mitch Robertson)

des Shetlandais qui construisent un vrai bateau avec l'intention de le brûler ensuite mais, en clin d'œil au consumérisme, ils sont adaptés au mode de vie de la "forteresse familiale" d'aujourd'hui. Ces répliques miniatures donnent une approche consumériste nord-américaine au festival, suggérant l'influence inévitable que la globalisation aura sur l'événement dans un futur proche[19] ». Avec ces deux projets, Robertson explore le déclin de la valeur accordée aux formes de rassemblements communautaires et offre une évolution naturelle à ces expériences. Ses œuvres se placent sur la mince ligne entre cynisme et sincérité.

NOTES

1 Échange de courriels entre Goota Ashoona et l'auteur, septembre 2010.
2 *Ibid.*
3 Entretien téléphonique entre Thérèse Chabot et l'auteur, août 2010.
4 L'ange fait partie d'un groupe de quatre sculptures créées par Jobin pour l'église Saint-Joseph de Deschambault (Québec). Les sculptures représentent le Christ en croix, l'ange de la justice et l'ange de la victoire qui se trouvaient à l'entrée du cimetière et saint Joseph qui se trouvait devant l'église. Elles ont été restaurées en 1998 et installées à l'intérieur de l'église. Chabot a demandé à ce que l'ange de la justice soit déplacé là où elle voulait faire son installation pour la Biennale internationale du lin de Portneuf en 2007. Échange de courriels entre Thérèse Chabot et l'auteur, octobre 2010.
5 Échange de courriels entre Thérèse Chabot et l'auteur, octobre 2010.
6 Échange de courriels entre Robert Houle et l'auteur, octobre 2010.
7 *Ibid.*
8 *Ibid.*
9 Échange de courriels entre Ed Pien et l'auteur, janvier 2011.
10 *Ibid.*
11 *Ibid.*
12 *Ibid.*
13 Échange de courriels entre Ted Rettig et l'auteur, août 2010.
14 *Ibid.*
15 *Ibid.*
16 *Ibid.*
17 *Modular Church* a été présenté dans le cadre de l'exposition *567: Economies of Good & Evil* qui a fait une tournée au Canada. L'exposition a été inaugurée au Plug In Institute of Contemporary Art, Winnipeg (Manitoba) le 18 mai 2007.
18 L'exposition *Up Helly Aa* a été présentée à la Birch Libralato Gallery à Toronto en 2008. L'artiste est toujours présent pour le brûlage rituel afin de pouvoir le documenter. « La photo du bateau en train de brûler complétait la vente du bateau viking que le client avait en sa possession depuis un an. Il a été brûlé le 22 décembre 2009 » (traduction de l'auteur). Échange de courriels entre Mitch Robertson et l'auteur, avril 2012.
19 Échange de courriels entre Mitch Robertson et l'auteur, août 2010.

in a nod to consumerism, these boats are designed for the 'family fortress' lifestyle of today. These miniature-carved replicas propose a consumerist North American approach to the festival, suggesting the inevitable influence globalization will have on this event in the near future."[19] With both projects, Robertson explores the declining value placed on traditional forms of community gatherings and offers a natural evolution for these experiences. His works walk a very fine line between sincerity and cynicism.

NOTES

1 Exchange of email between Goota Ashoona and the author, September 2010.
2 Ibid.
3 Phone interview with Thérèse Chabot by the author, August 2010.
4 This angel is one of four sculptures executed by Jobin for the Église Saint-Joseph in Deschambault, QC. The sculptures represent Christ on the cross, the angel of justice, and the angel of victory that were at the entrance of the cemetery and St. Joseph that was at the front of the church. They were restored in 1998 and brought inside the church. Chabot asked for the angel of justice to be moved into the space of her installation in 2007 for the Biennale Internationale du lin de Portneuf. Exchange of email between Thérèse Chabot and the author, October 2010.
5 Exchange of email between Thérèse Chabot and the author, October 2010.
6 Exchange of email between Robert Houle and the author, October 2010.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Exchange of email between Ed Pien and the author, January 2011.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Exchange of email between Ted Rettig and the author, August 2010.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 *Modular Church* was part of the exhibition *567: Economies of Good & Evil* that toured in Canada. The exhibition opened at Plug In Institute of Contemporary Art, Winnipeg, MB, on 18 May 2007.
18 The exhibition *Up Helly Aa* was presented at Birch Libralato Gallery in Toronto in 2008. The artist always attends the ritual burning so he can document it. "The photo of the burning ship was the completion of a sale of one of the Viking ships that the client kept for a year. Then we burned it December 22, 2009." Exchange of email between Mitch Robertson and the author, April 2012.
19 Exchange of email between Mitch Robertson and the author, August 2010.

AA BRONSON is an artist living and working in New York City. In the sixties, he left university with a group of friends to found a free school, a commune, and an underground newspaper. This led him into an adventure with gestalt therapy, radical education, and independent publishing. In 1969 he formed the artists' group General Idea with Felix Partz and Jorge Zontal; they lived and worked together to produce the living artwork of being together, undertaking over 100 solo exhibitions and countless group shows and temporary public art projects. They were known for their magazine *FILE* (1972–89), and their early involvement in punk, queer theory, AIDS activism, and other manifestations of the other. Both Partz and Zontal died in 1994 and since then, AA has produced work focused on the subjects of death, grieving, and healing, most recently his series *Invocation of the Queer Spirits*. He has had solo exhibitions at the Vienna Secession, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, and the Power Plant, Toronto, amongst other venues. His work is in the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Jewish Museum, and the National Gallery of Canada. AA Bronson's work is dominated by the practice of collaboration and consensus. From his beginnings in a free school and commune, through his twenty-five years in General Idea, his deep involvement with founding and directing collaborative structures such as Art Metropole, the NY Art Book Fair, and The Institute for Art, Religion, and Social Justice, and his current collaborations with younger generations, he has focused on the politics of decision-making and on living life radically as social sculpture. In 2008 he was made an Officer of the Order of Canada and in 2011 he was named a *Chevalier de l'ordre des arts et des lettres* by the French government.

VALERIE BEHIERY is an art historian whose area of research covers both historical and contemporary art and visual culture from or related to the Muslim world with a particular focus on gender, comparative aesthetics, and the representation of Islam and Muslims. She is presently a postdoctoral fellow affiliated with the Canada Research Chair in the Study of Religious Pluralism and Ethnicity held by Valérie Amiraux at the Université de Montréal. Behiery's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council-funded project entitled "Objects of Mistranslation: Representing the 'Burqa' in Canadian Newspapers since 9/11" uses a cross-cultural visual studies perspective to analyse the reasons the image of the fully veiled Muslim woman so readily provokes cross- or intercultural misunderstanding in Euro-America. Her article analysing the discursive and visual uses of the Muslim veil in contemporary art, "Alternative Narratives of the Veil in Contemporary Art," was published in French in *Sociologie et sociétés* and is forthcoming in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*

(CSSAAME). A text examining the relationship between gender, visual art, and Islam or Islamic self-identity, "Muslim Women Visual Artists Congregating in Cyberspace: A Study of IMAN and MWIA," will appear in an anthology to be published early next year. Valerie Behiery has contributed entries to several reference works and currently serves as the Islamic art consultant at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, researching and writing about their permanent Islamic collection and preparing for the forthcoming opening of the new Islamic gallery.

LOUIS KAPLAN is professor of history and theory of photography and new media in the Graduate Department of Art at the University of Toronto and inaugural chair of the Department of Visual Studies at its Mississauga campus. He is also a member of the Centre for Jewish Studies at the University of Toronto. Kaplan has published widely in the areas of photography studies, art history, Jewish studies, visual culture, and deconstruction. His book *Laszlo Moholy-Nagy: Biographical Writings* (Duke, 1995) rethinks the Bauhaus master through the lens of postmodernism and deconstruction. It was translated into Mandarin and published by Zhejiang Photographic Press in 2010. Other books include *American Exposures: Photography and Community in the Twentieth Century* (Minnesota, 2005), and *The Strange Case of William Mumler, Spirit Photographer* (Minnesota, 2008). Kaplan curated the exhibition *Command J: Jewish Laws, Digital Arts* in 2005 that included works by Simon Glass, Melissa Shiff, Helene Aylon, and Jeffrey Shaw. He is currently co-investigator on a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada-supported Insight Development Grant entitled "Mapping Ararat: An Imaginary Jewish Homelands Project." His keynote lecture at the ART+RELIGION conference in Montreal in 2010 serves as the basis for his essay here. Kaplan is a senior research consultant for the Shpilman Institute for Photography in Tel Aviv and a member of the international editorial boards of *History of Photography*, *Topia*, and *Photography and Culture*. He is currently researching a book on *Photography and Humour* for the Exposures series of Reaktion Books in London.

NADIA KURD is a PhD candidate in the Department of Art History and Communication Studies at McGill University. Her doctoral research focuses on race and representation and the appropriation and practice of Islamic architecture in Canada and the United States. She has written for several artist catalogues and publications such as *FUSE Magazine*, the *International Journal of Islamic Architecture*, and *Proteus: A Journal of Ideas*. As a curator, Kurd has organized a number of exhibitions, most notably, *Muqarnas: Intersections of Contemporary Islamic Architecture* (2006), *Black Holes* (2009), and *Tagore:*

Bright Oriental Star (2011). She is currently the curator of the Thunder Bay Art Gallery, where her focus is on community engagement and emerging artists in Northwestern Ontario.

LOREN LERNER is a professor of art history at Concordia University. Lerner was curator and editor of *Afterimage: Evocations of the Holocaust in Contemporary Canadian Arts and Literature/Rémanences : Evocations de l'Holocauste dans les arts et littérature canadiens contemporains* (Montreal: Institute for Canadian Jewish Studies, 2002) and curator and author of *Memories and Testimonies / Memoires et Témoignages* (Leonard and Bina Ellen Art Gallery, 2002) and the *Sam Borenstein Retrospective Exhibition* (Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 2005). Her other writings on the intersections of art and religion include "Sam Borenstein and Marius Barbeau: Ethnography, Modern Art and the Meeting of Two Worlds" in *Around and About Marius Barbeau: Modelling Twentieth-Century Culture* (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2008), "Sam Borenstein, Artist and Dealer: The Polemics of Post-Holocaust Jewish Cultural Identity" in *Canadian Jewish Studies / Etudes juives canadiennes* (2004) and "The Aron Museum at Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom in Montreal" in *Material Culture Review / Revue de la culture matérielle* (2004). In 2010, Lerner assisted Tim Clark, a professor of studio arts at Concordia University and François LeTourneux, the associate curator at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal with the organization of ART+RELIGION, the Fourth Max and Iris Stern International Symposium. The conference, supported by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada grant, brought together scholars representing diverse disciplines to explore the connections between religion and current artistic practices.

DENIS LONGCHAMPS a été nommé gestionnaire des expositions et des publications du Musée provincial des beaux-arts The Rooms, Saint John's, Terre-Neuve, en janvier 2012. En 2009, il a obtenu un doctorat en histoire de l'art de l'Université Concordia, où il a été administrateur de l'Institut de recherche en art canadien Gail et Stephen A. Jarislowsky de 2006 à 2011. Longchamps a aussi enseigné l'histoire de l'art à l'Université Concordia et au Collège Dawson. Il a publié des essais, des articles et des recensions dans des publications telles *Espace-Sculpture, Ceramics Monthly, Ceramics Art and Perception* et la revue trimestrielle de la Picturesque Society. Il a récemment organisé les expositions *Crafting Paradox* (Musée provincial des beaux-arts The Rooms, Saint John's, 2011) et *Guilty Pleasures* (upArt Contemporary Art Fair, Toronto, 2011). Il est éditeur et rédacteur en chef de *Cahiers métiers d'art* (http://craftjournal.ca).

CARMEN ROBERTSON is an interdisciplinary Indigenous scholar and associate professor of contemporary Indigenous art history at University of Regina. She is currently writing a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada–supported monograph on Norval Morrisseau that analyses media constructions of the artist juxtaposed with his art works. This text pairs both performative and artistic examples that complicate the more simplistic and confining identities assigned him in popular culture. The project builds on her 2007 RACAR essay, "Body Politics and the Art of Norval Morrisseau." In an ongoing investigation of constructions of Indigenous identities in Canadian popular culture, Robertson recently co-authored the monograph *Seeing Red: A History of Natives in Canadian Newspapers* (2011) with Mark Cronlund Anderson, which charts the representation of Aboriginals in Canada's mainstream print media since 1869. This text won three Saskatchewan Book Awards. Robertson also questions established frames that have narrowly defined the parameters of Aboriginal art discourse by analysing Indigenous art production, curatorial practice, and media coverage in Canada. Robertson is currently president of the Norval Morrisseau Heritage Society and serves on a number of arts-related boards in Regina. Robertson also maintains an independent curatorial practice; she co-curated an exhibition *Clearing a Path: New Ways of Seeing Traditional Indigenous Art* (2005) and co-authored the catalogue (2009) with Sherry Farrell Racette.

SUSAN SURETTE is a PhD candidate in the Department of Art History at Concordia University and holds doctoral scholarships from Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and Fonds québécois de la recherche sur la société et la culture, as well as a J.W. McConnell Memorial Graduate Fellowship. Her doctoral work, which developed from questions arising from two decades of her own ceramic practice, focuses on the role of Canadian ceramic relief murals as public art between 1961 and 1981. Aspects of this research have been published in *Cahiers Métiers d'art/Craft Journal* (2009 and 2010) and presented at several conferences, including University Art Association of Canada Conference (2008 and 2009), Association of Art Historians Conference (2011), the Mackenzie Art Gallery (2011), and Canadian Women's Art History Initiative Conference, Concordia University (2012). Her master's degree (Concordia 2003) research into the role of landscape in Canadian ceramics has been published in *Craft: Perception and Practice 2* (2005), *Cahiers Métiers d'art/Craft Journal* (2007), *On the Table: 100 Years of Functional Ceramics in Canada* (2007), and *Utopic Impulses: Contemporary Ceramics Practice* (2007). She has taught the history of ceramics at Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and currently teaches it at Concordia University. Her own ceramic murals are found in public, corporate, and private collections, in Canada and the United States.

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The *Journal of Canadian Art History* welcomes submissions of previously unpublished manuscripts. One printed copy and a digital file are required; both should include a short abstract. Send printed copies (including photocopies of images) to the editorial office address below. Send digital files to jcah@concordia.ca. Typescripts for articles should not exceed 8,000 words, excluding endnotes. Essays should not exceed 4,000 words. Reviews of exhibitions and books are assigned by the editor-in-chief; proposals from reviewers are invited.

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