

Salt Water Bodies and Turning Tides: Women with Cameras on the East Coast

*Curatorial essay by Amanda Dawn Christie to accompany a screening on Oct. 15 / 2010
of Salt Water Bodies: Women With Cameras on The East Coast*

This unique collection of experimental films and videos made by women in Atlantic Canada, explores the interconnected play of body, gender, and landscape in the region. It is a rare and exciting opportunity for these works to be screened together, outside of the Atlantic region due to the fact at there is not a single distribution centre in all four of the Atlantic Provinces, and many of these works have very few screening opportunities within the region let alone beyond its borders.

Women and filmmakers in general, in Atlantic Canada face great obstacles when it comes to funding, distributing and exhibiting their work. In terms of funding for production, not a single city in all four of the Atlantic Provinces has a municipal arts council, and Nova Scotia is the only province in Canada that does not have a provincial arms length arts council. In terms of distribution, there are no distributors in the region since the closure of Atlantic Independent Media (formerly the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Atlantic), which operated from 1985 to 1995. Not only are there no distributors, but there are also very few opportunities for the exhibition of experimental media art works within the region, given that there is not a single cinematheque in all of the four Atlantic provinces.

There are a few film societies that bring in independent feature films and documentaries, but in terms of animation and experimental film, the only consistent options are art galleries, annual screenings, and generalized film festivals dedicated to either commercial or independent film (primarily mainstream narrative and documentary). As a result, these films rarely get a chance to screen in their own region. Many of these works are simply screened underground as they get passed around from person to person, on home made DVDs of DIY video transfers. Often, the 16mm film prints screen only a few times before retiring to a life on a shelf, or in some cases, getting lost altogether.

While artists in this region are free to work with distributors from other regions, unfortunately this rarely happens, as the urban centres of Toronto and Montreal seem too distant and foreign – both geographically and psychologically. Ironically Toronto and Montreal are often referred to as Eastern Canada, while people forget that the country continues on much further East for quite some time after them (about 22 hours by train from Montreal to Halifax!).

This screening in particular takes the viewer on a journey through representations of the female body in Atlantic Canada through dance, animation, and experimental documentary. These films and videos chart the territorial

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frontiers between the inner and the outer body; mapping the phenomenological inhabitation of the body, and the empirical excursions of the body into the external geographies and social landscapes of Atlantic Canada.

Given that so many Atlantic Canadian filmmakers leave the region at some point in their careers, it seems appropriate to begin the screening with a film that explores tenuous connections to landscape and the impossibility of homecoming. Louise Bourque, who was born in Edmunston, New Brunswick, presents us with a look at the impossibility of reliving the past, in her film, ***Going Home***. As houses collapse amidst flames and floods to the sound of a music box, the message is clear; that when you return, the home you return to is never the home you left.

With our idealized notions of 'home' put behind us, the program continues with a look at where we are seated right here and now, as Becka Barker's ***Assembled*** situates us back in the seats of the cinema making each viewer aware of all of the other viewer's in the space, and all of the possible thoughts that may be floating around in the heads in the seats in the cinema. This self-conscious look at viewing experiences leads us to Gerda Cammaer's ***Struggling in Paradise*** which deals with information-overload, communication overkill and mediated emotions in mainstream media.

From these explorations of cinematic media, we move to a closer look at historical representations of the female body on film as Michelle Lovegrove Thomson's ***Hysterica and the Wandering Womb***, presents the viewer with an abstract expressionist look back on portrayals of women's bodies as psychological sites. This theme of embodied anxiety is picked up and carried further in Lisa Morse's ***Pustulations***. The screening then moves from psychological inhabitations of the body to the body's inhabitation of geographical space as Natalie Morin's ***Baseball Dances*** presents gestures of ambition and defeat played out on a baseball field in an industrial location by a dancer in a catcher's mask.

This site specific look at the impact of geography on the body then leads us to a further meditation on the impact of the body on geography in Tara Well's ***Pretty Bird***. This film explores the impact of human actions on social ecology through an animated music video for local songwriter Fred Squire. Tara's birds then give way to pelicans in Melanie Colossimo's ***Throwing Rocks***, which is a beautiful homage to the Halifax harbour and the act of bowling. These relationships between humans and the animals of the air are continued in Milliefore Clarke's ***Crows and Branches*** which is a colourful meditation on the daily migration of crows in Charlottetown, PEI.

By now the films have led us away from the body and into the landscape, only to be brought back into intimate

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touch with the body through Linda Rae Dornan's video, *I Wish*, which returns to the body as a psychological site for concern and desire. These concerns evolve into ideas about identity and naming in Angela Thibodeau's *I'd Rather Have a River*, which delves into theme of marriage in various cultures. Themes of identity and marriage lead the viewer into other complications of love in Maryse Arsenault's playful animation, *Quand Je La Cueille*, where the flowers must be killed before they are plucked.

These journeys through social landscapes and interpersonal relationships culminate beautifully in Siloen Daley's *Olive Prepares*, which is a concerted look at the tentative and hesitant development of a new friendship between two neighbors. Meanwhile, Amanda Fauteux's *Things for Now*, takes the viewer a step back from these intimacies to consider the impact of social tensions and interactions on the strength and fragility of the individual psyche and the need for naps and quiet time. This quiet time gives us chance to pause and consider our own agency in the face of our own force and the weight of everyday in Colleen Collins *Video ET Taceo (I See but I Keep Silence)*.

These naps and this silence takes us to a place of contemplation in Barbara Sternberg's *Opus 40* which pairs images of men working in a foundry with the writings of Gertrude Stein. We began the program by collapsing idealized notions of home through repetitious images of demolition, and we will end by constructing an ever present space of mindfulness through repetitious images of construction and fabrication. This embracing of repetition places us in a space between collapse and construction; landscape and body; inner and outer; solid and liquid; salt and water; high tide and low tide.

Sackville, 2010

Going Home

Louise Bourque (Mass. / NB)

35mm, colour, sound, 2000 1:15

Louise Bourque is an Acadian artist, originally from New Brunswick who has lived and made films in Montreal, Chicago, and Boston. "To the scratchy sounds of an old music box... 'Going Back Home' weaves snippets of old reels of houses collapsing, fires and floods into a 30-second elegy... Deep within its battered places and antique sounds, the film offers the possibility of recalling something that otherwise could be lost forever." - Joanne Silver, the Boston Herald, Dec. 17, 2004

Assembled

Becka Barker (Halifax, NS)

35mm, colour, sound, 2006, 5 min

Becka Barker hails originally from Woodstock, New Brunswick. She made this film while living in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where she was actively involved with the Atlantic Filmmakers Co-op and taught at NSCAD. She now lives in Korea. This film is a hand-etched and collaged film where three figures navigate the modern social spaces of being "together alone." Created with scratch animation, with an original score by Stephen Kelly of pop duo The Just Barelys.

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Struggling in Paradise

Gerda Cammaer (Halifax, NS)

16 mm, colour, sound, 2004, 6 min

Gerda Cammaer is a Belgian filmmaker who has lived and made films in Halifax, Montreal, and Toronto. She made this film while living in Halifax, where she was an active member of the Atlantic Filmmakers Co-op, and taught at both NSCAD and Dalhousie University. She now lives and works in Toronto. This film takes place amidst information overload, communication overkill and mediated emotions. Paradise, as a state of complete happiness, remains a fleeting promise, a state of mind impossible to achieve. Some seek refuge in the creative process, some multiply "various emotions" while other just drive along on the road to Paradise, thinking there is "nothing to worry about." In the end, it is just all about "the drive."

Hysterica and the Wandering Womb

Michelle Lovegrove Thomson (Fredericton, NB)

16mm, BW, sound, 2004, 5:30

Michelle Lovegrove Thomson is a filmmaker from Fredericton New Brunswick with ties to both the NB Film Co-op and UNB. Rendered in hand cranked black and white, this film is a stylized and melodramatic look at the historic pathologizing of womens bodies (and hence, emotional state) by science. "She would no longer be divided against herself".

Pustulations

Lisa Morse (Halifax, NS)

16mm, paint animation, sound, 2002, 8:00

Lisa Morse is an animator and printmaker originally from Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, who now lives and works in Halifax, where she has been actively involved with the Atlantic Filmmakers Cooperative since 2000. "Pustulations" is a short animated film using the painting-on-glass technique. It is about one woman's compulsion to pick at her skin and the purulent, pustular world beneath it.

Baseball Dances

Natalie Morin (Moncton, NB)

Video, Colour, Sound, 2005, 5:00

Natalie Morin is a dancer from Moncton, New Brunswick who has created and presented work across Canada and Asia. In this video performance work, gestures of ambition and defeat are played out on a baseball field in an industrial location by a dancer in androgenous clothing and a catcher's mask. The taping is raw and playful as it reveals a close relationship between the camera operator and the dancer.

Pretty Bird

Tara Wells (Sackville, NB)

Video, BW, sound, 2010, 2:33

Tara Wells is an artist and animator originally from Fredericton, who has made a home for herself and her artwork in Sackville, NB. This animation is inspired by a song of the same name by Fred Squire. The straightforward tenderness of Fred's song is echoed through Tara's use of monochromatic imagery and graceful animation. The song was inspired by real events, and reminds us that our actions may have untold effects on ourselves and those around us. The animation was completed in seven days using hand-carved rubber stamps and digital processing.

Throwing Rocks

Melanie Colosimo (Halifax, NS)

Video, colour, sound, 2009, 1:14

Melanie Colosimo is a visual artist and animator from Halifax, Nova Scotia. This film is a playful reminder that when life gives you pelicans, get them to bring you a bowling alley.

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Crows and Branches

Millefiore Clarkes (Charlottetown, PEI)

Video, colour, sound, 2009, 4:00

Crows and Branches is an experimental video that meditates on the wonder of the movement of nature. In Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, there occurs a daily natural phenomenon. At dusk, thousands of crows appear, as if out of nowhere, in the sky over the city, and flock to Victoria Park at the water's edge. They amass in such numbers that they turn the entire trees black and fill the sky with a symphony of haunting cries. Crows and Branches is an homage to this wonder.

I Wish

Linda Rae Dornan (Sackville, NB)

Video, colour, sound, 2006, 1:50

Linda Rae Dornan is an interdisciplinary artist originally from Montreal, who has been living and making work in Sackville, New Brunswick, for the past two decades. This video broadsheet speaks of peace and war against a visual backdrop of anxiety, immanent danger, and change.

I'd Rather Have a River

Angela Thibodeau (Sackville, NB)

Video, colour, sound, 2010, 4:15

Angela Thibodeau is an artist from Halifax, Nova Scotia who has been living between Asia and Atlantic Canada for the past few years. She currently lives and works in Sackville, New Brunswick. This video is a meditation on marriage and naming. Images of Japanese weddings are paired with text taken out of context on the subject of naming and identity.

Quand Je La Cueille

Maryse Arsenault (Moncton, NB)

Video, Colour, Sound, 2009, 3:26

Maryse Arsenault is an Acadian artist from Moncton, New Brunswick. This mix of live puppet action and stop motion animation presents a vaudeville style performance by Ethel the marionette. This bittersweet lovesong reminds us that in giving flowers to our lovers, we have to first kill the flowers as we pick them.

Olive Prepares

Siloen Daley (Halifax, NS)

16mm, colour, sound, 2007, 15min

Siloen Daley moved to Halifax, NS, from Nelson, BC, back in the 1990s. *Olive Prepares* was inspired by, and is based on, time she spent working at home as an artist, living with fellow animator and filmmaker Helen Hill. In this film, a new tenant in the apartment upstairs discovers Olive sawing her wall and invites her to tea for the following day. Olive prepares.

Things for Now

Amanda Fauteux (Sackville, NB)

Video, colour, sound, 2009, 2:00

Amanda Fauteux is a visual artist and animator from Ontario, who has made a home for herself in Sackville, New Brunswick. This video was originally a part of a larger gallery installation, and it is a delicate look at the little thoughts and worries of daily life, played out in collaged drawings and lined paper.

Video ET Taceo (I See But I Keep Silence)

Colleen Collins (Port Greville, NS)

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Video, colour, sound, 2004, 6:18

Colleen Collins is a Metis artist living in Port Greville, Nova Scotia. In addition to making installation and media art, she also plays in the indie rock band Construction and Destruction. She and her partner run a small recording studio out of their home near the Fundy coast. This video is a meditation on eagerness, attainment, and devastating force in the face of acceleration, change, and the weight of everyday.

Opus 40

Barbara Sternberg (Sackville, NB)

16mm, BW, sound, 14.30 min. 1979

Barbara Sternberg is one of the founding members of Struts Gallery in Sackville, New Brunswick where she made many of her early films. She now lives and makes work in Toronto. This film was made during her time in Sackville, on AFCOOP's optical printer, which she would bring with her from Halifax to Sackville. "*Opus 40*" is about repetition: repetition in working and living, repetition through multiplicity and series, repetition to form pattern and rhythm, repetition in order and in revealing. "*Opus 40*" was filmed in the Enterprise Foundry, Sackville, New Brunswick, and has excerpts from Gertrude Stein's writings.