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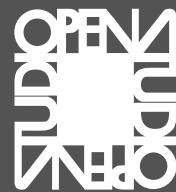
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(continued from overleaf)

to *Working Drawings*, I also have in mind Seth Siegelaub's *The Xerox Book* (1968), Hans Ulrich Obrist's *Do It* books (1998, 2005, 2008, 2013), and numerous other invitational compilations, including the exchange portfolios that are a staple of print communities. The open-ended invitation is a *modus operandi* I've adopted in other projects undertaken as an artist-curator. Throughout this one, I've been aware that in place of a curatorial thesis at work, it's been more of a case of a curatorial hypothesis.

Some submissions will involve artists identifying something they've already engaged in as research, not necessarily coming up with a new proposition. It could be an opportunity for some to represent something that isn't so self-evident about their methodologies. The work might entail something visual, text-based, notational, and/or informational, etc. Furthermore, the submissions could represent past, current, or future practice-based research. To all the artists' questions and suggestions about the nature of the work to be submitted, I found myself answering, by paraphrasing Bochner: "Yes, but not necessarily."

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> As quoted in Meyer, James. "The Second Degree: Working Drawings And Other Visible Things On Paper Not Necessarily Meant to Be Viewed As Art." *Mel Bochner: Thought Made Visible 1966-1973*, ed. Richard S. Field. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995. p. 94.

<sup>2</sup> Chapman, Owens & Sawchuk, Kim. "Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis and 'Family Resemblances'." *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 37 (2012): p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Loveless, Natalie S. "Practice in the Flesh of Theory: Art, Research, and the Fine Arts." *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 37 (2012): p. 103.

#### Interior Images

Images are courtesy of:

Risa Horowitz, Marla Hlady and Diane Borsato.

#### Artists included in exhibition

Barbara BALFOUR	Nina LEVITT
Marcus BOON and Christie PEARSON	Gwen MacGREGOR
Diane BORSATO	Patrick MAHON
Yael BROTMAN	Annie MARTIN
Bill BURNS	David MERRITT
Tara COOPER	Christof MIGONE
Marc COUROUX	June PAK
Michel DAIGNEAULT	Andy PATTON
Janice GURNEY	Ed PIEN
Marla HLADY	Stephanie SHEPHERD
Risa HOROWITZ	Penelope STEWART
Janet JONES	Derek SULLIVAN
Nestor KRUGER	Monica TAPP
Caroline LANGILL	Jeannie THIB
Yam LAU	Brandon VICKERD
Jenn LAW	Joy WALKER

#### Curator Bio

**Barbara Balfour**, a Toronto-based artist, is Associate Professor in the Print Media Area of the Department of Visual Art and Art History, York University, where she is Graduate Program Director, MFA/PhD in Visual Arts. Her recent research, funded through SSHRC Research/Creation, involves text-based art practices and print's relationship to multiplicity. Balfour has exhibited her artwork internationally and has printed professionally for artists including Leon Golub, Robert Indiana, Komar and Melamid and David Rabinowitch. Selected curatorial projects include *Keren Yuan/Guest Garden* (Beijing, China, with Stephanie Shepherd); *In the Stacks* (Queen\*Specific, Toronto); *Printing Errors* (akau Gallery, Toronto); *Printapalooza* (Gales Gallery, York University, Toronto); *text* (TYPE Bookstore, Toronto). Other activities include artist residencies, conference presentations and critical writing, including an essay in *PUBLIC 51: Colour*. An Art Metropole lifetime member, Balfour's most recent publication, *The Inkiest Black*, launched at Katzman Contemporary, Toronto, and the LA Art Book Fair, Los Angeles. [www.barbarabalfour.ca](http://www.barbarabalfour.ca).

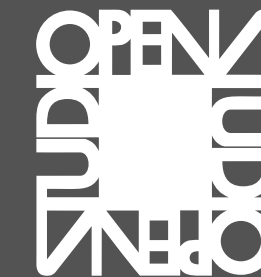
# À la recherche (in search of practice-based research)

Curated by Barbara Balfour

**Marcus BOON and Christie PEARSON**  
**Diane BORSATO Yael BROTMAN Bill**  
**BURNS Tara COOPER Marc COUROUX**  
**Michel DAIGNEAULT Janice GURNEY**  
**Marla HLADY Risa HOROWITZ Janet**  
**JONES Nestor KRUGER Caroline LANGILL**  
**Yam LAU Jenn LAW Nina LEVITT Gwen**  
**MacGREGOR Patrick MAHON Annie**  
**MARTIN David MERRITT Christof MIGONE**  
**June PAK Andy PATTON Ed PIEN**  
**Stephanie SHEPHERD Penelope STEWART**  
**Derek SULLIVAN Monica TAPP Jeannie**  
**THIB Brandon VICKERD Joy WALKER**  
**Barbara BALFOUR**

**JANUARY 8 - FEBRUARY 6, 2016**

Opening Reception: Friday, January 8, 6:30-8:30pm



OPEN STUDIO

Contemporary  
Printmaking Centre

# Not Necessarily

By Barbara Balfour

*What I've been trying to do is raise these processes to the level of thought.<sup>1</sup>*

Mel Bochner

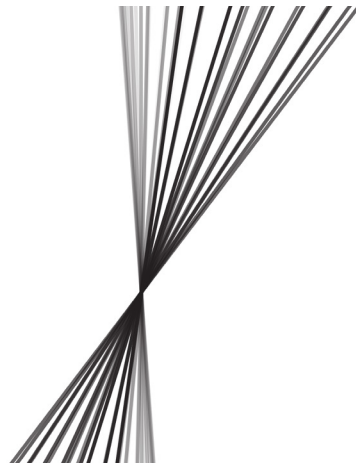
*À la recherche* (in search of practice-based research) suggests a call in honour of research, as something to be celebrated, while also alluding to the title of Marcel Proust's novel *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Etymologically, there is a sense of "search" within "research," which I've echoed in the subtitle and kept in mind in undertaking this curatorial project.

I'm also aware how one could take issue with certain terminology related to practice-based research. Roberta Smith, for one, has decried the undertones of professionalism that inflect the term "art practice," suggesting something similar to a medical practice. Others, such as Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk, have responded to the privileging of scholarly research over the creative by arguing for research-creation as a form of "critical intervention."<sup>2</sup> Natalie Loveless has written of intellectual and creative forms of labour as "messy and entangled" both deeply creative practices that emerge as a kind of thinking that takes many many forms," including what she calls "*makingthinking* practices."<sup>3</sup> The impetus behind *À la recherche* is to bring to light what practice-based research might look like.

In envisioning models for practice-based research, one might consider then reject the formidable scientific method. There's something attractive about its claims, yet nonetheless unyielding in the strict imposition of methodology. For artists working from a base of doubt and not-knowing, it can be too closed a system. The case study model of architecture, a field somewhat more sympathetic to art, has merits in terms of in-depth documentation and study, yet not all artists will want to work from this standpoint. The structural principles at the core of archival studies appeal to certain artists who take on

aspects of this field in their research, albeit not always to the satisfaction of archivists' standards. In fact, all the models mentioned so far can and do prove useful within the context of artmaking, yet none could serve as one incontrovertible method for artists.

Given the wide-ranging media, processes and methodologies artists employ, alternatives to a grand unifying method might include methodological pluralism, or any number of practice-based approaches—singly or in combination with others. Artists have been known to turn to established forms of scholarly research, including various kinds of fieldwork, interviews and consultation of primary and secondary sources. However, if you asked any number of artists about what's involved in the production of an art project, they would probably mention less scholarly pursuits such as taking long walks, cleaning the studio, reading fiction, pursuing a new hobby, preparing or testing certain materials, looking at other artwork, and so on.



Let's also consider bursts of inspiration, educated guesses and hunches, happy accidents, unexpected discoveries and serendipitous connections leading to breakthroughs. While these instances apparently fail to demonstrate what might be expected to be intellectual rigour, I'd argue that how one engages with happenstance, as well as tacit knowledge and embodied experience of the ways things behave, provide worthwhile contexts for crucial decision-making. There is both

flexibility and rigour in these processes that's familiar to those who adopt them. Moreover, there would not necessarily be a sharp division in all cases between what is considered research and what is considered artmaking.



There seems to be a need to defend and rationalize practice-based research—more casually in art communities and more officially in academia, especially with the increase in practice-based PhD programs. To put it bluntly, research undertaken by artists isn't always accepted on a par with that of scholars in other academic disciplines. The term "practice-based research" succinctly differentiates this kind of research from the purely scholarly, as well as recasting the question of the relationship between practice and theory as one between practice and research. It seems less constructive to me to think of this latter pair in causal or hierarchical terms, and more compelling to reflect on the potential relationships involving both.

Research in many forms has been an important part of my art practice and teaching of studio and theory courses—most recently in the Methods in Practice-Based Research course in the MFA/PhD Program in Visual Arts, in the School of Arts, Media, Performance and Design at York University (Toronto). Much of my thinking about practice-based research has been expanded and galvanized by discussions with graduate students in the Winter 2015 Methods course. I then conceived of this exhibition at Open Studio as a survey from a sampling of

artists, to see how they would interpret and represent practice-based research within the context of their own practices.

I want to acknowledge that I'm quite blatantly taking my curatorial model from Mel Bochner, in particular his 1966 exhibition *Working Drawings And Other Visible Things On Paper Not Necessarily Meant to Be Viewed As Art*. Following Bochner's example, I asked for contributions to be materialized in the exhibition as part of a larger group of printed documents, this time in a print-on-demand publication. In place of a gallery installation of the original "working drawings" he collected from participants, Bochner exhibited reproductions of their work as photocopies in binders, later printed in book form. Without going too deeply into a discussion of the notion of original copies (in various forms of print as well as the digital), there might be originals of what the artists scanned and submitted to me in digital form, but not necessarily. They might have submitted something created digitally from the start, as the means of production.



I can't help but have a certain notion of how this will all unfold and materialize, and yet I know it won't necessarily be so. Extended without strict parameters, my invitation to formulate representations of practice-based research wasn't intended to be provocative or vexing, but instead intimated that there wasn't only one possible type of response. In addition