

**David Eustace** grew up in Toronto and currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York, where he draws, paints, and makes prints using both traditional and experimental techniques. Recent public art installations include *Project for Canal* (Brooklyn), which received support from the Brooklyn Arts Council and New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. He has exhibited his work in both Canada and the United States.

**Deborah Loxam-Kohl** is a graduate of the Alberta College of Art & Design Fibre program and the inventor of a technique and machine to felt three-dimensional objects in-the-round. She works as an independent curator and directs DLK Design Lab, a multi-disciplinary studio, from her base camp in the Slocan Valley, BC.

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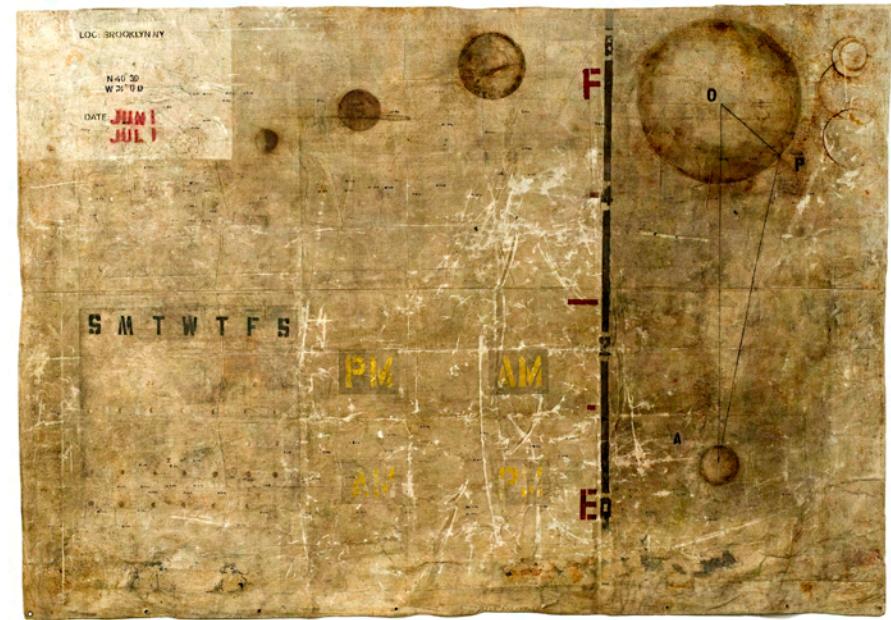
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# David Eustace *Project for Calendar Studies*



Canal #1, iron, enamel, acrylic, ink on canvas, 365 x 245 cm, 2006



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## **Project for Calendar Studies: Days, Months, Years**

by Deborah Loxam-Kohl

*Project for Calendar Studies* was created in the high-density urban environment of Brooklyn, New York, on the edge of an industrial/residential neighbourhood. Created entirely out-of-doors, the work utilizes a combination of weather, tides, time, and technical trial and error. In his open-air, rooftop studio, David Eustace first stencilled, photo-etched, and screenprinted large canvases using a shared language of notations, words, symbols, and relationships that are used to record the passage of time. Living and working in proximity to the Gowanus Canal, a shipping conduit lined with heavy industry and cement factories, Eustace came to observe the daily activity along its banks and recognized within the rhythmic rise-and-fall of the tidal movements the same motion as utilized in screenprinting. Looking to use the action of the tide to generate a record of the changing water levels, Eustace advanced his process by submerging the canvases in the canal. After a prolonged exposure of approximately three months, the canvases were returned to the rooftop studio where raw iron filings and pieces were applied to the surface and left exposed to the elements, completing the time-based process and producing a series of monoprints.

A prior exhibition of *Project for Calendar Studies* in Brooklyn had Eustace leading boat tours of the canal, visiting the site where the canvases were strapped to pilings and submerged beneath the murky waters. Introduced to the work in these surroundings, many viewers were inclined to interpret it within the context of environmental issues. Without intending to comment on the ecological state of the Gowanus Canal, or to draw general attention to industrial contamination of the environment, the work, nevertheless, captures the viewer's imagination. Eustace recognizes the inclination to align the work with political and social concerns associated with the environment, and understandably, it is a natural response to the dark watermarks and sooty shadows of the canvases when one understands what created them. Though the work raises issues that were not a factor in its formation, Eustace supports a dialogue that enables people to address the matters that the work brings up for them.

*Project for Calendar Studies* was fueled by curiosity and an enthusiasm for scientific inquiry. Informing both his process and choice of visual imagery, the predictive quality of science prompted the use of controlled variables, deductive thinking, observation and recording, but it was the intersection of the seemingly disparate worlds of art and science that excited Eustace. The methodology of scientific process can be seen in the detailed schematics used to illustrate the variables contributing to the experiments contained in each canvas. The variables encompass both the definitive – such as the visual application of proven scientific equations used to indicate distance between planets and stars – and the temporal, as seen in the subtle watermarks recording the rise and fall of the tides and the passage of time. He evokes a pseudoscientific chemical reaction between metal shavings, water, and set times when preparing canvases for rooftop exposures. But, Eustace explains, the influence of science ends when it comes to formal considerations that contribute to the aesthetics of the work: "Jung spoke of *spiritus mundi*, the spirit of the world or collective unconscious. I'm not interested in the psychological aspects surrounding the notion [of a collective memory and why it results], I'm more interested in practical knowledge. I like the shift from science-subject territory rather than psychology."<sup>i</sup> Using this methodology, Eustace found a scientific theory that provided a starting point for the work with exosomatic memory.

Exosomatic memory is a theory that was penned by Gregory B. Newby, a professor of information retrieval whose work focuses on statistical methods to identify relations among terms and documents. A survey of the Internet, the prevailing information retrieval system, provides little detail or insight into the theory. Wikipedia summarizes exosomatic memory as "the recording of memories outside the brain. The earliest forms of symbolic behavior – scratching marks on bones – seem to be intended as exosomatic memory. However it was the

invention of writing that allowed complex memories to be recorded."<sup>ii</sup> An excerpt from Newby's own essay explains the primary attribute of the theory: "Ideally, use of an exosomatic memory system would be transparent, so that finding information would seem the same as remembering it to the human user."<sup>iii</sup> In layman's terms, an exosomatic memory system enables the user to find information; the process of discovery resembles the act of remembering except that what you find isn't something you knew before. This is best illustrated by the process that takes place each time you pick up a reference book and begin reading: the content, a record of information or history preceding the moment, enters into your awareness, with the effect of you then 'knowing' about it.



Eustace interprets exosomatic memory and knowledge as one and the same: a collective memory outside of our bodies, such as the documented knowledge you find in libraries, art or film. He explains that the information chosen for use as imagery in the work could only come from collective memory: "...things only known, and not really experienced – part of a great effort over centuries to understand things beyond our experience, like the movements of the planets around the sun. That is pure knowledge, something never experienced and only known."<sup>iv</sup> He emphasizes that his

idea of exosomatic knowledge as some sort of collective memory isn't intuitive, it is "things mathematically or theoretically observed or inferred from long strings of discourse; but most definitely not something any one person could divine on their own, no matter how smart or spiritual. And that, to me, is amazing. No other species has done this, to my knowledge. It's why writing is so incredible."<sup>v</sup> Having borrowed from this mass of collected knowledge to inform the work, Eustace wonders if in time the work will register with or contribute to the collective memory as archival documents or a documentary of time and process.

Though not intended, the physicality of the Gowanus Canal makes a lasting impression in *Project for Calendar Studies*. The rise and fall of the tide records the passage of time, here documented as something abstract that we inherently recognize and imbue with meaning on seeing. By contrast, the remoteness of the stars and planets exists at such a scale, and externally to our experience of the world, that it is difficult to relate to. It is only through repeat observation of the astral bodies in the night sky and the endless pattern of the rise and fall of the sun and moon in defining our daily lives that we are able to recognize and relate to the imagery contained in the canvases. The work requires us to access the shared knowledge of our surroundings and through the contrast in local environment/external environment creates a reference point from which we are able to recognize where we are and are not capable of effecting change. Perhaps this dichotomy between the remoteness of the astral heavens and the immediacy of our earthly environs are well-paired opposites. Where we lack the ability to relate to one, we are able to see the possibility of effecting change with the other.

<sup>i</sup> David Eustace. Personal interview. 26 April 2008.

<sup>ii</sup> "Exosomatic Memory." Wikipedia. Web. 1 June 2008. <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exosomatic\\_memory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exosomatic_memory)>.

<sup>iii</sup> Newby, Gregory B. "Cognitive Space and Information Space." *Journal of the American Society of Information Science and Technology*, 52 (2001): 1026-1048.

<sup>iv</sup> *Ibid.* i.

<sup>v</sup> *Ibid.* i.