

November 4 to 27, 2010

Artists' Talks at Open Studio
Thursday, November 4 | 6 pm. Free admission
Opening Reception
Thursday, November 4 | 7-9 pm

2010 Scholarship/ Fellowship Exhibitions

Shannon Gerard:

Unspent Love, Or, Things I Wish I Told You

Nadine Bariteau:

Consecrated Multitude

Tobias Williams:

Ecce Cheeto



Gallery Hours

Tuesday to Saturday, noon to 5 pm

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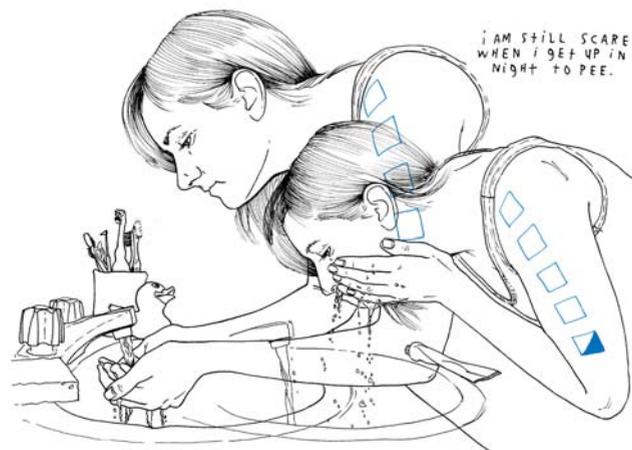
Production/Object/Image: The Work of Shannon Gerard, Nadine Bariteau and Tobias Williams

by Joel Elliott

Open Studio's 2010 Scholarship/Fellowship exhibitions present work from three artists: Shannon Gerard, Nadine Bariteau, and Tobias Williams. They are the recipients of Open Studio's Nick Novak Fellowship, Donald O'Born Family Scholarship, and Don Phillips Scholarship respectively. Utilizing a diverse range of media including printmaking, sculpture, photography and commercial design (sometimes all within the same work), these pieces range from the intimately personal to the broadly political, both aligning themselves with and subverting the popular forms that they reference.

Shannon Gerard's ongoing collection, *Unspent Love, or Things I Wish I Told You*, comprises a series of twenty vignettes—graphic novel-style line drawings juxtaposed with text that serves not quite to illustrate the images so much as to draw out the latent wishes, hopes, desperation and heartbreak that they subtly imply. Attempting to reach out to a loved one whose suffering the narrator realizes she can never relieve, these pieces point to the often one-sided nature of longing and the limits of empathy. The format of pairing simple illustrations with text works perfectly for this concept, as the disjuncture between the two highlights the divergences and subtle overlaps between what we think, say and imagine. Gerard's words are often brutally honest: "There are times when I wish particularly to be another person," she admits in one panel. The narratives are both fragmented and subjunctive: the narrator follows a trail of dreams and possibilities and we are left to imagine, rather tragically, that she is never able to communicate them to the person for whom they were intended. In this sense, *Unspent Love* is a confessional, but one that seems meant for someone else. As an audience we feel as if we are eavesdropping on intensely private moments.

Shannon Gerard,
*Unspent Love, or, Things
I Wish I Told You*, pen
and ink, 9" x 13", 2010.



Like the other two artists in this exhibition, Gerard's images are primarily concerned with the quotidian and everyday. Her illustrations consist of people shopping for groceries, shaving or waiting for a subway. However, these familiar scenarios provide a springboard for the narrator's deepest desires, fears and fantasies. On the one hand, the juxtaposition of word and text suggests a longing to transcend these everyday situations, while at the same time there is a tacit acknowledgement that it is only through the most ordinary experiences that we know each other intimately. Objects with no inherent meaning or value nevertheless become invested with the emotions surrounding their use.

While the book, with its small-scale format and artisanal proximity to its maker, offers an intimate experience that immerses the reader directly in its sea of troubled emotions, Gerard also exhibits some of the images as giant, overlapping methylcellulose prints that wrap the walls of the gallery. The arrangement of prints, perhaps unconventionally (considering its lack of textual accompaniment and mode of presentation) suggests a stronger narrative impetus than does the book. Its overlapping drawings hint at a story that the viewer is all the more sure exists because of the absence of text, which in the book actually highlights the gap between word and image.

The ways that *Unspent Love* reaches beyond the book represent an important aspect of Gerard's work. Although the wall-sized images suggest a narrative, they do so in a very basic, and open-ended way. The presentation of fragmented comic strip-like images in the space of a gallery may recall Roy Lichtenstein's work, but rather than being completely divorced of its context, it suggests modes of shifting context, with Lichtenstein's sense of irony and pulp melodrama replaced by an earnestness and directness. Through the book we are given a very specific set of emotions attached to the images, but through the larger images we are given the chance to attach our own meanings to the work. In acknowledging the potential for a radically different set of emotional responses, Gerard further illuminates the fluid relationship between objects and feeling.

Nadine Bariteau's *Consecrated Multitude* manages to carefully straddle the delicate territory between the poetic and the socially conscious. Conceptually and aesthetically an expansion of Bariteau's recent work, *Consecrated Multitude* consists of three pieces: a giant six-pack of bottled water suspended from the ceiling by an oversized fishhook, a small hand-bound book of printed and embossed images and text and documentation of a site-specific installation entitled *Water Blanket*, featuring three thousand plastic water bottles gathered from one neighbour's recycling bin over a ten-month period, floating on a river.

The use of oversized consumer products in the gallery has a long history – most notably with Claes Oldenburg's soft sculptures. But where Oldenburg simply transformed objects of consumer culture or "low art" into epic, gargantuan monuments, Bariteau's work provides a far more nuanced and complex commentary. If the main focus of attention during the high point of Pop Art was the distinction between high and low art and the ubiquity of consumer brands, *Consecrated Multitude* moves the debate into the realm of social and political policy, engaging with environmental

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Open Studio Scholarships

Open Studio awards three artist scholarships annually to artists of merit to develop their professional practice and artistic excellence. Scholarships are 12 months in duration and provide print media-based artists with free access to Open Studio's facilities to produce new work and engage in professional development opportunities.

The Don Phillips Scholarship is awarded to a graduating student in an undergraduate art program who will not be returning to full-time studies the following year.

The Donald O'Born Family Scholarship is awarded to an artist in the early stages of his or her professional career with demonstrated commitment to their practice.

The Nick Novak Fellowship is awarded to an outstanding Open Studio Artist Member with a commitment to a long-term project.

Annual application deadline is May 1st. Visit www.openstudio.on.ca for further information.

Nadine Bariteau, from the *Supermarket* series, photo documentation of a public intervention, photo by Patrick Dionne, 2010.



issues, employment, resource management and Canadiana, albeit with a sense of the playful and poetic rather than the didactic.

The connection is the relationship between over-fishing and the over-consumption of bottled water. But there is also the connection – and contrast – between an age-old Canadian tradition and modern convenience; between the tranquil and bucolic world of fishing and the rapid pace of modern life that allowed for the bottled-water industry to thrive. In titling her fake water company “Crown”, Bariteau evokes the government-owned land of the Canadian north, and by extension, the fight for the commons and the struggle between private and public property at the heart of resource-management issues.

Finally, there is the relationship between artisanal and mechanical creative processes. Bariteau's project is as much about the ongoing (if often unhappy) dialogue between industrial and non-industrial modes of production. Each part of the work's centerpiece—from the fit of the bottle caps, to the graphic design on the bottles, to the logo on the box that holds the giant plastic icons of mass production—is carefully planned and hand-made by Bariteau. In an ironic gesture, Bariteau creates an object of mechanical anonymity using traditional printmaking and molding techniques.

The bound book reads like a set of design sketches and instructions for prints rather than finished products, emphasizing the importance of process in both her own work and the commercial industries she references. Illustrations demonstrating the technique of various fishing knots are placed alongside handprinted text and image detailing the environmental costs of bottled water and over-fishing. The sketch-like quality of the book suggests, along with the ambiguity of the sculpture, that the audience must complete the work by forging the complex connections themselves.

Tobias Williams' work *Ecce Cheeto* makes fine art out of the most unlikely of culinary subjects. Over-processed and nutritionally bankrupt, the Cheeto could be the poster-child for everything that's wrong with the food industry in the US, but in Williams'

hands it becomes an object of both disgust and veneration. Some of his prints are surrounded by aureate wallpaper and others are displayed as light-box transparencies; in both cases each Cheeto is isolated from the millions produced alongside it, ironically re-appropriating it as a unique aesthetic object. Under vibrant light, the details of the surface of the snack come to the fore, suggesting that organic forms exist even within industrial processes. As if in acknowledgement of the accidental nature of this enterprise, Williams playfully labels some of his images as the objects they vaguely resemble: “boot,” “ball,” “bone.”

At the same time, and equally as a result of their idiosyncratic shapes, these images are fundamentally grotesque, suggesting physical deformation and fecal matter. In this sense, they remind the viewer that processed snack foods are neither wholly “natural” nor “artificial,” but an often unhealthy combination of natural and chemically-created ingredients. However, the piece is decidedly ambivalent: it asks why something so inherently repulsive could become so addictive, even functioning as a “comfort food.” Without providing any straightforward answers, the images seem to hint that attraction and repulsion are intimate partners rather than polar opposites, that we are often drawn to things we know are bad for us.



Tobias Williams, *Ecce Cheeto*, screenprint, 2010.

In its title, the work echoes the Latin translation of Pontius Pilate's famous dictum “*Ecce homo*” (Behold, a man) as he presented a scourged Christ to a crowd ready to crucify him. In the same way, Williams' pronouncement is pregnant with irony, displaying the Cheeto in all its glory and disgust, washing his hands of any definitive judgment. The title also recalls Hieronymous Bosch and other medieval and Renaissance-era painters who depicted this scene from the Gospels, evoking a reverence and piety that belies the subject matter.

Williams is no stranger to this sense of decadence: in his previous, graphic-based work, he paid tribute to Aubrey Beardsley and Art Nouveau. In this piece, he has taken the

former artist's sense of the erotic and taboo and transposed it from the mythic and exotic to the banal, everyday world of mass food production.

If there is a common thread between these three artists, it is an engagement with the everyday, both in form and content. While they harken back to the 1960's when consumer products and popular art forms like comic strips and pulp fiction began to appear in galleries, all three artists have moved beyond the need to simply appropriate familiar objects and images in a fine art setting. Instead, they take the blurred distinction between commercial design and contemporary artforms, or between the “unique” aesthetic creation and the everyday object, as the starting point for exploring a wide range of political, aesthetic and emotional concerns. For Gerard, Bariteau and Williams, it is not a matter of accepting or rejecting popular forms, but of finding ways to incorporate them in such a way that they comment on their own function.

Artists' Biographies

Shannon Gerard works across a variety of media. She writes and draws comics, crochets soft sculptures, binds books and makes prints. Early chapters of *Unspent Love* appeared as an online serial for Top Shelf Productions (many thanks to Brett Warnock and Leigh Walton). An excerpt of this project recently won first prize in the Graphic Narrative category of This Magazine's Great Canadian Literary Hunt and appears in the Nov/Dec 2010 issue. Many residents of Shannon's Small Town loaned their faces and hearts to this work and deserve sincerest gratitude and love, especially Scott and Willy (the right conditions are imperative).

Nadine Bariteau, a Francophone artist originally from Montréal, is currently based in Toronto. She is a multi-disciplinary artist with a focus and long-standing commitment to print media and her work is primarily rooted in printmaking, video, sculpture and installation. Her recent body of work explores the subject of water and its simultaneous state of free movement within a confined and bottled environment. Bariteau obtained her BFA at Concordia University and completed her MFA at York University. She has participated in solo and group shows across Canada, the US: at the International Print Center in New York City, the Manly Art Gallery & Museum in Australia and the Novosibirsk State Art Museum in Russia. Bariteau's work has been included in private and public collections such as Foreign Affairs Canada, Ernst and Young, and the National Library of Québec. She currently teaches printmaking at York University. Nadine would like to thank her family and Open Studio for their support.

Tobias Williams is a print-based artist who lives and works in Toronto. He graduated in 2009 with a BFA in printmaking from OCAD. He has shown work in a variety of galleries around Toronto including his recent installation *Contest Winner* in the window of XPACE Cultural Centre. A common thread throughout his work is the influence of the ideas and work of the late 19th century Aesthetic Movement. His work often incorporates a variety of techniques and media, including screenprinting, light boxes, and wheat pasting. His most recent body of work examines the aesthetic ramifications of corn subsidies in North America.

Writer's Biography

Joel Elliott is a Toronto-based writer, filmmaker and video artist. He is currently finishing his MFA in Documentary Media at Ryerson University, where he is conducting a thesis on Mt. Ararat, the history of Christianity in the Near East and the Armenian Genocide. His work revolves around the genres of essay film and historical documentary, and his interests lie primarily in theology, memory and the study of violence and atrocities.