

March 5 - 28, 2009

Opening Reception: Thursday, March 5, 6pm - 9pm

## Kyle Bravo, Jenny LeBlanc & Claire Rau *Snowball*

**Kyle Bravo** and **Jenny LeBlanc** live and work in the upper 9th Ward of New Orleans. Kyle Bravo holds an MFA from University of North Carolina. He teaches visual art at Lusher Charter High School and manages the printshop at Louisiana Artworks. He is the editor of the book *Making Stuff and Doing Things: A Collection of DIY Guides to Doing Just About Everything* (Microcosm Publishing). New Orleans native Jenny LeBlanc is an artist and educator who holds degrees from the Alabama School of Fine Arts, Louisiana State University (BFA, sculpture), and Virginia Commonwealth University (MFA, sculpture). Bravo and LeBlanc are founding members of The Front, a New Orleans art collective and gallery. They have exhibited their artwork widely in the US, and also in Canada, Italy, and Japan.

In 2002 the couple founded Hot Iron Press, a printmaking studio that also serves as a hub for support and promotion of grassroots arts activities in New Orleans. Through the press, they have worked to implement and organize such projects as The Rebuild Fund, the New Orleans Bookfair, Babylon Lexicon annual book arts exhibition, and the Hot Iron Press residency program. Hot Iron Press would like to express deep gratitude to the Louisiana Cultural Economy Foundation whose support helped to make this performance possible.

**Claire Rau** was born in Sandusky, Ohio and raised in northeast Tennessee. She completed graduate work at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (2004) with the installation *Body Plunder*. She has taught printmaking and sculpture at several institutions and presently teaches at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs. She is the recipient of several awards and residencies, including the Book Arts & Printmaking Fellowship at the Scuola Internazionale di Grafica (Venice, Italy) in 2006.

Claire has exhibited in the US and internationally; upcoming exhibitions are scheduled in Kentucky, Texas and Colorado.

**Andy Fabo** is an artist, critic, curator and educator, and is currently teaching at McMaster University.

**Open Studio**, Canada's leading printmaking centre, is dedicated to the production, preservation and promotion of contemporary fine art prints.

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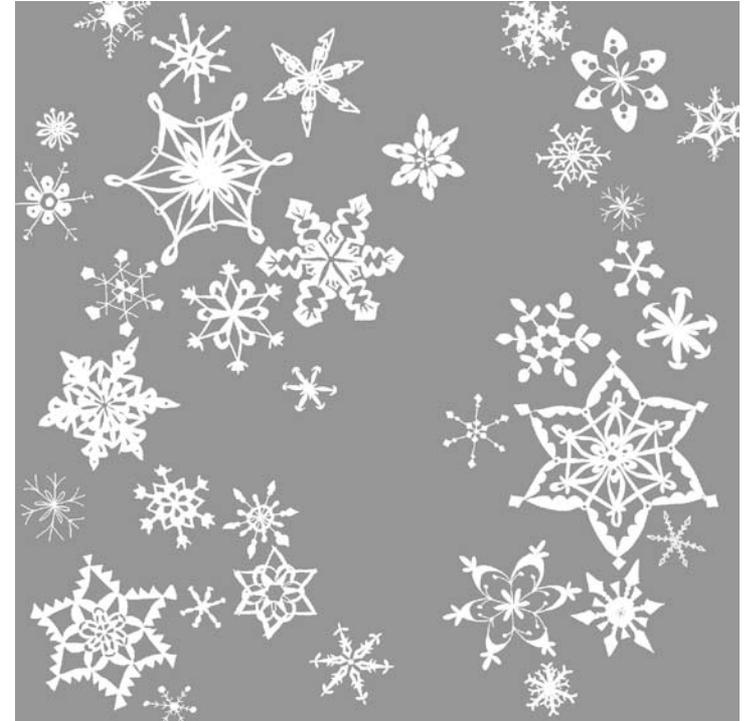
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*Snow*, digital study, 2009.



Tuesday to Saturday, noon to 5 pm

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# Performing Peril Through Print and Process

by Andy Fabo

Some may accuse the collaborating American trio, Kyle Bravo, Jenny LeBlanc and Claire Rau, of carrying coals to Newcastle (or selling ice to the Inuit) with their performance-based installation, *Snowball*. I, however, was struck by the way in which their project surprisingly addresses the very roots of Canadian performance art. I suspect this was a serendipitous coincidence and the three young artists knew nothing of the pioneering performance by Françoise Sullivan to which their work alluded. *Danse dans le neige* (1948) was a spontaneous and unaffected performance documented by Sullivan's fellow *Automatistes*—cinematically by Jean-Paul Riopelle and photographically by Maurice Perron, with only the photographs surviving today. The continuing historical importance of this work is underlined by Luis Jacob's *A Dance for Those of Us Whose Hearts Have Turned to Ice*. The video installation, presented at *Documenta XII* in Kassel, Germany in 2007, pays homage to Sullivan's radical gesture, in which she tried to escape the aesthetic categories of the time.

This may seem like a fatuous digression in relation to Bravo, LeBlanc and Rau's work but they share some of Sullivan's pioneering instincts. We have seen artists like Ana Mendieta, Massimo Guerrera or Matthew Barney using sculpture as a component of performance art and artists such as Zachary Longboy, Matt Mullican or Arnulf Rainer using drawing as an element of performance art, but it is difficult to think of any artists who have integrated printmaking into performance.

Nicolas Bourriaud, French cultural theorist and curator of Tate Britain, describes a genre of art as it was practiced by artists like Rirkrit Tiravanija, Angela Bulloch and Andrea Zittel as Relational Art: "a set of practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the entirety of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space."<sup>1</sup> Bourriaud asserts that the emphasis is shifted from the individual consumption of art to a community as an audience. The goal of Relational Art is to privilege the production of intersubjective encounters rather than the incidental art object. The *Automatistes*, with their 1948 manifesto *Le Refus Global*, presaged the Quiet Revolution—a social and political upheaval and transformation of Québec society—and they were able to tie aesthetic gestures to this crucial transformation in the minds of the Québécois. Performance is the art medium that best encompasses the fluidity of intersubjective encounters; it is hardly surprising that the *Automatistes* and subsequent generations have lionized the innovation of Sullivan's 1948 work and many generations of Québec artists have built on that legacy.

In a similar social and political crucible (post-Katrina New Orleans), Kyle Bravo and Jenny LeBlanc have increasingly attempted to launch the cumbersome machinery of printmaking into the fluid stream of Relational Art. Referring to a property insurance term indicating all the unnamed losses not specifically listed in a policy, their printmaking performance *Open Peril* (2008) openly addressed the crisis of their city. Dressed in the yellow rubberized suit of an emergency cleanup crew member, Bravo silkscreens his regenerative images of Louisiana oak trees while LeBlanc, dressed as a Southern debutante, sweeps the images from the atelier and pins them to the walls of a sculptural installation that includes fetid pools of supposed floodwater. In a printmaking performance the previous year, *Face Off*, the two satirize the production imperatives of both the art market and those that are intrinsic in the process of printmaking. The fine art multiple becomes inflated with mass production in a performance that mimics the competitive bravado of a reality TV episode.

Similarly, Claire Rau has fashioned sculptural instruments of combat and defense, which utilize a printmaking element, as a means to engage with aspects of Relationalism. With booby-trapping motion sensors she invites a reactive physical participation from her audience, who feel trapped behind silkscreened sandbag barricades.

In *Snowball*, this mischievous trio creates a burlesqued surrogate of the Great White North with crumpled prints becoming snowballs while intact prints construct snow fortresses and shelters. As Americans traveling across the now defended border of their alienated northern neighbour, they acknowledge the way the Bush administration created divisions even with their supposed allies by using the snowball fight as a metaphor for the bullying unilateralism of the past eight years.

It is instructive to note that the social networking tools of Facebook, YouTube, and the Web in general only precipitate the move towards Relationalism, as will the deepening global financial crisis. Artists like Rirkrit Tiravanija and Andrea Zittel, who took up the challenges of previous movements like Dada and Fluxus, flourished in the social, political and aesthetic interstices that came to be pigeonholed by theorists and critics as Relational Aesthetics. It is becoming apparent that the circumstances that created this wave of art activity have only deepened and artists like Claire Rau, Jenny LeBlanc and Kyle Bravo will be finding innovative means to advance this trajectory.

<sup>1</sup>Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Relational Aesthetics*. Paris: Les presses du réel, 2002. pg. 113.