

MARIO DOUCETTE

Dispersions

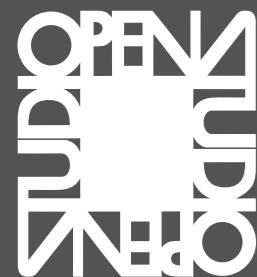
Visiting Artist Exhibition



JUNE 17 - JULY 16, 2016

Artist Talk: Friday, June 17, 6:00-7:00 pm

Opening Reception: Friday, June 17, 7:00-9:00 pm



OPEN STUDIO

Contemporary
Printmaking Centre

IMAGE: *La Dispersion des Acadiens* (after Henri Beau), 2016, etching. Printed by Laine Groeneweg under the auspices of Open Studio's Visiting Artist Residency.

Mario Doucette: *Dispersions*

By Jennifer Winter



L'assèmentement de Louis J. Robichaud, 2016, etching.

Despite the fact that “history is written by the victors” is a common and often correct statement made with regards to past events, revisionist historians have done an admirable job of making sure that the voices of the defeated are heard, understood and given their place in the historical record. What then, are historians to do when those defeated and dispersed voices are silent? When there is no written evidence from history’s “losing” sides? How does a group, such as the Acadians, have their stories shared? Historians can piece together the past and attempt to give those who have lost their voices at least some agency, but assumptions are not fact, and likelihoods do not hold the same weight as handwritten, carefully preserved “truths.” Enter then, the artist.

The artist can play a very different, but extremely important, role in the retelling and sharing of the past. Through various mediums artists can both give and diminish the agency of their subjects, inject or remove elements of reality, and by simply creating a work add to both visual cultural and the historical discourse of a topic. Artists may be less reliant on surviving evidence though, and more concerned with the visceral reaction of viewers to the version of the scene, or story, placed before them. As Rabb details in his book *The Artist and the Warrior*,

military engagement has for millennia been a popular subject for artists however, the actual accounts of a battle become almost meaningless next to the truths created and believed by the viewer as they experience a work. It matters less (to take another Acadian example, this time from fiction) that *Evangeline* was not a real girl separated from both her home and her beloved because of the possibility that it and all its connected emotions might be true.

The inclusion of fact to a richly designed piece of fiction, such as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s *Evangeline*, gives it just enough legitimacy for readers to take the content and their reactions to it seriously: How could the British separate not only a people, but such a blameless and virtuous girl from her one true love? Here, Longfellow has cemented through myth the roles of good and evil for his story’s characters. For artist Mario Doucette, complementing historical fact with visual representations of violence and upheaval produce an even stronger reaction. Who are the good guys? Instead of lulling the viewer into a nostalgic and romanticized past filled with a passive people who have actions done to them, he confronts the viewer with animated scenes of brutality and displays of resistance from those being forced from their homes. Even the good retaliate and fight for their homes and families.

Doucette’s works are violent, stark and not hopeful. It’s clear who’s winning the battle over Nova Scotia. The important thing is that the viewer sees these works, is struck by them, and



La Dispersion des Acadiens (after Henri Beau), 2016, etching.

wants to take in and try to understand the story taking place. Does telling a more detailed account of the Acadians and their resistance to the British validate the British position of military necessity against the Acadians in the early 18th century? Perhaps it does. Does it strip the Acadians completely of their perceived innocence? Again, perhaps, but it also provides them with the agency they’ve been missing for some time from historians and nostalgic story-tellers.. Here, on a gallery wall rather than in the pages of a book, the viewer is asked to witness, feel and question everything they know about one of the most important events in Canadian history.

Works Consulted

Faragher, John Mack. *A Great and Noble Scheme: The Tragic Story of the Expulsion of the French Acadians from their American Homeland*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005.

Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth. *Evangeline: a tale of Acadia*. London: George Routledge and Sons, 1878.

Jobb, Dean. *The Acadians: A People's Story of Exile and Triumph*. Mississauga: John Wiley & Sons Canada, Ltd., 2005.

Rabb, Theodore K. *The Artist and the Warrior: Military History through the Eyes of the Masters*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.

Author’s Biography

Jennifer Winter is a Paris, Ontario-based freelance historian with degrees from Wilfrid Laurier University, the University of British Columbia, and the University of Toronto. While her background is strongly rooted in Canadian and art history, she also has a passion for studying early colonial domestic architecture. She is an avid presenter for the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada, an organization that she credits with introducing her to the real beauty and history of the Annapolis Basin, Nova Scotia. When not travelling or buried deep in research, Jennifer can be found in her workshop as a miniaturist recreating scale models of 19th century furnishings and needlework.

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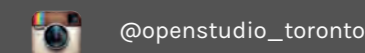
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LIZA EURICH

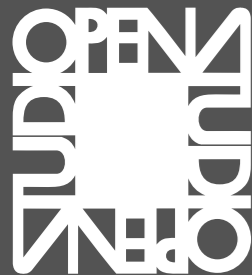
Staging

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IMAGE: *Staging* (detail), 2016, screenprint, dimensions variable. Printed by Flora Shum under the auspices of Open Studio's Visiting Artist Residency.

Liza Eurich: Staging

By Kendra Ainsworth

The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects “unfamiliar,” to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged.¹

In the case of visual literacy, it is the cliché, a pre-established image of the world that we teach learners to seek out, in lieu of extracting new images of the world through the creation of novel signs.²

It is now a near constant refrain that we live in a visual culture, that the image is king; the adage that a picture is worth a thousand words should really be adjusted for inflation. Given their import and omnipresence as sources of information, entertainment and instruments of power, we have a tendency to work under the assumption that images yield to us easily, that they are as accessible and legible as language, revealing their meaning immediately at a glance. And yet, in the context of contemporary art, public opinion would suggest that the image (as a part of an art object) remains a cipher, unreadable to those without specialized training. This dissonance is at the heart of Liza Eurich's work.

Eurich cites Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky as an influence, in particular his articulation of the idea that art makes the familiar strange, and requires the viewer to work through this strangeness through a prolonged act of looking. By only showing one image, but presenting it multiple times, Eurich alludes to the ease with which we gloss over images that confront us in day to day life—they may as well be all the same. Interestingly, for all its repetition, the image itself is perhaps the least important element of this work, bearing little of the exegetic weight of the work. Rather, it is the subject matter of the image that is percipient. Eurich's imagery often focuses on subjects/substances that are emblematic of the dichotomies brought up by this exhibition—pooling water, or the glass housing of a greenhouse. In black and white, somewhat pixelated form, they illustrate the dual qualities of water and glass: both have surfaces that can reflect what is in front of or above them and obscure what's beneath or beyond the surface, or alternately provide a clear lens through to another space. What is called to mind are the potentially antithetical characteristics of surface versus depth, embodied here in the form of the image and



Staging, 2016, screenprint, dimensions variable

art object, and how they speak to the aforementioned rift in our understanding of the visual.

We are also dissuaded from constructing a narrative or thematic understanding of the work, from associating it with the familiar, and moved instead to devote more attention to examining the image within its context

of presentation. However, these also seem to intentionally preclude access to much beyond the surface. We cannot see beneath the surface, we cannot see beyond the one image, and we are not afforded immediate access to the different modes of production of each presented object. In some cases the image is printed on tinted photo gel and then displayed in a clear mount; in others, the image is printed on clear acetate and placed in a tinted one. In some cases the image is printed in its entirety on one sheet of acetate; in others, the image is printed in sections on several sheets of acetate giving the appearance of seamlessness once layered. In all cases, the initial impression of the image may be the same, and yet our ability to distinguish between the different processes is limited.

This lack of access points towards what many viewers of contemporary art may feel upon entry to a gallery; expectations of the legibility of the image reinforced in daily life are upended, the surface of the art object is unyielding. Arts educators and museum and gallery interpreters seek to overcome the barrier to engagement with contemporary art by advocating the very process of “making strange” that Shklovsky proposes, and that Eurich's work necessitates. We have a tendency to read images in, as Shklovsky states, an “algebraic” way, seeing only their recognizable, broad characteristics, or in clichés, drawing on a social history of images and iconography in attempts to discern meaning in something that, at least in a contemporary art context, may not be effectively

“read” in the same way that one reads non-art images/objects. Arts educator Jessie Beier suggests that teaching visual literacy in the same way that we teach language, through the recognition of “clichés” would result in a stifling of the critical, creative and innovative thinking that can lead not only to the production of art but also to the critique of a culture in which the surface image is all-pervasive.

Eurich's work asks us to confront our entrenched notions of what we expect from images, and how we interact with them, calling for a questioning of whether the image is truly as accessible as our “visual culture” implies. If the images in our magazines or on our computer screens are just as worthy of, and indeed require the same degree of engagement as those in the contemporary art realm, then perhaps the distinction between the two, and the differential expectations of interactions with each, should be re-evaluated. Perhaps, we should, as W. J. T. Mitchell exhorts, ask pictures what they want, and begin a dialogue that may take us into strange waters, but that breaks through the surface that merely reflects and never reveals.

Endnotes

¹ Shklovsky, Victor. “Art as Technique.” *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*. Third Edition. Ed. David Richter. New York: Bedford/St. Martin, 2006. 778.

² Beier, Jessie. “Visual Literacy and the Untimely Transmogrification of the Problem.” *Visual Arts Research* 39.1 (2013): 44. Project MUSE. Web. 9 Apr. 2016. <<https://muse.jhu.edu/>>.

³ Shklovsky, op cit., 774-784.

⁴ Beier, op cit, 35-51.

⁵ Mitchell, W. J. T. *What do pictures want?: The lives and loves of images*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press (2005).

Author's Biography

Kendra Ainsworth is a curator, writer and interpretive planner based in Toronto. She is currently the Curator of Contemporary Art at the Art Gallery of Mississauga. She holds a Masters in Museum Studies from the University of Toronto with a focus on interpretation of contemporary art. Her practice is focused on working collaboratively with artists, providing accessible gallery experiences, and removing both intangible and tangible barriers to public engagement with contemporary art, allowing it to serve as a catalyst for community building and intellectual development. Recent projects include the exhibitions *Beyond the Pines: Homer Watson and the Contemporary Canadian Landscape* (2015), and *Be a Sport* (2015) at the Art Gallery of Mississauga.

Through the **Visiting Artist Program**, Open Studio is accessible to all professional artists, with or without printmaking experience, to explore and develop new bodies of work through print media. Each year, four artists produce their work in the Open Studio facilities followed by two-person exhibitions in the Open Studio Gallery. See openstudio.on.ca/visiting-artist-residencies.

Artists' Biographies

Mario Doucette is an Acadian artist from Moncton, NB. He is a painter, but also works with video, digital animation, performance and Super8 film. In 2004, after a residency in the French village of Brouage, he created *Histoires*, a series of works combining drawing and painting that reflects on the effects of colonialism. He has been featured in many exhibitions in several Canadian museums and galleries, notably at Toronto's ROM where he was a Sobey Art Award finalist in 2008. He recently contributed work to *Oh Canada* in 2012 (MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA), *The Painting Project* in 2013 (Galerie de l'UQAM, Montreal, QC), and *Shine a Light: Canadian Biennial* in 2014 (National Art Gallery, Ottawa, ON). He is currently working on a new series of paintings and sculptures called *Harias*. He is represented by Galerie Division (Montréal/Toronto). Mario would like to thank the New Brunswick Arts Board for their support, and would like to give special thanks to Laine Groeneweg.



Liza Eurich completed her BFA from Emily Carr University in 2010 and her MFA from Western University in 2012. She co-publishes the online project *Moire* and recently completed international residencies in the UK at Glasgow Sculpture Studios and Acme Studios. Her work has been exhibited by MKG127, Neutral Ground, Hamilton Artists Inc., Plug-In ICA, Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, the McIntosh Gallery, and the Power Plant Gallery. Liza would like to thank Flora Shum, Anna Gaby-Trotz and all of those at Open Studio, Kendra Ainsworth, MKG127, Canada Council for the Arts and Ontario Arts Council.



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