



Aleesa Cohene *Ready to Cope* 2006

doors, one can hear the rumble of all that angry earth and the din of all those questions; someone has tried to steal a book, the alarm sounds.

QUEERING AND PLUNDER

These four works on exhibition at the Dunlop Art Gallery represent recent video installations by five of this country's most provocative and accomplished producers. These pieces find connections in their unique capacity to challenge hetero-normative narratives in music, cinema and language. Through their collective crush on media, the artists remake and remix the materials they have appropriated, recontextualizing it to produce sophisticated, poetic, and counterintuitive examinations of the inter-sections of popular media and a queer unconscious. It is at these intersections that we find the artists asking us to dispense with familiar understandings and move toward a new, queer kind of knowing.

In a world where queer is a simultaneously empty and overflowing signifier, and no longer comfortably defined, these works offer us a new way of thinking about the queer self, and perhaps a new, culturally imperative, queer way. Queer in its strangeness, in its imperceptibility, and in its perversion of the knowledge project – are these pieces not, in some way, telling us it's okay (if not absolutely necessary) to not know, seeking out confusion rather than conclusion?

In *Queering Plunder*, artists boldly dispense with traditional hierarchies of knowing. Instead of drawing on reason, they privilege the emotive, opening up the meaning-making process to the visceral, the visual and the personal. In *Ready to Cope*, anxiety becomes an epistemological *raison d'être*; *Lyric* recklessly inhabits heartbreak as a cognitive imperative; *Satellite* inverts our words and curiosity; and *Impossible Landscapes* beckons us to the chasm between real and fantasy, known and unknowable. The works are rambunctious and calculated, swift and strategic. They pull the rug out from under us, dismissing the structures and systems that we have come to know and replacing them with something else entirely.

As we engage with this work, we find ourselves searching for this "something else," trying to organize the fragments – waiting for answers, combing the landscape, sifting through the evidence – and though we are seduced by the rhythm of this looking, we

come up empty-handed. It is here that we recognize that the works deliberately embrace a kind of psychic instability so that in our failure to find – that is, our inability to locate an emblematic narrative, a predetermined order, an appropriate emotion, the right words – we are strangely satisfied and, somehow, free.

And like the giddiness that threatens us on the edge of this idea, these works are irrepressible and unstoppable, summoning us toward a future where questions weigh the same as answers, confusion sits alongside truth, and scripts become unrecognizable in the face of the impulse to deconstruct.

Deirdre Logue
Guest Curator

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THE ARTISTS

• **Aleesa Cohene** is an experimental video artist and picture editor based in Toronto, Canada. Her work re-edits found media to build an emotional language through which to explore contemporary political problems. Her videos have shown in festival and gallery settings internationally including screenings at the Rotterdam International Film Festival (Netherlands), the Oberhausen Short Film Festival (Germany), MIX Brasil and the Indonesian Independent Film and Video Festival. Her 2003 video *All Right* was awarded prizes at the Impakt Media Arts Festival (Netherlands) and the Images Festival (Canada). Cohene is the In-House Editor at Charles Street Video, a media arts centre in Toronto, and teaches courses and workshops on video editing theory in diverse local educational settings.

• Born in Sydney, Australia, **Dara Gellman** is now based in Toronto and works as a video artist, curator, writer and cultural organizer. Dara is a founding member of the curatorial organization VVV, which is one of the Co-founders of the Tranz Tech Toronto International Media Art Biennial. She was the Director of the 3rd Tranz Tech Biennial, which took place in October of 2003. Exhibitions of Dara's video work include: the Sydney International Film Festival, Australia (2003), Images Festival of Independent Film and Video, Toronto (2003), Inside Out Lesbian & Gay Film & Video Festival, Toronto (2002), Brussels Lesbian and Gay Film Festival, Belgium (2001), Imaginaria Festival Internazionale del Cinema Lesbico, Italy (2001), 7th Warsaw International Media Art Biennale, Poland (1999) and Festival International de Cinema et de Video, Montreal (1999).

• **Nelson Henricks** was born in Bow Island, Alberta and is a graduate of the Alberta College of Art (1986). He moved to Montreal in 1991, where he received a BFA from Concordia University (1994). Henricks continues to live and work in Montreal, where he teaches at Concordia University, also at McGill University (2001) and at the Université du Québec à Montréal (1999). A musician, writer, curator and artist, Henricks is best known for his videotapes, which have been exhibited worldwide. A focus on his work was recently presented at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, as part of the Video Viewpoints series. For its 1998 edition, the Palermo International Videart Festival (Italy) dedicated its section "Focus" to Canadian Video, with special attention to Henricks' work. His writings have been published in *Fuse*, *Public*, *Coil*

magazines and in the anthologies *So, To Speak* (Éditions Arctes, 1999) and *Lux* (YYZ Press, 2000). Henricks co-edited an anthology of artist's video scripts entitled *By The Skin Of Their Tongues* (YYZ Press, 1997) with Steve Reinke.

• Toronto based artist **Leslie Peters** has been actively working in video, multi-channel installation, curating exhibitions and coordinating cultural events since completing her studies at the Ontario College of Art and Design in 1997. Leslie is a founding member of the curatorial collective VVV which has presented programs of video work here in Canada for TranzTech: Toronto International Video Art Biennial and internationally, in Amsterdam, (Montevideo) for the Canadian Media Art Exhibition. Exhibitions of Leslie's work include: London, UK: *Pandemonium* (1998); Ontario, National Gallery: *Fragile Electrons* (1998); Normandy, France: *Video Art Plastique* (1999-2000); Québec: *Images du Nouveau Monde* (2000); and in Germany: Hamburg Short Film Festival (2000) and at the International Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen (2001); Toronto, Power Plant: *Substitute City* (2001); Toronto, Art Gallery of Ontario: *Video Primer* ; Australia, IDFA Film Festival, Australian International Film Festival (2003), Barcelona, Spain, The Video Art Foundation S.C.P., *25 HRS* (2003); Recently Leslie was the featured Spotlight Canadian Artist at the 2004 Images Festival in Toronto where a retrospective screening of her work was shown and her installation *becoming* premiered. Last fall Leslie released limited edition DVDs of selected titles from the *400* series.

• **Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay** is a Montréal-born artist working predominantly in video, text and sound. Since 2000, his work has brought together song, self-reflexive performance and lyrics from pop music as vehicles for examining the singing voice, the untranslatability of emotions into language and the ways in which emotional expression changes shape when mediated by technology and popular culture. Ramsay's work has screened in festivals and galleries across Canada, Europe and East Asia and has won prizes at the Hamburg Short Film Festival, the Kasseler Dokumentarfilm- und Videofest and the Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen (all in Germany), the Toronto *Inside Out* Film and Video Festival as well as First Prize at the Globalica Media Arts Biennale in Wrocław, Poland. He currently divides his time between Canada and Europe.

QUEERING PLUNDER

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Cover: Aleesa Cohene *Ready to Cope* 2006



Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay *Lyric* 2004 (details)

SEPARATE, YET TOGETHER

One enters the *Queering Plunder* exhibition at the doors to one of the most beautiful libraries I have ever had the pleasure of entering. The setting sun bathes the stacks in light. Each of the bright orange, blue and white cathedral spaces is open and warm. Once inside, five bright televisions make themselves apparent on your right, in the Dunlop Art Gallery's main front window. In the distance, a monitor is mounted on the wall of the gallery's main administrative office. Moments pass, and a faint thunder begins to emanate from somewhere in the building, followed by the perplexing resonance of disco.

Discovering that the Dunlop is a gallery within a library, one immediately senses a friendly bit of push and pull between the two. They are separate, yet together, related and independent, each providing a unique context for the other. It is a brilliant idea: co-habiting institutions mutually invested in the presentation and consumption of culture, two institutions dedicated to providing an environment conducive to interpretation, to learning of those vibrant, sometimes unstable moments in and of expression; two institutions dedicated to communication. Creating new challenges for administrators, curators and artists alike, the Dunlop Art Gallery's special relationship with the Regina Public Library was extended in November 2006 to include a partnership with Regina's lesbian and gay film and video festival, *Queer City Cinema*.

In its sixth incarnation, *Queer City Cinema* dedicated itself to presenting a substantial and sophisticated collection of new experimental film and video art works from around the world. Accompanying more traditional festival programming were the four video art installations that comprise this exhibition, providing audiences with another way of

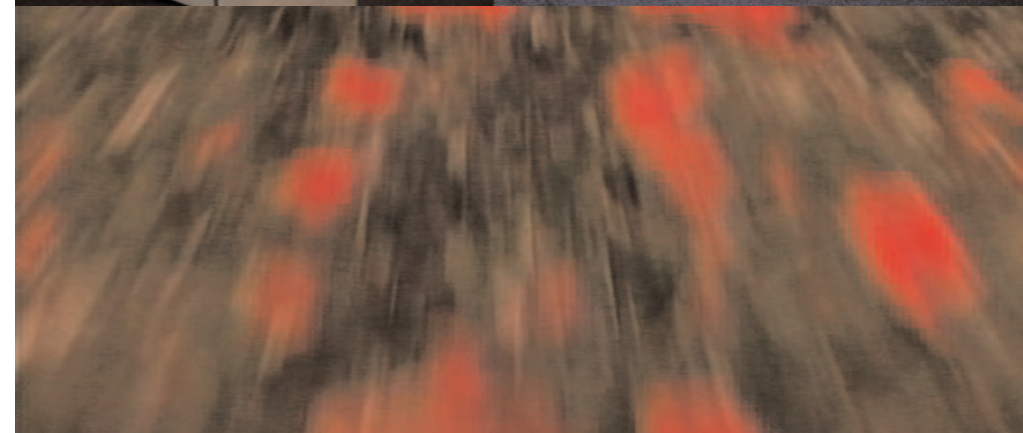
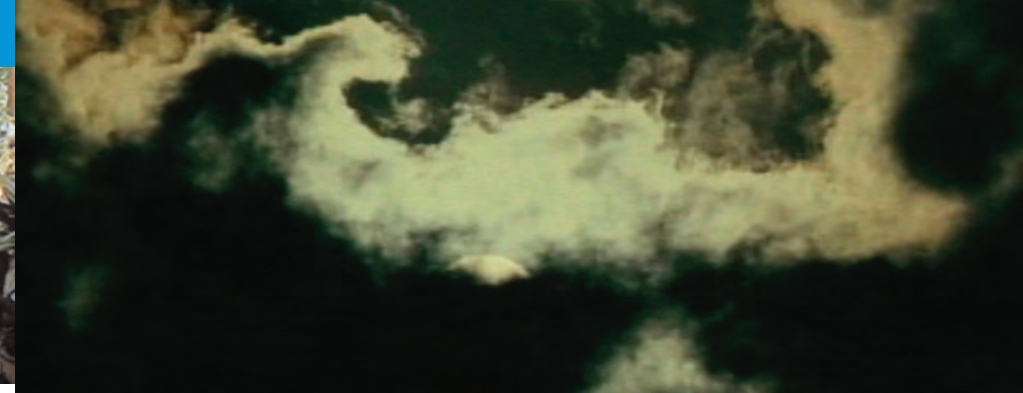
looking at queer media, content and artistic practice.

In *Queering Plunder*, there are no same-sex kisses or coming out stories. In place of these tropes, we are presented with perspectives: rich in social and political critique, these works trace a powerful queer arc that speaks to the libratory absence of the familiar. These are works situated not quite outside the realm of the queer, but not precisely within its boundaries either; indeed, these are works that redraw these lines altogether.

LOVE IS BUT A SONG I'M SINGING

Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay's *Lyric*, presented opposite the library's checkout counter, offers us the performance of an epic sung narrative, assembled from fragments of one thousand love songs. Patently familiar lyrics such as "I will love you forever" and "I would die without you" are isolated, collated and re-presented to us thematically, drawing our attention to the prosaic, if not disciplining, nature of much pop music. While *Lyric* engages us musically, it also reveals to a marked sense of human endurance, a physicality that reflects not only exhaustion from the act of marathon singing, but also the weight of consuming mass quantities of pop music and the trying nature of loving itself.

Approaching *Lyric* takes time: time to watch the performer mouthing the words to a song only he can hear; time to read the fragmented text that he has constructed; and, finally, time to pick up the headphones and listen in. Once we do, we share in the performer's manic remixing of his own innovative brand of pop. The subtitles provide



Dara Gellman and Leslie Peters *Impossible Landscapes* 2006

us with context, referencing and reflecting on madness, flight, patience and pleading – trying to stabilize an unsteady and discordant reconstruction. His iPod heartbreak is as enduring as it is potentially infinite, his performance an exquisite corpse of emotions, his *Libretto* a new poetry of loss where everything gets started but nothing is ever finished.

IRREDUCIBLE

Moving a few steps beyond *Lyric*, one encounters the "official" Dunlop Art Gallery entrance. There, a powder blue text leads us into darkness, where *Impossible Landscapes* stretches out before us. In Dara Gellman and Leslie Peters' projection, we are drawn helplessly into an irreducible image where instability has been allowed to flourish. Composed entirely of found footage and sound, *Impossible Landscapes* reveals a constantly shifting but entirely fluid panorama of idealized and exaggerated terrains. The artists manipulate contemporary cinematic images of the natural landscape to re-envision and confuse them, teasing out the tensions contained therein, including those between violence and ecstasy, fear and beauty, and – ultimately – real and imagined.

It is a rush when it begins, a high camera dropping us into a landscape both familiar and strange; speakers behind and to both sides of us surrounding us with sampled sounds that – by design – grab hold and unsettle. Both exhilarating and terrifying, this is a work of magnificent proportions where the borrowed landscapes are manipulated and organized in such a way as to reveal a not-so-quiet rebellion. An almost hysterical feeling situates itself in the stomach, feet beckoning us to run.

FREE ASSOCIATION

As we leave the sublime garden behind, curious disco can be heard calling to us. We pass through a brief reluctant mash-up of the two soundtracks, and find ourselves in a black box, in front of a white couch and a floor-to-ceiling wall-to-wall dual projection. Sharing the Dunlop's main gallery space is Nelson Henricks' *Satellite*. This piece couples found footage with a steady techno beat to trouble western societies' ongoing obsession with science, technology and the future. Pairing images pillaged from vintage educational films with common, but absurd axioms, Henricks uses a signature wit to comment on our compulsive need to "make sense of" at any cost.



Nelson Henricks *Satellite* 2004

With a dark dry humour, Henricks turns a society gone *word-crazy* on its metaphorical ear and leaves us with more questions than there could ever be answers. Accordingly, confusion sets in fast, and one's best efforts at reconciling image and text are quickly thwarted – the danceable sound track only adds to the disorder. The dual and imploding images undo themselves. Lofty and apparently logical ideas are destabilized by texts that clearly identify the author's mistrust of them. Is it really as hard to be dumb as it is to be smart? Is intelligence really insanity by consensus? Is this a time for translation, free association or abandon? Something of the familiar world feels lost forever. Flight or fight?

DON'T TOUCH ME

Once back outside the gallery proper (or is it inside the library proper?), one notices that Aleesa Cohene's *Ready to Cope* has infiltrated the space. Three monitors, each with headphones, are "found" by both gallery-goers and the library's general public: one in the Dunlop's resource centre; one in Maps and one in Periodicals.

Motivated by a resistance to Canada's recent Anti-Terrorism act, *Ready to Cope*

sharply comments on the contemporary obsession with safety and security. Stitched together from clips from horror and science fiction films, thrillers, self-help guides and motivational instruction videos, this work stages an unknown and unknowable crisis. The crisis itself is unimportant, irrelevant even; it is the moments before and after of which we must take stock; it is at these sites that the psychological implications of compulsive self-protection and chronic defensiveness take hold. It is here that a devastating, yet recognizable portrait of collective anxiety emerges.

In the Dunlop's resource centre, a woman answers a telephone with apprehension; in the library's Maps area, a stick scratches a circle in the dirt; in Periodicals, figures fall from the sky. A father speaks, "Nora, please don't cry at the dinner table [he pounds his fist], don't cry." The library's public is both curious and indifferent. Televisions are expected everywhere, and pictures and words have permission to collide, especially here.

Back at the entrance to the gallery, across from the Circulation Desk, one can see that a selection of books about video art, montage, appropriation and projection have been set out on a special shelf for our consideration. Behind the gallery's glass