



# scrapes

Unruly Embodiments in Video Art

Back to Back Theatre / Theatre of Speed

Aleesa Cohene

Jeremy Drummond

John Greyson

Deirdre Logue

Jorge Lozano

Allyson Mitchell and Christina Zeidler

Shelley Niro

Lisa Steele

Anna Tsouhlarakis

Emily Vey Duke and Cooper Battersby

Co-curated by Dr. Sarah Brophy and Dr. Janice Hladki

Jorge Lozano *On the Side*, 2006, video still, courtesy of Vtape

McMaster  
University  
MUSEUM OF ART



## Foreword

### *Scrapes: Unruly Embodiments in Video Art*

The McMaster Museum of Art (MMA) is both a public and a university-affiliated art museum. This, in association with our goal to actively contribute to the academic mission of the University AND to be unique amongst cultural institutions in the region, guides the Museum's programming decisions.

On the one hand, the Museum develops research, exhibition and interpretation projects that respond to the discourse on art in Canada. In this regard, the institution considers historical, modern and contemporary production. Projects such as that on the work of Robert Houle, Richard Fung, Leonard Baskin and Allyson Mitchell, amongst many others, reveal the breadth of that work.

On the other hand, the MMA works in collaboration with faculty at McMaster University to develop collaborative projects that bring into the realm of the art museum, faculty work that intersects with visual culture. Over the past several years, the MMA has produced the very successful *Synesthesia: Art & the Mind* in association with the Department of Psychology, Neuroscience & Behaviour; *Light Echo* with the Department of Physics and Astronomy; *Fierce: Women's Hot-Blooded Film/Video* with Theatre & Film Studies; and the *Visual Literacy Program for Medical Residents* with the Department of Family Medicine, to name only a few.

It is with great pleasure that the MMA partner with the Department of English & Cultural Studies and the Theatre & Film Studies Program on *Scrapes*. The focus of the exhibition—moving image work by artists from around the world who mobilize the body as a method of social and cultural investigation—is important and revealing work not only in the academy but also in the broader context of the contemporary art world. The launching of the exhibition to coincide with the 2010 John Douglas Taylor Conference at McMaster University—"Health, Embodiment, and Visual Culture: Engaging Publics and Pedagogies"—further reveals the prevalence of the ideas expressed here. We are pleased to be able to support and broaden the intellectual work of the conference participants through the ideas and images presented in the exhibition.

Many thanks to Professor Janice Hladki and Professor Sarah Brophy for their dedicated work on the conference and exhibition; to the artists for their engaging works of film and video; and to Wanda Vanderstoop at Vtape, Toronto and Larissa Fan at CFMDC, Toronto, for their assistance in transferring the work to presentation format.

Carol Podedworny  
Director and Chief Curator  
McMaster Museum of Art

# Scrapes

by Sarah Brophy and Janice Hladki

**scrape** *v.* to rub, to uncover, to remove a layer. *n.* to get into a scrape, to get into or make trouble.

*Scrapes* is a group exhibition of moving image culture by artists based in Canada, Australia, and the U.S. These artists mobilize the body as a method of social and cultural investigation, prompting new thinking about bodies across popular culture, everyday life, and the public sphere. The exhibition foregrounds the unruliness of particular embodiments. These corporealities contest and critique the organization of normalcy and marginalization in social life. Together, the works produce an interplay of gender, sexuality, Indigeneity, disability, and race.

*Scrapes* provides a mix of iconic and new video art, focusing on works that engage contradictions: lush and harsh visuals, gentle and extreme histories, everyday and unexpected performativities. Brought together for the first time, the works produce a potent and provocative agitation about how particular bodies scrape at the regulatory mechanisms of contemporary global culture. *Scrapes* considers how particular bodies trouble assumptions about health, wellness, and disability; community and belonging; transnationalism and citizenship; and the visual surveillance of citizens. The exhibition includes 11 works produced between 1974 and 2007. Mobilizing narrative, documentary, autobiography, video essay, video poem, animation, and experimental forms, the artists in *Scrapes*

activate bold and bizarre visual grammars such as dance moves, a transgender puppet, a clicking jaw, scarred flesh, and an AIDS activist demonstration.

*Let's Dance*, by Anna Tsouhlarakis (Navajo), is screened solo at the end of the long rectangle of the Panabaker Gallery (Program E), but its interrogations thread throughout the exhibition. The video beckons the viewer into a series of 30 dances. Filmed as a compilation of outdoor dance 'classes,' in which the artist moves her body with various cultural experts, the pedagogical structure is unmistakable, and, as spectators, we are urged to learn, to let go, to trip the light fantastic. "Let's dance," says Tsouhlarakis. She enters into the embodied spaces of the dances and demonstrates a facility for doing the moves. However, as an Indigenous woman, she is always already outside of these cultures. But who is 'other' to whom? Who appropriates whom? This video unfixes Indigenous subjectivity, comments on the stereotypical tropes used to represent multiculturalism, disrupts cultural coherency through the Indigenous body's insertions, and interrogates the constitution of 'otherness.' As Tsouhlarakis 'masters' the dances, she becomes more than student. She performs an intervention, an Indigenous knowing and presence that survives cultural contexts of colonialist dominations. *Let's*

*Dance* is also a celebration of rhythmic landscapes: the artist's pleasure in moving is evident throughout as she smiles, twists her limbs, and gyrates her hips.

Dance is also the central trope for *Theatre and Speed versus BOZ 'n' HOK* by Back to Back Theatre / Theatre of Speed. The performance group, based in Geelong, Australia, develops dance languages that trouble understandings of disability. The dancers constantly gaze at viewers, and, as disability theorist Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2009) puts it, they become powerful "starees" who shift the terms of viewer/viewed relations. This video is the first selection in a looped series of five works that also includes Jorge Lozano's *Out Side*, Allyson Mitchell and Christina Zeidler's *Unca Trans*, Shelley Niro's *The Shirt*, and John Greyson's *Shame on Abbott* (Program A). This cluster produces "bodies in commotion" (Sandahl and Auslander, 2005), thereby challenging whose bodies matter and how. *Out Side* and *BOZ 'n' HOK* interrogate the constitution of disability, suggesting that bodily life needs to be understood beyond able-bodied norms.

Demands for and visions of social justice are palpable throughout the works in Program A – and in the exhibition as a whole. Greyson's short video essay *Shame on Abbott* traces activists' demands for safe and affordable treatment for bodies at risk. Superimposed on the gathering, marching, and performing activists, words in caps assign Abbott Laboratories no "PRIDE" and urge "AIDS ACTION NOW." Corporate greed and negligence are charged with "SHAME"

for refusing to make new AIDS treatment drugs available to subjects in Thailand. The character Unca Trans, in Mitchell and Zeidler's piece of the same name, is also concerned with activism, but his story is constructed through a fantasy narrative of a just future. In this super 8 animation, a transgender puppet, sitting on a log in the countryside, is interviewed in the year 2045. Looking back at the histories of "big time social change," he links the politics of health for gender/queer/trans subjects to the triumph of Native land claims and to the achievement of a safe agrarian culture. In Lozano's *Out Side*, another single figure represents the possibility of bodies transgressing and transforming. Navigating streetscapes with a cane, this male subject is outside of able-bodied norms, and he is literally outside – yet not "other" – as he elegantly ignores traffic noises. The environment in *The Shirt*, by Shelley Niro (Mohawk), is a range of landscapes along the Grand River in southern Ontario, a location once inhabited by numerous Indigenous tribes. The camera pans slowly across a field to reveal an Aboriginal woman in a t-shirt, staring silently out to the viewer. Another "staree," this woman confronts us with the impact of colonialism, which is marked on her body through the writing on her t-shirt.

Lisa Steele's iconic video, *Birthday Suit - with scars and defects*, faces the *BOZ 'n' HOK* cluster in the exhibition space (Program B). *Birthday Suit* is recognized as a foundational work in the history of video art, and, in *Scrapes*, it functions as a touchstone for the entire exhibition. On the occasion of her 27<sup>th</sup> birthday, and in static camera close-ups on her naked

body, particularly those places injured by 'tomboy' accidents, Steele very slowly strokes her scars. These gestures of remembering – felt in and on the skin and in the oral telling – produce a diary of survival following the scar that marks a recent biopsy for breast cancer. Steele's choreographed performance highlights the body as a site of feminist memory work, in all the complexity of injury, wellness, aging, and endurance.

The episodic *Songs of Praise for the Heart Beyond Cure*, by Emily Vey Duke and Cooper Battersby, illuminates strange nature, including human and animal embodiments (Program D). As with many of the works in *Scrapes*, practices of "survival," the implications of time and history, and an awareness of mortality are predominant features in *Songs of Praise*. A young woman survives the violence of rape, creatures resist attempts to erase animal life, cities last despite high-speed change, and nature continually "comes back." In the final moment of the video, a voice repeats, "We're going to survive." The *acapella* songs throughout the video are discordant laments: poetic, eerie, philosophical, and humorous. This sound-scape – and the weird animations that recognize the vulnerability of life – combine to question animal-human and urban-wilderness relations, underscoring how unruly embodiments endure.

The second looped sequence in *Scrapes* includes Jeremy Drummond's *Spit*, Aleesa Cohene's *Abscess*, and Deirdre Logue's *Eclipse* (Program C). The works intertwine in their exploration of body intensities and outbreaks, producing a forceful relationship between the subjects

on view and the subjects viewing. In *Spit*, we feel the saliva on our faces; in *Eclipse*, we feel the jaw clench, and in *Abscess*, we feel the skin infected. Drummond's extreme close-up of a mouth jetting saliva onto the camera lens, evokes expulsion, ejaculation, transmission, and, with John Greyson's AIDS activism video in mind, the politics of health practices. *Abscess* also interrogates health care. The video consists of a soundscape of digital sounds, multiple voiceovers, and rhythmic percussion in combination with a layered mix of images of skin, hospitals, women swimming, and an abscess on a woman's breast. The sense of rupture in the construction of the video resonates with the woman's struggle to understand her body's reaction following breast reduction surgery: the woman's body did not absorb her sutures, "as is normal." In the case of Logue's work, a jaw that clicks incessantly reminds us of bodily mysteries and mishaps, and the image of Logue's face appears increasingly obscured and misshapen through harsh lighting and shadows.

Logue repeatedly asks viewers listening to her jaw noise: "Did you hear that?" The works in *Scrapes* echo this refrain: they make noise and ask questions about how unruly corporealities scrape at normative cultural constructions of embodiment.

#### References

- Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie. (2009). *Staring: How We Look*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sandahl, Carrie, & Auslander, Philip. (Eds.). (2005). *Bodies in Commotion: Disability and Performance*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

## List of Works & Floor Plan

### SHERMAN GALLERY

#### Program A

1. Back to Back Theatre. Theatre of Speed. "Theatre of Speed versus BOZ 'n' HOK." Australia. 3:45 min. 2004.
2. Jorge Lozano. "Out Side." Canada. 1:29 min. 2006. (V-Tape)
3. Allyson Mitchell and Christina Zeidler. "Unca Trans." Canada. 4:30 min. 2007. (CFMDC)
4. Shelley Niro. "The Shirt." Canada. 5:55 min. 2003. (V-Tape)
5. John Greyson. "Shame on Abbott." Canada. 1 min. 2007. (V-Tape)  
**Time:** 15:59 min; Sound: All ambient sound.

#### Program B

1. Lisa Steele. "Birthday Suit - with scars and defects." Canada. 13 min. 1974. (V-Tape)  
**Time:** 13 min; Sound: Headphones

#### Program C

1. Jeremy Drummond. "Spit." Canada. 2:27 min. 2000. (V-Tape)
2. Aleesa Cohene. "Abscess." Canada. 10:18 min. 2001. (V-Tape)
3. Deirdre Logue. "Eclipse." Canada. 4:38 min. 2005. (V-Tape)  
**Time:** 16.83 min; Sound: Headphones

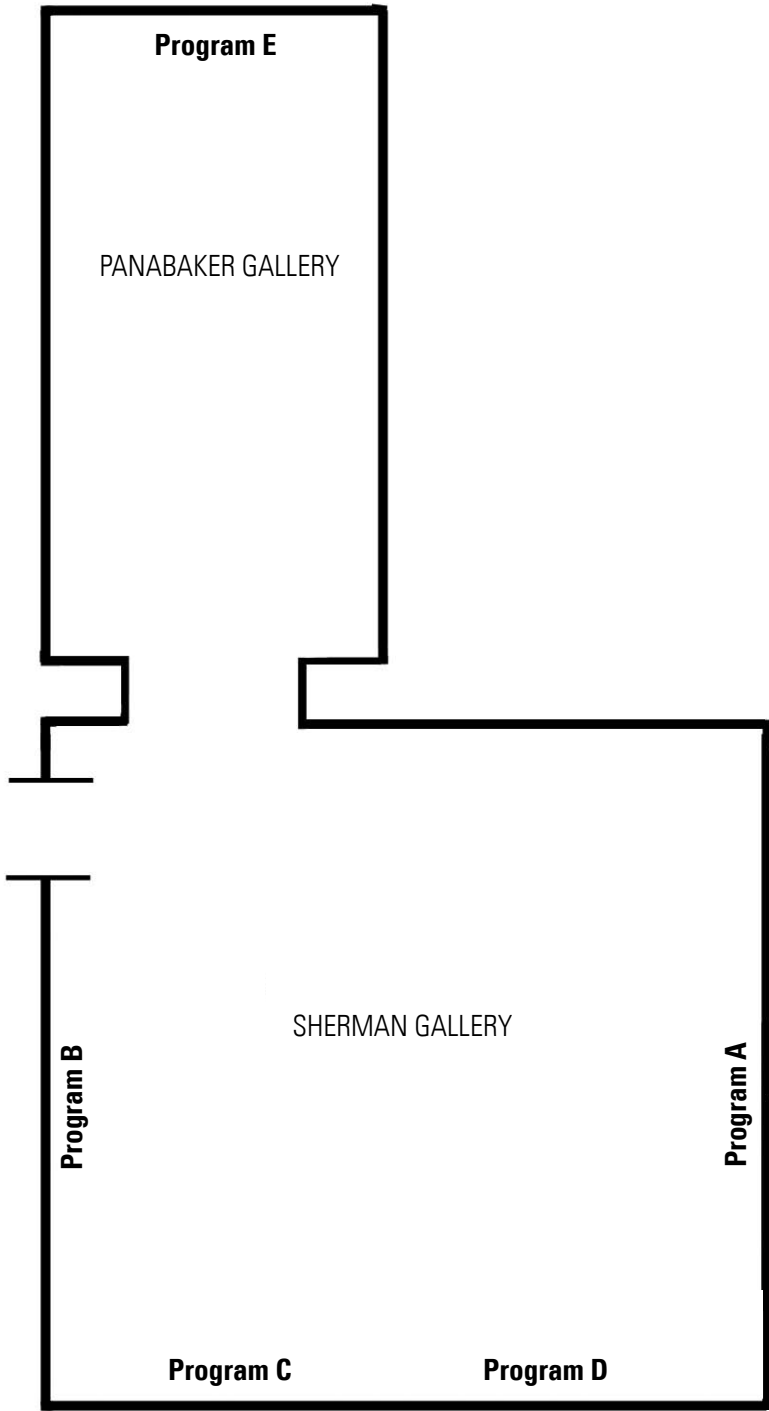
#### Program D

1. Emily Vey Duke and Cooper Battersby. "Songs of Praise for the Heart Beyond Cure." Canada. 14:40 min. 2006. (V-Tape)  
**Time:** 14:40 min; Sound: Headphones

### PANABAKER GALLERY

#### Program E

1. Anna Tsouhlarakis. "Let's Dance." USA. 14 min. 2004.  
**Time:** 14 min; Sound: Ambient





## Back to Back Theatre / Theatre of Speed

Based in Geelong, Australia, Back to Back Theatre creates new forms of contemporary theatre imagined from the minds of a unique ensemble of actors perceived to have an intellectual disability. The company's last three major works have premiered at the Melbourne International Arts Festival to critical and audience

acclaim, and then toured across Australia, Europe, the UK, and North America. An initiative founded by Back to Back Theatre, Theatre of Speed is an experimental centre for young people with intellectual disabilities in Geelong, providing an intensive work and training environment where no other exists.



## Aleesa Cohene

Vancouver-born artist Aleesa Cohene has been producing videos since 2001. Her work has been screened in festivals and galleries across Canada as well as in Brazil, Germany, Netherlands, Russia, Scandinavia, Turkey, and the United States, and has won prizes at Utrecht's Impakt Festival and Toronto's Images Festival. She has participated in artist residencies in Canada, the

Netherlands, and Denmark. She recently completed a fellowship at the Kunsthochschule für Medien (KHM) in Cologne, Germany.



## Jeremy Drummond

Jeremy Drummond is a Canadian artist based in Richmond, Virginia, and Toronto, Ontario. His work has been exhibited internationally in festivals, galleries, and museums. Consistent throughout all of his work is the relationship between people and their environment, both on an intimate level and a grand scale. Drummond's

videotapes are distributed through Montevideo (Amsterdam), Videopool (Winnipeg), Videographe (Montreal), and Vtape (Toronto). Drummond is represented by ADA Gallery and teaches in the Department of Art & Art History at the University of Richmond.





## John Greyson

John Greyson is a film/video artist whose features, shorts, and installations include *Covered* (2010), *Fig Trees* (2009), *14.3 Seconds* (2008), *Proteus* (2003), *Lilies* (1996), *Zero Patience* (1993), and *The World is Sick (sic)* (1989). A winner of the Bell Canada Video Art Award and the Toronto Arts Award for Film/Video, Greyson teaches at York University, serves on the boards

of Vtape and the Toronto Palestinian Film Festival, is a PhD candidate in the University of Toronto's Sexual Diversity program, and is active in Queers Against Israeli Apartheid.



## Deirdre Logue

Deirdre Logue's film, video and installation works are self-portraits. Her work is often located between comfort and trauma, self-liberation and self-annihilation. Solo exhibitions of her work have taken place at the Berlin International Film Festival, Oakville Galleries, YYY Artists' Outlet (Toronto), the Images Festival (Toronto)

– where she won both Best Installation and Best of the Festival – Beyond/In Western New York, Art Star (Ottawa) and *articule* (Montréal). Deirdre was a founding member of Media City in Windsor, Executive Director of the Images Festival (1995-1999), Executive Director of the Canadian Filmmakers' Distribution Centre (2001-2006), and is currently the Development Director at Vtape.



## Jorge Lozano

Jorge Lozano is a video and installation artist who has achieved national and international recognition. His fiction films have been exhibited at the Toronto International Film Festival and at the Sundance Film Festival amongst others. His experimental work has been shown at many international festivals and galleries. He has

expanded his practice to the organization of many cultural and art events: creating *aluCine*, Toronto Latin Media Festival; curating international screenings of Canadian works in Latin America; and facilitating self-representation video workshops for marginalized Latin and non-Latin youth in Colombia and Canada.



## Allyson Mitchell and Christina Zeidler

Allyson Mitchell is a maximalist artist working in sculpture, performance, installation, and film. Her practice melds feminism and pop culture to trouble representations of women and contemporary ideas about sexuality and the body. Mitchell's work has exhibited in numerous venues including the Textile Museum of Canada,

the McMaster Museum of Art, The Winnipeg Art Gallery, the Warhol Museum, the Walker Art Center, and the British Film Institute. She collaborates frequently with artist Christina Zeidler under the moniker Freeshow Seymour. Mitchell is based in Toronto, where she is an Assistant Professor in the School of Women's Studies at York University.

Christina Zeidler is a film and video artist who has created over thirty film and video titles, which have shown internationally at festivals and have appeared on television and the web. In 2003, she won the Best Canadian Media Award at the 2004 Images Film Festival. Christina is interested in combining small gauge, hand-processed, and camera-less film techniques with digital and electronic media. She founded Freeshow Seymour, a film collective, with artist Allyson Mitchell, and a retrospective of their work, "Deep Lez Film Craft," is touring North America. Christina engages in as much community activism as possible.



## Shelley Niro

Shelley Niro is a member of the Six Nations Reserve, Mohawk, Turtle Clan. Niro was born in Niagara Falls, NY in 1954. She graduated from the Ontario College of Art with honours in visual arts. She received her MFA from the University of Western Ontario. In 2001, she became an Eiteljorg recipient at the Museum of Western and Indian Arts, Indiana, Indianapolis. She has

participated in the Women in The Director's Chair Program at the Banff Centre for the Arts, 2003.



## Lisa Steele

Lisa Steele is a multidisciplinary artist primarily known for her work in performance, photography, video and photo/text work. Since 1983, she has worked exclusively in collaboration with Kim Tomczak. They have received numerous grants and awards including the Bell Canada prize for excellence in Video Art and, in 2005, a Governor General's Award for lifetime achievement in

Visual & Media Arts. Most recently, Steele and Tomczak have been exhibited in Turkey, Bulgaria, Berlin, France, and Canada. Steele is a co-founder of Vtape, a Toronto media arts centre, and is Associate Chair and Graduate Program Director of Visual Studies, University of Toronto.



## Anna Tsouhlarakis

Anna Tsouhlarakis was born in Lawrence, Kansas and graduated from high school in Taos, New Mexico. Her family hails from the Navajo Nation in New Mexico and the Greek island of Crete. In 1999, she received her B.A. from Dartmouth College and then attended Yale University where she received her M.F.A. in 2002. Her work consists of various media including sculpture,

installation, video, and performance art. She is currently living in Washington, DC.



## Emily Vey Duke and Cooper Battersby

Emily Vey Duke and Cooper Battersby have been working collaboratively since 1994. They work in printed matter, critical writing, and curation, but their focus is sculptural video installation. They are shortlisted for the 2010 Sobey Art Award.

Their work has been exhibited in galleries and at festivals in North and South America and

throughout Europe. Their video work has won prizes nationally and internationally, has been broadcast by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and Bravo, and has been collected by many university libraries, including those at Harvard and Princeton. Duke and Battersby teach at Syracuse University.

**Sarah Brophy** is Associate Professor in the Department of English and Cultural Studies at McMaster University. She is the author of *Witnessing AIDS: Writing, Testimony, and the Work of Mourning* (University of Toronto Press, 2004); writers discussed in this study include Derek Jarman, Amy Hoffman, Eric Michaels, and Jamaica Kincaid. She has published articles on intersections of sexuality, race, and gender in contemporary literature and film in venues such as *Contemporary Women's Writing*, *Teaching Life-Writing Texts*, *Literature and Medicine*, *scrutiny2*, and *PMLA*. With the support of a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada grant, Sarah Brophy is writing a book on sexualities in British fiction, film, and autobiography since 1945.

**Janice Hladki** is an Associate Professor in Theatre & Film Studies, School of the Arts. She is also affiliated with Gender Studies and Feminist Research and the Department of English and Cultural Studies. Her research engages with critical and political issues in media, art, and culture, and draws from theories and approaches in disability, gender, sexuality, Indigenous, and critical race studies. Recent publications include essays in *Feminist Media Studies*, *Atlantis*, and the *Review of Education, Pedagogy & Cultural Studies*. With the support of a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada grant, she curated the exhibition *Fierce: Women's Hot-Blooded Film and Video* at the McMaster Museum of Art and produced the exhibition book. Hladki was a member of the performance group *The Clichettes*, who are recognized for their central role in the development of feminist multidisciplinary art in North America.

Sarah Brophy and Janice Hladki are currently co-editing a collection of essays titled *Embodied Politics in Visual Autobiography*.

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