

## Platform

**Mercer Multiples Launch** Friday 11 September, 7 PM

**Artist Talk: Taku Dazai in conversation with Lise Hosein** Saturday 26 September, 4:30PM  
followed by the **Canadian Art 25th Anniversary Celebration and Launch**, 5:30PM-7:30PM

## Biographies

**Diane Borsato** is a visual artist working in performance, intervention, video, installation and photography. She has exhibited in galleries and museums across Canada and internationally including Skol (Montreal), the National Museum of Fine Arts of Quebec (Quebec), the Art Gallery of York University (Toronto), the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art (Toronto) and The Power Plant (Toronto). She is the 2008 winner of the Victor Martyn Lynch-Staunton Award from the Canada Council for the Arts. Diane Borsato is currently Assistant Professor of Interdisciplinary Studio at the University of Guelph, and lives in Toronto. [www.dianebersato.net](http://www.dianebersato.net)

**Taku Dazai** lives and works in Toronto and is a graduate of the Ontario College of Art and Design. He loves his wife and daughter and enjoys spending time in their one room cabin in the woods with their trusty dog Babbit.

**Lise Hosein** is a writer, curator, and doctoral candidate working on animals and violence in contemporary art. She currently teaches at the University of Toronto and the Ontario College of Art and Design.

**John Marriott** is a multidisciplinary artist and writer based in Toronto. His art has been seen internationally in venues including the Impakt Festival (Utrecht), the Rotterdam International Festival of Film and Video (Rotterdam), ZKM (Karlsruhe), The Power Plant (Toronto), 7a\*11d International Festival of Performance Art (Toronto) and the Toronto Sculpture Garden (Toronto). His writings have appeared in books and magazines including *Canadian Art*, *C Magazine*, *Mix Magazine* and *Prefix Photo*.



Derek Sullivan at Mercer Union working on Gareth Long's fifth iteration of *Bouvard and Pécuchet's Invented Desk for Copying*, 2007-ongoing.



Gareth Long and Derek Sullivan, illustration for the entry 'Artists' in Flaubert's *Dictionary of Received Ideas*.

## Canadian Art Gallery Hop / Canadian Art 25th Anniversary Celebration and Launch

Saturday 26 September 2009

**Artist Talk 4:30PM Launch 5:30PM-7:30PM**

At 4:30PM Mercer Union hosts a free conversation between exhibiting artist Taku Dazai and writer Lise Hosein as part of the Canadian Art Gallery Hop. Following the talk, join us together with the Canadian Art Foundation for post-Gallery Hop cocktails as we toast Canadian Art magazine's 25th anniversary! The celebration includes the launch of Canadian Art's newly redesigned fall issue, presenting the art, people, places and ideas that define Canada's visual arts. For Gallery Hop details please visit [www.canadianart.ca/galleryhop/](http://www.canadianart.ca/galleryhop/)

## *Bouvard and Pécuchet's Invented Desk for Copying*

On the 23rd of July 2009, Gareth Long and Derek Sullivan set up Long's fifth iteration of *Bouvard and Pécuchet's Invented Desk for Copying* in Mercer Union's lobby entrance. The desks are a series of sculptures pulled from the unfinished pages of Flaubert's incomplete last novel. A modest monument to bourgeois cliché, friendship, amateurism and potential; the failures of total knowledge, authority, and books as a site of learning. These desk-sculptures—in addition to being standalone art objects—are the site from which they work on their on-going project to illustrate (and re-translate) Flaubert's *Dictionary of Received Ideas*. Flaubert's Dictionary was undoubtedly to be featured—in some form—in the second half of *Bouvard and Pécuchet*. With the desks acting as a provisional sketch, or illustration, of the final act of Flaubert's two sympathetic idiot-Fausts, the effort to produce an illustrated version of this text functions as a sort of illustrated copy of these two copyists, their efforts and their futile but quixotic spirit.

## Mercer Multiples Launch

Friday 11 September 2009, 7 PM

Mercer Union is pleased to announce the formal launch of our latest series of Artists' Multiples and Projects.

Johanna Billing

*This Is How We Walk on the Moon*, 2008.

Original Film Soundtrack LP

Produced by apparent extent in collaboration with Malmö Konstall and Mercer Union

\$20

Various Artists

*Mercersound II*, 2009.

Second *Mercersound* CD compilation featuring the audio art of Cory Arcangel, Johanna Billing, Pierre Bismuth, Kenneth Goldsmith, Anitra Hamilton, Brian Joseph Davis, Christof Migone, Lee Ranaldo and Tony Romano

FREE to Members / cost of shipping

Jonathan Monk

*Meeting #56*, 2009.

Edition of 90

Two water glasses printed with a bilingual invitation to meet the artist at The Maid of the Mist Niagara Falls

Ontario Canada on August 1st, 2015 at noon

\$40 (signed and numbered edition also available)

Scott Rogers

*Knowledge is Power*, 2008.

Pink bevel eraser printed with the text 'KNOWLEDGE IS POWER'

\$4

Can't make it down to Mercer in person? For more details, please contact [elaine@mercunion.org](mailto:elaine@mercunion.org).



Diane Borsato  
*The Chinatown Foray*

Taku Dazai  
*Nature Morte*

**11 September–24 October 2009**  
Opening: Friday 11 September, 7 PM



## Mercer Union, A Centre for Contemporary Art

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Cover image: Diane Borsato, *Bouquet*, 2006-ongoing.

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Diane Borsato, *The Chinatown Foray*, 2008.

#### Front Gallery

#### Diane Borsato: *The Chinatown Foray*

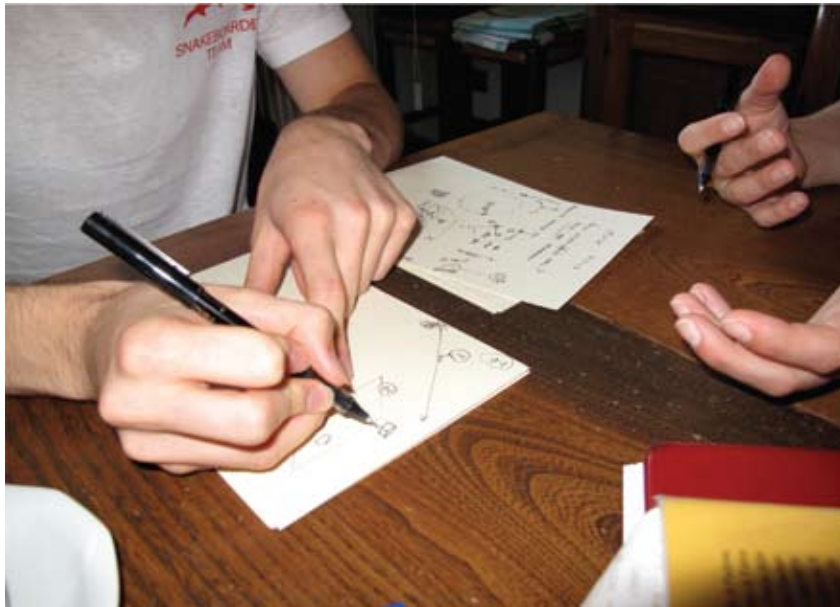
In speaking about one of her projects, Diane Borsato asks “Would it be more legitimate to reference a French Philosopher? Or is it possible that insights might be available if I just immerse myself in [a] relationship?”<sup>1</sup> This process of insightful immersion describes Borsato’s rich artistic practice, which often takes the form of after the fact accounts of her performative interventions. These actions usually take place unannounced, to be shared later via photographs and texts that sparingly explain Borsato’s actions and motivations and ration what is acknowledged and proposed as knowledge. There is a “productive gap,” notes Kim Simon, between the photos and words that prompts us to look deeper.<sup>2</sup> Borsato’s artistic choices reveal a vital interplay of experiences and contexts, which are her chosen tools of discovery.

Her documentation doubles as an evidentiary and confessional tale, reminiscent of a clandestine explorer, amateur inventor or self-styled scientist. Though assuming a position akin to the Artist-as-Researcher, Borsato doesn’t leverage academic or scientific conceits to legitimize her art. Rather, she inhabits, re-imagines and re-purposes; as in *Museum* (2006), where Borsato is depicted licking an antiquated portrait of a society lady, an approach which Daniel Baird has observed, “does not so much transgress the properties of the museum, as wholly and fundamentally ignore their premises.”<sup>3</sup> Her explorations contend that knowledge is situational, permeable and personal.

Borsato’s processes are also her findings, the raw data that she presents. In her recent projects institutionalized disciplines are used as points of departure for unassuming social subversions. For example, *The Chinatown Foray* (2008) displaces expert-oriented knowledge, opting instead for the peer contact found among amateur mycologists seeking and sharing in an urban Chinese market. Both *Italian Lessons* (2007–ongoing) and *Terrestrial/Celestial* (2009–ongoing) reject conventional pedagogical discipline, asserting instead the power to learn through social experiences and free exchanges—methods for learning that are casual, embodied and roving. These newer works exist in a counter-economy, opting out of regulation, taxation and evaluation.<sup>4</sup>

Other projects by Borsato involve a shift in tone to quietly contained transgression. In *Bouquet* (2006–ongoing) and *Snowballs* (2006), Borsato presents anti-social set pieces that brush against propriety without breaking skin: stealing flowers to give to others; sending snowballs in the mail with instructions and a hit-list. Proudly displayed, they are misdemeanours, declarations of willful disobedience and complex works of art.

Borsato’s back-catalogue includes other subliminal provocations including *Carrying my Heavy Bag* (2002), in which she taxed commercial niceties by having her luggage carried incessantly by a porter. For *A series of Minor Incidents* (2008), the artist and an accomplice<sup>5</sup> “accidentally” spilled and broke things in public locations. And, in *Touching 1000 people* (2000), the artist made uninvited contact with 1,000 strangers, echoing Vito Acconci’s performances *Following Piece* (1969) and *Proximity Piece* (1970). Both artists’ programmatic actions, filtered through gender and historical moment, border on the invasive and unnerving.



Diane Borsato, *Italian Lessons*, 2007–ongoing.

Borsato’s transgressive works are like an undercurrent running through her practice. Artistic transgression is explained as the breaking of art historical rules of genre and medium, the breaching of the social order and the violation of perceived taboos.<sup>6</sup> It is also explained as nihilistic destructiveness or the process of re-defining society.<sup>7</sup> Recall Baird’s observation that Borsato doesn’t transgress but rather ignores the premises of the museum, and compare this notion to Georges Bataille’s<sup>8</sup> and Michel Foucault’s<sup>9</sup> characterizations of transgression as the testing of societal boundaries for the purposes of knowing their limits and gaining greater self-knowledge. Foucault uses the image of a spiral to describe how transgression and limits are interdependent and entwined<sup>10</sup> whereas Michel de Certeau sees limits as active forces: “From birth to mourning after death, law ‘takes hold of’ bodies in order to make them its text. Through all sorts of initiations (rituals, at school, etc.), it transforms them into tables of law, into living tableaux of rules and customs, into actors in the drama organized by a social order.”<sup>11</sup>

Balancing between assuredness and uncertainty, what kind of immersion do Borsato’s artworks offer? If we embrace her discrete violations without ambivalence, do we miss something essential to their depth? Consider what is at work in the reprimand “Behave!” The fluid possibilities of unconscious response and deliberate action are truncated by the social dictate of self-restraint. Against intuition, to behave is to internalize, to be mindful of limits. Personal and societal boundaries are reconfigured and ignored by Borsato as she taps into experiences of conformity and dissonance that are borne of obligation and prohibition. Yet the arc of her art is hopeful and liberating as she insists on possibility, acting-out poetic autonomy.

—John Marriott

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> J. Paul Halferty, “Intimate Interventions: An Interview with Diane Borsato,” *Canadian Theatre Review* 137 (2009).

<sup>2</sup> Kim Simon, “Touching Science: Diane Borsato,” *Warm Things to Chew for the Dead* (Toronto: Gallery TPW, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Baird, “An Emergency of Passion,” *Police, Parliament and Museum* (Ottawa: Saw Gallery, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> From the Wikipedia entry “Counter-economics,” <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Counter-economics>>.

<sup>5</sup> *A Series of Minor Incidents* was a collaboration between Diane Borsato and Stacey Sproule as part of the exhibition *viñcia poética*, curated by Erika DeFreitas for Fado Performance, Xspace, Toronto, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> This is a reference within a broad discussion of transgression in Anthony Julius, *Transgressions: The Offences of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002) 23.

<sup>7</sup> Donald Kuspit, “The Ethics of Transgression: Is It Still Possible?” (lecture, Simmons College, Boston, MA, November 14, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Julius, 22.

<sup>9</sup> Michel Foucault, “A Preface to Transgression,” *The Essential Foucault: Selections from Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, ed. Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (New York: The New Press, 2003) 446.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982) 139.



Taku Dazai, *Mountain Goat Knife Fight*, 2009.

#### Back Gallery

#### Taku Dazai: *Nature Morte*

The *Dangerous Book for Boys*, if considered an authority on pre-pubescent masculinity, indicates a relationship with nature that seems much more physical than aesthetic. Its entries—drawing on a mid-twentieth century conception of childhood now trumped by increasing environmental awareness and compassion for animal life—include instructions on hunting and cooking rabbit, and tanning skin. The guide’s markers of boyhood are overtly predatory in character, and the book would indicate that the onset of puberty brings with it a vision of nature that ranks animals according to their prowess in a fistfight. I witnessed this sort of childhood debate myself: who’d win in a match between a squirrel and an otter? A bear and a moose? Could a donkey kill you and could a raccoon take on your dog? The fantasies of boys at my grade school seemed laced not only with naïve ruminations on sex, but with ornately devised, fur-laden mixed martial arts matches.

Taku Dazai’s work until *Nature Morte* takes on this innocent (if bloody) dream of the natural world and conflates it with our more mature, spooky, and threatening encounters with wildlife. He brings gleeful fascination with the anatomy and mannerisms of animals and counters it with the sort of healthy fear of them that any camper should maintain. In Dazai we see a naturalist, woodsman, hunter, Xbox fisherman and paintball enthusiast who reveals his incredible affection for animals while he sets them up to take a fall. There’s reverence in his effort to taxidermy and re-animate the bodies of dead animals, while his works celebrate a boyish pleasure in watching them take each other apart.

Dazai’s taxidermied beasts are often powered by internal motors. For example, in *Everybody’s Working for the Weekend* (1998), a bear violently shakes a stake upon which laidback campers have hung their beer cans, and in *Untitled* (2002), a dead mouse trapped in a bell jar appears to breathe when the viewer triggers a motion sensor. These movements, from minute to expansive, are unanticipated by the viewer and seem magnified by Dazai. In reality the gestures are no more monumental than those the animals would have made while alive, but now the grip of a bear or the ragged breath of a dying mouse seems magnified, crucial, and fleeting. Dazai’s works may accusingly point out that we most often ruminate on the specific oddities of animals only after we have lost them.

The animal violence in Dazai’s earlier installations was provoked by human intervention, whether part of the subject, in the case of the bear’s seduction by camping detritus, or our own movement past the piece. In *East Coast vs. West Coast* (2006), viewers on either side of a vitrine faced off using joysticks to propel an animatronic crab and lobster. The vengeful crustaceans tore each other to bits over the course of just a few weeks, destroying not only themselves but also the mechanisms that drove them while they seemed to possess the viewers with bloodlust.



Taku Dazai, *All the Things I Have Done*, 2009.

The works in *Nature Morte* are no less vicious, but now Dazai has extracted the human element and given the animals their own weapons (and agency). He replaces the natural savagery of animal attacks with harmful mechanical implements, making the fights humanly homicidal. In *Mountain Goat Knife Fight* (2009), the beasts wield blades like greasers from the 1950s who race cars and confront each other in dark alleys. An owl uses a stick to prop open the mouth of a snake and render him powerless, a classic cartoon move. Animals are the knowing perpetrators of injury, and they take pride in the results. In *All the Things I Have Done* (2009), the tiny head of a mouse is meticulously presented on a diminutive hunter’s plaque that’s been awkwardly scratched with the date of the kill; we can only imagine the cat licking his chops as he claws the engraving into his trophy, to display it in an animals-only hunter’s lodge.

Together, the pieces in *Nature Morte* offer a glimpse of the heated visions of a boy growing up in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Dazai’s installations display his fixation with video games, camping manuals, and animals gone wild. Using taxidermied bodies brings a heightened sense of realism to the scenes while suggesting encounters ripped out of the pages of comic books. As human viewers, we’re able to distinguish between the real and the staged; however, the animal world is not so jaded. The mouse head presented in *All the Things I Have Done* (2009) also commemorates a predatory attack that the artist didn’t choreograph: Dazai’s cat ripped the head off the mouse featured in the now destroyed *Untitled* (2002). Likewise, during the preparation of the exhibition *Nature Morte*, Dazai’s cats became enraged by the spectacle of an owl vs. snake battle, destroying these animals in a frenzy and leaving the remains scattered around the artist’s home. In the end, the bestial homicidal impulse Dazai offers us is uncomfortably close to reality.

—Lise Hosein