

BIOGRAPHIES

Jacqueline Hoang Nguyen (b. Montréal, CA) is a research-based artist currently based in Stockholm (SE). In 2011 she completed the Whitney Independent Study Program, having obtained her MFA and a post-graduate diploma in Critical Studies from the Malmö Art Academy, Sweden, in 2005, and a BFA from Concordia University, Montreal, in 2003. She has been awarded grants and fellowships from the Canada Council; The Banff Centre; The Swedish Arts Grants Committee's International Program for Visual Arts and the Swedish Research and Development Fellowship in the Arts. Recent solo exhibitions include; The New Gallery, Calgary (2015), MAI (Montréal, arts interculturels), Montreal (2014), Momenta Art, Brooklyn (2014); Kunstverein Braunschweig, Braunschweig, Germany (2013); VOX: Centre de l'image contemporaine, Montreal (2012) and group exhibitions such as *MTL BNL*, Montreal; A Space, Toronto (both 2014), Apexart, New York; PAVED arts, Saskatoon; Or Gallery, Vancouver (all 2013), and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia (2011). In 2011 she was commissioned by CC Seven to produce a site-specific sound piece for The Woodland Cemetery, a Unesco World Heritage site in Stockholm.

Krista Belle Stewart's work engages the complexities of intention and interpretation made possible by archival material. Her work approaches mediation and storytelling to unfold the interplay between personal and institutional history. Stewart's recent exhibition *Motion and Moment Always* at the Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver (2015) marked the first solo exhibition of her work and the culmination of fall 2014 residencies at the Nisga'a Museum and Western Front. She has exhibited in group shows including; Artspeak, Vancouver (2014); Western Front, Vancouver (2014); and Esker Foundation, Calgary (2013). Stewart holds a BFA from Emily Carr University and is currently an MFA candidate at Bard College. She is a member of the Upper Nicola Band of the Okanagan Nation, and lives and works in Vancouver and Brooklyn.

Gabrielle Moser is a writer, educator and curator based in Toronto. She regularly contributes to *Artforum.com*, and her writing has appeared in venues including *Art in America*, *ARTnews*, *Fillip*, *Photography & Culture* and the *Journal of Visual Culture*. She has curated exhibitions for Access Gallery (Vancouver); Gallery TPW, Xpace and Vtape (Toronto). Gabby holds a PhD in art history and visual culture from York University and teaches at OCAD University.

Georgina Jackson is the Director of Exhibitions & Publications at Mercer Union, a centre for contemporary art.



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Cover image: Krista Belle Stewart, *Seraphine: Her Own Story Told By Seraphine Ned*, digital video still, September 17, 1967.
All images courtesy the artists.

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Walter Scott, excerpt from *Wendy for SSENSE* (2014)

SPACE: Walter Scott
8 April – 20 July 2015

Mercer Union has commissioned artist Walter Scott for the third billboard project at the corner of St Clarens Avenue and Bloor Street West.

Walter Scott is an interdisciplinary artist working in writing, illustration, performance and sculpture. His ongoing comic book series, *Wendy*, follows the fictional narrative of a young woman living in an urban centre, whose dreams of contemporary art stardom are perpetually derailed. Recent exhibitions include 8-11, Toronto, Macaulay and Co. Fine Art, Vancouver (both 2015) and Western Front, Vancouver (2014). In 2014, he was Artist-in-Residence at the Koganecho Bazaar in Yokohama, Japan.

SAVE THE DATE

Wednesday 13 May 2015

STELLAR LIVING 2015

Join us for Stellar Living 2015, Mercer Union's biannual fundraising auction. Canadian and international artists have generously contributed unique works of art to be sold in support of Mercer Union's programming and exhibitions in 2015-2016. Works will be on view at Mercer Union starting Thursday 30 April leading up to the auction night Wednesday 13 May.

Check www.mercerunion.org for preview and catalogue information in early April.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Challenge for Change and a new society:
A discussion after *Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle*
Saturday 14 March 2015, 2-5PM

Join us on Saturday 14 March for a discussion on the history of the CFC/NS program and to consider film as a media of social transformation with Brenda Longfellow (York University), Scott McKenzie (Queen's University), Jacqueline Hoang Nguyen, Krista Belle Stewart and Ezra Winton (Cinema Política). For full details, visit www.mercerunion.org



FORUM: Suhail Malik and Nick Srnicek
What Can Art Do for Post-Capitalism?
Tuesday 24 March 2015, 7PM

A discussion on 'Left Accelerationism' and the political potentials of contemporary art.

Suhail Malik is 2012-15 Visiting Faculty at CCS Bard, New York, and Programme Co-Director of the MFA Fine Art, Goldsmiths, London, where he holds a Readership in Critical Studies. Malik writes on political economy, theory, and art's axioms. His book *On the Necessity of Art's Exit From Contemporary Art* is forthcoming from Urbanomic (2015).

Nick Srnicek is a PhD graduate in International Relations from the London School of Economics. He is the author of *Postcapitalist Technologies* (2016), *Inventing the Future* (2015, with Alex Williams), and editor of *The Speculative Turn* (2011, with Levi Bryant and Graham Harman).

FORUM: Aisha Sasha John and Jacob Wren
Why Do We Do Things?
Wednesday 22 April 2015, 7PM

In both art and in life, why do we do the things we do? As Aisha wrote to Jacob: what might it mean to be wholesomely, hungrily ambitious – ambitious for life? And how might this connect to the multiple identities and self-questionings we often call art.

Jacob Wren makes literature, performances and exhibitions. His books include: *Unrehearsed Beauty* (1998), *Families Are Formed Through Copulation* (Pedlar Press 2007), *Revenge Fantasies of the Politically Dispossessed* (2010). Most recently, his book *Polyamorous Love Song* (2014) was a finalist for the 2013 Fence Modern Prize in Prose and one of *The Globe and Mail's* 100 best books of 2014. Wren is co-artistic director of Montreal-based interdisciplinary group PME-ART.

Aisha Sasha John is a poet and dance artist. Her publications include *THOU* (2014) and *The Shining Material* (2011). *VOLUNTEER*, John's solo, improvised dance show, premiered at the 36th Rhubarb Festival in February 2015. In 2014, she was one of four Canadian poets to participate in Princeton University's "A Rhythm Party" and was a UNESCO-Aschberg Laureate Artist in 2013. John lives and works in Toronto.

FORUM is generously supported by the Hal Jackman Foundation



Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle: Documents in Participatory Democracy

A project by Jacqueline Hoang Nguyen

Krista Belle Stewart
Seraphine, Seraphine

13 March – 25 April 2015
Artist Talk Friday 13 March 2015, 7PM
Opening reception to follow



Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle: Documents in Participatory Democracy front gallery
A project by Jacqueline Hoang Nguyen

Krista Belle Stewart back gallery
Seraphine, Seraphine

Mercer Union and the 28th Images Festival are delighted to present *Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle: Documents in Participatory Democracy*, a project by Jacqueline Hoang Nguyen, and *Seraphine, Seraphine* by Krista Belle Stewart.

Between 1967 and 1980 the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) spearheaded a social activist documentary initiative placing film skills into the hands of the people to tackle poverty, environmental, first nations and women's issues. Government bureaucrats, documentary filmmakers, community activists and citizens defined a participatory model of filmmaking by putting the media into the 'hands of the people.' Positioning the potential of a new public voice, film was asserted as the medium of social transformation. Artist Jacqueline Hoang Nguyen has excavated the archives of the NFB, re-presenting the seminal *Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle* (CFC/SN) program in five selected programs displayed within the gallery. Nguyen re-inserts this utopian project into the present, employing the archive as a toolbox for the future.

Echoing this excavation of the past in her work, Krista Belle Stewart juxtaposes two images; a docu-drama shown on CBC in 1967 portraying the first Aboriginal Public Health Nurse in British Columbia, with excerpts from a personal testimony for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission held in Vancouver in 2013. This two-part video installation weaves between past and present but the subject is the same, the artist's mother Seraphine Stewart. The disjuncture between the scripted façade of the docu-drama and emotional tales of daily rituals and childhood family trauma in her mother's testimony, creates a space to explore the gaps between image, subject, voice, the personal and the political.

We would like to acknowledge the National Film Board of Canada for producing and distributing the CFC/SN program.

We present both exhibitions in collaboration with the Images Festival, April 9 – April 18, 2015. For more information, visit www.imagesfestival.com.



Jacqueline Hoang Nguyen, *Slide* (2012), light box: pigmented inkjet on front-printed backlit film.

Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle: Documents in Participatory Democracy
A project by Jacqueline Hoang Nguyen

An interview between Jacqueline Hoang Nguyen and Georgina Jackson

GJ: Your earlier research and exhibition project *Space Fiction & the Archives* (2012) gathered a series of events; 1967's centenary of Canada's Confederation, Expo '67 in Montreal, Pierre Trudeau's White Paper on Indian Policy and the building of the world's first UFO landing pad in the small community of St. Paul in Alberta "to welcome everybody from this earth, and also extraterrestrial beings, if there are any." What is your interest in this moment?

JHN: The sixties was a period of great turmoil, including the Cold War, but also of great change prompted by the civil right movements and the dawn of the space age with technological advancements. More importantly, the beginning of a modern and global awareness was at its emergence. Addressing the United Nations General Assembly in 1965, the United States ambassador Adlai Stevenson compared the Earth to a solitary spaceship in an attempt to awaken forms of global consciousness and environmental responsibility. He said, "We travel together, passengers on a little spaceship, dependent on its vulnerable reserves of air and soil; all committed for our safety to its security and peace; preserved from annihilation only by the care, the work, and I will say, the love we give our fragile craft. We cannot maintain it half fortunate, half miserable, half confident, half despairing, half slave to the ancient enemies of man half free in a liberation of resources undreamed of until this day. No craft, no crew can travel with such vast contradictions. On their resolution depends the survival of us all."¹ This evocation of a "One World" philosophy, with its political implications, awakened a sense of planetary awareness. However, how this "One World" has been imagined and how it manifest itself are central in my work.

The focus in *Space Fiction & the Archives*, coupling science-fiction and identity politics, revolves around the intersection of the notion of hospitality, diversity, and the implementation of Canada's radical immigration policy, known as the point-based system. Here, the UFO landing pad functions as a conceptual vessel for addressing issues around the ideological formation of multiculturalism and the concept alien as understood in its broader sense. My family history in Canada has only been possible thanks to the late 1960s liberal politics initiated by Lester Pearson and pursued by Trudeau, while the promises of a liberal and multicultural society were laid out.

Artist Mary Kelly's use of psychoanalysis and political theory helps me to locate my personal history at the junction of the intersecting histories laid out above. Kelly calls the impetus of revisiting the past by many young artists today as a desire to locate the political primal scene. As she outlines, "I would describe this [...] as a form of intuitive knowledge forged from words, gestures or silences of familiar interactions and decoded as parental desire. Insofar as it concerns the mystery of conception in the causal and historical sense, I have come to call this psychic disposition as the political primal scene."²

GJ: It was the research initiated for *Space Fiction & the Archives* (2012) that led to your discovery of the *Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle* (CFC/SN) program which took place between 1967 and 1980. Why were you so interested by in this program?

JHN: I became fascinated by the CFC/SN film program when I stumbled upon the film *PowWow at Duck Lake* (1967) while conducting research in the archives of the National Film Board of Canada. An audio excerpt of this film was subsequently used in my own film *1967: A People Kind of Place* (2012). I further researched the CFC/SN film program and discovered that the methodologies used for making the documentaries were incredibly original for their time. I was struck by the visual treatment of the image and its storytelling forms. The films' rawness appealed me; they challenged the traditional way of making documentary films, contrarily to the too-often heard authoritarian male voice-over, but instead, the main protagonists expressed structural injustices in a heartfelt way, while the filmmakers were reflecting upon their own processes of documentary making.

GJ: What is the potential of imaginative re-readings of history? How does the CFC/SN project realised at VOX: Centre d'image contemporaine in Montreal last year and here at Mercer Union relate to this concept?

JHN: History is used in my work in accordance with Walter Benjamin's assertion that every story about the past is more importantly a story about the present, suggesting that memory functions less as an accurate tool for exploring the past and much more as an exercise in re-interpretation. So, for me, this mise-en-scène opens up an imaginary space in which a critical questioning of canonical narratives and their edification operates. Art critic and co-founder of the magazine *Text Zur Kunst*, Isabelle Graw, argues that research means the construction of a reality in which imaginary problems, as problems of the imaginary, can serve as models subject to experimental treatment. I see the film series I organized *Challenge for Change/Société Nouvelle: Documents in Participatory Democracy* more as an open sketchbook of my work. The project takes almost the shape of a study on form, content and context.

¹ Adlai E. Stevenson, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, last major speech to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, Geneva, Switzerland on July 9, 1965. In *Adlai Stevenson of the United Nations*, edited by Roland, Albert, Richard Wilson and Michael Rahill. 1965. Manila, Free Asia Press, p. 224.

² Kelly, Mary. 2010. "On Fidelity: Art, Politics, Passion and Event." In *Feminism Is Still Our Name: Seven Essays on Historiography and Curatorial Practices*, edited by Hedlin Hayden, Malin, and J. Sjöholm Skrubbe. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, p.1.

Krista Belle Stewart
Seraphine, Seraphine

Seraphine: Her Own Story by Gabrielle Moser

Krista Belle Stewart's two-channel video installation, *Seraphine: Her Own Story* (2014), uses found film sources to present alternating accounts of the life of the artist's mother, Seraphine Stewart, to masterfully activate the affective textures of two modes of storytelling. In the first channel, a black and white documentary chronicles episodes from Seraphine's life as a nursing student in Victoria, BC. In the other, a closely cropped colour video records an older Seraphine's testimony for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), recounting her childhood experiences in the Kamloops Indian Residential School. From the outset, distinguishing which is the "real" or more truthful account of Seraphine's life is complicated. The 1967 documentary at first seems an invention of the artist: a painstaking remake of the kinds of documentaries produced by the National Film Board to inform and educate the public. Shot in grainy black and white, it features sweeping panoramas showing Seraphine on her home territory in Douglas Lake, juxtaposed with reenactments of her working with classmates and patients, and a series of painfully awkward dates with a man in Vancouver, all accompanied by an incongruous jazz soundtrack. In fact, it is in an unaltered version of a docu-drama produced by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) that chronicled Seraphine's life before, during and shortly after her training as a nurse (later becoming British Columbia's first Aboriginal Public Health Nurse).

While the CBC film dramatizes Seraphine's story as a classic coming-of-age tale about an individual struggling to find acceptance and self-worth in a new environment, her TRC testimony reveals the complex network of actors that supported the residential school system: from the state government and Catholic church, to the students' own parents, some of whom registered their children in residential schools out of desperation for not being able to care for them (themselves victims of earlier rounds of residential schooling). Oral history projects like the TRC, which centre on the reparative possibilities of public testimony, carry with them a promise of catharsis, both for the subject and the listener. The aesthetics of the 2013 TRC video reflect this expectation. Gone are the theatrics of the CBC documentary, and in its place is the unrelenting gaze of a single camera, its subject framed by a still image of a waterfall—one assumes for its calming or therapeutic qualities—awkwardly dropped into the background.



Krista Belle Stewart, *Seraphine: Her Own Story Told By Seraphine Stewart*, digital video, September 20, 2013. Film courtesy of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) File number: 2011522

By placing these two accounts of Seraphine's life side by side, Stewart's installation asks what it is we want and expect from these kinds of filmic narratives. On the one hand, they offer a much-needed corrective to Canada's self-image as a multicultural society, reminding us of the cultures that have been erased (sometimes quite literally) in contemporary understandings of citizenship and belonging.¹ Yet they also offer a tremendous amount of spectatorial pleasure. Watching the younger Seraphine quietly put a pushy and disingenuous white classmate in her place, or masterfully navigate an overbearing date, feel like small moments of dissent: a refusal to follow CBC's script of how things went and who was in control. And, while it is painful to listen to the modern-day Seraphine's account of being separated from her brother upon arrival at the residential school in Kamloops, of being made into a number—72—rather than a name, and of her deep sadness when the fancy new school clothes her mother bought were taken from her, there are also moments of levity in her testimony. She talks warmly of relying on her siblings to take care of one another as children, of her husband and the life they now live together, of her relationship to Douglas Lake, of her education and her work as a nurse. I imagine Stewart watching these two versions of her mother and recognizing her in both, despite the hokey reenactments and jazz music, and the distracting waterfall backdrop. I wonder if she feels that peculiar form of nostalgia so many of us have for the stories our parents tell about a time before we were born: events we cannot possibly remember because we did not experience them, but that feel familiar nonetheless. These intergenerational affects take on added resonance in the context of the residential school system, where the TRC's public oral history project is just beginning to register the long-lasting effects on survivors and their families.

As curator Jonah Gray asserts, Stewart's juxtaposition of her mother's two narratives does not seek to reconcile the two accounts.² Nor does it ever try to "correct" the story told by her 1967 source material with the context provided by her mother's 2013 testimony. There is no attempt to rescue the "real story" of the Seraphine of the CBC documentary through the testimony of the Seraphine at the TRC. Both are her mother's own story. To hold the two in tension reveals both the pleasures, and difficulties, at stake in our efforts to recognize one another's place in the world.

¹ It is important to note that the year of the CBC documentary, 1967, also marked the opening up of Canada's immigration laws to a greater number of countries, heralding the shift to policies of multiculturalism that stay with us to this day.

² Jonah Gray, curatorial essay for *Where Does It Hurt?* at Artspeak, June 7–July 26, 2014.