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1 August, 2011

Proposal to Grunt Gallery, Vancouver for an exhibition in 2012

Saik'uz: Tracing Stoney Creek
concept:
This installation combines 24 photographs, that were made on an old cell phone with limited accuracy and that are often 'sketchy' and painterly, with a series of audio recordings of telephone conversations in both the Carrier language and English. The conversations are both language lessons for Carrier and bilingual discussions of aspects of the community portrayed in the photographs: the village of Saik'uz or Stoney Creek which is south of Vanderhoof BC and about 150 kilometres south-west of Prince George. Excerpts of the recorded conversations will be attached to the walls near relevant photographs. We explore and at times challenge notions of loss of accuracy both in terms of disintegration of photographic imagery and through the shift from use of a language for day-to-day purposes to ceremony and poetry. This essay on Sai'kuz traces the disintegration of the photographic imagery, especially the decline in the currency of large-scaled realistic depiction and presentation (huge photographic prints that dominated photographic conversations in the 1990s and early 2000s) and the rise of a culture of digital snap-shots coupled with the fading and 're-use' of indigenous languages and local dialects as new forms of cultural (re)production. In other words, when a language is not used by a community on a day-to-day basis, and when it becomes increasingly ceremonial, the capability to transmit information, feelings, and metaphors shifts from a highly accurate, big photograph to that more like a sketchy (but sometimes beautiful and powerful) cell-phone snapshot. And both the bits of language and little photograph files are at least partly salvageable and relevant in the context of globalizing culture.

sites with further documentation:
A PDF file with this proposal along set of colour images has been filed at the following URL:

media:
a. cellphone photographs: 4 very large prints (1 x 1.5 metres) with another 20 relatively small prints (10 x 15 cm)
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b. 2 channel audio in the Carrier and English languages discussing and creating narratives about the photographs as soundscapes throughout the Grunt exhibition space

c. text mounted on walls in Carrier and English

d. possible performances of contemporary Carrier poetry and song combined with dance organized by Susie Antoine

e. on-line documentation of the project posted at one of Ingram's sites such as www.gordonbrentingram.ca/saikuz (which does not yet exist)

theoretical engagement:

Saik'uz: Tracing Stoney Creek revisits, challenges and then reworks notions of documentaries of aboriginal communities and ethnographies. Visually, we focus on fragments of narratives that are quite different from those associated with earlier forms of photorealism. Focused on combining two media: photography and recorded speech, this project is comprised of three explorations:

1. coupling the continued loss of fluency of one indigenous language (the Saik'uz dialect of Carrier, an Athabaskan language in north-central BC along with ways to assert that language through contemporary culture) and the recent shift away from highly accurate, photo-realistic imagery towards small-file, digital photographs (that are evocative of sketches and paintings).

2. revisiting the parallel and intersecting roles of language (spoken and written) in photographic imagery – especially after the primacy of photo-conceptualism. In particular, the exceptional amount of information in big-print, high-detail photographs, often generated as part of photo-conceptualism, sometimes functioned to obscure the role of language in cognition and the experiencing of a reproduced image. No manner how precise (or fuzzy) is a particular photographic image, its reading is always linking to experiences of particular language – with assertion of local, aboriginal languages acts of cultural resistance; and

3. challenging the dominant iconography of aboriginal adjection (The Reserve) and asserting a Reserve Aesthetic as some aspects of these places are quite beautiful. Next to crack houses and penitentiaries, Indian Reserves are considered some of the most hellish places in the iconography Canada's dominant media. This heavily cultivated aesthetic
of abjection conflated with despair often functions to obscure and divert attention from successful and often creative forms of resistance and community building. So while these communities may be relatively poor, in terms of cash income, Indian Reserve communities can increasingly provide new models for community and self-government especially for the more remote parts of Canada.

**background on Saik'uz and Stoney Creek:**

**politics, language & contemporary culture**

Saik'uz, which is also called Stoney Creek, has a particularly historic place in late 20\textsuperscript{th} Century Canada. For years one of the poorest and most under-developed aboriginal communities in BC, Saik'uz was one of the first native communities in Canada to challenge the RCMP around abuse and deaths in detention and to set up community-based institutions to support the local language, the Saik'uz dialect of Carrier. One of the community leaders to rebuilt the community, Mary John, may one day be remembered as a kind of Nelson Mandela-type figure in the decolonization of north-central BC. Mary John was the subject of two books, from two decades back, *Stoney Creek Woman* and *Judgement At Stoney Creek*, copies of which are still unavailable in the Vanderhoof area because of the portrayal of the area's violent, apartheid-like conditions that extended into the 1980s.

Today, Stoney Creek is a highly organized and functional community that, as education levels have increased and social marginalization of aboriginals have declined, has been losing population as people move off-reserve for better jobs and opportunities. Older kinds of activities and associated skills such as horse-training and guiding are also in decline. Similarly, the landscape vernaculars are changing from traditional shacks to decaying track homes to new, and sometimes more creative forms of contemporary architecture. But after a quarter of a century of efforts to protect the Carrier language, fewer and fewer people are speaking it on a regular basis.

**practices linking the visual & audio recordings**

The core of the audio work, and link to the photographs, will be a series of telephone conversations, set on intercom, between Susie Antoine and both Julian Castle and Gordon Brent Ingram. After working with us for two weeks, Susie is intent on teaching us Saik'uz Carrier. Ingram will send Antoine photographs and over the telephone Antoine will comment on the
Saik’uz: Tracing Stoney Creek

images and teach Carrier words, phrases, and sentences – with fragments of narratives and 'stories' sometimes emerging. Castle will edit the conversations into a series of audio streams that could be played in a cycle in sometimes two streams.

availability of work & possible installation schedule:
The work would be available for installation within 4 months of being requested and preferably in March of 2012 or after.

gallery equipment & additional funding
1. a computer and a good audio system to play one and, if the equipment were available, two audio tracks
2. Performances of contemporary Carrier dancing would require the funding of a grant proposal or perhaps partnering with a local group with lines of funding for specifically supporting contemporary treatments of aboriginal culture such as the UBC Museum of Anthropology.

biographies
Rosemary (Susan) Antoine grew up at Stoney Creek and has taught and advised on Carrier language, both translation and teaching, for over two decades. She has also been an active dancer since the 1970s – increasingly involved with contemporary treatments of traditional dancing, singing, and storytelling. 'Susie' is active in a number of activist and cultural projects promoting both the Carrier language and related social justice issues in the region.

Julian Castle is an archivist of zines and contemporary comics who has also been involved with several visual and audio projects. The focus of his work has been on characters and narratives where characteristics of humans and animals are combined.

Gordon Brent Ingram has been producing work combining photographic images with text and some kind of site-based intervention for nearly three decades. Brent was born and raised on southern Vancouver Island with a mother who was Métis and a father who spoke Chinook in an extended multiethnic family that was often engaged with the Tsartlip First Nation. With scholarships from the BC Cultural Fund, Brent completed a BFA in Photography from the San Francisco Art Institute and a PhD in
Saik'uz: Tracing Stoney Creek

Environmental Planning and Design, extending to site-based and public art, from the University of California, Berkeley. His work has been included in group shows in San Francisco, New York (including at Storefront Art and Architecture), Vancouver, and Kamloops and he has had solo exhibitions in London UK, Victoria, and Prince George. This is his first proposal for an exhibit at Grunt Gallery. More information on Ingram's vitae in contemporary art and photographic essays is posted at www.gordonbrentingram.ca/photobased.
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