

AN INVITATION TO AN INFILTRATION

FIA BACKSTRÖM, LUCY CLOUT, HADLEY+MAXWELL,
JONATHAN MIDDLETON, DEXTER SINISTER, HOLLY WARD,
AND JORDAN WOLFSON

CURATED BY ERIC FREDERICKSEN
JANUARY 22 TO FEBRUARY 28, 2010

The venue declines to hold still for its scheduled intervention. Or, through a frenzy of overbookings (perhaps under stress, in confusion, a curator asked for too much, and said yes to everything?) too many interventions have been scheduled for the space. The cube will not stay white, and the art objects will not hold still, and it is difficult to détourner when everything and everyone is already turning. —————

Forty years after Vancouver artists Iain and Ingrid Baxter's *N.E. Thing Co. Building Structure* duplicated the 2 x 6 inch wall supports of Toronto's Carmen Lamanna Gallery inside the gallery space itself, the artist's intervention has matured as a genre of artistic creation. Andrea Fraser writes "Nearly 40 years after their first appearance, the practices now associated with 'Institutional Critique' have for many come to seem, well, institutionalized."¹ This exhibition attempts to unsettle settled understandings of these forms by use of an institutional form that would seem alien to the intervention: the group show. —————

In 1996 Fraser criticized the competitive structure of group exhibitions of artists: "Every public juxtaposition of individual artistic positions on panels and in shows which invites viewers to compare, contrast and judge artists against each other reinscribes artists and works in this competitive structure, reducing them at the same time—regardless of intended effects—to their formal or strategic differences."² *An Invitation to An Infiltration* takes that critique as a model, making explicit the competition inherent to group exhibitions.³ Instead of attempting to solve the problem, the exhibition is designed to exacerbate and examine it. In part the exhibition questions Fraser's critique of competition as inherently reductive, posing competition as a productive state of engagement. —————

The exhibition is scheduled during the 2010 Winter Olympics, which is no coincidence. The Vancouver Olympic Organizing Committee (VANOC) is a major source of funding for the exhibition, and its logo will appear on all promotional materials related to the exhibition. The paradox inherent in the Olympics, which apotheosize both competition and friendship, will play out within the institution of the Contemporary Art Gallery during the exhibition. More directly, several artists will explicitly address the Olympics via its symbolism, its expressed ideals, and its effects on Vancouver and its citizens. Holly Ward reads the Olympics as an act of appropriation of the city, which is facing budget cuts in human services and culture alike. Her project will use the exhibition as "a platform to voice resistance, dissent and critique." —————

The display windows at the CAG will be lined with a new wallpaper designed by Dexter Sinister (David Reinfurt and Stuart Bailey) for the exhibition. An allover pattern of linked rings, the design derives from hatching, a medieval system for representing heraldic colors (e.g. argent or gules) as patterns in blackline drawings. The new color represented, bronzé, is created by mixing the five colors of the Olympic rings. As the gallery's display windows turn the corner to face an alley, the representation will be replaced by a wall painted in the new color. By the entrance to the gallery will stand an empty pedestal in marble. A minimal monolithic form, this work by Hadley+Maxwell represents the base of a Zane, a figure of Zeus erected by a penitent athlete caught cheating in the ancient Olympics. An expression of contrition, this Zane stands as an open, unspecified, and incomplete apology.— In front of the reception desk, visitors to the gallery will find a suspended grey plank of mdf at eye level between them and the desk attendant. This work by Lucy Clout prevents eye contact or, when ducked under, places the viewer uncomfortably close to the attendant—this gesture of mediation either repels the viewer or brings attendant and viewer closer together. —————

Dexter Sinister have designed a series of useful objects for the gallery spaces, built by the gallery technician in Douglas fir. A pair of lecterns, a sandwich board, a simple, and empty, bookshelf, and other pieces begin as blank implements to be put to use, and thus more firmly defined, over the course of the exhibition. Nearby, a piece also in Douglas fir, in the form of a pole vault beam by Hadley+Maxwell, attempts to fit into the panoply (and into the gallery itself, which is too short to accommodate it upright). Blurring authorship and dissolving identity through role-playing and appropriation, Hadley+Maxwell's masquerade will continue with a private performance during the run of the show. Recorded on video, the performance will collapse the collaborative couple into a single figure, who will stake a private claim on the other works in the show. —————

In one of the galleries, Jordan Wolfson's video *Con Leche* is presented in a formal screening environment, separated from the rest of the show. Denying the curatorial attempt to force juxtapositions within this group, Wolfson's video addresses the show's theme through its content rather than its formal engagement. The video shows an army of animated Diet Coke bottles marching across derelict American cityscapes. Filled with milk, and walking on bare human feet, these bottles are complex

and absurd symbols. Over these scenes, a female voiceover, audibly directed by the artist, reads found texts. Mostly in the first person, these fragments range across topics: advertising, self-defense, reincarnation, physical therapy. Forces of dissolution, negation, and mutation buffet these assertions of unitary identity. —————

Performances and conversations will occur over the course of the exhibition, sometimes alter-ing the show through action. Lucy Clout's opening night performance will address audience engagement, though Clout herself will stand in for both performer and viewer. Jordan Wolfson plans a performance that will incorporate this very text, and Jonathan Middleton will perform minor, and sometimes invisible interventions on the show's title, the office supplies of gallery staff, the wall text, and the CAG's budget, to which he will add a small sum of money as a restricted donation, to be spent on drinks in the event of the gallery's permanent closure. Fia Backström will organize an event scheduled right before the men's Olympics hockey semi-finals, at the end of this exhibition. A game theorist and a hockey coach will discuss tactics, from their respective perspectives, including infamous Cold War political showdowns and legendary international hockey tournaments. These performances comment on the structure and aims of the exhibition, and also alter the exhibition, joining it in the form of recordings and transcripts, or leaving souvenirs in the gallery's public and private spaces. —————

Throughout these projects, conflicts over space, installation issues, curatorial interference, and artistic strategies will be publicly reported via memos, posted broadsheets, videos, and blog entries. Beginning with the empty rooms of the CAG, the exhibition will develop stages or backdrops for its activities, as the artists, curator, and institutional staff begin to develop the exhibition. The materials generated in this process will be collected as the exhibition's final record. Beginning as a curatorial stunt, the exhibition becomes more complex as the artists negotiate the terms of their participation, navigate between competition and collaboration, respond to or resist the requests made of them by the curator and gallery. As institutional critique becomes institutionalized, this exhibition attempts to discover what problems have been papered over. To find out what is at stake, or to discover if anything is at stake. To raise the stakes. To create an artificial situation and see how the participants react. To air those reactions publicly. A reality show. —————

Eric Fredericksen

- 1 Andrea Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique." In John C. Welchman, ed., *Institutional Critique and After*. Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2006.
- 2 Andrea Fraser, "Services, A Working Group Exhibition." In Beatrice von Bismarck, Diethelm Stoller, and Ulf Wuggenig, eds., *Games, Fights, Collaborations: Art and Culture Studies in the Nineties*. Luneberg: Kunstraum der Universität, 1996. Archived at <http://home.att.net/~artarchives/fraserservice2.html>
- 3 The title of the exhibition is borrowed from the lyrics of "Message Received" by Unwound, from the 1996 LP *Repetition* (Olympia: Kill Rock Stars).

IMAGE CAPTION

Dexter Sinister
Bronzé, 2010
Heraldic wallpaper pattern

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

PERFORMANCE	ARTIST TALK
by Lucy Clout at the opening reception	by Dexter Sinister
Thursday, January 21, 7:30 pm	Emily Carr University, room 301
PANEL DISCUSSION	Thursday, January 28, 7:00 pm
with Lucy Clout, Hadley+Maxwell, Jonathan Middleton,	GAME-SET-MATCH
Dexter Sinister, Holly Ward, and Jordan Wolfson	by Fia Backström: A conversation between a
moderated	game theorist and
by Eric Fredericksen	a hockey strategist moderated by Eric
	Fredricksen

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