



**Foreword by Shirley Madill**

**Senior Curator, Art Gallery of Hamilton**

Public art is no longer the domain of the bronze memorial sculpture of years ago. Nor is it the large-scale abstract sculptures commonly seen situated in front of corporate buildings. Public exhibitions of art and the irresolution of “what constitutes a work of art” often go hand in hand. A large portion of the public does not frequent galleries or museums. They are either cautious about or indifferent to contemporary art in public spaces and the interests of contemporary artists. This indifference characterizes a limited exposure to art and misinformation in that regard. From a critical perspective, it may also reflect that the public may be overwhelmed by or mired in urban experience and an ongoing struggle to just get through the day.

In the 1980s, an explosion of new forms of public art appeared in North America street art: guerrilla theatre, video projections, page art, billboards, protest actions and demonstrations, oral histories, environmental art, posters, murals, paintings and installation works. These radically changed the face of contemporary public art. In the 1990s, public art became more activist and communitarian extending many of the expressions of public art from the decade before. Today, many public-spirited art critiques in the public

space, through approach and intent, explore the subject of the public in the public domain. New genres of artist's public works that offer more collaborative efforts on the part of the community are coming to the fore.

Recently, artists working in the new public address have offered a wide range of human concerns that the public can identify with - from toxic waste, environmental concerns or cultural representation. Often these artists may undergo a tremendous amount of research into the area they are interested in, its history, use or its character. The exhibition, **Centrifugal** is a public art project that seriously addresses the environmental impact and function of a busy urban environment on the individual. Curated specifically for the City of Hamilton and installed in parking lots, the works in the exhibition offer strategic connections with the rapid movement of traffic in and out of the city. Downtown Hamilton is a place of one-way streets. Commuters in their cars all converge at peak hours of the day in and out of the parking lots. Guest curator Eileen Sommerman has brought together a dynamic group of artists from the region of Hamilton-Wentworth and Toronto who together have produced site-specific projects in the parking lots. Sommerman has presented a provocative exhibition that presents a unique and diverse approach to art in public spaces. The project confirms that public exhibitions of art serve a variety of functions and offer a host of benefits for all associated parties, including participants and the public. The public format

challenges artists to enrich the daily lives of city inhabitants within the framework surrounding art as free expression, in a way that is compatible with their integrity as contemporary artists.

The AGH is very proud and pleased to host this exhibition and on behalf of the Gallery, I would like to thank Eileen Sommerman for her conception of and organization of **Centrifugal**. Her insight and dedication to the project is to be commended. I would also like to thank the artists – Kim Adams, Kelly Mark, machyderm, Alan Flint, Adrian Blackwell and Gwen MacGregor for their participation, especially at such short notice. Appreciation is also extended to the parking lot managers and attendants for their patience, cooperation and assistance. Without their participation, this project would not have been possible. The support of the sponsors who generously donated material and funds for the project is gratefully acknowledged. Thank you to the staff and program team at the Art Gallery of Hamilton, particularly Alison Faulknor, Exhibition and Events Program Co-ordinator for her acute attention to every detail in the organization of the exhibition and Greg Dawe, Chief Preparator for his care in transport and installation.



## Walk This Way

by Eileen Sommerman, Project Curator

According to Nietzsche, everything that happens has happened before and is destined to happen again, preceded and followed by exactly the same events every time.

That is, if you make no attempt to resist.

Apparently our will to routine is cosmic, but our need for rupture is human nature. The continuous orbit of our daily lives begs to be tripped up, even if, and perhaps because, it will inevitably regulate itself; quantum theory states that a balance of forces is maintained until it is upset, after which a new balance is established. But even if we can depend on a restorative balance, there is no way to predict its tenor or where we will find ourselves. (During the panel discussion on the day of the opening of this exhibition, someone asked about the desired result of the installations, and how to measure their effect. Gwen MacGregor's response was revelatory: she suggested that art may be one of the few places left where cause and effect are not predetermined, and that part of the motivation, and surely the commitment, comes from this uncertainty or unknowability.)

Originally this exhibition came about in response to the way Hamilton moves people — swiftly and away from the centre. The city has a pattern of one-way streets that quickly shuffles motorists outward toward the periphery, as though the city itself is a mapping of routine. (When I think of routine as an image, I always picture a circular pattern that continues ceaselessly, numbingly.) This was clever and strategic urban planning when it was put in place, when industry thrived there at the edges, because the design propelled the city toward the workplace. But now the streets are a palimpsest of Hamilton's vital industrial

past and the centrifugal force is tough to counter. The city's once vacuous centre, now somewhere in the process of regeneration, is encircled by fantastic tombstones.

The movement is persistent, impressive and onerous. The parking lots, at last, are places of stasis, mostly dead or negative space formed by the backsides of spectacular buildings. Hidden there (like the things that one would place behind their back) are the things we are generally loath to display, things that are meant to be kept from view, essential but not especially pretty things: power sources, water tanks, wires and other banal mechanical stuff. They are some of the city's most textured spaces, possessing a crude sort of beauty that is attractive expressly because it is free of facade.

Since parking lots are 'facadeless' spaces — concerned with utility, not with esthetics — no one pays much attention. Introducing art there is a way of acknowledging the overlooked spaces by highlighting them as 'places', in a city where they have an important representative function: as still spaces in a swift current. *Centrifugal* realized as its starting point the cyclical and repetitive movement enforced by the streets in downtown Hamilton, and encouraged a resistance to it. The exhibition was motivated, broadly, by a desire to sidestep the groove of orbit, if only for a moment, not necessarily with something cataclysmic, but through a shift in focus.

Inviting artists to make site-specific work is challenging, exciting and risky. You take a leap of faith, hoping their work will in fact translate as an application of their sensibility, an extension of their practice. For the artists it can be constricting — working within a 'place' — but it also presents an opportunity, to expand ideas, method, audience and so on. In some ways it is a collaborative process, effectively creating a tag team: I contribute the formal and conceptual context, and then offer it to the artists to run with, to interpret freely, critically, even playfully. The artists

'make' content. They were given as much latitude as their project fee allowed.

*Free Parking* was very Kelly Mark. It was smart play: a combination of the artist's quick and incisive wit, and a sense of place and economy. Mark thought of the exhibition as an offering to the public and made a work that explicitly realized that. Based loosely on the board game Monopoly, she offered free parking to various people each day for the duration of the exhibition — a gesture, an invitation, an outstretched hand to the community — calibrated by her total project budget. The lot was the board, the public were the players, the Art Gallery of Hamilton was the bank. Mark identified the piece simply and subtly, with a small sign fixed to a giant wall (painted with the familiar free parking symbol from the board game). The attendant in the booth used his own judgment and whimsy to decide who, each day, would receive the small but unexpected gifts of free parking. The chosen ones walked away with a stamped stub showing the artist's signature and that familiar free parking retro car. Most people were delighted.

The booth that offered free parking was one of the sites fitted with Kim Adams' *Toque (glo-hut)*: a massive orange plastic beehive (8x8 ft) perched atop a platform. An odd looking fixture, serving no structural purpose, with no apparent utility — a cupola on a parking hut. The juxtaposition was awkward, but no more outrageous than building a quasi-domestic structure — with curtains and other trappings of home — for the parking attendant, so Adams thought. (There were originally two works in the exhibition, but the other, a blue one, had to be taken down because drivers were colliding with the steel legs that supported it.)

It was amusing to watch people collect under Adams' 'hut', which played off Mark's work, emerging as a crown on complicity. The free parkers were delighted, but also curious, some even suspicious and momentarily guilty.

At night the huts glowed. The transformation was quite spectacular: the structures went from dubious to dazzling, shining like beacons as the city darkened and emptied. At night they transcended their conceptual motivations. At night they became signposts, really visual magnets.

Alan Flint's illuminated sign board, *Power (the family as a cultural corporation)* was installed on the roof of a building overlooking this same parking lot. The work, a 7x10 ft digital light box, projected an image of a white aluminum-clad suburban house — Flint's family home — imprinted with the text from the title. Installing the work above our heads, Flint purposefully placed his humble home, and his exclamation, in a lofty position. He was acknowledging the centrality of family and home as a cultural 'place', bringing it from the disenfranchised periphery to the important centre. He is conscious of the inversions that come to pass as we mature, become independent and get power. Here Flint has established a new order, his own inversion, a resistance to the current that enforces what is and is not important over time, and determines the sources of our inspiration.

Around the corner on Hughson Street, Gwen MacGregor's *Up* introduced a lyrical hiccup into people's passage. Her installation transformed the parking lot, a non-place, into a spectacular place. The lot starts at the street and recesses into a cavern, with an exceptional and precarious leaning smokestack as centrepiece. It's hedged in by the backside of the Lister Block (MacGregor's installation took us on a fantastic tour through the recently abandoned mid-century 'mall'). Across the street is Hamilton's central hydro station, the hum from the hydro building serving as MacGregor's metronome. She dropped two yellow plumb lines from the top of the Lister Block to highlight the lean of the smokestack. Then she built a small, covered platform around the stack, approached by a short staircase, for musician and composer Martin Arnold to play his hurdy gurdy. On a couple of mornings each week Arnold would appear there, on a low chair, magically

playing his compositions on the curious instrument that he had tuned to the pitch of the hum from the hydro station across the way. The sound, like a wail, carried right out to the street, and nearly everyone who parked or passed fell out of step, if only slightly. MacGregor created an allusive echo there. It was a quiet and deeply resonant work that may ironically have been felt as much after it was gone as when it was there.

On Rebecca Street, works by machyderm inc. and Adrian Blackwell faced one another from opposite sides of the street. machyderm is the collaboration of artists Chris MacNamara and Dermot Wilson. Their work is characteristically wry, at times wacky and flip, always oblique and ambitious. For *Dead Country (and Western Singer)* they reanimated a signboard on the side of a building. With an overhead projector fitted with a motor, machyderm created what amounted to an electronic flip book. After dark, continuously, for hours, a cycle of images projected 'back' onto the sign told the story of a 'real' fictive Western singer: crooning, swooning and then croaking. It was hokey and nostalgic. Salvaged sign letters from somewhere else were applied to the sign box, spelling "Dead Land", which perfectly described this corner of the city and the site in particular: a patch of land formed by the happenstance of staggered buildings. It was a curious thing to find there, in the usually chilly dark space, and even more curious to be there among other people. On a number of occasions I saw people gathered under the work, trying to pin it down, which was not easy to do: it teetered between hack, inside joke and site-specific art. machyderm was ever-conscious of the context, particularly the obsolescence there, which was echoed in the klunky hardware and not-so-slick installation. In content and appearance the work was like a resurrection — not a total invigorated rebirth, but a momentary, half-witted, coming alive, a second thought, motivated by tentative desire.

On the other side of the street was Blackwell's *How to open a car like a book*. With a sense of wonder and a steady hand, Blackwell

centrifugal

used a reciprocating hand-saw to slice a car in half. He turned the front seats to face the back ones, hinged one side of the car together and pulled the other side apart, forming an entrance, a wedge (like an open book) which read like an invitation: welcome! He offered a place to hide and a place to hang. Blackwell used the word 'piazza'. He eschewed car hierarchy — driver, passenger, people in the back seat— and reformed the social conditions there. Generous, industrious and clever. But perhaps what gave the work much of its charge was the indignant act (unsettling and awesome) of taking on this authoritarian object: the bold gesture made by playing with 'the car', expanding it beyond utility and status symbol. We have an inflated respect for cars, it seems, because they take us places, and free us, they are heavy, powerful and expensive. Blackwell's project was a wholesome act of rebellion. It expanded the real car, but deflated our notions of it.

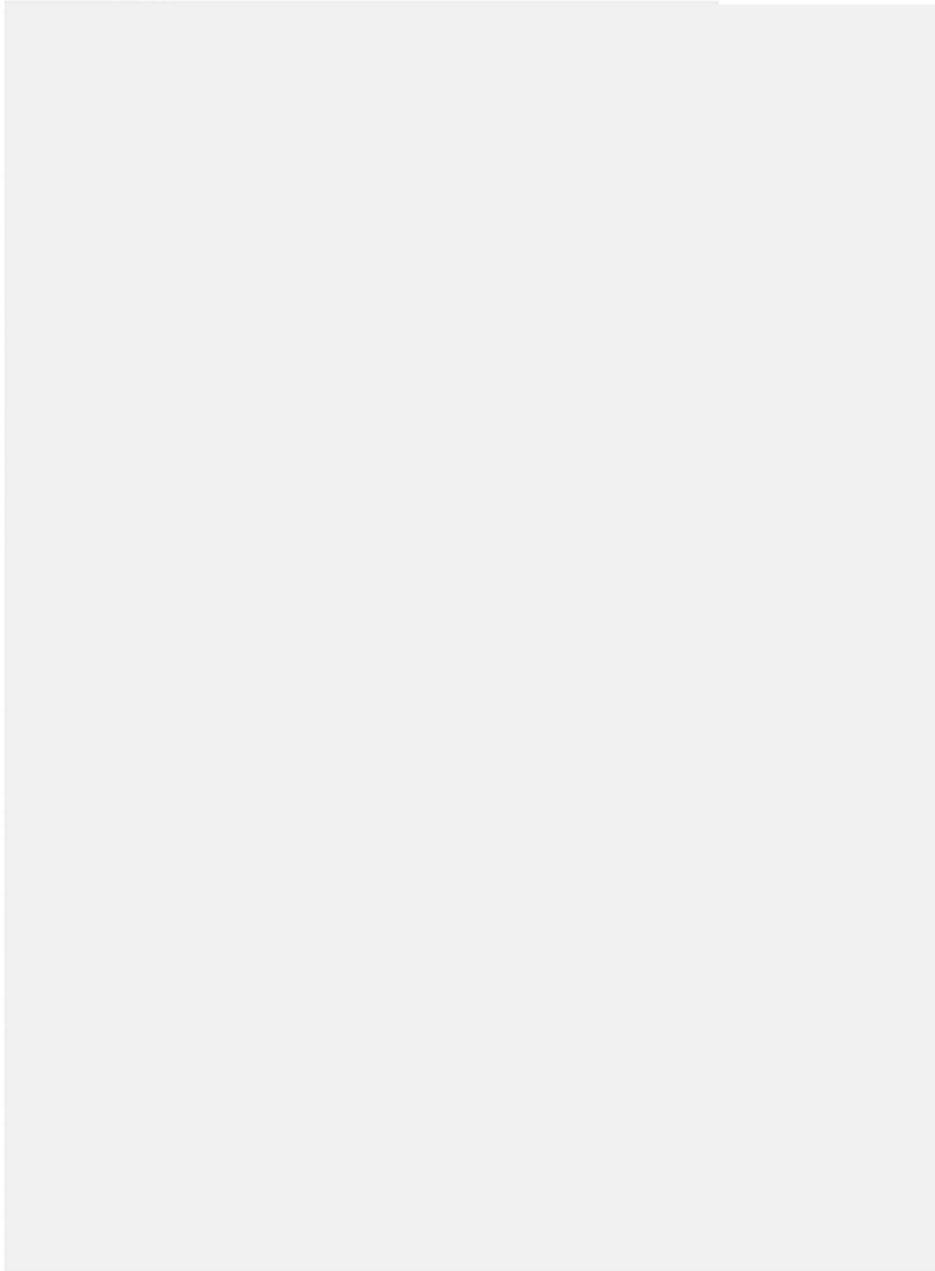
After cutting it in half, he tinkered for days on the car, cleaning it, filing the edges, setting it at just the right angle. The effort was upstaged, however, by the work's nonchalance: ultimately, it was still a car parked in a parking lot. It was astonishing that so many people were wowed by it, sat in it, signed it, even destroyed parts of it (one day it was found turned on its head), and that some people walked by without noticing.

*Centrifugal* may have made a new impression by highlighting different places in the city, and encouraging an alternative direction. Perhaps the palimpsest shows something slightly different now.

Walk This Way

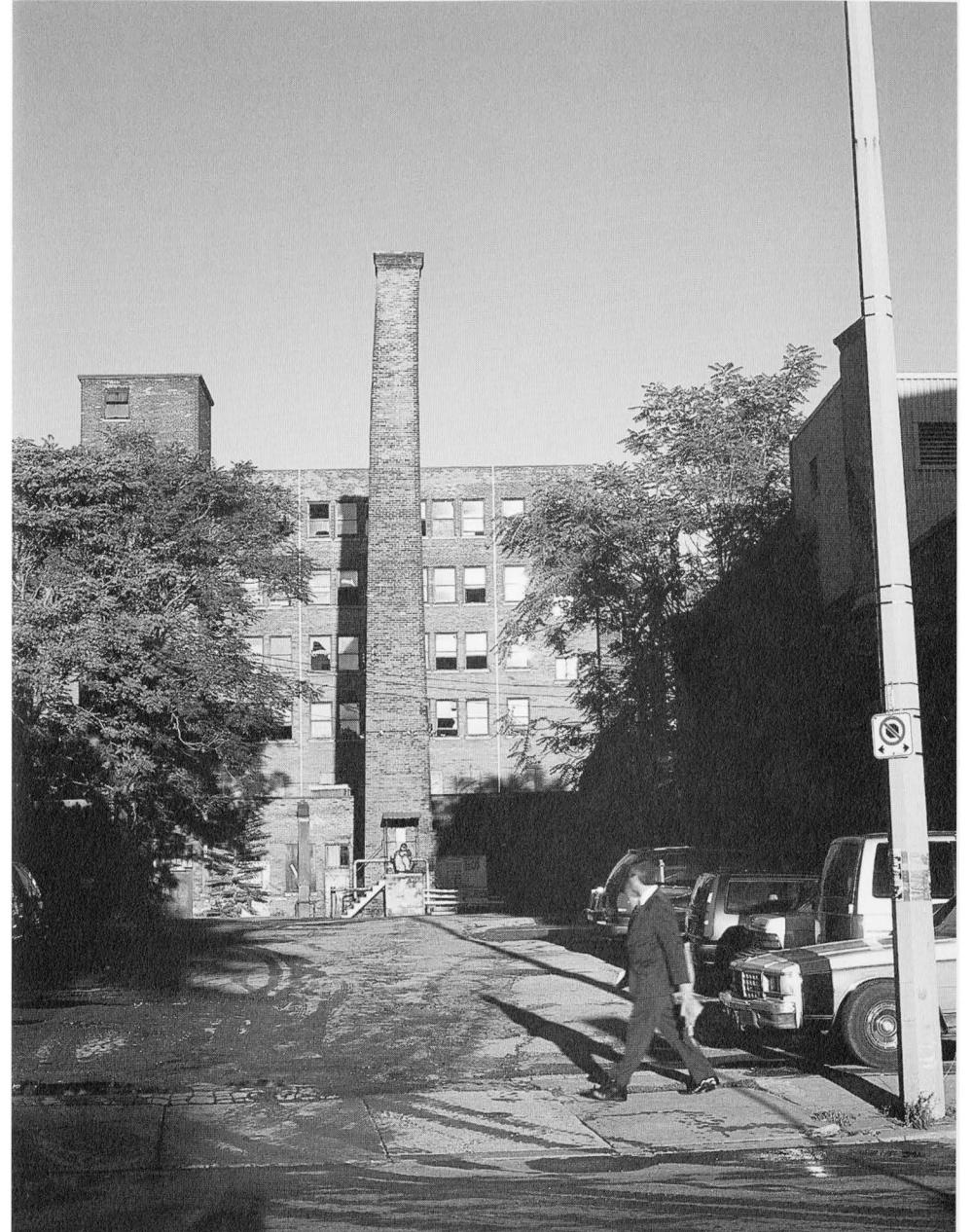


centrifugal



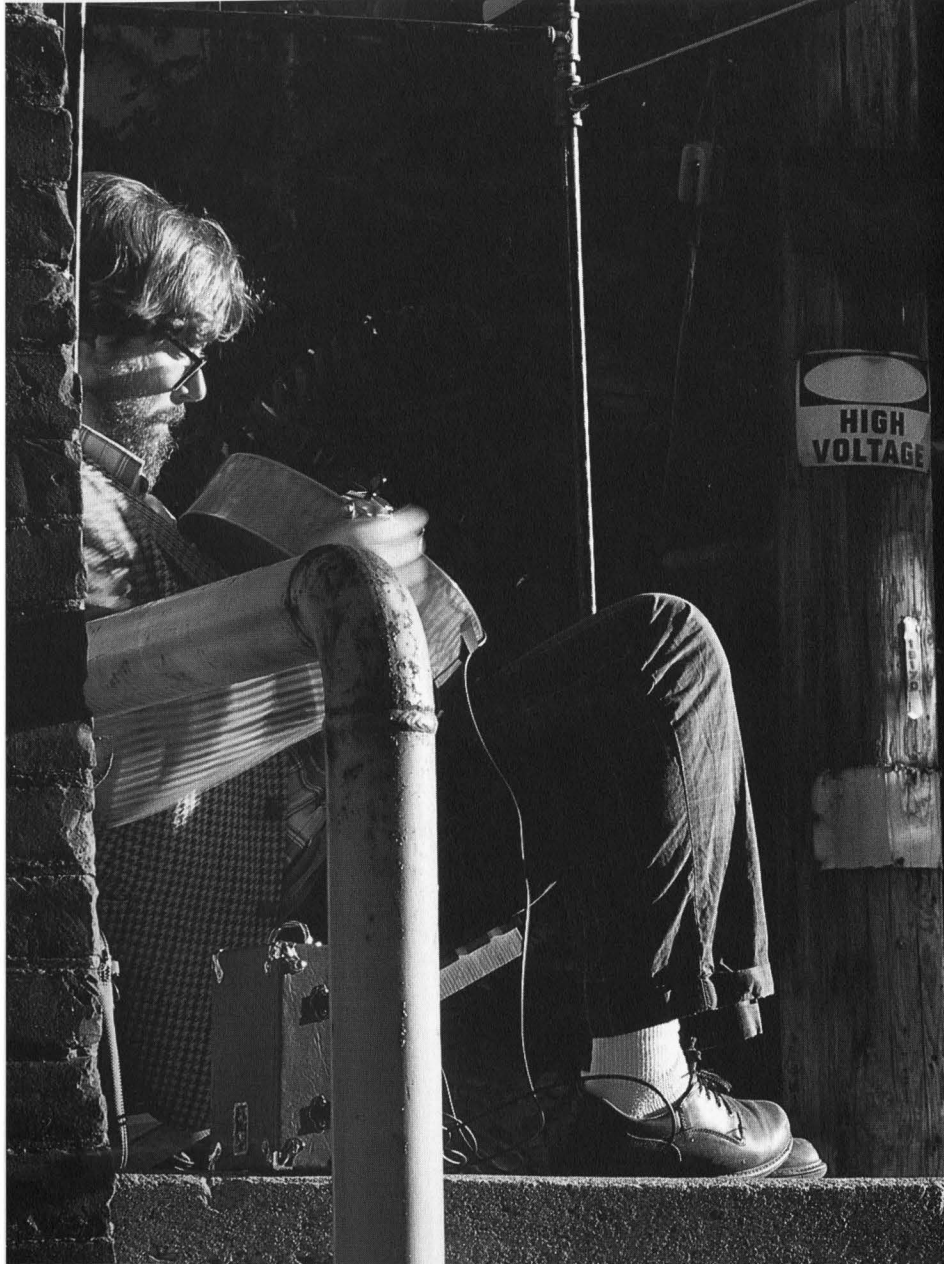
Gwen MacGregor -

Up  
sitting on a low-slung chair at the bottom of the skewed smokestack  
Martin Arnold played the hurdy gurdy to an unsuspecting audience



A SPECTACULAR NON-PLACE

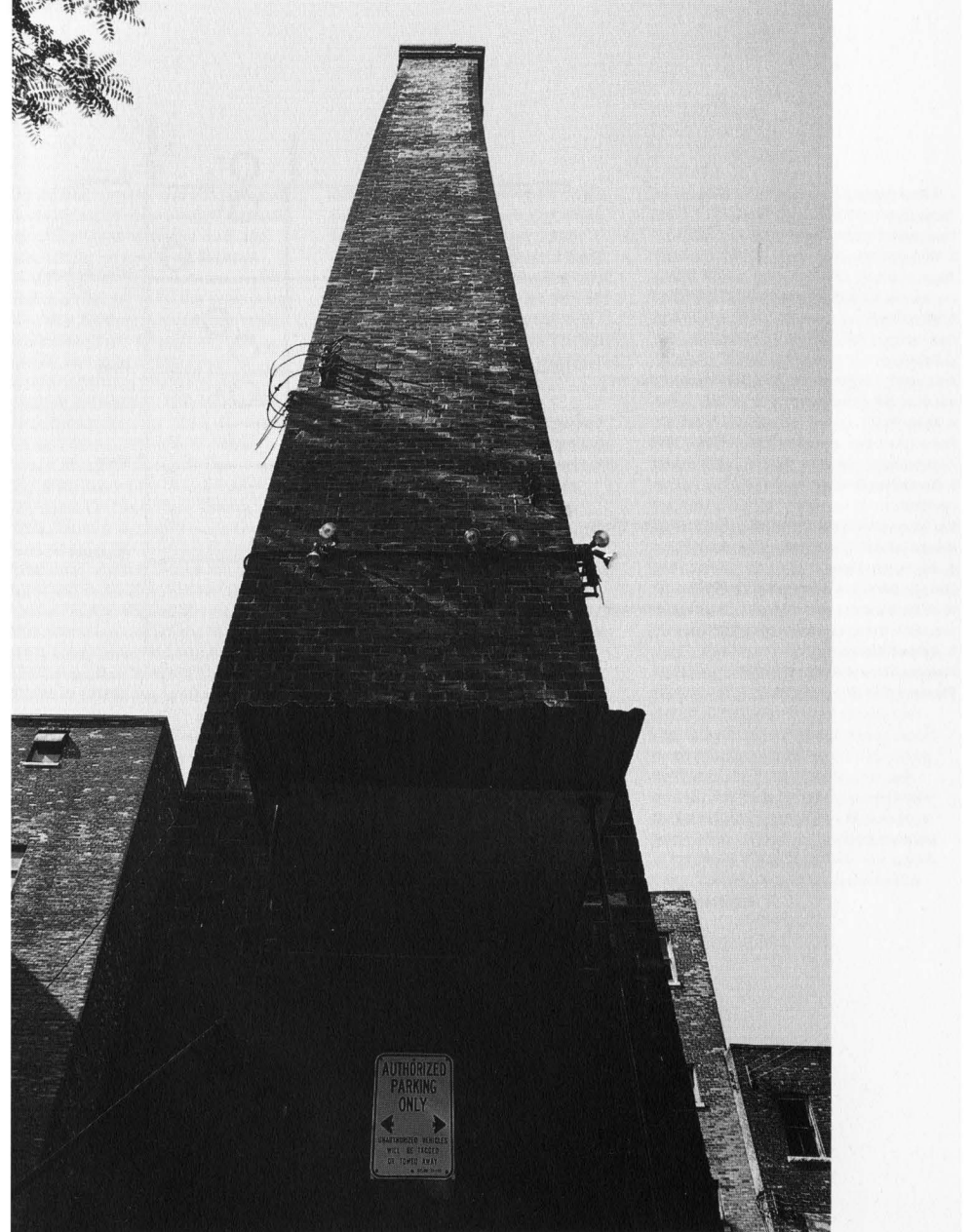
centrifugal



Gwen MacGregor -

Up

Martin Arnold playing the hurdy gurdy (opposite)  
the platform and the smokestack (this page)

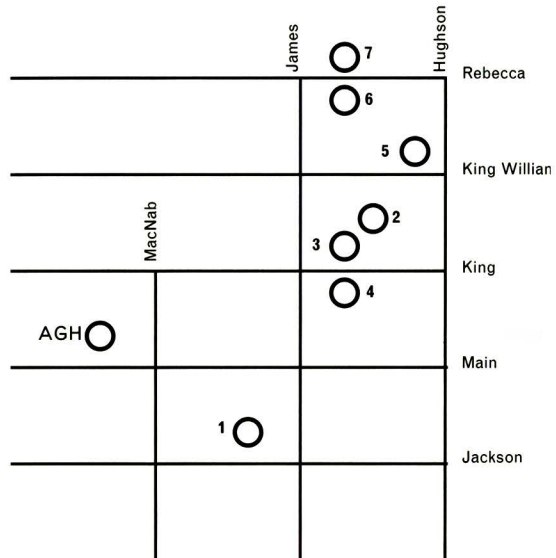


THE SMOKESTACK IS A MARK



centrifugal

1. **Kim Adams**  
*Toque (glo-hut)* 1999  
blue plastic beehive, steel table
2. **Kim Adams**  
*Toque (glo-hut)* 1999  
orange plastic beehive, steel table
3. **Kelly Mark**  
*Free Parking* 1999  
painted sign  
Free parking to the public, on a random basis, for the duration of the exhibition
4. **Alan Flint**  
*Power (the family as a cultural corporation)* 1999  
illuminated signboard
5. **Gwen MacGregor**  
*Up* 1999  
two yellow plumb lines dropped from top of Lister Block, elevated platform built around smokestack.
6. **machyderm inc.**  
*Dead Country (and Western Singer)* 1999  
re-animated signboard: vintage sign letters, overhead projector, motor, transparencies, lighting
7. **Adrian Blackwell**  
*How to open a car like a book* 1999  
Plymouth Reliant cut in half



List of Works & Biographies

**Kim Adams** currently lives in rural Ontario. He has shown his work nationally and internationally since 1978. Adams' work was most recently included in *Art Grandeur Nature*, a public art biennial in Paris and *On Location: Public Art for the New Millenium* at Vancouver Art Gallery. Recent solo exhibitions include Scott Gallery, Emily Carr College, Vancouver (1999), Galerie Christiane Chassay, Montreal (1998), Winnipeg Art Gallery (1998), Musée d'art Contemporain, Montreal (1996), Centraal Museum, Utrecht, Netherlands (1995), Toronto Sculpture Garden (1994), Macdonald Stewart Art Centre, Guelph (1994), and *The Power Plant*, Toronto (1992). Recent group exhibitions include *Model Homes* at Edmonton Art Gallery (1999), *Little Worlds* at Dunlop Art Gallery, Regina (1998), *Montreal Biennale* (1998), *Skulptur Projekte*, Munster, Germany (1997), *InSite*, San Diego and Tijuana, Mexico (1997), at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, New York (1997), Art Gallery of Windsor (1996), among others.

**Adrian Blackwell** is a Toronto-based artist and architect. He is active in collaborative public initiatives, most notably the October Group's *inflatable tunnel* and February Group's *mattress square*, actions against the provincial assault on the City of Toronto. In 1999 he installed his *Inflatable Carpet* in an unmarked storefront in Toronto, *Public Water Closet* at the corner of Queen Street and Spadina, Toronto, in the *Offsite @ Toronto* exhibition, and *Spiral* at University of Manitoba, Winnipeg (1999). Blackwell has participated in numerous group exhibitions, including *Clear Cut*, Toronto (1996), *Man Size*, Toronto (1997), *Trans* at Artlab, London (1998) and *Urban textures Urbain*, Ottawa (1998). His proposal for Dundas Square will be published in *Practice Practise Praxis*, YYZ books (2000).

**Alan Flint** is a Hamilton-based artist. He graduated with an MFA from Concordia University, Montreal in 1989, and a BFA from Nova Scotia College of Art and Design

in 1983. His recent solo exhibitions include Niagara Artists' Company, St. Catharines (1999), Koffler Gallery, Toronto (1999), Mercer Union window, Toronto (1998) and Art Gallery of Hamilton (1998). Flint's work has been included in numerous group exhibitions in southern Ontario, as well as at Hallwalls, Buffalo, Grunt Gallery, Vancouver, and Art Metropole, Toronto. Flint teaches at McMaster University, Hamilton.

**Gwen MacGregor** is an installation and video artist based in Toronto. She graduated from York University in 1982. Recent solo exhibitions include *The Koffler Gallery*, Toronto (2000), *Ex Teresa Art Actual*, Mexico City (1999), *Southern Alberta Art Gallery*, Lethbridge (1998), and Mercer Union, Toronto (1994). She has been included in group exhibitions at Agnes Etherington Art Gallery, Kingston (1997), Ottawa Art Gallery (1997) and Synagogue Na Palmovce, Czech Republic (1996), among others. MacGregor is a member of Spontaneous Combustion artist collective and the Flywheel collective which had its inaugural exhibition at the Nunnery in London, England (1999).

**Kelly Mark**, formerly a Hamilton-based artist, now lives and works in Toronto. She graduated from Nova Scotia College of Art & Design in 1994. Mark has shown nationally and internationally, including solo exhibitions at the Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver (2000), Proposition Gallery, Belfast (2000), Hamilton Art Gallery (2000), Hamilton Artists Inc. (2000), Wynick/Tuck Art Gallery, Toronto (1997), Art Gallery of Ontario (1997), Eye Level Gallery, Halifax (1997) and Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery, Halifax (1995). Mark was one of six artists chosen to represent Canada at the 1998 Sydney Biennale.

**Dermot Wilson** and **Chris McNamara** teamed up to make narrative-based video installation, video productions and performance art in 1991 as **machyderm inc.** They have performed sound, video and spoken

word collage works across Canada and in the U.S. Recent exhibitions include Forest City Gallery, London (1999), Western Front, Vancouver (1998), Stride Gallery, Calgary (1998), Khyber Gallery, Halifax (1998), Art Gallery of Hamilton (1997) and Art Gallery of Windsor (1996). Wilson lives in Hamilton and works as director of Niagara Artists' Company; McNamara lives in Windsor and teaches at University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, Detroit, and Centre for Creative Studies at Cranbrooke College, Detroit.

**Eileen Sommerman** is an independent curator and writer based in Toronto. Her curatorial practice is site-specific and she works primarily in public spaces. Recent exhibitions include *Intercourse: two videos and a painting*, in a vacant warehouse, Toronto (1999), *4 days at the white house*, a series of exhibitions in a domestic space, Toronto (1999), and *in lieu*, installations in public washrooms, Toronto (1998). Upcoming exhibitions include *Climbing the Walls* at Robert Birch Gallery, Toronto (2000) and *Being on Time* at Central Tech High School, Toronto (2000). She is a regular contributor to *Canadian Art*, has written for *C Magazine*, *Artfan* (Melbourne) and *Inversions* (Winnipeg). She graduated from University of Toronto with an M.A. in 1995. Sommerman worked as curatorial assistant at The Power Plant (1995-1997) and before that at C Magazine and Ydessa Hendeles Art Foundation.

## centrifugal

The Art Gallery of Hamilton and Eileen Sommerman would like to thank the following individuals and organizations whose assistance and dedication to the project contributed to its success.

**Martin Arnold**  
**Michael Awad**  
**Andrew Di Rosa**  
**Philip Grant**  
**Vern Harrison**  
**Ivan Jurakic & Hamilton Artists Inc.**  
**Jasper Kujavsky**  
**Gustave Morin**  
**Hamish Pelletier**  
**Michael Rothfeld**  
**Doreen Wherrett**

**Burlington Signs**  
**North American TV & Appliance**  
**Grassroots Advertising**  
**Parkland Plastics**  
**Salvation Army**  
**Fine Lines Sign Co.**

**Greg Freileigh**  
**Lou Serafini Jr. & Fengate Property Management**  
**Pasquali Silvestri**  
**Paul Silvestri**

### Curator's Acknowledgements

This exhibition was an initiative by Louise Dompierre, Director, to have the Art Gallery of Hamilton engage with the public on different grounds. Her desire to expand the gallery's programming and presence is both encouraging and admirable. I am grateful to her for the invitation and the opportunity to realize a project like this, which enables art to speak directly to a place and a public. Thank you especially to Shirley Madill, Senior Curator, who oversaw the exhibition with great attention, from the beginning, and to Alison Faulknor and Greg Dawe for their leadership and cooperation in administering and installing the show particularly when it was cold and curious.

## Acknowledgements

### Art Gallery of Hamilton Staff

Louise Dompierre, Executive Director  
Robert Ridge, Deputy Director  
Lorna Zaremba, Senior Officer, Corporate/Capital  
Peter Lesser, Senior Officer, Marketing  
Mary Beth Horvath, Communications Officer  
Tobi Bruce, Curator of Historical art  
Christine Braun, Registrar  
Greg Dawe, Chief Preparator  
Tina Destro, Head Gallery Attendant  
Alison Faulknor, Exhibition and Events Co-ordinator  
Helen Hadden, Librarian  
Tor Lukasik-Foss, Outreach Co-ordinator  
Philip Mansfield, Officer, Membership  
Antonia Laurence Allen, Educator  
Carlos Brieiro, Manager, Building and Security  
Alison Devine, Accountant  
Julie Smith, Administrative Coordinator  
Mary Anne Snelling, Manager, Retail Operations  
Heather Sexton, Retail Assistant  
Gallery Attendants: Paula Esteves, Julie Bronson, Dana Cowie,  
Matthew Schofield, Alisa Belshaw, Jennifer Balogh

### Credits

Curator: Eileen Sommerman  
Design: Andrew Di Rosa/SMALL  
Editor: Carol Toller  
Photography: Michael Awad

Sommerman, Eileen, 1967  
Centrifugal

Includes bibliographical references.  
ISBN 0-919153-64-X

1. public art – Ontario – Hamilton – Exhibitions. 2. Art, Modern – 20th century – Canada – Exhibitions. 3. Art, Canadian – Exhibitions. I. Art Gallery of Hamilton. II. Title.

N6547.H35S652000 709:71'07471352 C00-900859-4

The Art Gallery of Hamilton gratefully acknowledges the support of the region of Hamilton-Wentworth, the City of Hamilton, the Ministry of Culture and Communications, the Ontario Arts Council and its members and friends.

The financial support of the Canada Council is gratefully acknowledged.

All rights reserved. No portion of this publication may be used without written permission from the Art Gallery of Hamilton.

© ART GALLERY OF HAMILTON  
123 King St. W., Hamilton, Ontario L8P 4S8

**AGH**  
Art Gallery of Hamilton