ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The **Blanket Artists' Collective** approached Gallery 76 a little over a year ago to discuss having an exhibition about ghosts that would relate to the space and history of the gallery. G76 is in an old Victorian building which was a family dwelling before being acquired by the Ontario College of Art. According to several

OCA staff, students and former curators, the place is haunted by the ghost of a young child.

Within the theme of Ghosts, Blanket explores the related realms of memory, remnants, history, nostalgia, death and remembrance. All of the works in the exhibition have evolved as each artist has developed

their ideas, aesthetics and materials. The Blanket methodology of collectively curating their work has once again proved successful, as it has with all of their shows since their inception in 1987. As well as regular conversations on the progression of work, studio visits go a long way to clarify and define the works for the individual artist and the group as a whole. The resulting interpretations of the theme range from Brian Piitz' photo-based work exploring the ethereal 'hungry ghosts' to Gwen MacGregor's installation about 'cultural ghosts' using thousands of clay tobacco pipes

found in the Thames river in London.

All this talk of ghosts has of course led to personal musings on the topic. When I visited my family in the Ukraine in the spring of 1989, I had the opportunity of participating in an annual tradition called *Provody* (meaning farewell) that falls on the Sunday following

Easter. Laden with food baskets and flowers, we went to the village cemetery, along with dozens of other families to lay gifts of sweets, bread or vodka on the graves of our loved ones. Having a camera, I was immediately seized upon by relatives and complete strangers to photograph them next to the graves of

their dearly departed. After much socializing and reminiscing, we spread out blankets and vast amounts of food and settled in to feast among the graves. Later, as the sun was setting, all the old women from the village gathered and began to sing hauntingly sad, old songs. There was something completely surreal about the proceedings which intensified when I realized that all the fences that enclose the graves had their gates open. We weren't alone.

Christine Swiderski, Director, Gallery 76.

Rosa arrived dreaming; dreaming and weeping as I had. So a few of the others went to comfort her.

I didn't. I knew how she felt. And I knew that, like me, she wouldn't take the news well...

- -Where am I? What is this?
- -You're Inside, dear.
- -Rosa, dear.
- -Inside.
- -How?

Well, dear Rosa, Rosa dear. You entered the way I did. Through a tiny opening in the heart. A journey through the genitals, bowels and brain of your loved one brought you here to join us now.

The others took care of her, washed her, helped her to her feet. They weren't much for answering questions, though. No one would quite come out with the truth about how we had become ghosts in the head of another; nor how elsewhere, we were being populated by ghosts of our own.

How do you collect a head full of ghosts? How do you not? No one who has loved more than once lives without ghosts.

According to Hindu theology, more than a million gods and their consorts live inside each cow. To slaughter a cow would be to commit mass deicide. The sacred cow is not a Cow-God; its divinity comes from its status as home to bodiless essentials of life force.

Only Rosa and I, so far, have entered living. I resided in the heart until she came. It's not a permanent occupancy, the heart: it beats, it rushes, and renews its life force with each pulse. Some internal moon pulls the tide 72 times per minute, and nothing rests here for long. Even though the beloved says "stay, stay forever", Rosa will be washed away and her place taken by another. Where will she go?

In the bowels of this place (let's call it the cellar) is a spaniel-eyed poet with a pointed brow, and a stiff lace ruff. His white stockings are soiled, and twist around his ankles. He's been here a long time.

When he is remembered (what a ghostly verb!), when his words are recited or pleasure he has given is recalled, he becomes bodied. He rises

shows hands and torso, bows, and his face gains flesh. But this is rare. Most often he is insubstantial as the others in the cellar, on the stars, in the attic. Many times the poet is just a widow's peak floating about the luminescence of his lace collar. The stockinged legs below bob and knock their knees together.

He looks so doleful I laugh at him behind my hand. I have hands! I have a nearly complete body - legs and arms and breasts at the very least! Once, when my legs and feet were particularly tangible I stepped through a doorway and abruptly found myself fixed against the window of the bedroom I had shared with the beloved. But I was struck naked and angry, and I turned to the bed behind me. I turned and opened my mouth to speak, and the damn bed vanished. I forgot what I said, what I was about to say, what I was supposed to have said. I was left only with the smell of something burnt an awful relief that I had not been fully remembered.

I hate playing that old role. It steals from me the illusion of control.

It was better when I lived nearer the heart, before Rosa the Usurper came.

The success of the Sandinista revolution was due in part to the work of Brazilian Augusto Boal who developed Teatro Popular techniques for oppressed peoples. Nicaraguan villagers who wished to spread the revolution were trained to create their own performances and plays through improvisation.

The pull of narrative, plot and resolution are instinctual and irresistible. It is how we remember ourselves to ourselves. All you have to do, says Boal, is watch out for the Cop in the Head.

Poor dear Rosa doesn't get it. She shuffles around crying into her fist and asks over and over again, "where am I?"

The others call it Inside. "We are Inside the Beloved." I don't know what to call it. I wander from head to toe, biding my time, timeless.

I suppose I should show my gratitude to poor Rosa, because it was with her arrival that I began to remember that once I lived within a space-time continuum which included "then" as well as "now". When she arrived, I was reminded of my own memories: an act which is if not outrightly forbidden, then at least

unconceived. It appears that we are obliged to wander unmanifest through the body, without volition or weight, until we are re-membered by the beloved.

Since Rosa's arrival I have discovered that by concentrating fiercely I can maintain an almost permanent corporeality. There have been reports of pain throughout the body: aching near the heart and tenderness in the hips at night. (If nothing else, this alarms the others who drift and fade without control.) So I suppose I owe her something.

The spiny anteater is a unique mammal in that it has a proportionately huge frontal lobe to its brain and yet does not measure REM state during sleep. Given that the relatively large frontal lobe in mammals is the area of the brain in which recordable dream activity occurs, we can hypothesize that of all mammals, only the spiny anteater does not dream.

The function of dreams in animals cannot be verified. In the human animal, dreams are sometimes believed to be the souvenirs of soul-making; post-cards to the conscious self from the places the soul has been, or would

like to visit. But this cannot be satisfactorily verified. More likely, dreams evolved in the human animal to multiply exponentially the amount of experience, hypothetical or otherwise, to be stored in the memory for later use.

I've taken Rosa into my care. After all, we two share the distinction of being the only ones who are different: not dead. Somewhere outside, configurations of ourselves continue: eating, struggling, falling in love and being haunted by ghosts of our own.

I know these things because my memories grow stronger and more numerous every day. Can I say every day? There is no time Inside, but I know time was once my precious prison, and I want it back.

I have wakened myself from the beloved's memories to have memories of my own.

The beloved began to remember me by the window in our bedroom, but I fought it. I fought to remember the bed, my anger, my nakedness. When I opened my mouth to speak this time, I remembered the words: "we're not in love any more."

On Huxley's Island, trained parrots squawk, "Here and now, boys! Here and now!" It is a brute distillation of the teachings of the Buddha, the fantasy of alcoholism, the optimistic intention of electro-shock therapy. It is the condition of heroin intoxication, itself an artificial approximation of the endorphin-drunk athlete's joy.

I thought remembering would lead me out but instead it has made me into a terrible storm. The mournful and vaporous patience of the poet in the cellar will never be for me.

Beloved, when you took me into your heart I entered the stream of your mortality, bringing with me a million tiny gods, animal dreams, and the endorphin hunger of the addict, implanting a cop in your head who cannot distinguish lies

from desires. I crowded in with the others, and although you watched me turn angrily away, I entered you as surely had I pierced your skull with an instrument and lodged in your brain.

Out of pity or revenge, I will remember for Rosa. She will become a storm in the guts of the beloved and we will haunt together. You loved us. We haunt you. Beloved, is there such a great difference between the two?

Stay, stay forever.

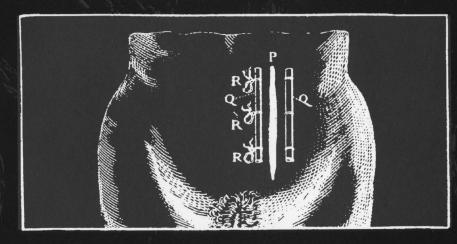
Janette Platana

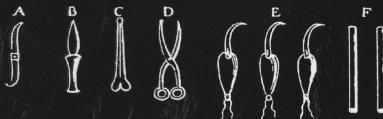




Men will never feel like women, nor women like men.

- J. G. Spurzheim Phrenology, or the Doctrine of Mental Phenomena, 1833





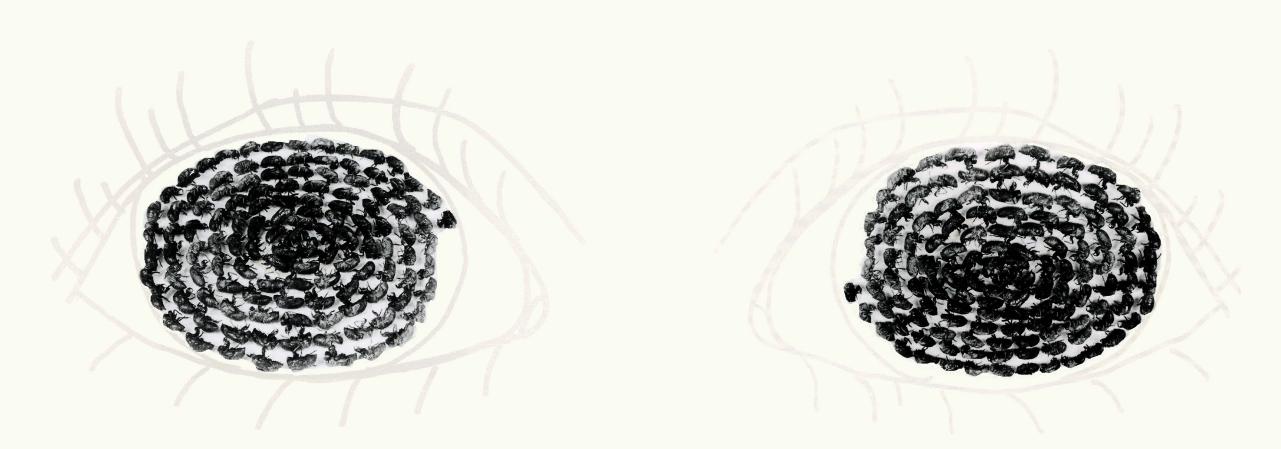


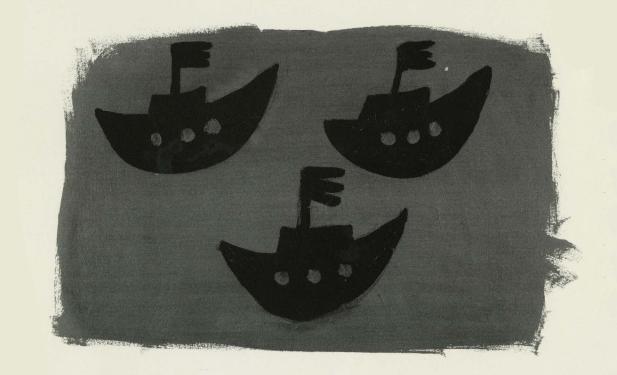


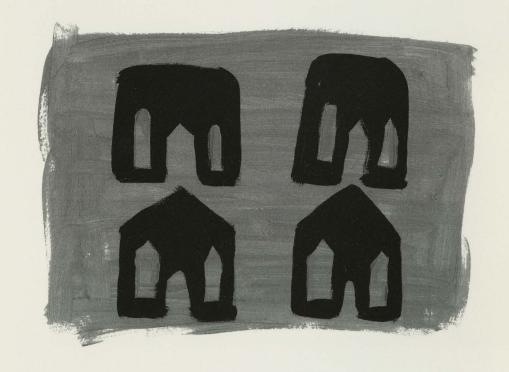












Blanket is a distinctive collective in Toronto's complex contemporary art community and yet it shares many of the characteristics of numerous maverick collectives that came together in the 80's and 90's.

All through this century, collective action by artists has been essential in terms of bringing new art to the Canadian public. We can go as far back as the formation of the Group of Seven in 1920, to trace this movement through to the publishing of *Refus Global* in Montreal in 1948, and chart it to such varied activities as the exhibitions of the Painters 11 in Toronto in the 50's or the multi-media events of the Intermedia group in Vancouver beginning in 1966.

In the sixties the forerunners of collective artist-run galleries evolved. The first two were established in the small city of London Ontario. The Region Gallery opened in 1962, requesting Canada Council funding soon after it began. 20/20, the real prototype of the artist-run centre, was founded in London in 1966. It's Board of Directors was made up of artists and established the practice of paying artist's fees. The early seventies saw the founding of many of the nation's artist-run centres that still exist: A Space, Forest City, Plug-In, Optica, etc.

By 1980 all the artist-run centres that currently make up the scene in Toronto were in existence, albeit in completely different locations. It had become public knowledge that a new art community had burgeoned along Oueen Street West and bars and restaurants catering to this new community opened accordingly. Artists from all over Canada were flocking to Toronto during this period and their population increased dramatically. It became difficult for the established alternate galleries to represent all of these new artists. They were particularly resistant where dissident sensibilities were encroaching on their predominantly formalist and structuralist aesthetics.

The recession of the early eighties produced the first prototypes of the maverick collectives of the fin de siècle. By this time many young artists had become frustrated with the increasing bureaucratization of the artists-run spaces. Identifying this phenomenon as part of the accountability required to get core-funding from the arts councils, they began to take polemical positions against such funding, either advocating small project funding or eschewing funding altogether. In the changed political

and economic environment of the early eighties, it became very apparent that we would not be seeing many new government funded spaces to accommodate succeeding generations of artists.

The first collectives that reflected this significant cultural rupture were ChromaZone (1981) and Eye Review (1982). It is worth noting that both began by actually running spaces. However, neither group felt it was necessary to locate in the requisite loft warehouse space that had become the North American cliché for a serious gallery. That was simply beyond the budget of these self-funded collectives and too reflective of a type of art world-imposed homogeneity from which they were trying to disassociate themselves.

ChromaZone located itself in a small apartment above a fabric store on Spadina and Eye Review was founded in a tiny storefront on the eastern edge of the Junction. Both collectives immediately began working on projects that took place in venues outside of their galleries, neither group feeling tethered to their modest spaces. ChromaZone mounted Jaywalking at the Intersection of Fashion and Art in December of 1981 and the mammoth exhibition, Chromaliving. Similar to

ChromaZone, Eye Revue is most often remembered for its satellite activities which included the Evedentity series at the Orbit Art Room and the display window exhibitions at Union Station. By taking a stand against accepting government funding, ChromaZone hoped to become more of an entrepreneurial endeavor, even while recognizing that this position would most likely create a short life span for the collective. After much heated debate, this approach was softened to allow for project funding. The group closed its space on Spadina in the summer of 1983 and did four subsequent projects until 1985. Eye Revue was funded for only the last year of it's four years of existence.

Also of note was the Women's Cultural Building a feminist collective that crystallized feminist activity in Toronto with in a series of projects that included a storefront installation festival, readings and major group shows. This collective evolved into the Women's Art Resource Centre in the latter half of the decade.

There was lull in the downtown art scene of the mid-eighties but three very different collectives were formed to fill the void that was created by the collapse of a fairly cohesive Queen Street art community. In 1984, UMAS (United Media Artists) was founded "to facilitate production, research and dissemination of cultural activity in the form of video, performance, film, print and related media." Their best-known projects have been the Emperor's New Clothes (one that introduced artists whose production was in media other than video to the medium) and Diderot (a video magazine that included an eclectic mix of video artists). In 1984 Republic formed. Their first exhibition in 1985, The Power of the Cross, was a template of what was to come: group shows with weighty themes, nomadically moving from space to space, involving a mixture of highprofile and emerging artists. They produced a half-dozen shows before entropy took its toll. Public Access was formed as a project-oriented collective in 1985, interested in finding alternative ways to bring visual and textual work into the public sphere. Besides their publication, *Public*, there best known projects have been Some Uncertain Signs, a series of artists' message on the electronic pixel board on Yonge street and The Lunatic of One Idea, a series of artist' projects on a gigantic video

walls at Square One Mall in Misssissauga.

In the latter part of the 80's one of the new maverick collectives did run its own space. Calling themselves the **Purple Institute**, they occupied the entire floor of a Style Moderne warehouse in Parkdale, mixing living accommodations and exhibition space. The Purple Institute mounted a series of funky, anarchistic exhibitions with a range of media, and made the space available to other collectives.

Since 1988 a deluge of collectives have swept through the Toronto art scene with artists banding together to rent a variety of temporary spaces for exhibitions. A new collective rises like a phoenix every year to mount the gigantic **RoundUp** exhibition in which artists open their studios to the public. After the second year in 1989, collectives (Sea Monkeys, Blanket to name a few) began joining together to rent exhibition space in order to show as a group component of RoundUp. A more seasoned collective that was largely culled from the defunct Ydessa Gallery came together and did two shows under the satirical, fictitious moniker of the Grace Hopper Gallery. In 1989 a younger group, Spontaneous Combustion

mounted a large show with an emphasis on installation, holography and kinetic sculpture at the giant showroom that Massey Ferguson once occupied on King Street West. They are planning a new Toronto show in the fall of this year and an exhibition in London U.K. in February of 1994.

The 90's have seen a continuing of these strategies with form and function tailored to the needs of each group. Nether Mind, a collective largely working in sculpture with a strong surrealist roots and an interest in using the eccentricities of found sites to the best installational advantage, made their debut in the summer of 1991. Installing in a rough-hewn cellar of an old King Street commercial building they invited a few established artists with whom they felt an affinity, in order to contextualize their work within the larger Toronto art scene. The next year they mounted a show in a three story 30's warehouse in East downtown Toronto.

Place and Show worked with the residents of an innovative shelter for the homeless in Toronto's East End to create a challenging site specific installation in 1991. Clamorous Intentions is a trio that banded together to do

curatorial projects related to the AIDS crisis and also issues around gender and sexual orientation. As yet they have produced three projects: Electric Blanket, Re:Dressing the Body and The Memorial Project. In their debut outing Localmotive dotted the main commercial street of the Junction with art pieces geared to their environment: storefronts, hoardings, shopping carts and park sidewalks became sites for innovative work. Late in the fall of '92. Diverse City, a large group of artists with eclectic aesthetics and media (drawing, sculpture, painting, installation) filled the now familiar (Grace Hopper, Aurathon) building in the Dupont and Landsdowne corridor. Other collectives from this period included A Bunch of Feminists, LivingRoom, Homogenius, Bureau and Shake Well.

How does the **Blanket** collective fit into this hive of activity? One of the more casual groups, Blanket has produced many freewheeling projects since its inception in 1987. The members of Blanket reacted to the increasing bureaucracy of the artist-run centres not as outsiders but as insiders; all of them had worked as an employee of an artist-run centre. This gave them a great incentive to approach

their projects with light-heartedness and a minimum of paperwork and organizational meetings. Blanket's irreverence was epitomized by the Workscene Gallery exhibition, Actual Photographs of U.F.O.'s, mounted in 1990. In this show the member of the collective reacted to the tabloid media phenomena of aliens and flying saucers, underlining our curious will toward transcendence in a largely secular society. Old, the inaugural show at A.R.C. in 1987, laid the pattern out for many of the succeeding shows. An ambiguous title would give the collective members maximum freedom in creating their contributing pieces and yet provide a loose curatorial direction. Such a strategy was repeated in Blankets in 1987 (with an Ossington Street studio as a venue) and Night in 1989 at the Purple Institute. Blanket's gentle tweaking of the serious intentions and rules of the established art world was reflected in the 1989 Blanket on Tour project and their multiples exhibition, Down and Dirty in 1991. Blanket on Tour was a gridded poster with a list of cities' names. The shows were fictional giving lie to the ego-inflated careerism of artists in the eighties. Down and Dirty totally muddied the generally accepted commercial art world

when most of the artists produced a multiplicity one-of-a-kind pieces. Typical of Blanket, these were not self-righteous attacks, they were goodnatured ribbings. Blanket seems to take the position that play and permission are the very core of creative endeavors, eschewing pompousness while recognizing the importance of a critical practice.

No particular medium is privileged in this collective and the shows feature photography, installation, painting, sculpture, video and laser reproductions. The casual attitude has allowed the members to grow and develop as artists without the debilitating self-consciousness that is prevalent among so many artists today. If Blanket is more unpredictable than many of the maverick collectives have emerged in the last decade, this unpredictability is worth nurturing in a time of over-determined artistic practices... and that's a BLANKET statement!

Andy Fabo

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