

Aida Sulcs, Studio Visit March 21, 2017

Michael DiRisio

In order to provide an opportunity to learn more about artists in Kingston and the surrounding region, we will now include a new *Studio Visits* column in each issue of Syphon. This section will serve as a space for dialogue and exchange, where a local artist will open up their studio to a writer to reflect on what the artist is currently working on, what is motivating them, and what projects or exhibitions they may have coming up! We are pleased to have Aida Sulcs, a local artist and member of Modern Fuel since its inception as the Kingston Artists' Association Inc. in 1977, host us for the inaugural studio visit.

I am always struck by the colours when I am invited into Aida's home. This applies as well to her home studio, occupying a central space in her basement. Colour is a significant component of Aida's work; it compliments her interest in material and form. It conveys a meaning and expression that she is not interested in pinning down. Rather than seeking resolution, she expresses a desire to appreciate her presence in a space—whether a physical or mental space—and values the ephemerality that this presence can entail.

While she works in a range of media, from drawing and drypoint to painting and performance, much of her work defies easy categorization; it is for this reason that her exhibition at the Verb Gallery (April 15 to May 14, 2017) is titled "drawing"—written with quotation marks around "drawing." The quotation marks are significant. Combining a mix of mark making that is both additive and subtractive, her recent works do not remain in the conventional parameters of drawing media and techniques. The erasure is particularly striking, where graphite would begin to blend and smear, resulting in an almost painterly effect. This subtly pushes back against the age old questions of where drawing ends and painting begins, with her removal of material disrupting graphite's typical texture.

As Aida served us mint tea, we discussed the artists that have inspired her lately. She spoke of Hajra Waheed, whose work she came across in Waheed's recent Sobey Art Award exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada, where Waheed's balance between loose mark making and more controlled, angular forms re-energized Aida's love of this kind of disruption. Meryl McMaster, an Ottawa-based artist who similarly uses colour to convey a range of cultural and personal references, has further motivated Aida, where McMaster's work resonates with aesthetic interests that Aida has been exploring for years. I too was struck by the resonance between their practices, where the physical body seems to serve as a stand-in for the mental or emotional body.

A less expected point of reference, however, was Aida's work with children. She is continually motivated by the creative ways that they approach mark making, where they are not weighed down by art historical references or pictographic traditions, nor by concerns for likeness and so-called 'accuracy of representation.' The drive to resolve works within this logic is absent. While Aida's efforts to problematize this logic find inspiration in their approach, it is situated within her own highly developed technique and formal understanding; but don't tell Aida I wrote that, as she would be far too humble to let this go to print.



Aida Sulcs' studio, spring 2017

Aida Sulcs' exhibition at the Verb Gallery is on from April 15 to May 14, 2017, and she will have a solo exhibition at Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre in Spring 2018. Aida is a Kingston based multi-disciplinary artist, educated in fine arts at Queen's University and in graphic design at the Kootenay School of Art in B.C. She offers visual arts workshops at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, in the Fine Arts department at Queen's University, in the Limestone District school board, and most recently with Syrian refugee youth groups whose collaborative work will be exhibited at Unit 115 in December of 2017. Aida's work centers around the power of art as communication.

3.4

Michael DiRisio in conversation with
Srimoyee Mitra, artist projects by
Tara Lynn MacDougall and Mike Marcon,
and a studio visit with **Aida Sulcs**

A publication
of Modern Fuel
Artist-Run Centre
Kingston, Ontario
Volume 3, Issue 4
Spring 2017
ISSN number:
1480-0306



Distributed
freely at select
artist-run centres
inside Canada,
by subscription,
or online at
modernfuel.org/
syphon

EDITORIAL

In recent years the term "social enterprise" has gained prominence in discussions of socially and community-oriented businesses. While the use of the term varies from region to region, it is generally applied to organizations that combine a conventional business model—where the profit motive is central—with a greater regard for the social or environmental impact of their activities.

Although the work of these organizations is often deeply appreciated, the emerging discourse around social enterprise too often fails to address the context within which these organizations operate. The profit motive is, after all, not a neutral hand guiding the market, but a brutal social force with a long history of exploitation and dispossession.¹ It is this context that we wanted to address with this issue of Syphon. We reflect on political economy from a range of perspectives, while focusing more closely on arts labour in particular with the issue's Art Work Supplement.

Mike Marcon's installation-based exhibition TEOTWAYKI, which will be exhibited at Modern Fuel from June 24 to August 5, 2017, engages with this context by addressing what he considers to be the "irrational fears, macho fantasies and general overkill that increasingly populate narratives of late Capitalism." Marcon's scratched renderings featured in this issue speak to the violence embedded in this system, invoking forms of refusal and retreat.

Tara Lynn MacDougall's artist project *Give me a Break* (2017) explores a different form of refusal, with a set of instructions inviting readers to reject the dominant logic of production. Responding to the physical and emotional impact of precarious employment, MacDougall asks that we look out for each other, paying particular attention to ways of 'taking a break' when you are underpaid or deprived of permanent employee rights. Without the stability of these rights, workers are often motivated to work harder for longer hours, for fear of not having their contract renewed.

Turning to the realities of arts labour, our new Studio Visits Column will feature one local artist in each issue, where they will discuss current directions in their practice and some of the things that are motivating them at the moment. Our aim is to provide insight into the depth and complexity of contemporary arts practices, while creating space for sustained reflection on the often unseen aspects of one's work.

Further insight will be provided by our Art Work Supplement, which addresses a range of topics relevant to practicing artists, from submitting programming proposals and writing for arts periodicals to navigating artist contracts and negotiating payment. These are central components of many artists' practice, and the best practices outlined in the supplement offer not 'hard-and-fast' rules, but a broad guide to help navigate these unseen administrative aspects of maintaining a practice in the arts.

As is likely apparent at this point, we are not attempting to engage directly with specific social enterprises, but consider the *social* dimension and *enterprising* nature of contemporary capitalism. While this consideration continues to remain on the periphery of more conventional discussions of politics and economics, it is crucial for a broader understanding of our present socio-political moment, as well as for a critical reflection on the role of the arts in these post-fordist times.

ENDNOTES

1. See Ellen Meiksins Woods' *On the Origins of Capitalism* (Monthly Review Press, 1999) for a detailed account of the specific social and political context within which this social system emerged.

Michael DiRisio is the Artistic Director of Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre.

GIVE ME A BREAK

The following instructions describe how to participate in Give me a Break. They are designed to ease some of the stress associated with precarious employment. In other words, they outline how to 'give a break' to people who are poorly paid or who fill permanent jobs but are deprived of permanent employee rights.

1. Put this poster in your window or hang it in your home. Use it to express solidarity with people employed outside of stable positions or to display your inclusion within an insecure workforce.
 2. Form a 'Break' Union.
 3. Organize the people in your community who are in precarious employment positions and ask them to join your union. Unionize your friends, colleagues, and neighbours.
 4. Support each other and give each other regular breaks. If someone in your union needs a break, give them one. The benefit of membership is the mutual support; you will also be given a break when needed.
 5. Name your union. Make union cards. Outline how you can support each other.
 6. Meet regularly to discuss the individual needs of your group.
 7. Mobilize against laws that make precarious labour possible. Attend rallies and write letters, or emails to government officials. Remind your politicians that there are other classes besides the affluent middle class, remind them that these classes need more help, more support.
 8. Modify or extend this list in any manner that works for your organization.
- * Mimic the conditions of organized labour to improve the social conditions of precarious labourers. Give each other a break.

Mike Marcon, *The Chronicles of Burt Gummer*,
21 drawings on scratch paper, 2017

Drawing influence from post apocalyptic folklore and Western survivalist culture, my practice examines the irrational fears, macho fantasies and general overkill that increasingly populate narratives of late Capitalism.

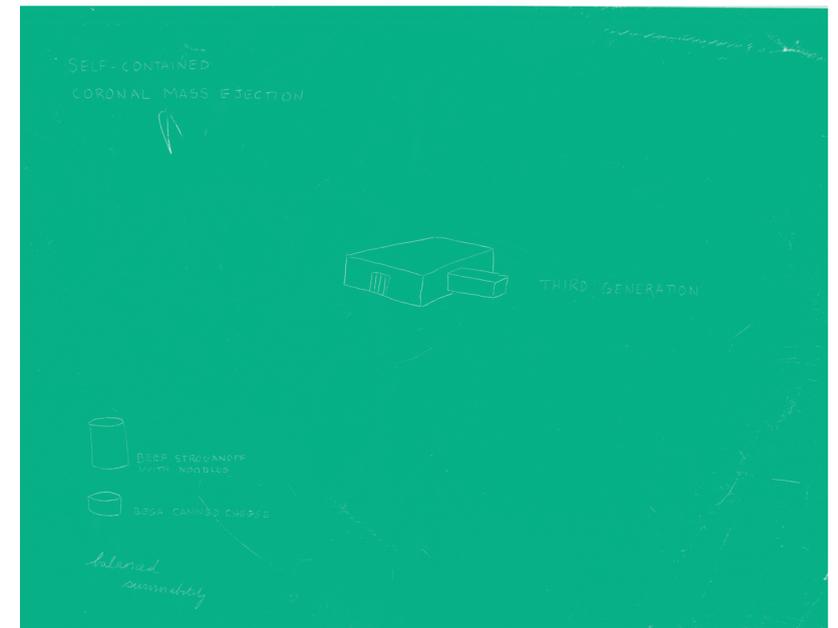
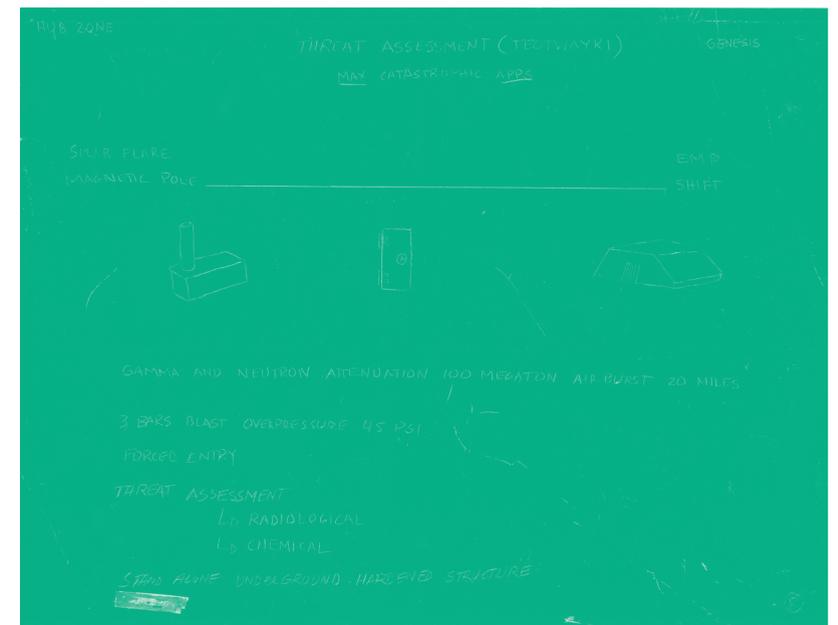
TEOTWAYNI focuses on the physical and textual language of shelters. The cabin in the woods, the bomb shelter, and the "When the Shit Hits The Fan" retreat symbolize both the hyperbole and paranoia that exists on the fringes of Western societies, while at the same time symbolizing the cultural and intellectual bankruptcy at the core of our postindustrial, postmodern world order.

Mike Marcon lives and works in Windsor, Ontario. He received his MFA from the University of Windsor in 2015. His work has been shown across Canada; including galleries at the Sculpture Society of Canada (Toronto), Arnica, Artist-Run-Centre (Kamloops), Centre d'exposition de Rouyn-Noranda (Rouyn-Noranda QC), and the Art Gallery of Windsor (Windsor).

OPPOSITE

Tara Lynn MacDougall, *Give me a Break*,
artist project commissioned for Syphon 3.4, 2017

Tara Lynn MacDougall is an interdisciplinary artist based in Lethbridge, AB. She received a BFA from NSCAD University in 2007. Professionally she has exhibited in group exhibitions locally, nationally, and internationally. She is currently an MFA candidate at the University of Lethbridge. Her interest lies in a critical and humorous reevaluation of the art historical canon, and reconsideration of distinctions between standard labour and artistic production.



A Conversation with Srimoyee Mitra

April 20, 2017

Entering its 8th year, the MayWorks Festival continues to operate at the intersections of workers' solidarity, social justice and human rights. In conjunction with this year's festival, *Walks of Survivance* at Artcite features new work by Farrah Miranda and recent work by Lisa Myers, where the artists address diverse experiences of contemporary work, from cooking and domestic labour to migrant agricultural work. We spoke with Srimoyee Mitra, who—prior to her recent appointment as the Gallery Director of Stamps Gallery in Anne Arbour—curated the exhibition at Artcite, discussing both the labour addressed by the artists and the curatorial work of developing an exhibition.

MODERN FUEL: *How do you see the exhibition engaging with broader discussions of labour, either in relation to MayWorks or more generally?*

SRIMOYEE MITRA It began with an invitation to curate a show for Mayworks, and that in many ways dictated the overarching theme of the show. In terms of Farrah [Miranda] and Lisa [Myers], I was aware that Farrah was working on an installation called *speaking fruit*, where she was wanting to set up a fruit stand. The question she was asking was “if the fruits and vegetables that the migrant workers pick could speak what would they say—what kind of narrative?” She was interested in these conversations taking place in Windsor, because the workers she was working with were in Leamington. So that's how the conversation began.

Along with migrant workers I also wanted to think about Indigenous narratives of the land and Indigenous labour in relation to the land, and how those narratives are either unknown or overlooked as well. I have followed Lisa Myers for a long time and have never had an opportunity to work with. Her methodology is through cooking and through food as a way of knowing, so I approached her and she introduced me to these two projects about blueberries, including her project *and from then on we lived on blueberries for about a week*, which I thought would be a great fit.

MF: *It's interesting the way they both relate to care—especially in relation to food—in different ways, whether it's the care of cooking or agricultural work. In what way do you see them resonating with each other's work?*

SM: Farrah is really looking at the tools of labour; she has this idea of having a dinner table with plate settings, and having a chandelier which is made up of tools, whether it's gloves or wheels in a spiral.

In conjunction with that, we see Lisa Myers, with the blueberries and the delicious, almost fecund blueberry sauce, and the ebs and flow of the blueberry sauce on a wooden spoon. It alludes to the process of cooking, stirring, mixing, whether it's a cake batter or a sauce that's being mixed. The body is very much present, but you don't see a body, only a spoon. And along with that is this incredible soundtrack, which once again brings the body in with almost a marching tone to it.

For me there is an incredible movement, as if they were anthem-like songs, songs of survival, and I think it's a really beautiful dialogue with the boots of the migrant worker which are going to be part of the chandelier. But I want to be really clear that these are very different experiences and I don't want to flatten them as a single uniform experience. The feeling of the works are going to be very different; Lisa's is almost visceral and tangible in a very different way, whereas Farrah's work is going to be almost literal in a way, where it *is* tangible, where you will be able to touch and smell the hay.

In terms of Indigenous histories and stories—how they have lived *in* the land and *with* the land—are perhaps deeply woven into the landscape in Canada, and the ways in which we've forgotten. Whereas the migrant worker in some ways is still looked at as this 'other.' It is a service relationship that we have. Temporary workers provide us with a service, are paid X amount, and then they go home, and that is the relationship that the state wants with them. I'm really curious about those relationships, and to see how they work together and see what kind of discussion these two works bring out.

MF: *I am curious to see how they do resonate because as you say they have such a different presence. I feel like Artcite could facilitate that well being a space that is split into two, with the central dividing wall. I wanted to ask, regarding your own work as a curator, how you reflect on working in different spaces, whether regional galleries or artist-run centres.*

SM: I think different galleries have different things to offer. For example, Artcite is an excellent storefront space—they have great visibility, you're on the ground—versus something that's more institutional. Passersby who stroll into Artcite can do that more easily than in an institution.

My approach is always to first understand the space and see what would work in the space, and then build out from that. With any work we want to compliment the space, rather than make it feel limiting. For this exhibition, from the beginning I wanted it to be more than a one person solo show, I wanted it to be more dialogic. In some ways Artcite really allows for that, as you mention with the dividing wall. It allows for two separate spaces, but also because it is small enough there will always be a spill-over or an overlap.

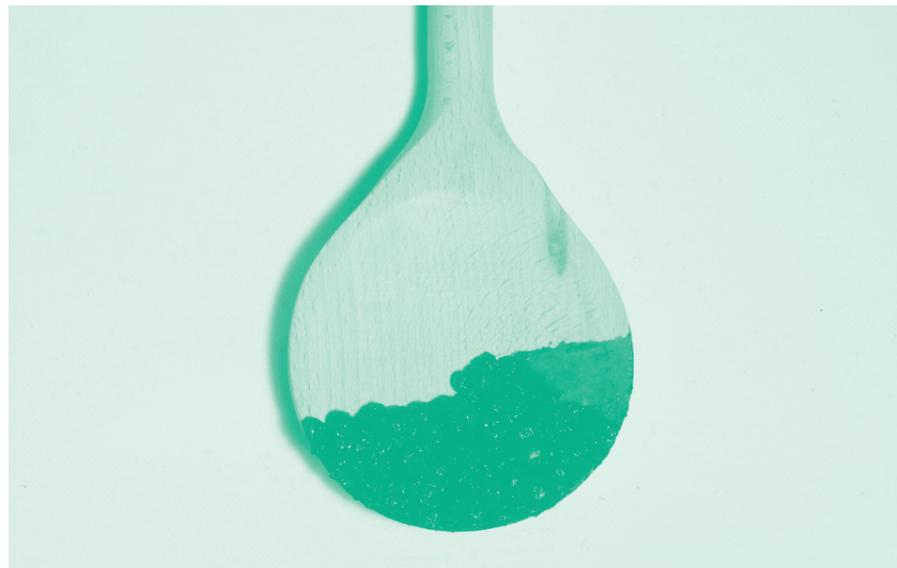
MF: *With this issue focusing on labour, and the Art Work Supplement focusing on arts labour in particular, I wanted to ask what advice you might have for young curators.*

SM: Don't hesitate to dream big and allow the dream to take the space it needs to take, and at the same time look at the reality and see how they could come together. Some things may need to be scaled back, others may be allowed to have more space. It's a really

privileged space, on one hand, to be a curator, because you are the person who is in conversation with so many different folks.

It's not just your idea, but it's also the artist's idea that you are bringing together, that you are facilitating and giving it the space and the respect that it deserves. It's important to take that seriously. At the same time it's important to take your own labour seriously. Make sure that there is a line item for a curatorial fee, even though that is hard when budgets are really tight. But I think it's a question of respecting one's own work, even if it's an honorarium, in the same way that we always pay artist fees.

Walks of Survivance: Works by Lisa Myers and Farrah Miranda, curated by Srimoyee Mitra, will be at Artcite from May 5 to June 10, 2017.



Lisa Myers, *and from then on we lived on blueberries for about a week*, still from animated video, 2015

MASTHEAD

Syphon is an arts and culture publication produced by Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre that is meant as a conduit between the arts community in Kingston and communities elsewhere. It was created in response to the lack of critical arts commentary and coverage in local publications, and seen as a way to increase exposure to experimental and non-commercial art practices. Syphon has a mandate to feature local arts coverage in conjunction with national and international projects, and an emphasis on arts scenes and activities that are seen as peripheral. It acts, in essence, as a record and communiqué for small regional arts communities throughout the country.

Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre is a non-profit organization facilitating the production, presentation, and interpretation of contemporary visual, time-based and interdisciplinary arts. Modern Fuel aims to meet the professional development needs of emerging and mid-career local, national and international artists, from diverse cultural communities, through exhibition, discussion, and mentorship opportunities. Modern Fuel supports innovation and experimentation, and is committed to the education of interested publics and the diversification of its audiences.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Stéfy McKnight, President
Emily Pelstring, Vice-President
Kelly Bolen, Past President
Chris Ball
Teresa Carlesimo
Adrian Deveau
Judith Popiel
Matt Rogalsky
Anna Elmberg Wright

STAFF & PERSONNEL

Michael DiRisio,
Artistic Director

Genevieve Flavelle,
Operations Director

Modern Fuel would not be able to function without the generosity and spirit of its volunteers.

Suite 305 613 548 4883
370 King Street W. info@modernfuel.org
Kingston, ON www.modernfuel.org
K7L 2X4

Gallery Hours: Tuesday to Saturday 12 noon to 5pm

EDITORIAL & PUBLISHING FOR SYPHON

Michael DiRisio, Editor
Vincent Perez, Art Director
Genevieve Flavelle, Publisher
McLaren Press, Printing

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Teresa Carlesimo
Sydney Hart
Graeme Langdon
Judith Popiel



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts
du Canada



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO



kingston
arts council

Ontario
Trillium
Foundation



Fondation
Trillium
de l'Ontario



Ontario

An agency of the Government of Ontario.
Un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario.