

Highlighting that certain images are missing is just one way that Simon draws our attention to this fact. She seems well aware that wrestling chaotic stories of passion, hubris, fear, and greed, and the human toll they have wrought, is a Sisyphean task. Even an exhaustive three-part system of unique images with captions, explanatory text, and contextualizing images lays out more about what we *cannot* know than what we *can*.

This is not to suggest that Simon's effort is wasted as the project is compelling and the work it demands of the viewer is ultimately rewarded. However, just as the people in Simon's chapters are subjugated to the overwhelming forces of fate and circumstance, the scope and scale of the artist's project runs the risk of overwhelming her audience. The exhibition creates a specific viewing pattern in which most viewers stand back to survey the chapter as a whole and then move in to read it from left to right. This is a slow process, not just because of the volume of text and image, and the need to bounce from one panel to the other to identify the portraits, but also because the text itself is tiny and printed on a narrow panel, meaning that only one or two people can comfortably read it at a time. Consulting the book version of the project alleviates the impatience embodied by the line of other viewers waiting for you to finish reading, but working your way through (or even lifting) the 864-page, ten-pound book version is also no small task.

The serious nature of the project and its grand scale will ensure that its arrival at the Museum of Modern Art, New York in spring 2012 will be a major event. After all, Simon is a rising art star, a native New Yorker, and also the partner of film director Jake Paltrow (better known as the brother of Gwyneth). But Simon's is not the sensuous work of Marina Abramovic that played so well to the media and to audiences at MoMA last year. It will be interesting to see if American critics and audiences will respond to the cool and often difficult work as well as to the excitement that will be expertly generated by MoMA with help from Simon's dealer, the über-powerful and very savvy Gagosian Gallery.

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In addition to its extended run in London, *A Living Man Declared Dead and Other Chapters* is on display concurrently at the Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin, September 22, 2011–January 1, 2012.

ART EX 2011: RIVER AS SOURCE

GRAND FALLS-WINDSOR, NEWFOUNDLAND
JULY 7–JULY 10, 2011

by Craig Francis Power



Begun as an initiative of the Exploits Valley Development Corporation, Art Ex presents the work of international, national, and regional artists in and around the town of Grand Falls-Windsor, Newfoundland. Now in its second year, Art Ex is establishing itself as a vital bridge between the local and regional art community, and the larger contemporary art world. This year's event, themed "River As Source," presented the work of eight contemporary artists and artist collectives and was held July 7–10.

Adding an element of balls-out rock 'n' roll to this year's event was the happy coincidence of having Grand Falls-Windsor's annual Salmon Festival running concurrently with Art Ex. The Salmon Fest can be viewed as the musical equivalent of the visual art festival in that it brings in acts from all over the world to play an outdoor concert, featuring this year none other than the holiest of holy, practically octogenarian collection of rockers, KISS, as the top billing. So while Yours Truly was scoping out the various installations and art performances happening about this little town, a 30,000-strong contingent of KISS fans from the province and beyond were visiting Grand Falls-Windsor to witness the (last?) desperate spasms of Gene Simmons & Co.

Both Art Ex and, to a lesser degree, the Salmon Festival are the beneficiaries of federal and provincial government largesse in the face of Central Newfoundland's recent economic woes, and can be seen as attempts to stimulate the region's businesses through cultural spending. The committee behind Art Ex have thus pulled off a top-notch contemporary art festival the likes of which haven't ever been seen in these parts. With a roster of national and international artists (thanks to the aforementioned governmental generosity), Art Ex promises to be an exciting off-the-beaten-track destination for Canadian and international art lovers. In short, Art Ex rocked out.

Wednesday Lupypciw's fibre/performance piece, *Dreamweaver's School of Ladycrafts* (2011), lampoons the notion of the female Victorian watercolour-painting hobbyist. Set in the placid beauty of the Exploits River Valley, Lupypciw weaves a hammock the design of which is derived from the artist's direct

↑ Wednesday Lupypciw, *Dreamweaver's School of Ladycrafts*, 2011, performance/installation view at Sanger Park in Grand Falls-Windsor, Newfoundland
PHOTO: ERIC WALSH, IMAGE COURTESY OF ART EX, GRAND FALLS-WINDSOR

observation of the flowing current of the river. Working at various points along the riverbank and seashore, Lupypciw, in full Victorian garb, is photographed in states of action and repose, culminating, once the hammock is completed, in the documentation of the artist snoozing *en plein air* in her hammock, which is nestled amid a grove of riverside birch trees. The piece addresses notions of class, labour, and tourist culture while operating as an ironic critique of Lupypciw's own status as elevated cultural producer.

Liss Platt and Will Gill's separate projects embrace the role of chance operations the flow of the Exploits River provides, but with decidedly different goals in mind. Platt's *Technological Exploits* (2011) piece



↑ José Luis Torres, *The Observatory*, 2011, wood, 11m x 9m x 2.5m
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

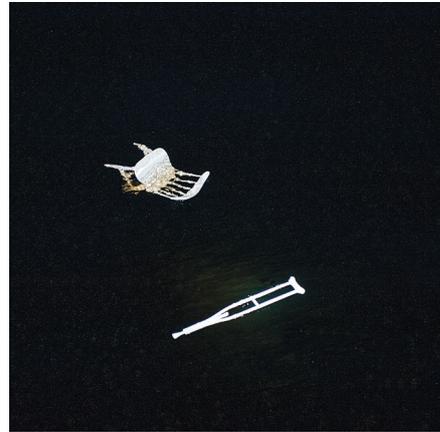
combines performance art, installation, GPS and Web-based tracking, and documentary photographic practice within the framework of a scientific experiment. Addressing the role of technology in nearly every aspect of our lives, Platt launches a small Plexiglas globe into the river, in which a digital camera is set to photograph the landscape at five-second intervals. The resulting slide show, screened on a loop at the Gordon Pinsent Centre for the Arts over the course of the festival, presents a fragmented representation of the river and surrounding landscape that illuminates our increasingly mediated relationship to the natural world. Gill's work, *High Water* (2011), an extension of an earlier project entitled *Cape Spear* (2009), embraces the river's current as a means by which to explore narrative. Mundane household objects (chairs, a bike, a pair of jeans, among other things) are painted with white glow paint and floated down the Exploits River at night. Lit from a nearby trestle with spotlights, the objects are cast in an eerie, ghostly light, suggesting not only a catastrophic deluge, but how the mundane object is made special through the artistic process.

Likewise, the French collaborative duo Scenocosme present a project named *Akousmaflore* (2011), an installation of sensitive, interactive musical plants, which challenges the viewer's expectations and assumptions around the art experience. Appearing to be nothing more than an installation of potted plants hanging from the ceiling, the plants, through technological manipulation, respond to physical contact, emitting various music-like sounds. Volume, tone, and pitch are all manipulated by how much pressure is applied to the leaves and stems, and, in concert with other participants of the work, a cacophonous symphony of shrill *bleeps*, *bloops*, and various electronic noises combine for a wondrous effect. As in Platt's work, *Akousmaflore* confronts the viewer with a surprising mediation of how technology and the "natural" intersect.

Finally, rounding out the festival was a slightly more conventional gallery show at the Gordon Pinsent Centre for the Arts. Featuring Diana Dabinett, David Kaarsemaker, and Urve Manuel, the exhibition focuses on exploring the flora and fauna of the local environment, and felt as though festival organizers were throwing a bone to the local gallery going public, as it were. Of the three, Kaarsemaker's well-executed oil paintings exploring the tension between constructed and naturally occurring stacks or piles of various



↑ Liss Platt, stills from *Orb on river*, used for 12 minute animation in *Technological Exploits*, 2011, performance with GoPro surf camera and GPS tracking device in *Orb*, images taken at 2-second intervals
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST



↑ Will Gill, *High Water*, 2011, readymade objects, coated in reflective paint, various, video documented performance, Bishop's Falls, Newfoundland, Art Ex Festival
PHOTO: ERIC WALSH, IMAGE COURTESY OF ART EX, GRAND FALLS-WINDSOR

materials stood out as having the most considered relationship with the other works in Art Ex. A tree planter for part of the year, Kaarsemaker depicts the landscape as both "real" and "manufactured," with evidence of human activity acting collaboratively with nature as the inspiration for his imagery. The resulting paintings remain ambiguous in terms of where wilderness and human planning intersect. Manuel's stained-glass installation of a school of salmon running through the exhibition space was reminiscent of what one might find in any one of the innumerable craft shops that populate the island's tourist destinations. With the local population of Grand Falls-Windsor ravaged by a recent mill closure amongst other economic hardships, Manuel's work suggests one possible saviour: the cultural tourism industry.

Additionally, the festival featured a number of artist talks, workshops, and presentations that embraced the local community, creating a sense of collaboration and mutual exchange that is sometimes missing in more well-established events of this type. Outside for a cigarette after one of the events, I was accosted by a gang of teenaged boys on their BMX bikes who, after chit-chatting about KISS, wanted me to tell them what in the hell contemporary art is all about. This was a refreshing change, as I've found that at other events similar to Art Ex, the general public wouldn't be engaged enough to even bother asking that particular question. The only bad thing was that, on the night of the big concert, rain pisted out of the sky, soaking all the poor suckers who'd paid good money and travelled considerable distances to see KISS, not to mention a clutch of artists, writers, and curators attempting to enjoy an outdoor hot tub. Otherwise, Art Ex totally rocked it out, and promises to be an important destination for both artists and those interested in contemporary art from with Newfoundland and Labrador and beyond.

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