

The Dig

Centre A's first 10 years

Let's Twist Again

Introduction
by Hank Bull

Centre A was formally launched in May 2000, ten years ago, with an international symposium called *Twisting the Box*. The title was suggested in a preliminary forum by Leo Quan. The "box" we had in mind was the museum. We wanted to examine how the idea of the museum might be re-invented, or de-invented, for the 21st century, freed from its colonialist trappings. We wanted specifically to look at the interference between four key words: Asian, contemporary, art and museum. The debates that took place before, during and after this symposium were at times heated and critical. The founders of the proposed were asked to confront a number of questions: for whom would it exist, whom would it represent, who would control it and how? It was during the symposium that Hou Hanru suggested, why not call the project "Centre A". *Twisting the Box* and questions it generated were important when it came to drawing up the by-laws and governing policies of the new organization. Just under two months later, at the beginning of July, Centre A held its first Annual General Meeting and opened its first gallery on Homer Street. The inaugural exhibition, curated by Rocky Huang, was called *The Bubble Tea Club, Vancouver Identity from a Contemporary Asian Art Perspective*.

Ten years and over eighty exhibitions later, it is time to "twist again". How well have we done? How have the world, art and Vancouver evolved in the last decade? To say quite a bit would be putting it mildly. And where do we go from here?

We decided—and the "we" here is a team of co-curators, Makiko Hara, Debra Zhou and myself, with input from Christina Panis, Dylan McHugh and Centre A board members and donors—to return to one of the most troubling of our founding questions, that of the collection. Should Centre A be a collecting institution or a centre for temporary exhibitions, discursive projects, performance and research? Responding to the desires of the community as much as to necessity, we chose the second path. Nevertheless, as inevitably happens, the storage room started to pile up with stuff, so much so that you could hardly squeeze in there. As well as well organized financial and administrative records, there were boxes of catalogues, a number of limited, signed editions, media works, recordings, fragments of past installations and even a few paintings and sculptures. We decided to empty the storage and take stock of this unofficial collection as a way of assessing the past, making connections and, in sense, being able to see ten years of history all at once.

The selection of works in the exhibition has managed in this way to escape the agony of having to choose. It does not pretend to be balanced or comprehensive, nor is it a "best of collection". It is merely what has been saved, like remnants, incomplete, remains. The metaphor of archaeology came to mind, that this was a midden through which we might dig for clues. The Dig. I am perhaps the only member of the team who knows all the material. My colleagues are seeing much of this work for the first time. In this sense, the writing to the past becomes a discovery, and a kind of invention.

Many of the works in the exhibition are incomplete, fragments of larger originals. Some are literally shards. The viewer is left to fill in the blanks and connect the pieces of the puzzle into some sort of legible narrative. To further subvert cohesion, the curators have chosen to juxtapose works, and in one case even combine them, in a way that blurs the distinction between artistic and curatorial practice. The intention is to suggest that art is more and more becoming a collective creation, that we have bypassed the era of the individual creator and are now on the scene of sampling, mixing, filtering and re-mixing. As always, the question of framing is crucial.

There is an interesting quote in the catalogue to the Fiona Tan exhibition now up at the Vancouver Art Gallery. In conversation with Okwui Enwezor, Homi Bhabha suggests. "...we must learn to favor the idea of cultural archives over those of cultural traditions." Enwezor picks up on this, "While traditions seem set in aspic, archives are more unruly. In the postcolonial age the archive becomes the necessary operating modality of the contemporary artist." More and more we are seeing the database of history being used as the raw material for art making, whether it be the history of film, current mass media, family or community histories and so on. For example, Erika Tan and Anthony Lam produced a superb exhibition at Centre A in 2005 called "Mining the Archive" that was based on their research in picture and film archives of images from the British Empire. Questions of archiving—how to archive an increasingly diffuse and ephemeral contemporary art practice, and how archives can be used to make art; how, in a sense, to archive the future—will occupy a panel of contemporary archivists on the closing day of the exhibition.

And we are very concerned about the future. Not only does Centre A have a big FOR RENT sign on it's front window (don't worry, we have no intention of moving any time soon and are doing our best to negotiate a win-win lease with our landlords) but the questions around space for art – where, what kind, how many, how big and how much – are much on the minds of the citizens of Vancouver right now. While we are touting ourselves as the "Asia Gateway" city, what are we doing to make make the cultural dimensions of this vision real? How does Vancouver situate itself in the globalized systems of contemporary art. Where are we? What are our own regional specificities and what do we have to say to the world? These are pressing issues. If we are not proactive, there soon won't be any new space for art in downtown Vancouver. We need leadership and we need people power. In connection with the exhibition, a public symposium will take place in mid-September, called *The Twister*. It will look at

the conditions of world art today, consider the impact of new modes of interactive global communication, and paint a picture of the city we want to be in ten years. If you are interested, please join us. If you can show up in person, there will be lunch.

It would be difficult to say enough to thank our donors. Private support has always been important to Centre A. The unstinting and consistent generosity of founding donors Stephanie Holmquist and Mark Allison is without parallel and a testament to their faith and loyalty. Centre A was born thanks to Mark and Stephanie and here they are, still with us today. Bravo! Our President Emerita, Anndraya T. Luui, has once again demonstrated her vision and leadership with a major gift that shoulders the lion's share of the exhibition costs. Several departments and agencies of the University of British Columbia, as you can see in the official credits, have come together to co-sponsor our distinguished symposium keynote speaker, David Elliott. The symposium itself is made possible in part by a Bruce and Lis Welch Award, and a special grant from the Office of the President of Simon Fraser University. This event coincides with the opening of the Simon Fraser University School for the Contemporary Arts at the Woodward Building. We welcome the staff and students of the school to Hastings Street and look forward to future collaborations.



Hong Hao
Qingming Shanghe Tu, 2000
Photo

Hong Hao is well known for his work in “re-mapping” Chinese epistemologies. This photographic hand scroll is based on a celebrated Song Dynasty painting by Zhang Zeduan.

In its formative stages, Centre A imagined itself as a collecting institution. This important work was donated by the artist and was the gallery’s first acquisition.



Karim Rashid
Umbra Garbino, 2000
Waste basket

Karim Rashid is a Canadian born designer recognized for making high design affordable and accessible. His Garbino wastebasket is in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Acquired and donated by Centre A co-founder Stephanie Holmquist, this wastebasket has been in constant use for ten years.



Santiago Bose
Behind the Immigrant, 2000
Acrylic painting

The late Santiago Bose was a leading figure in the rise of Philippine contemporary art in the revolutionary and post-Marcos era. He was the subject of Centre A's first artist-in-residence project in the fall of 2000. He produced a series of paintings and an exhibition on the relationships between Asian immigrants to Canada and indigenous First Nations. Bose himself was of mixed race ancestry, descendant from Bengali immigrants to the Philippines and Igorot people.



Joseph Wu
Twisting the Box, 2000
Origami

Computer programmer and origami master Joseph Wu made this piece during a design meeting in preparation for Centre A's founding symposium, *Twisting the Box*. An image of the work was used in the symposium poster design.



Evan Lee
Closer Than They Appear, 2001
Photographs

A number of firsts: *Closer Than They Appear* was Evan Lee's first solo exhibition. It was also the first exhibition to be curated by Centre A's first curator, Sadira Rodrigues. It consisted of a carefully selected series of twenty-five photographs of street scenes and urban landscapes taken in Vancouver over a seven year period.



Yoshiko Shimada
Korean Family Photographs, 2001
Altered pachinko machine

Yoshiko Shimada produced a body of work based on research and dialogue with Korean-Japanese people, Cho-sen jin, a community which has traditionally been subjected to prejudice in Japan and limited to the performance of specific businesses, such as pachinko parlours. Shimada was accompanied in Vancouver by an activist representative of the community, Hwanbo Kanja. The symposium featured interventions by Grace Eiko Thomson and Yong Soon Min.



Heri Dono
Interrogation, 2002
Shadow puppets

One of leaders of the Indonesian new wave, Heri Dono is recognized as a pioneer of Asian contemporary art. His residency was shared with The Western Front, where he worked with local dancers and artists to produce a political shadow play performance.



Jinhan Ko
Get Well Soon, 2002
Installation

The gallery was transformed into a surreal waiting room for Jinhan Ko's first Vancouver exhibition curated by Sadira Rodrigues. The project was produced in collaboration with Homer Street neighbour, the Helen Pitt Gallery, which was located just across the street.



Mo Salemy
Exhumed: Deliberating R.M. Khomeini, 2002
Photographs

One year after the attacks of 9/11, this provocative exhibition confronted the stereotype image of Iran presented by the Western media. Blurring the line between reality and fiction, documentation and fantasy, Salemy played with the concept of an “official” state-sponsored exhibition. They were part of Mo Salemy’s first solo exhibition in Vancouver.



Keith Längergraber
Sunken Histories, 2003
Drawing

Curated by Sadira Rodrigues, the project involved extensive research into an early 20th century lawsuit between Chinese tenant farmers and Musqueam Nation landlords that was brought before the court in Vancouver (the current home of the Vancouver Art Gallery). The floor of the gallery was turned into a Fraser River tidal mudflat, complete with a half-submerged boat and other historical traces.



Nobuo Kubota
***Loophole*, 2004**
Courtesy of V-Tape

Nobuo Kubota was the first artist whose work was sponsored by Centre A in a performance piece presented at the Powell Street Festival in the summer of 1999.

To commemorate this event, the artist has contributed a recent work from 2004.



Yang Jiechang
***Lohkchat!*, 2003**
Silkscreen book, edition of 20

Some would call Yang Jiechang China's greatest living master of ink painting. His works include a wide range of video, installation and performance. For *Lohkchat!*, he imposed the floor plan of Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport onto Centre A's small space as part of an installation that went beyond issues of terrorism and international politics to raise larger questions about individual human freedom, mortality and fate. This limited edition book was printed by Michael de Courcy and produced especially for the Centre A exhibition.

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Gailan Ngan
Untitled vase, 2004

Ceramic artist Gailan Ngan worked for a month at the Sumas Clay Products factory, a brick kiln on the Sumas First Nations Reserve in Abbotsford, BC. This brickworks has over a dozen giant beehive kilns, some almost a century old and among the few still operating in Canada. She produced an installation of site-specific clay works from this experience, which were exhibited along with a series of ceramic sculpture-vases that explored the space between design and art. The vase was a gift to the gallery by the artist.



Leung Chi-Wo and Sara Chi Hang Won (Para/site)
City Cookie, 2004
Four café tables

Alice Ming Wai Jim's first exhibition for Centre A as she came into the role of curator was a retrospective survey of the work of the pioneering Hong Kong artist collective, Para/site. The four café tables come from a series of works based on images of the Hong Kong skyline. They were shown as part of Para/site's presentation at the Venice Biennale.



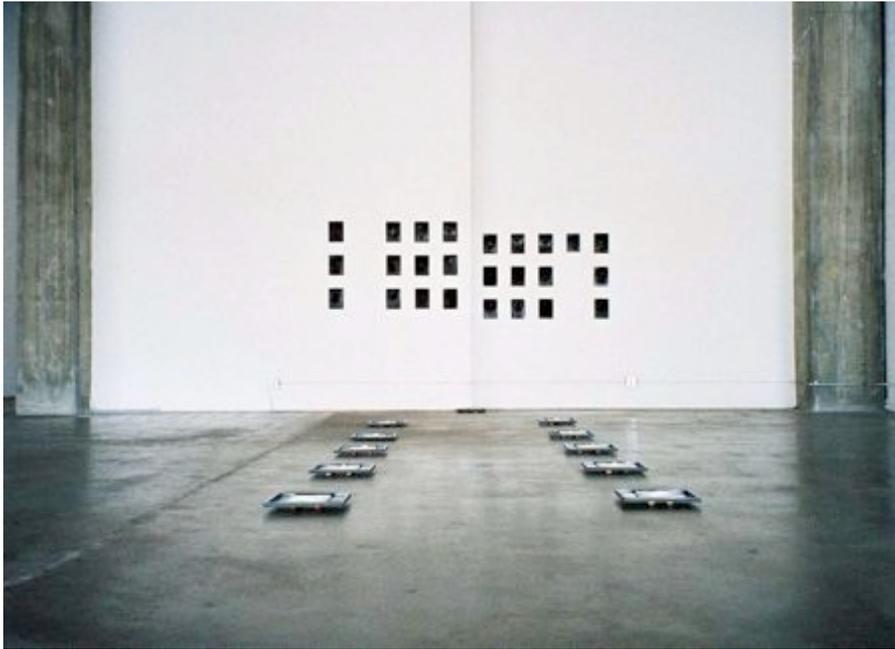
Phoebe Man
P-read, 1997
Offset print

Part of the *Para/Site: Open Work* exhibition in 2004. *P-read Jam Version* is a poster for the visual dialogue between Anthony Leung and Phoebe Man. They have used "feminine" objects such as hygienic napkins and traditional embroidery shoes in their mixed media works to address the stereotypes on women.



Subodh Gupta
Untitled fragment, 2004
Steel bowls

Exhibiting with Anita Dube in the exhibition *Resonance: Contemporary Art from New Delhi*, curated by Keith Wallace, Subodh Gupta constructed a cylindrical tower out of six hundred steel bowls. These four are remnants. It's the first time that Gupta's work had been presented in Canada.



Maeda Hiroya
Untitled, 2005
Laquer

The first exhibition in North America of contemporary art from Okinawa involved the Vancouver Okinawa community and the Japanese language school in a one-day workshop which featured calligraphy, dance, music and traditional Okinawan cuisine. The exhibition featured work by three artists from Okinawa, including Maeda Hiroya, whose lacquer works extend the formal possibilities of a medium for which Okinawa is traditionally famous.



Bubble Tea Club
Poster, 2000

This was Centre A's very first exhibition in 2000, curated by Rocky Huang. This group exhibition featured young Vancouver artists working in various media on the theme, "Vancouver Identity from a Contemporary Asian Art Perspective".

The artists were
Grace M Chan,
Greg Chan,
Elana Herman,
Rocky Huang,
Sarah Koo,
Howard Lung, and
Mark Soo.



Yoko Ono
Mending Peace, 2006
Installation and performance

People were invited to mend broken pottery as part of an exhibition that took place in conjunction with the World Peace Forum. The project was curated by Alice Ming Wai Jim. The mended pots included here are by Wayne Ngan, Eric Metcalfe, Charmian Johnson and Mick Henry.



Germaine Koh
Overflow, 2007
Recycled bottles

The artist worked in collaboration with the community bottle depot, United We Can, to collect and clean over 5,000 used bottles. Originally exhibited in January 2007, this work drew attention to the local economy, urban ecology, drug addiction and redemption.



Bernadette Phan
Untitled, 2007
Oil paintings

For their joint exhibition *Fantastic* in 2007, Bernadette Phan and Sally Lee transformed the gallery into a working painter's studio, a place not only for the production of art but also a space bridging private and public, where art is also collected and discussed.



Koki Tanaka
Turning the Lights On, 2007
Lights, DVD, notebook

Turning the Lights On was a site-specific installation and large window projection based on a three week residency by the artist. It was Makiko Hara's first curatorial project for Centre A, and part of INTERSECTION, a pilot public art project for the Carrall Street Greenway sponsored by the City of Vancouver. This installation is a re-staging of the exhibition using lights left over in our storage.

The video is an edition of 10.
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Shen Yuan
Blue freeway, 2007
Set of seven ink drawings

Shen Yuan produced a large installation based on handmade made toy vehicles – cars, boats and planes – created by young people in a residency in Zaire (now Republic of Congo). This suite of prints was produced at that time.

Private collection



Wei-li Yeh & Yu-hsin Wu
Treasure Hill Tea House/Phase Five/Oversight, 2007
Posters and video

The artists moved into the ruins of an abandoned neighbourhood in Taipei where they created a tea house and informal museum. They produced a series of high quality but affordable prints, and a publication documenting the project and comparing urban development in Taipei and Vancouver. The project was guest curated for Centre A by Amy Cheng Huei-Hua.



Babak Golkar
A Brief History 1370-1374, 11' 18", 2008
Videographer: Danny Chan

As a part of *Orientalism & Ephemera*, curated by Jamelie Hassan in 2008, Golkar produce a new video work in response to the critical view on the idea of "Orient". *A Brief History 1370-1374* restages Golkar's hairstyles he wore when he lived in Iran before moving to Canada. The date in the title is based on the Muslim calendar.

Collection of the artist.



Babak Golkar
My Name is not Abbas, 2008
T-shirt

At the symposium organized in conjunction with *Orientalism & Ephemera*, co-produced with Centre for Comparative Study of Muslim Societies and Cultures at SFU, Golkar wore the T-shirts commenting on the false identity and confusion of Iranian names.

Collection of the artist.

Image: Portraits of Mo Salemy from "*Before & After*" series as part of Golkar's solo exhibition *The Science and Philosophy of Mutation* at Centre A, 2003.



Diyan Achjadi
***See Girl Look*, 2004**
Silkscreen banner

"Girl" is Achjadi's ongoing body of work that centers around a single, awkward, cartoon-character, a forever-flat golden-skinned young girl of unspecified ethnic or national origin, dressed in a simple pink dress with knee-high socks. *See Girl Look* was originally produced in 2004 and was presented as a part of *Orientalism & Ephemera* in 2008.

Collection of the artist.



Louise Noguchi
***Shanghai Dragon (Moisture Forms)*, 2008**
Photographs

Noguchi examined the role of the heroic landscape in Hollywood action films such as *Star Wars*, *Enter the Dragon*, and *The Lady from Shanghai*. The artist recreates props from these movies remaking them in materials different from their original in order to give the work a new context. By using a photograph to represent the mirrors and sculptures of the objects within the reflections, viewers will not be able to locate themselves within their environment. This new space is reminiscent of film space where one is an unseen participant in a scene.

Large: Centre A Collection (Available for Sale)

Small: Private Collection



Doris Buttignol
***The Living Blanket*, 2008**
Installation

The Living Blanket is an ongoing project that invites participants to contribute squares to an ever growing quilt. The North American debut of the project included the display of the Women's Memorial Quilt, produced by artists and individuals working at the Carnegie Community Centre. Quilt-making workshops were led by Lois Klassen with a number of women's organizations in downtown Vancouver.



Paul de Guzman, Masashi Ogura, Yoshiro Suda
***Another City*, 2009**
Edition of 200

Another City is an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural collaboration by Masashi Ogura, Yoshihiro Suda, and Paul de Guzman that takes the form of a site-specific exhibition and a publication addressing architecture, transfiguration of urban environment, and the human condition. In 2009, this project was organized by Makiko Hara and presented at Centre A and le Musée d'art de Joliette. This limited edition is the result of the inter-transmission of all participants of the project— artists, writers, designers, photographers, video and sound artists— through their interpretation and response to each other.



Khan Lee
One Million Pennies, 2009
Sculpture

A sphere made of one million pennies was part of Lee's first solo exhibition at Centre A in 2009, presented along with another major commissioned video work, *Shot*, and series of small sculptures that are the products of his daily studio practice. While very small scale, these works often deal with the idea of excess and repetition.

Collection of the artist.
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Roy Caussey & Maggie Boyd
Drinking Down the Earth, 2009
Ceramic cups and shards

During the 2009 *South South East* exhibition, Caussey and Boyd re-staged the life cycle of the clay chai drinking cups in the gallery. Often seen on the trains of India, the chai vendors pour the tea into clay cups that hold about 3 gulps worth, and when the chai is done the cups are tossed out the windows to shatter on the ground, allowing the organic detritus to return to a state of fulfillment. These shattered cups are collected from the original installation.



Elizabeth MacKenzie
***Eight*, 2010**
Ink drawings

Eight is a new work that MacKenzie produced for the project, *SLOW: Relations + Practices* in 2010. The eight portraits are the faces of the SLOW group members, and this is the first attempt of the artist using color in ink paint portrait series.

Collection of the artist.



Garry Neill Kennedy
***Five Flag Bases*, 2008**
***Eight Banners*, 2008**

Garry Neill Kennedy, a pioneer of conceptual art, produced a monumental wall painting, *I Don't Want Pay Full Price* as part of two-person exhibition, *Beijing-Vancouver* curated by Makiko Hara. The five colours used for his painting were inspired by the construction site signage seen by the artist in the preparations for the Beijing Olympics. The colored concrete bases were originally used as bases for flags, and were donated to Centre A. *The Eight Banners, Chinese History Painting* was another large wall painting work in *Beijing-Vancouver*.

Five Flag Bases: Centre A collection
Eight Banners: Private collection



Sharmila Samant

***Loca Cola*, 2000-2010 (2008)**

Installation

As a part of her first solo exhibition in North America, *kathajal: A Web of Stories* co-curated by Makiko Hara and Haema Sivanesan (SAVAC, Toronto) in 2008, Sharmila Samant presented her most popular work, *Loca Cola*. In the original work, the artist shows her collection of Coca-Cola bottles from many countries filled with the recipes of local beverages. The presence of 'Coca-Cola' in fact silences the local tastes by propagating a more or less universal (read: *hegemonic*) flavour.



Kyohei Sakaguchi

***Zero Yen House*, 2006**

Photographs

Although Kyohei Sakaguchi has often donated artworks for Centre A's annual art auction, these photo based works were exhibited in his first solo exhibition, *Zero Yen House*, at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 2006, curated by Makiko Hara. The exhibition led Hara to be a curator at Centre A, and it traveled to Walter Phillips gallery at the Banff Centre and Plug In ICA in Winnipeg. The works returned to Vancouver and are presented for the first time in Centre A.

Collection of the artist.
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