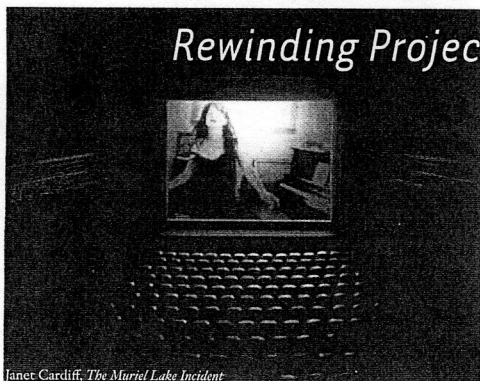


## The art of viewing light on a surface:

### Rewinding Projections at the University of Toronto

by Shana MacDonald

When discussing the cinema we often talk of a medium in which events are captured by a camera and then relayed to an audience, usually within a digestible narrative format. It is rare in conventional cinema-going culture to examine one aspect of this 'seamless' process on its own. However, throughout the history of cinema there have been avant-garde experiments in the visual arts, performance and film; experiments which have tried to underscore the functions of one or more elements of the cinematic apparatus. The exhibition **Projections**, curated by Barbara Fischer, provides a survey of artistic works which all focus on an integral element of the film process—the projection of light and image onto a viewable surface.



Janet Cardiff, *The Muriel Lake Incident*

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*Projections* ran from April 8 to June 17 at four University of Toronto venues: the U of T Art Center, the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, the Doris McCarthy Gallery and the Blackwood Gallery. The exhibition reflects a post-1990s trend to mount international, large-scale shows dedicated to the theme of projections, exhibitions such as *Into the Light* at the Whitney Museum in 2001 and *Beyond Cinema: the art of projection* in 2006 at the Hamburger Bahnhof gallery in Berlin. Building upon the discourse of these previous exhibits, *Projections* effectively displaces our expectations of traditional viewing practices and, under Fischer's vision, enables the act of projection to be seen as an art form in and of itself. Positioning the art of projection as a distinct medium, *Projections* is worthy of praise for revealing the ties between light and image with performance, painting and sculpture—a link often overshadowed by the more technical role of projectors at multiplexes playing the latest Hollywood blockbusters.

One of the most commendable features of this exhibit is its scope. Rather than functioning as a simple overview of artistic trends, *Projections* considers Canadian media-based works produced between 1964 and 2007, suggesting that the manipulation of light, video, film and slide projections has been a central concern for many Canadian artists for the past four decades. *Projections* provides both a historical reflection on

Canadian art and a critical starting point from which to consider the development and impact of Canadian projection art.

The exhibition is organized thematically rather than chronologically. The U of T Art Centre housed, on one side, a collection of works which consider projected light and illumination as a central theme. On the other side, a collection of pieces were shown which considered the projection surface as a central theme. The works at the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery focused on works which explore the spatial aspects of the viewing experience, and on the different ways perception can be constructed through architecture. The Blackwood and Doris McCarthy galleries examined the theme of travel and how cinema can project alternate viewing points, times and spaces.

A crucial dialogue is created amongst the works within these thematic sections—a dialogue which asks the viewer to contemplate the non-tangible aspects of the term projection. For example, upon entering the Doris McCarthy Gallery there is a video projection of a man sleeping in the back of a car as lights and scenery pass by out the windows. The piece, *Halcion Sleep* (1984) by Rodney Graham, functions as a suggestive gateway to the other two works in the gallery: Stan Douglas' *Overture* (1986) and Jana Sterbak's *Waiting for High Water* (2005). Both Douglas and Sterbak's works challenge our normal viewing perceptions by causing us to see 'traveled' spaces differently. In Douglas' *Overture*, the camera is positioned on the front of a train traveling through mountains. In Sterbak's *Waiting for High Water*, the projected image is seen from the ground-level perspective of a Jack Russell terrier as he travels around Venice during flood season. Graham's video projection successfully ties these two



Rodney Graham, *Halcion Sleep*

works together through his suggestion that cinematic projections induce alternate states of perception. The Douglas and Sterbak films, and their configuration inside the gallery reveals connections between cinema and the unconscious mind, in some sense becoming the dreams of Graham's sleeping figure.

One of the most successful dialogues between thematic works was located in the U of T Art Centre's west wing. The pieces here experimented with the function and limits of the screen as a projection surface. Pieces by Michael Snow, Genevieve Cadieux, Christine Davis, Rebecca Belmore and Wyn Geleynse (among others) collectively considered the nature of desire and the gaze, questioning the politics of what we project onto the screen, and what psychically inflected themes are projected at the viewer from the art works on the screen. Seen individually, each work offers different insights: the projection of anxiety in the domestic sphere, the projection of desire in the peep show, the projection of authorship, the projection of myth and the inability to match projection with the material reality of an object or person.

*Projections* deserves recognition not simply for its function as a comprehensive history of projection art within the Canadian artistic canon, but for its engagement with the extra-textual themes that the term projection encompasses—the psychical and phenomenological elements tied into the persuasive powers of perception. It is the exhibition's revelation of additional layers of meaning that make it deserving of deep consideration and conversation long after the viewing experience is over. □

A catalogue for *Projections* will launch in September of 2007.