

# Projections

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO GALLERIES, TORONTO

In the wake of two recent survey exhibitions devoted to the medium of projection, the following words by Victor Burgin, used by Ian Carr-Harris in his 1995 projection piece *Rozenstraat 8*, seem especially apt: "History has moved around my own work, changing at least one of its meanings... Today such work constitutes a distinct genre, and an item in the available repertoire of stylistic conventions."

Ironically, the exhibition in which *Rozenstraat 8* appeared last spring, Barbara Fischer's "Projections," a 23-artist survey of work produced in Canada between 1964 and 2007, presented an elegant, clear-headed narrative that was free of convention. It stood in contrast to the international survey that ran in Berlin at the Hamburger Bahnhof last winter—"Beyond Cinema: The Art of Projection," curated by Gabriele Knapstein and Joachim Jäger in collaboration with the artist Stan Douglas and Christopher Eamon, curator of the Kramlich Collection in San Francisco, could not avoid seeming a model of convention. There was something vaguely numbing about wandering the museum's lonely, darkened, flickering halls. How was it that an exhibition making a case for this work, some of it playing with unconventional narrative structure in an attempt to remake our relationship to cinema, gave the uneasy sense that one was witnessing enormous genre works in a 19th-century salon?

The strongest part of the Berlin show played out on the smallest scale. A section entitled "Repertory Cinema" linked Marcel Broodthaers's 16-mm film loop *Une seconde d'éternité (d'après une idée de Charles Baudelaire)* (1970) and his film and book work *A Voyage on the North Sea* (1973) with Douglas Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho* (1993), allowing a new, more subjective reading of this later work. Also involved in this section, which most resembled Fischer's broader, more analytical exhibition, was Stan Douglas's *Overture* (1986), the only work to appear in both cities. In Toronto, *Overture*, with its dreamlike use of passages from Proust, was exhibited with Rodney Graham's *Halcion Sleep* (1994) and Jana Sterbak's Venice nightmare *Waiting for High Water* (2005) in an engaging three-room sequence about the physical dislocation that cinema offers its viewer.

The artist John Massey was another link between the exhibitions. It was lovely and odd to find his *As the Hammer Strikes [A Partial Illustration]* (1982) in Berlin, its 25-year-old images of the Ontario countryside, Toronto strip clubs and obsolete beer-bottle formats illuminating the imprecise nature of language. One of the great and important pleasures of "Projections" was the presence of early, rarely seen, existentially oriented pieces by Murray Favro and Michael Snow. They demonstrated a unique feature of work made in Canada—a critical relationship to the screen itself. This theme was taken up again and again by more political artists of a succeeding generation, including Krzysztof Wodiczko, Geneviève Cadieux and Rebecca Belmore (in her powerful video *The Named and the Unnamed*, in which a light bulb-studded screen shone more brightly than the light projected onto it). A shared post-colonial, critical approach to image production situates Fischer's artists in the Canadian intellectual tradition of George Grant, Hugh Innis, Marshall McLuhan and Arthur Kroker.

Unlike the Berlin show—and its vast, all-but-invisible projection screens—the Toronto show constantly presented viewers with objects, "things-in-the-world" on which something was being projected. The projection medium was used as a tool within a larger narrative, one that suggested the critical importance of place in Canada. E. C. WOODLEY