

Anthropography: Three Contemporary Perspectives

Anthropography: Three Contemporary Perspectives brings together three Acadian artists who explore perceived and documented Acadian history in relation to other cultures. The term anthropography refers to the branch of anthropology concerned with aspects such as the physical character, language, customs and distribution of the human race. The chosen work in this exhibition poses an insightful examination of Acadie through questions of identity, language, history and fiction.

The print-based installation *Sanguine, Burnt Umber and Other Sorrows* by Maryse Arseneault reflects on the blending of Acadian and Mi'kmaq cultures -- a subject that became taboo after the great upheaval (the Acadian deportation). Through an image search, Arseneault printed 880 period Mi'kmaq portraits. These images as postcards are silkscreened upon with an eight-pointed star, a Mi'kmaq symbol for the sun that also appears in Acadian quilt making. This star halo or mask represents the all-too-forgotten alliances and the fact that they are genetically linked. In a poetic effort to rekindle relationships, Arseneault will be sending some hundred postcards from Acadie to the far end of the Americas to First Nations representatives.

Mathieu Léger's *On a Silver Platter* is a series of engraved silver plates that speaks to the conflicts between the British and the Acadians and how those impacts continue to resonate in modern-day Acadie. The platters, most often associated with British aristocracy, have ironically become inexpensive objects in thrift stores. Léger reappropriates the silverware as templates for his text-based practice by inserting new meaning and creating contrast between the container and its content: British utilitarian culture as a vessel for Acadian perspectives. Some plates address the impacts on the ever-changing Acadian geographic landscape, some reference storied genealogy, while others directly illustrate the impact on the inherited Chiac dialect. *On a Silver Platter* commemorates Acadian folklore past and present.

The video installation *Please Remember Me* sees Stefan St-Laurent portray a stereotypical male country singer in a montage that is made to appear like the music video from the would-be soundtrack to the 1929 movie *Évangéline*. This movie by American film maker Edwin Carewe is based on the familiar story of lost and reunited love told by the American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in his 1847 poem entitled *Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie*. In a cowboy hat and Wrangler jeans, St-Laurent lip-syncs to the Tim McGraw love song on a Southern-style veranda, accented by perennials and framed by a white picket fence:

You'll find better love
Strong as it ever was
Deep as the river runs
Warm as the morning sun
Please remember me

These lyrics not only add ambiance to the footage of Évangéline and Gabriel engaging in a dramatic reunion, but they can be equally applied to Acadian culture and history with regard to Évangéline's legend of faith. Longfellow's Évangéline was constructed from numerous life stories, building a created identity that eventually became a romanticized and commodified icon. Although she is a fictitious symbol created and immortalized by American culture, she signifies hope and courage to persevere through troubled times. Acadians, wherever they are, remember Acadie.

Jennifer Bélanger, Guest curator