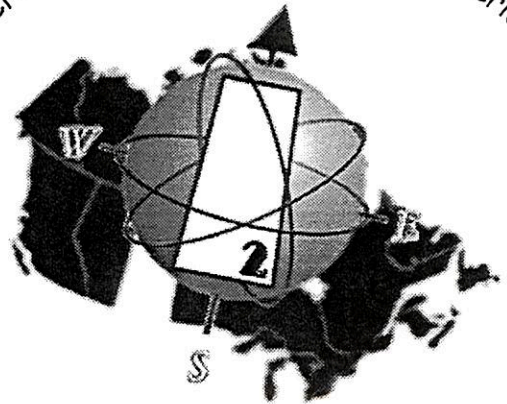


Magnetic North
A Cross Canada Curated Video Art Series



Travelling Light

The **Centre for Art Tapes** is an artist-run, community access centre specializing in the exhibition and production of audio, video and computer arts. We gratefully acknowledge the support of our members, The Canada Council for the Arts, The Nova Scotia Arts Council, CBC Television and Networx.

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video art from Saskatchewan

**Curated by
Joanne Bristol**

CBC  Television

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Magnetic North

A Cross Canada Curated Video Art Series

The Centre for Art Tapes was rapidly approaching its twentieth anniversary when the programming committee decided it was a good time to look outward rather than in. This community has always seen itself as part of the larger whole- Canadian independent media art production and more specifically video art. It was time to take the temperature beyond our walls. It was time to bring "the world" to us.

Planning began for an eleven part series based on provincial/territorial boundaries and the first few curators were selected. The series was never intended to be a survey of styles per area. Built into it is the premise that curators will have highly subjective viewpoints. We wanted artists/curators familiar with work within each province and the North to choose and contextualize videos, to present a point of view. As such they had a very free hand, beyond geography- all works originating in the curator's area.

Magnetic North is being presented over two years. Saskatchewan based interdisciplinarian Joanne Bristol takes up the second screening with *Travelling Light*. Thank you to Joanne Bristol for her thoughtful selections and dedication to this project and again to the programming committee for going above and beyond to do this series.

Catherine Phoenix, Director of Operations
April 2000

Travelling Light:

Video Art from Saskatchewan

The name Saskatchewan comes from Cree words meaning "swiftly flowing," referring to a system of rivers that cross over the land, passing through and exiting the province. Such is often the experience of video artists populating Saskatchewan: move away, come back, produce work over the winter or summer, record the scene while passing through, go west, hit the city. Through *Travelling Light* I want to focus on nomadic existence and other forms of travel. The limits of provincial boundaries are often more problematic than useful, delineating agendas of nationalism and colonization. With *Travelling Light* I wish to exceed these boundaries, including work by artists currently living in Saskatchewan, those born and raised here who now reside elsewhere, and non-Canadian artists currently living and creating here.

Perhaps the most obvious association between light and video resides in the intrinsic nature of the medium - the horizontal trajectory of an electron beam along lines of dots emits light, creating images on a monitor. For this project my interest lies in other plays of light(ness): aesthetic and ideological economies of means practised by video artists. Whether out of economic necessity, or in pointed contrast to the weighty standards of commercial production, practices of travelling with a minimum of equipment and a maximum of creativity, intelligence and passion appear fresh and challenging. The works in *Travelling Light* cover a broad terrain on a tight budget, offering a range of moving narratives including introspective mental trips, travelogues, and epic journeys.

14 Journeys

Clark Nikolai was one of the first Saskatchewan artists to work in video. His *Travel Sketch* presents longings that have been expressed by Saskatchewan residents for the past few generations - the belief that the action is elsewhere and the cost of this kind of escape, or adventure is unaffordable. In this tape Nikolai uses an early, modest means of electronic virtual travel (superimposition) to visit faraway lands. Though *Travel Sketch* is not representative of Nikolai's extensive, richly textured, surreal oeuvre, the economy of visual means he uses, paired with a subdued yet optimistic voice-over, make this tape especially poignant.

A similar form of economy flight is negotiated by Cheli Nighthtraveller in *Sailor Half-Breed*. Here the narrator flies, like a super-heroine, on a seemingly endless return trip between her dual identities. The work, produced on Hi-8, provides a hilarious parody of cartoon heroine Sailor Moon. Nighthtraveller's version, however, is filled with questions around the construction of race, identity and community.

Thirza Cuthand's *Colonization: The Second Coming* also combines humor with fresh in-camera editing techniques to articulate politics that lie between her bedroom and her backyard. With her characteristic witty and deadpan narration, she considers the threat of aliens colonizing the earth trivial in comparison to the expression of her desire. In light of the

everyday heritage (500 years and counting) of European colonization of North America, hysteria over potential alien takeover is seen as just another rerun.

An alien or at least ambiguous specter leads us over the land in *My Secret Identity* by Terry Billings. This human/bird/shadow hybrid understands the importance of treading lightly. It is aware of the violent tendency humans have historically had in naming and claiming, in projecting language onto nature. Through poetic and ethereal layers of image and text, the narrator recommends practices of listening, or it least being respectful in our interactions with the land and with others.

Unfortunately our interface with nature does not always allow such reverence. Two less-than-idyllic versions of "nature walks" are offered in Lisa Baldissera's *Snow* and Risa Horowitz's *Gem*. Both tapes call upon excess vocalization to sound or move through alienating terrain. In *Snow* the camera tracks a female figure on a solitary expedition, stumbling through deep snowbanks. The hysterical Berio/Berberian soundtrack evokes associations of madness, isolation sickness, dissociation or hypothermia - some of the less pleasant qualities of prairie winters.

Gem takes us on a trip through facets of embodied experience, collapsing boundaries of interiority and exteriority. The combination of persistent scraping and grinding sounds with the optical distortion of the lens presents a shifting and gelatinous landscape with no horizon line. A human voice emerges intermittently, casting out utterances such as, "... thought picks its way towards expression...towards surface, hovers beyond," alluding to phenomenologies and struggles of creating meaning from perception.

Don Gylls' use of silence in *Sojourn* carves out a meditative space, allowing the viewer to consider stillness as a transitional point in a journey. Formatted to emphasize the horizontal, the tape dwells on a gentle wave lapping toward the (grounded) viewer. This deceptively simple piece sustains repeated viewings - intricate shadows emerge and dissolve; flotsam slowly cruises across the screen. The greenish, greyish clay banks are a comforting presence, especially for those familiar with the banks of the South Saskatchewan river.

Inward journeys are strategies for survival in Susan McKenzie's *The 29th*. The tape bends and stretches time to present a range of psychic states in the day of a mother. Scenes depicting material poverty are contrasted with those expressing rituals of remembering and transformation. Time seems frozen while the female protagonist revisits sites of empowerment: digging in the earth, eating a raspberry. These gestures and pleasures hold specific meanings in her aboriginal culture and their emotive power is amplified through the slowed, grainy aesthetic of the sequence.

In (excerpts from) *Twenty Five Short Films In and About Saskatchewan*, Gerald Saul invites us to consider vertical paths of vision in an environment where horizontality rules. Originally filmed on Super-8 and transferred to video, this brief, lyrical sampling of films from a much larger project focuses on architectural and atmospheric phenomena.

The sequence opens with some of Regina's few truly neck-tilting moments - the practise of gazing up at office towers. It ends with a succession of beautiful time-lapse gestures, transporting the viewer to childhood reveries of cloud-watching.

The flatness and breadth of the plains are central to John Morgan's *Sunken Kingdom*. The viewer enters the landscape or narrative through a vertical split effect. In the first section the hand-held camera hovers precariously close to the ground. The camera is then abruptly dropped as if it is being abandoned. Metaphorically, it is as if the entire project(ion) is dropped: the immensity of the land exceeds our presence in it, our relationship to it. The final shot captures the exotic minimalism of the landscape (near the Gardiner Dam in south central Saskatchewan) with a lone figure hitching along the highway, suitcase in hand.

Steve Heimbecker and Tatyana Gershuni have collaborated in *Welcome to Gimli* to question how history is constructed around place. The video consists of one continuous walking shot down the main street of Gimli, Manitoba, leading to the lake. The lake itself is obscured by a wall of murals depicting scenes of the lake's history. In a variety of painting styles images of wars, recreational and cultural events, and landscapes of the changing seasons melt into one another in random sequence. Using a kind of tentative, jerky camera movement associated with tourists, Heimbecker and Gershuni record the length of the mural. The jarring soundtrack adds to the disruption of this linear visual narrative and it's selective sense of history.

The re-reading of architectural surfaces is also the focus of Brenna George's *Wallpaper*. Scraps of faded wallpaper adhering to abandoned farmhouses are perceived in relation to interiority, women, domesticity, and the politics of the "settling" of the land by European immigrants. The video combines a graceful arte povera aesthetic with insightful social and historical critique.

A return to the more recent past is the subject of Rae Staseson's *The Dollhouse Diaries*. Using structures of alphabetical listing as mnemonic devices, Staseson cuts and dissolves home movie images from her childhood with found footage documenting popular and local culture of early 1970s Saskatchewan. Ultimately, she suggests that one's relation to one's own past remains an ongoing act of the imagination.

In Sheila Urbanoski's *Vita Brevis*, a sequence of landscape images is stunningly intercut with close-ups of hands performing symbolic, ritualistic actions. The soundtrack features a beautiful and haunting Romany funerary song, evoking a sense of flight, timelessness, or the kind of intense memory flashback one experiences before death.

Joanne Bristol
March, 2000

PROGRAM

Travel Sketch

Clark Nikolai

1991/1:32/Video Pool

A land-locked jet-setter discovers video superimposition, creating an amusing and vicarious travel narrative.



Gem

Risa Horowitz

1999/3:27/Artist

A trance-like trip through facets of embodied experience, collapsing boundaries of interiority/exteriority.



Sailor Half Breed



Cheli Nighttraveller

1998/9:47/Video Pool

In Sailor Half-Breed the narrator flies like a super-heroine through a landscape of difference, investigating the nature of half-and-half-ness.

Colonization: The second Coming

Thirza Cuthand

1996/3:30/Video Pool

Aliens have landed. Colonization? Again?! A first nations baby dyke throws away her vibrator.



Sojourn

Don Grylls

2000/2:27/Artist

A silent meditation on the transformative and cyclical character of nature.



(Excerpts from) 25 Short Films In and About Saskatchewan
Gerald Saul

1999/11:00/Artist

Originally shot on Super-8 film and transferred to video, these three short works consider a range of local architectural and atmospheric phenomena.

My Secret Identity

Terry Billings



1999/3:17/Video Pool

This experimental video uses digitally layered images and sound as a counterpoint to a poetic reverie on the nature of language and its relationship to our perceptual interfaces with the world.

Snow

Lisa Baldiserra

1998/2:34/Artist

Snow presents the image of a woman on a solitary expedition through a winter prairie landscape to provide a metaphor for the experience of displacement and loss.



Sunken Kingdom

John Morgan

1995/4:21/Video Pool

The tape begins as a structurist piece, an extended tracking shot, but collapses after a couple of minutes. In that broken space of discontinuity, language briefly emerges. The second half of the tape follows the flight of a man running across the frozen Gardiner Dam on the South Saskatchewan River, laden with an unanswerable irrationality.



Wallpaper

Brenna George

1995/6:00/Video Pool

This video explores a microcosm of old, rotting wallpaper in abandoned farm houses, providing a poetic study of the relationships between interior decorating, gender, and the settling of the West.



Welcome to Gimli

**Steve Heimbecker
& Tatyana Gershuni**

2000/11:00/Artists

A trip down the main street of Gimli, Manitoba toward the lake, leads you first past a wall of murals depicting the history of the lake. Welcome to Gimli considers the gaps between representation, reality, history and tourism.

The Dollhouse Diaries

Rae Staseson

1999/7:11/Video Pool

The Dollhouse Diaries suggests that one's relation to one's own past remains an ongoing act of the imagination.



Vita Brevis

Sheila Urbanoski

1993/2:30/Video Pool

A non-narrative interpretation of Romany funerary "rolled" song, using landscape imagery from winter to summer intercut with close-ups of hands performing symbolic, ritualistic actions.



Lisa Baldissera is a visual artist, educator and Assistant Curator of Contemporary Art at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria. Her paintings and video installations have been exhibited across Canada, and are included in public and private collections. A recent curatorial project was organizing AGGV's first exhibition of international contemporary video work, with an interactive web component designed by Victoria artists. She received her MFA from the University of Saskatchewan in 1998.

Terry Billings is a visual artist with an MFA from the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon where she currently teaches studio courses. She has explored narrative, perception and consciousness in two and three dimensional work and electronic media.

Thirza Jean Cuthand was born in 1978 in Saskatchewan. She currently lives in Vancouver. Her works have been in demand at festivals nationally and internationally since she began making video when she was sixteen. She has been an out lesbian for seven years and no longer considers herself a baby dyke.

Brenna George is a multi-disciplinary artist who works in painting, ceramics, sculpture, video, digital imagery and web creation. Besides producing her own work, she is often hired for her freelance production, post-production and web skills. She has also taught many workshops at various artist centers in Canada. As well as international and national screenings, her work has been purchased by the National Gallery of Canada.

Don Grylls is presently a senior art student in the Department of Art & Art History at the University of Saskatchewan. His work has been video-based and inspired by his personal history, visual experiences from the natural world and by other artists' work. His video installation, ever present absence was shown at the Gordon Snelgrove Gallery in 1999. He co-curated (with media artist Joanne Lyons) configurations: recent single channel video and video installation work from Saskatoon in 1999 at Regina's The Antechamber Art Gallery and Cinemathèque.

Tatyana Gershuni, AKA **Eva**, has been working as a professional artist since 1994. She started her artistic career in Kyiv, Ukraine. In 1997 she came to Canada to complete an MFA Degree in Fine Arts at the University of Saskatchewan. Installation and painting are the major mediums she has worked with. Video is a new domain for her. Gershuni has primarily exhibited in Kiev and abroad. For the last two years she participated in group shows in Saskatoon and Regina. She is currently residing in Springwater, Saskatchewan while completing her MFA.

Steve Heimbecker is an interdisciplinary sound artist, producer, and educator working from his studio, The Qube Assemblage Company. Since attending the Alberta College of Art in the early eighties, his work has been presented festivals, exhibitions, and on radio, primarily across Canada and parts of Europe. He has received numerous provincial and national Arts Grants Awards and Residencies for his sound works and installations. He currently lives and works in Springwater, SK.

Risa Horowitz graduated in 1995 with a BFA from York University. Risa is from Toronto and lived in Prince Edward Island and Vancouver before arriving as a Masters of Fine Arts candidate at the University of Saskatchewan. Risa's current work in self-portraiture deals with personal systems and cataloguing.

Susan McKenzie's people are originally from Cumberland House, Saskatchewan. She currently works as a facilitator at the Dunlop Art Gallery and attends Regina's Saskatchewan Indian Federated College.

Beginning in 1990, **John Morgan** has made eight or nine experimental tapes; he has also written a number of reviews for Video Guide (now defunct) and the Newest Review magazine. Most of his videos rely on text at some point, for inspiration or clarification of intention. A founding member of Video VÉRITÉ, Saskatoon, John Morgan continues his involvement with the group in the winters. During the summers, he tries to make a living grain farming.

Cheli Nightraveller is oft described as "the enigmatic one-hit-wonder of the ultra elite half-breed videographer set." She resides in Saskatoon and sells earrings in a suburban mall. She hopes someday to be able to afford to rent a video camera. Her next project, she claims, will be an exposé of the mob tactics used by the underground of clowns for Christ.

Clark Nikolai was born and raised in Saskatchewan, has been working in film and video for over 15 years and is known as a pioneer in the exploration of video as an art form in the province. He has also worked extensively in still photography and the creation of experimental music and sound pieces. His video productions have been exhibited in numerous cities across Canada and also in the USA and Japan.

Gerald Saul is a Regina-based film/media artist and animator who has been investigating memory through narrative and formalistic abstraction since the mid-eighties. His recent works include the feature length postmodern drama *Life Is Like Lint*, the long delayed collaborative film *Dream Sequence* and the eighty minute exploration of his home province, *Twenty Five Short Films In and About Saskatchewan*. Saul teaches in the film and video department at the University of Regina. His current research involves computer animation and hand-processed, hand-manipulated film.

Rae Staseson was born and raised in Regina, Saskatchewan. Rae received her MFA in Video and Performance at Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University (New Brunswick, New Jersey). She then spent two years living and working in Chicago before returning to Canada in 1994. She has performed, screened and exhibited in Canada, the USA, Israel and Mexico. Rae Staseson is currently living in Calgary, Alberta and is the Executive Director of NUTV at the University of Calgary.

Sheila Urbanoski's background is in painting. Her videos tend to move in two distinct directions: a campy, light vein (usually with a bit of bite) and a very opposing, dark side with a slow contemplative rhythm. Urbanoski has moved from appearing in, and working on other's work to producing and directing herself. Her current focus is on website creation.

Joanne Bristol is a Saskatchewan-based interdisciplinary artist who divides her time between teaching Intermedia at the University of Regina, and writing songs for the grrrl group Regina Dentata